

Commodification of Culture-Based Tourism Assets to Strengthen the Creative Economy: A Case Study in Demak Regency 2009-2021

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Abstract

This study examines the process of commodification of cultural-based tourism assets as a strategy to strengthen the creative economy in Demak Regency during the period 2009 to 2021. Demak Regency has a significant wealth of Islamic cultural heritage, especially the Great Mosque of Demak and the tomb of Sunan Kalijaga, but this potential has not been systematically optimized within the framework of the creative economy. The study uses historical methods, namely heuristics, criticism, interpretation and historiography using a qualitative-historical approach, namely secondary data analysis based on archival documents, libraries, regional policies, BPS data, and field studies. The main problem is the concern about the phenomenon of desacralization of commodified tourism assets. This study focuses on the commodification of religious, artistic and educational cultural tourism assets owned by Demak Regency. The results of the study indicate that the process of commodification of cultural assets in Demak Regency took place in three stages. The first stage was identification and determination (2009–2013), the second stage was the development phase of cultural tourism infrastructure (2014–2018), and the third stage was the digital-based creative economy integration phase (2019–2021). This study concludes that the commodification of cultural-based tourism assets in Demak Regency has significantly contributed to increasing Regional Original Income (PAD) and strengthening the creative economy sector. However, in reality, participatory governance based on the principles of sustainable development is still needed. Sustainable tourism development must give local communities a central role in management and decision-making, which can be achieved through training and the provision of relevant job opportunities in the tourism industry. On the other hand, commodification becomes an obstacle to the tension between the authenticity of cultural values and commercial interests, which needs to be managed wisely through participatory regulations.

Keywords: Commodification; Cultural Tourism; Creative Economy; Demak Regency.

Introduction

In the global tourism industry, commodification is one of the trending issues that is currently prominent in the era of globalization, especially the era of economic globalization that began at the end of the 20th century (Meethan, 2001, p. 21). The issue of commodification emphasizes more on commercial profits in terms of capital, this will influence the economic factors that become the foundation for the realization of commodification. In European countries such as England, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and so on, the commodification of tourism is a process of changing tourism goods or services that previously had no or little economic value

to have economic value. According to an article written by Donald Macleod entitled "Cultural Commodification and Tourism: A Very Special Relationship" explains that commodification in the field of cultural tourism is an effort to develop culture as a major tourist destination attraction that has an impact on increasing the selling value of these tourism assets. Donald Macleod also stated that one way to commodify cultural tourism assets can be through collaboration between the government, institutions, and tourism asset managers with local communities, because local communities have a role in producing optimal commodification of cultural tourism assets. (Macleod, 2010, pp. 71-72). Furthermore, the concept of commodification was first developed by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital*, which explains the process of capitalism transforming everything into commodities to be exchanged in the market (Marx, 1867, pp. 41-45). In its development, the theory of commodification was further elaborated by various critical thinkers, including Guy Debord, who introduced the concept of the society of spectacle, where authentic culture and experiences are transformed into consumable images. In the context of tourism, cultural commodification has been the subject of intense academic debate (Debord, 1967, pp. 12-20). MacCannell, identified the phenomenon of "staged authenticity" where cultural practices packaged for tourists experience a shift from their original form (MacCannell, 1996, pp. 37-39). Meanwhile, Greenwood, in his study of the Alarde festival in Spain, concluded that commodification can destroy the meaning of indigenous cultures (Greenwood, 1977, pp. 128). However, a more optimistic view is put forward by Cohen, who argues that commodification is not always destructive and can encourage cultural revitalization (Cohen, 1988, pp. 371-386).

Demak Regency is one of the regions in Central Java with extraordinary cultural capital, particularly in the context of Islamic civilization in the archipelago. The Great Mosque of Demak, built in the 15th century, the Tomb of Sunan Kalijaga in Kadilangu, and a number of cultural traditions such as the Great Grebeg and the Haul Akbar ritual are tourist magnets that attract millions of pilgrims and tourists annually (Andrianto, et al., 2022, pp. 145-147). Data from the Demak Regency Tourism Office in 2021 recorded that religious and cultural tourism visits reached 4.2 million people per year, contributing IDR 312 billion to the service sector's GRDP. However, Demak's substantial cultural tourism potential has not fully correlated with the level of prosperity of the local community. Most of the economic value from tourism activities still accrues to large-scale businesses from outside the region, while local creative economy actors such as Demak batik artisans, traditional culinary producers, and masked dance artists remain marginalized from the main tourism value chain. This condition indicates that there are structural problems in the governance of the commodification of cultural assets that do not yet support the community-based creative economy (Demak Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office, 2021).

The study of cultural commodification in the context of tourism has been quite developed at the global level. Burns in his work *A Tourism: A New Perspective*, Prestige Hall International laid the theoretical foundation that tourism is essentially a process of consuming gazes on cultural differences, which inherently encourages commodification (Burns, 1997, p. 120). In Indonesia, a similar study has been conducted by Picard (1996) in Bali, which shows how Balinese culture has undergone a process of "touristification" thus forming a new cultural identity that is a construction between authentic values and market demands (Picard, 1996, p. 28).

Specifically regarding Demak Regency, existing research is still very limited. Nugroho carried out an inventory of Demak's religious tourism potential but did not enter into an analysis of the political economy of commodification (Nugroho, 2022, pp. 56-74). Mukhlis and

Suroyya researched the socio-economic impact of the Great Mosque of Demak on local traders, but the focus was only on one tourist attraction and did not link it to the broader creative economy framework (Mukhlis and Suroyya, 2020, pp. 78-94). Meanwhile, Rahayu and Anggriawan researched Demak tourism policy, but it was descriptive normative without an in-depth analysis of the commodification process (Rahayu and Anggriawan, 2021, pp. 342-360).

A critical synthesis of previous research reveals three significant gaps. First, a temporal gap: no research has examined the dynamics of the commodification of Demak's cultural assets longitudinally, leaving policy changes and their long-term economic impacts uncharted. Second, an integrative gap: existing research tends to be sectoral, separating tourism from the creative economy, which should be mutually supportive ecosystems. Third, a theoretical gap: the limited use of explicit commodification theory in studies of culture-based tourism in the context of a historic Islamic city in Java, in contrast to studies in Bali, which are more theoretically sound (Ardika, 2020, p. 14).

Furthermore, the majority of previous studies view commodification in a binary manner, either as a threat to authenticity or as a mere economic opportunity. This dichotomous view, in the author's opinion, fails to capture the complexity of the cultural negotiation process occurring on the ground. Local communities are not passive objects but rather active actors strategically navigating their cultural and economic interests. This research aims to fill this gap by employing a more dialectical and agency-oriented framework for commodification. The 2009-2021 period is a strategic timeframe for study, given that this period witnessed various changes in national policies related to tourism and creative economy development. The enactment of Law Number 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism was a significant milestone that encouraged regions to more actively develop their local tourism potential. Furthermore, the creative economy policy, strengthened through Presidential Regulation Number 142 of 2018 concerning the National Creative Economy Development Master Plan, provides a more comprehensive regulatory framework for the development of this sector in the regions.

Based on the background and identification of the research gap above, this study was formulated to answer three main questions: First, what cultural tourism assets does Demak Regency have and how did the commodification process of cultural-based tourism assets take place in Demak Regency during the period 2009–2021? Second, what efforts has the Demak Regency government made in implementing the commodification of cultural tourism assets and what factors influence its dynamics? Third, what are the results and impacts of cultural tourism commodification on strengthening the creative economy in Demak Regency?.

Method

The research method used in compiling this article is the historical method. The historical method is a method used to research, reconstruct, and analyze past events (Gottschalk, 2008, p. 39). The historical method includes four steps: heuristics (collecting sources), criticism (examining sources), interpretation, and historiography (writing history).

The first stage in the historical method is heuristics, or source collection. Heuristics is the process of collecting data and finding sources relevant to the problem, such as written and oral documents from past events as historical sources (Wasino, 2005, p. 11-12). The heuristics used in this article's research are divided into two categories: primary and secondary sources.

Written primary sources are archives of local government regulations, central government regulations, and laws related to tourism and the Creative Economy in Demak Regency obtained through the Demak Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office, the

Demak Regency Central Statistics Agency, the Demak Regency Regional Research and Development Agency, and the Demak Regency Industry and Manpower Office. Secondary sources are obtained through a literature study process originating from books, articles, and other library materials originating from previous research to support the research for writing this article (Suryomihardjo, 1975, p. 139).

The second stage after collecting sources is criticism. At this stage, sources are tested through external and internal criticism (Gottschalk, 2008). External criticism is an activity carried out to ensure the authenticity or authenticity of a source, which is done by examining whether the document or source obtained is an original or a copy. Furthermore, internal criticism is an activity carried out to ensure the credibility or truth of the content of the historical source.

The third stage after criticism is interpretation, namely the activity of interpreting the meaning of facts and the relationships between facts, so that a causal relationship is obtained that is relevant, chronological, and can be accounted for its truth. Historical facts relevant to the Development of Educational Structure in Indonesia from a Historical Perspective are synthesized through imagination, interpretation, and theorization to find chronological and causal relationships. The fourth stage is historiography, a method of writing using good and correct Indonesian, making it easy for readers to understand. Historical events are written logically, chronologically, and relevantly, and their truth can be scientifically verified (Gottschalk, 2008, p. 43).

The approach used in this study is an economic and tourism approach with a qualitative-historical model covering the scope of the creative economy, marketing, promotion, sustainable tourism, commodification of cultural tourism, the tourism industry and so on. The tourism economic approach is useful in this study because it can help analyze tourism economic activities, especially matters related to tourism activities from an economic perspective such as sales, promotion, tourism management, competition, and so on in the Commodification of Cultural Tourism Assets for Strengthening the Creative Economy in Demak Regency (Huang, 2020, p. 71).

Mapping of Culture-Based Tourism Assets in Demak Regency: Tangible and Intangible Cultural Assets

Demak Regency has a number of tangible cultural assets that are major tourist attractions. The Great Mosque of Demak is its most iconic asset, built during the Demak Sultanate around the 15th century AD. This mosque has a unique architecture with a triple-tiered roof that is characteristic of Javanese mosque architecture. This complex is not only a place of worship but also a museum that houses various historical artifacts, including soko tatal (mosque pillars made of tatal/wood chips) associated with the wisdom of Sunan Kalijaga. In addition to the Great Mosque, Demak Regency also has a complex of tombs of saints, including the tomb of Sunan Kalijaga in Kadilangu, which is a major pilgrimage destination (Asmarini, 2010, p. 15–28).

Demak Regency's intangible cultural assets include traditions still alive within the community. The Grebeg Besar tradition, held annually in the month of Dzulhijjah, is a cultural festival that combines religious, social, and artistic dimensions. This tradition involves a procession, folk festivals, and various traditional arts performances that attract thousands of visitors from various regions. Traditional arts such as Wayang Kulit (shadow puppetry), Ketoprak (traditional Demak dance), and Samproh (a traditional Demak hadrah art form) are also intangible assets with high market value in the context of cultural tourism. However, these

assets face serious challenges in terms of the regeneration of performers and the transfer of knowledge to the younger generation. This condition is one of the factors driving commodification efforts as a strategy for cultural sustainability (Pratama and Sungkono, 2023, pp. 156–172).

The Process of Commodification of Cultural-Based Tourism Assets

Cultural Assets Identification and Determination Phase (2009-2013)

The process of commodifying cultural-based tourism assets in Demak Regency began to gain more structured momentum following the enactment of Law No. 10 of 2009 concerning Tourism. During this phase, the local government began inventorying and mapping cultural assets with tourism potential. The Demak Regency Tourism and Culture Office developed the Regional Tourism Development Master Plan (RIPPDA), which served as the blueprint for tourism development during this period. Commodization initiatives during this phase were dominated by a top-down approach from the local government, with limited community involvement. Infrastructure development and improvements around key tourist attractions became the primary focus of interventions, including parking area renovations, public restroom construction, and improved road accessibility to the Demak Grand Mosque complex. The 2009–2013 period marked the initial phase of formalizing culture-based tourism policies in Demak Regency. The issuance of Demak Regency Regulation No. 50 of 2011 concerning the National Tourism Development Master Plan for 2010–2015 was a significant milestone, establishing a legal framework for the management and utilization of cultural assets as tourist attractions. In this document, the Great Mosque of Demak, the Tomb of Sunan Kalijaga, and the Tomb Complex of the Kings of Demak were designated as three priority tourism areas that would receive more intensive development attention. However, during this phase, the dominant approach remained conservation and promotion, not yet systematic integration with the creative economy ecosystem. The Demak Regency Government focused more on physical restoration and development of religious tourism areas than on developing the capacity of local economic actors. The budget allocated to the tourism sector during the 2009–2013 period averaged only Rp 4.2 billion per year, the majority of which was absorbed by physical infrastructure activities (BPS Kabupaten Demak, 2014).

The commodification process in this phase occurs organically and informally, primarily driven by the initiatives of merchant and artisan communities around tourist areas. This phenomenon aligns with de Certeau's argument about the "tactics" of marginalized groups exploiting structural gaps to survive and thrive, despite the lack of adequate policy frameworks (Kristiana and Rachman, 2021, pp. 185–197).

In 2013, the Demak Regency Government also commodified religious cultural tourism assets based on the policy of issuing Demak Regent Regulation Number 23 of 2013 concerning the Evaluation of the Results of the Demak Regency RKPD until the Second Quarter of 2013. In this regulation, the religious cultural tourism assets that were commodified were the Demak Grand Mosque, the Tombs of the Kings of Demak, and the Tomb of Sunan Kalijaga. The Demak Grand Mosque was commodified through efforts to establish a Demak Grand Mosque museum, create attractive tourism promotions for tourists by involving other major events such as the Demak Grand Grebeg tradition, Apitan, and Ruwatan, create a cultural festival with the main background of the Demak Grand Mosque, make the entrance ticket fee IDR. 2000 per person and create marketing in the form of billboards or banners and digital-based via the internet that can be accessed by all users (Dwi Marfiana, Personal Communication, 9

November 2022). Then, the Tombs of the Kings of Demak and the Tomb of Sunan Kalijaga were also commodified by creating digital promotions in the form of internet websites such as Google, YouTube, and Instagram to make it easier for tourists to access information about the Tombs of the Kings of Demak and the Tomb of Sunan Kalijaga.

Cultural Tourism Infrastructure Development Phase (2014-2018)

The second phase was marked by a significant increase in investment in cultural tourism infrastructure, following Demak Regency's inclusion in the Ministry of Tourism's National Tourism Destination Development (PDPN) program in 2014. National budget support, averaging IDR 18.7 billion per year, accelerated the construction of a tourist information center, renovated the area around the Grand Mosque, and improved accessibility to cultural tourism sites. More analytically significant was the beginning of a structured commodification process during this phase. The local government actively facilitated the formalization of micro and small businesses in the creative economy sector through the Demak Creative City program launched in 2016 (Nugroho, 2020, p. 45). This program targeted three priority subsectors: handicrafts based on Demak Islamic motifs; traditional culinary arts with local cultural identity; and performing arts as a tourist attraction. By the end of 2018, 189 creative business units had registered in this program, employing a total of 1,240 people (BPS Demak Regency, 2019). From a commodification perspective, this phase demonstrates what Richards calls the "institutionalization of commodification," a process in which previously informal commodification practices begin to gain legitimacy and structural support from the state. However, criticism needs to be raised regarding the unequal distribution of benefits: entrepreneurs who are able to access government programs tend to be those with better social and economic capital, thus perpetuating the reproduction of inequality within tourism communities (Richards, 2018, pp. 12-21).

Furthermore, the development phase was marked by the diversification of tourism products and the emergence of culture-based creative economy initiatives. During this period, various creative business groups began to emerge, capitalizing on the opportunities posed by increased tourist visits. These creative products included teak wood calligraphy crafts, Demakan-patterned batik, traditional foods such as presto milkfish and buntil, and various religious tourism-themed souvenirs. One important innovation in this phase was the development of tour packages that integrated visits to cultural sites with culinary experiences and shopping for local creative products. Creative business clusters began to form around tourist areas, creating a mutually supportive economic ecosystem (Wulandari and Prasetyo, 2020, p. 135). Data from the Demak Regency Cooperatives and SMEs Office shows that the number of MSMEs in the creative sector increased from 342 units in 2012 to 1,287 units in 2018, with an average annual growth rate of around 25%.

Digital-Based Creative Economy Integration Phase (2019-2021)

The third phase brought a qualitative transformation in the process of commodification of Demak's cultural assets, mainly triggered by two interacting external factors. First, the penetration of digital platforms which opens up new markets for local creative economy products, and second, the COVID-19 pandemic which paradoxically accelerates the digitalization of the tourism sector as an adaptive response to restrictions on physical mobility. The launch of the "Demak Heritage" platform in 2019 as a digital marketplace for creative economy products based on Demak culture is one of the interesting governance innovations. This platform allows consumers from outside the region and even abroad to buy craft

products, order virtual tour packages, and access Demak cultural content online (Setiawan and Haryanto, 2022, p. 189–204)

This phase also presents new challenges in managing authenticity. The demands of the digital market, which demands content that is easily consumed, visually appealing, and shareable on social media, encourage the simplification and even distortion of complex cultural values (Kho, et al., 2024, pp. 31-50). This phenomenon aligns with Baudrillard's critique of the "simulacrum," where cultural representations for mass consumption ultimately replace the cultural reality itself. In the Demak context, the sacred and philosophical values of the Singatunggal mask dance, for example, have the potential to be reduced to merely an exotic spectacle for tourist photos (Yin, 2018, pp. 67-76).

In this phase, the presence of social media and e-commerce platforms opens up new opportunities for local creative economy actors to reach a wider market. Demak's creative products began to be marketed through Tokopedia, Shopee and Instagram, which significantly expanded market reach and increased business income. However, this phase is also faced with a big challenge in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic which has hit since the beginning of 2020. The drastic decline in tourist visits by 65% in 2020 dealt a heavy blow to the creative economy ecosystem that has been built over a decade (Santono, 2021, pp. 123). However, on the other hand, the pandemic has actually encouraged the acceleration of digital transformation among local creative businesses, as an adaptation and survival strategy. For further details of the three phases described above, below is a progress table.

Table 1. Development of Commodification of Cultural-Based Tourism Assets in Demak Regency 2009-2021

Aspect	2009-2013	2013-2018	2019-2021
Dominant Actor	Local government	Government, Private Sector, Community	Multi-stakeholder and Digital Platform
Commodification Focus	Infrastructure and Accessibility	Diversification of Tourism Products	Digitalization and Innovation
Product Form	Conventional Religious Tourism	Integrated Tour Packages	Digital and Hybrid Tourism
Economies of Scale	Limited Local	Regional-National	National-Global

Source: Processed data from the Demak Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office, 2009-2021.

Support from the Demak Regency Government in Implementing the Commodification of Cultural Tourism Assets Based on the Creative Economy

The support of the Demak Regency Government in commodifying cultural tourism to strengthen the Creative Economy is explained below.

Providing Tourism and Creative Economy Training

Providing tourism training for tourism industry workers and Small and Medium Industries (SMEs) operating in the Creative Economy sector is a form of government support in commodifying tourism assets, including cultural tourism assets in Demak Regency to strengthen the Creative Economy. This training aims to ensure that tourism industry workers and Creative Economy entrepreneurs understand the concept of tourism commodification to strengthen the Creative Economy (Demak Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office, 2020, p. 42). This concept must be understood by tourism industry workers and Creative

Economy entrepreneurs. In commodifying tourism, tourism destination governance must be carefully considered from various elements such as environmental sustainability, cleanliness, security, and so on. The positioning of products sold by creative economy actors must be arranged so that visiting tourists can feel happy and comfortable when visiting tourist attractions that look neat and orderly. Therefore, the Tourism and Creative Economy Office provides joint training between tourism industry workers and creative economy entrepreneurs (Nila Citra Prabastari, Personal Communication, 11 January 2023).

Training for tourism industry workers and creative economy actors in Demak Regency has been provided since 2013 through Demak Regent Regulation Number 23 of 2013 concerning the implementation of Human Resources Development for Tourism and the Creative Economy, which was attended by 60 participants from tourism industry workers and 40 creative economy entrepreneurs from various sub-sectors, bringing the total number of training participants to 100 (Demak Regent Regulation Number 23 of 2013, 2013, p. 39). The provision of tourism training and creative economy training for creative economy entrepreneurs is not always carried out simultaneously. This is influenced by the limited budget used in the training process as well as the time and place provided (Nila Citra Prabastari, Personal Communication, 11 January 2023).

Collaboration with the Community

The Demak Regency Government requires collaboration with the community and creative economy entrepreneurs to develop tourism and have an impact on creative economy entrepreneurs. Collaboration with the community and creative economy entrepreneurs (MSMEs) can be carried out through village officials or the local village head, and through the village head, information on the collaboration can be conveyed to the community and creative economy entrepreneurs through village meetings. The purpose of this collaboration is to maximize the commodification of tourism assets, especially cultural tourism owned by the Demak Regency Government, so that it is successful and on target (Masluroh, Personal Communication, 11 January 2023).

According to the Head of the Demak Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office, that collaboration has been carried out since 2009 when the Demak Regency Government created a tourism development program to strengthen the creative economy in Demak Regency. The form of cooperation carried out by the Demak Regency Government with the community and creative economy entrepreneurs is by involving the community in the development of tourism assets. For example, commodifying cultural tourism in the field of batik crafts in Karangmlati Village, Wedung District, Demak Regency. In commodifying cultural tourism assets with the tourist attractions of batik artisans, batik clothing, and batik motifs, the involvement of village communities is needed to help develop cultural tourism in the art of batik crafts, the way is by supporting and helping to promote Demak batik craft products, participating in preserving Demak batik, and participating in making creative products from batik crafts such as making batik patterned shirts, batik patterned dresses, Demak batik patterned shoes, Demak batik patterned bags, and so on (Endah Cahya Rini, Personal Communication, 16 January 2023).

The process in this collaboration ran smoothly because the commodification carried out by the Demak Regency Regional Government was mutually beneficial for both the local government and the community. From the community's perspective, this collaboration can help the community, especially for creative economy entrepreneurs (SMEs), by commercializing and introducing creative products from various creative industry sub-sectors

such as crafts, culinary products, services, and so on, so that visiting tourists can enjoy tourism while also being able to get to know creative products from the community (Kumidi, Personal Communication, 19 January 2023). From the perspective of the Demak Regency Regional Government, this collaboration can provide an example to local governments in other regions in developing the cultural tourism sector to strengthen the creative economy, that the implementation of cultural tourism commodification cannot be done individually but requires collaboration with other parties, including the community and Creative Economy entrepreneurs. In addition, this collaboration can create a relationship of trust between the local government and the community (Seruni, 2022).

Creating a Digital-Based Tourism Promotion System

The background of the creation of a digital-based tourism promotion system in Demak Regency is because tourism promotion can not only be done through print and written media such as brochures, pamphlets, newspapers and so on, but tourism promotion must follow the trend of technological progress and globalization to support people's lifestyles (Endah Cahya Rini, Personal Communication, 16 January 2023). According to data from the results of a survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), it was explained that in 2016, people in Indonesia who used the internet were 132.7 million people out of a total population of 256.2 million people (Annual Report of the Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information, 2016, p. 25). Based on this, the Regional Government of Demak Regency sees a great opportunity to commodify tourism in Demak Regency, including cultural tourism, which must be promoted through digital media from various platforms such as YouTube, Google, Facebook, and Instagram to attract tourists visiting Demak Regency and can increase the selling value of cultural tourism assets in Demak Regency. The process of creating a digital-based tourism promotion system is running smoothly, this is proven by one example of creating a digital tourism promotion, namely by creating a YouTube channel called "Demak Tourism" which was created in 2018. The contents of this Demak Tourism YouTube channel are things that contain information about tourism in Demak Regency, both cultural tourism, arts and culture tourism, natural tourism, tourism events in Demak Regency and so on (Pariwisata Demak, 2023).

Driving and Inhibiting Factors of Commodification

Based on the analysis, several key factors are driving the commodification of cultural-based tourism assets in Demak Regency. First, national and regional government policies explicitly encourage the development of tourism and the creative economy, including the designation of Demak as one of Central Java's leading religious tourism destinations. Second, increased regional fiscal capacity allows for greater investment in tourism infrastructure development and the empowerment of creative economy actors. Third, growing public awareness of the economic value of local cultural assets, which encourages active participation in the development of culture-based creative products and services. Third, the development of digital technology has opened broader market access for local creative products, particularly since 2015 with the increasingly massive penetration of smartphones and the internet. Fourth, the rising trend of religious and cultural tourism in Indonesia, which has created a growing market demand for destinations like Demak (Schedyven, 2021, pp. 45-67).

On the other hand, the commodification process also faces various inhibiting factors that need to be identified and addressed. First, there is the limited human resources skilled in tourism management and creative product development. Many business actors still rely on

traditional skills without adequate capacity renewal. Second, there is the lack of integration between the management of cultural sites (often managed by religious authorities) and commercial tourism development strategies, resulting in fragmentation in destination governance (Mariani et al., 2016, pp. 57-62). Third, there is resistance from some community groups and religious scholars to excessive commodification, which they believe can diminish the sanctity and sacredness of religious sites. Fourth, there is competition from other, more established religious tourism destinations, such as Sunan Kudus and Sunan Muria, which divides the market share of pilgrimage tourists. Fifth, there is vulnerability to external disruptions, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, which has exposed the fragility of the creative economy ecosystem, which lacks sufficient resilience (Sari and Pratama, 2020, pp. 15-23).

The Commodification of Cultural Tourism to Strengthen the Creative Economy

The following is an explanation of the results of the commodification of cultural tourism in the context of strengthening the Creative Economy in Demak Regency.

Commodification of Cultural Tourism Products

According to Suswantoro, a tourism product is the totality of services obtained, enjoyed, and felt by tourists during their stay at a tourism object (Suswantoro, 2007, p. 75). The commodification of cultural tourism products can be tangible, intangible, and packaged in a series of tourism trips. Examples include cultural performance attractions, museums, cultural arts and crafts such as batik, calligraphy, tambourines, and so on (Hadinoto, 1996, p. 187). The sustainable commodification of cultural tourism products can also strengthen the Creative Economy if they are processed and packaged creatively and innovatively by involving the skills of local human resources.

According to Burns and Holden, creating creative, innovative, and sustainable tourism products requires three key considerations. First, identifying tourism product opportunities before creation, meaning the tourism product must meet the tastes and desires of consumers or tourists and exceed their expectations. Second, the tourism product must not have a negative impact on the environment, society, culture, or economy, as outlined in the guidelines for sustainable tourism development. Third, the tourism product must have a Unique Selling Point (USP) as a unique feature offered to tourists to increase its selling value (Burns and Holden, 1997, p. 157). Based on this explanation, the Demak Regency Government has created creative and sustainable cultural tourism products such as museums, handicrafts, performance attractions, and so on. The following explains the commodification of cultural tourism products in Demak Regency to strengthen the Creative Economy until 2020.

Demak Grand Mosque Complex

In 2011, the Demak Grand Mosque religious cultural tourism complex commodified its educational cultural tourism product by establishing the Demak Grand Mosque Museum. The Demak Grand Mosque Museum was officially established in 2011 and inaugurated by the Governor of Central Java Province, H. Bibit Waluyo (Demak Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office, 2015, p. 3). The Demak Grand Mosque Museum was established with the aim of storing unused collection objects in the Demak Grand Mosque so that they are not damaged and can provide knowledge to the wider community about the history of the Demak Kingdom through the legacy of heirlooms owned by the Demak Grand Mosque consisting of the Qur'an and ancient handwritten books from the 16th century, lamp shades inherited from Paku

Buwono I in 1710, andesite type base stones, photos of the 19th and 20th century Demak Grand Mosque figures, Sunan Kalijaga's total wood shingles, a kong jar gift from Princess Campa from the 15th century, a 16th century Javanese script wood carving inscription, a 16th century kentongan and bedug, the door leaves of the Demak Grand Mosque, the bledeg door of the Demak Grand Mosque, former pillars, and so on. These heirlooms are regulated in the Decree of the Ta'mir of the Demak Grand Mosque Number: 03 / SKEP / TMAD / IX.2020 concerning the Inventory of the Property of the Demak Grand Mosque Museum. The following is a photo of the Demak Grand Mosque Museum building.



Figure 1. Demak Grand Mosque Museum building that has been build since 2011.

Source: Author's Documentation, 2022

According to the management of the Demak Grand Mosque Museum, the museum is being commodified in the following ways. First, by providing information on each collection of heirlooms stored within. This information is written in Indonesian to facilitate tourists' understanding of the information presented. Second, by digitizing the museum to facilitate tourists' online search for museum information through websites such as Google, YouTube, and other browsers. Third, by designing the museum's rooms and collections to be neat, clean, cool, and comfortable for visitors, so they don't get bored easily. Fourth, by setting an affordable entrance fee for the Demak Grand Mosque Museum, at IDR 2,000 per person. Fifth, by providing tour guides who are ready to assist tourists during their visit to the museum, and sixth, by providing a suggestion book for tourists so they can write down the advantages and disadvantages of visiting the Demak Grand Mosque Museum. These recommendations can be used by the Demak Grand Mosque Museum to improve the museum's function and services to tourists (Hadi Sumaryono, Personal Communication, 15 September 2022). Based on the methods of commodification at the Great Mosque Museum of Demak that have been described above, the results of commodification can be seen from the increase in the number of tourists visiting the tourist attraction area.

According to data from the Demak Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office, visitors who visited the Demak Grand Mosque complex in 2009 amounted to 440,128 people and in 2019 increased to 675,800 people (Report on the Number of Tourist Visitors to the Demak Grand Mosque, 2011). Furthermore, according to the manager of the Demak Grand Mosque tourist attraction, the existence of the Demak Grand Mosque Museum also has an impact on the Creative Economy MSMEs in the surrounding area, especially culinary service

businesses. According to data from the Demak Regency Trade, Cooperatives, and MSMEs Office, the Creative Economy MSMEs selling around the Demak Grand Mosque religious tourism complex in the culinary sector in 2011 were 3 units, namely culinary businesses selling tempeh, crackers, and various foods and soft drinks. Furthermore, in 2020 the number of culinary MSME business units increased to 14 units. Thus, the commodification of religious cultural tourism products at the Great Mosque of Demak can strengthen the creative economy of local MSMEs (Rohmat, Personal Communication, 15 September 2022). The following shows photos of culinary MSMEs around the Great Mosque of Demak cultural tourism attraction.



Figure 2. Photo of a culinary MSME around the Demak Grand Mosque Cultural Tourism Object. Established since 2011.

Source: Author's Documentation, 2022.

Barongan Performing Arts

In 2013, the cultural tourism of barongan performing arts in Demak succeeded in producing a commodified tourism product in the form of a cultural tourism performance attraction recognized by UNESCO with registration number 2013003743 (Directorate of Indonesian Cultural Heritage Diplomacy, 2013). Thus, the barongan performing arts product in Demak has been recognized by the UN special agency that handles the field of cultural heritage and is included in the intangible cultural heritage. In achieving this, barongan performing arts are commodified through the following ways. First, developing and introducing barongan performing arts as a traditional art of the Demak Regency community for the cultural identity of local wisdom through cultural preservation. Second, barongan performing arts are commodified with the concept of pseudo-traditional art supported by the holding of arts festivals or arts event performances that influence the promotion of the cultural tourism industry in Demak Regency. Third, digitizing the promotion and staging of the Demak barongan performance on internet websites such as YouTube and Instagram to make it easier for audiences to access information about the barongan performing arts and can be followed directly or indirectly (online) (Ardhito Prabowo, Personal Communication, 26 April 2023).

The Demak Barongan performing arts are also commodified through community-based tourism management, involving the skills of the local community. One example is the barongan performers, props, and costumes (Santoso, 2021, p. 42). According to Mus'tain, one of the Heads of the Demak Barongan Arts Studio, the barongan performers who participate

are prioritized from the Demak Regency community, and the recruitment process is straightforward, as prospective performers must have an interest in the performing arts and be willing to learn (Must'ain, Personal Communication, 20 June 2023).

Based on the commodification methods described above, in addition to the results of the commodification of the barongan performing arts recognized by UNESCO and already on an international scale, there are other commodification results, namely first, raising the image of cultural tourism in Demak Regency. Second, increasing the interest of the people of Demak Regency in staging the Demak barongan performing arts as evidenced by the number of players which in 2013 had reached 300 young men and women from various villages in Demak Regency spread across various art studios such as the Kademangan Studio, Kusumo Joyo, and Putro Turonggo Samudro. (Arisyanto, 2019, pp. 114-116). Third, the results of the commodification of the barongan performing arts in Demak have an impact on improving the community's economy as evidenced by the income received by barongan players for one performance, which is Rp. 100,000 to Rp. 150,000 and the income received by art studio institutions is Rp. 7,000,000 to Rp. 8,000,000. If the schedule is busy, the barongan performance can be performed 4 times a day, namely morning, afternoon, evening, and night, and the income earned by the art studio and barongan players can reach 4 times that, namely for the art studio institution it can reach an income of Rp. 28,000,000 to Rp. 32,000,000 and each individual barongan player can reach an income of Rp. 400,000 to Rp. 600,000 for one day (Mus'tain, Personal Communication, 20 June 2023). The following is a photo of the barongan performance art practice performance in Demak.



Figure 3. Barongan's performance rehearsal before appearing on the stage

Source: Documentation Archives of the Demak Regency Tourism and Creative Economy Office, 2021.

Demak's Batik Craft Art

In 2018, Demak batik craft resulted in the commodification of cultural tourism products in the form of a batik tourism village located in Karangmlati Village, Demak District, Demak Regency, presenting Demak batik motifs morning and evening with decorative variations of scales, guava flowers, butterflies, and so on made by Demak batik artisans. To achieve this, Demak batik craft art was commodified in the following ways. First, Demak batik craft art was grouped as a tourist attraction through the Tourism Village program (Kusumaningrum and Wahyudin, 2021, pp. 55-68). Second, in the human resources sector, batik craft MSMEs

participated in training organized by the Demak Regency Government with the aim of developing skills. Third, promoting Demak batik as a cultural heritage of the Demak Regency community through batik exhibitions organized by the Demak Regency Government and the batik artisan community. Fourth, setting affordable batik prices for visitors or buyers. The price for one Demak batik cloth is affordable for consumers or tourists ranging from Rp. 70,000 – Rp. 3,000,000 per cloth depending on the batik making technique, namely hand-drawn batik, stamped batik or eco-printing batik, raw materials, size, and so on (Wilis Janu, Personal Communication, 6 June 2023). Based on the commodification methods explained above, the results of the commodification of Demak batik craft culture tourism, namely the Demak batik tourism village, have an influence on the development of Demak batik, such as the development of various Demak batik motifs that represent the city of Demak, such as the starfruit and pomegranate motifs of Demak, the longan motif, the karangmlati motif, the Great Mosque of Demak motif, the owl motif, the Lara Gendhing motif, the Kembang Arum motif, the Demak sekar jagad motif, and other motifs (Komariah, 2018, p. 3). Based on these motifs, the Demak batik motifs that are often sought by consumers are the Great Mosque of Demak motif, the Demak Starfruit motif, and the Demak sekar jagad motif. The characteristic of Demak Batik motifs is that most of them are brightly colored because they represent Demak as a coastal area.

The batik motifs created by batik artisans in Demak are derived from training activities organized by the Teaching and Learning Activity Center (PKBM) in Karangmlati Village, Demak District, Demak Regency. PKBM Karangmlati also serves as a forum for Creative Industry entrepreneurs, especially those in the craft and sewing sectors, to develop their businesses. PKBM Karangmlati was established in 2010 with a notarial deed numbered: 4219/225/2010, which was inaugurated by the Demak Regency Education, Youth, and Sports Office (Arifah, 2020, pp. 181-190). In addition to batik motifs, the commodification of batik tourism villages has also had an impact on increasing batik production. According to one Demak batik artisan named Basiroh, the production of eco-printed and stamped batik can produce around 300 pieces of cloth in one month, whereas previously it could only produce 150-200 pieces. Furthermore, for written batik, which previously could produce around 15-20 cloths in one month, this can increase to 30 cloths in one month. This also affects consumer order demand (Basiroh, Personal Communication, 6 June 2023).

Marketing of Demak batik is not only focused on consumers within Demak Regency, but also outside Demak Regency, such as Semarang, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Jakarta, Bandung, and so on. One Demak batik artisan, Wilis Janu, has even received orders from overseas, including the Netherlands, England, and Singapore. Thus, Demak batik has become well-known and marketed internationally (Wilis Janu, Personal Communication, 6 June 2023).

Based on the explanation above, with the publication of a batik tourism village in Demak which presents various motifs and styles of batik clothing, it can increase the diversity of cultural tourism products in Demak Regency, and can be a reference for tourists who want to go batik tourism and deepen their knowledge about Demak batik. Thus, the cultural tourism products of batik arts and crafts produced by Demak batik artisans can strengthen the Creative Economy (Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy of Indonesia, 2020, p. 5) The following are images of batik motifs produced by Demak batik artisans.



Figure 4. Left are the Demak Guava and Kembang Arum Batik's pattern. On the right side is the Demak Grand Mosque pattern with stamp technique created on 2018.

Source: Author's Documentation, 2022.

Based on the explanation of the commodification of cultural tourism products above, it can be seen that the results of cultural tourism products made by the Regional Government of Demak Regency together with Creative Economy business actors, and the community are diverse with various types of creative products and prices offered, then through these products can be used as a promotional tool to introduce Demak Regency tourism, especially in the cultural sector. Thus, the efforts of the Regional Government of Demak Regency in commodifying cultural tourism assets to strengthen the Creative Economy can be successful because one of the indicators can be seen from the tourism products produced.

The Impact of Commodification on Strengthening the Creative Economy

The commodification of cultural-based tourism assets from 2009 to 2021 has had a significant positive impact on strengthening the creative economy in Demak Regency, as evidenced by the increase in tourist numbers shown in the table below. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a decline due to restrictions on outdoor activities and the closure of tourist destinations.

Table 2. Development of the Number of Tourists Coming to Demak Regency

No	Year	Number of Tourists (people)	
		Domestic	Abroad (Overseas)
1.	2009	1.033.154	1.204
2.	2010	1.097.053	816
3.	2011	1.173.107	853
4.	2012	1.486.149	1.190
5.	2013	1.507.129	837
6.	2014	1.537.388	676
7.	2015	1.399.770	467
8.	2016	1.496.294	571
9.	2017	1.573.194	805
10.	2018	1.632.744	1.423
11.	2019	4.099.522	1.491
12.	2020	856.866	42
13.	2021	418.418	0
14.	Total	15.780.811	10.375

Source: Processed from the BPS-Statistics of Demak Regency, 2009-2021

Based on appendix table 1, the number of tourists visiting Demak Regency from 2009 to 2021 can be seen. In 2009, the number of domestic tourists visiting Demak Regency was 1,033,154 people, and the number of foreign tourists visiting Demak Regency was 1,204 people (BPS, 2009, p. 284). In 2019, the number of domestic tourists visiting Demak Regency almost quadrupled, namely 4,099,522 people and foreign tourists amounted to 1,419 people (BPS, 2019, p. 303). This can indicate the success of the cultural tourism commodification program to strengthen the Creative Economy carried out by the Demak Regency Regional Government, but in 2020 and 2021 the number of tourists from both domestic and foreign decreased. This was influenced by the main factor of the Covid-19 pandemic which resulted in a ban on travel, including tourism.

Furthermore, the number of visitors to Demak Regency influences the contribution of tourism and the Creative Economy sector to regional income. Table 3.2 shows the contribution of tourism and Creative Economy revenue to Demak Regency's regional income.

Table 3. Total Contribution of Tourism and Creative Economy Revenue to Regional Revenue in Demak Regency 2011-2021.

No	Year	Regional Income (Rp)	Tourism and Creative Economy Revenue (Rp)	Persent
1.	2011	1.132.135.927	507.370.000	6,24
2	2013	1.398.722.359	612.395.000	7,86
3.	2014	1.637.948.630	858.805.000	7,79
4.	2015	1.786.987.653	534.092.000	12,52
5.	2017	1.820.354.472	474.567.500	13,45
6.	2018	1.830.364.753	497.107.500	13,32
7.	2021	2.400.405.766	1.450.702.000	19,94

Source: Processed data from the BPS-Statistics of Demak Regency, Demak in Figures 2011-2021.

Based on the data in Table 2, it is known that the amount of regional income of Demak Regency along with the contribution of income in the tourism and Creative Economy sectors in 2011-2018. In 2011, the amount of regional income of Demak Regency was Rp. 1,132,135,927, and the income from tourism and Creative Economy of Demak Regency amounted to Rp. 507,370,000 (BPS, 2011, p. 285). Furthermore, in 2014 the amount of contribution of tourism and Creative Economy income increased to Rp. 858,805,000, however in 2015 and 2017 it decreased to Rp. 474,567,500 (BPS, 2017, p. 302). Furthermore, in 2018 the amount of contribution of tourism sector income to regional income increased again to Rp. 497,107,500 (BPS, 2018, p. 304).

Furthermore, in addition to indicators of increasing regional income and income from the tourism and creative economy sectors, other indicators that demonstrate that the cultural tourism asset commodification program in Demak Regency to strengthen the creative economy has elevated Demak Regency to a non-poor region include increased per capita income, a reduced number of poor people, and a reduced percentage of poor people. Table 4.8 presents the development of per capita income in Demak Regency, along with the number and percentage of poor people.

Table 4. Development of Per Capita Income of Demak Regency Population, Number of Poor Population, and Percentage of Poor Population, 2012-2019.

No	Year	Per Capita Income of Population (Rp)	Number of Poor Population (people)	Percentage of Poor Population (%)
1.	2012	Rp. 276.041.000	178.100	16,73
2.	2013	Rp. 299.773.000	172.500	15,72
3.	2014	Rp. 315.570.000	162.000	14,60
4.	2015	Rp. 328.529.000	160.900	14,44
5.	2016	Rp. 356.919.000	158.800	14,10
6.	2017	Rp. 371.525.000	152.600	13,41
7.	2018	Rp. 402.211.000	144.100	12,54
8.	2019	Rp. 411.202.000	137.600	11,86

Source: Processed from the BPS-Statistics of Demak Regency, Demak in Figures 2012-2019.

Based on the data in table 3.3, it is known that the development of the number of per capita incomes of the population, the number of poor people, and the percentage of poor people in Demak Regency from 2012-2019. In 2012, the per capita income of the population amounted to Rp. 276,041,000 with a poor population of 178,100 people and a percentage of poor people of 16.73%. Furthermore, in 2019, the per capita income of the population increased to Rp. 411,202,000 with a poor population of 137,600 and a percentage of poor people of 11.56% (BPS, 2020, p. 85) Since 2012-2019 the number of poor people in Demak Regency has decreased and the per capita income of the population has increased. This indicates that the program implemented by the Demak Regency Government, namely the commodification of cultural tourism assets to strengthen the creative economy, has been successful, as it has reduced poverty rates in Demak Regency, albeit only gradually. Furthermore, the increase in per capita income also indicates that people's purchasing power has increased and the poverty rate has decreased (Pangestu, 2008, p. 56-61).

On the other hand, the commodification process also has several negative impacts that require serious attention. One of the most worrying is the degradation of cultural authenticity, where several traditions and cultural practices are beginning to be modified to suit tourist preferences (Hermayani et al., 2025, pp. 45-59). Ethnographic research by Wulandari and Prasetyo found that Samproh art performances, which were once performed only in the context of religious rituals, are now often staged as commercial performances with shortened duration and simplified content (Wulandari and Prasetyo, 2020, p. 139). The findings of this study also indicate that the success of sustainable commodification in Demak Regency depends heavily on the ability to manage the balance between commercialization and the preservation of indigenous cultural values. Participatory cultural revitalization programs designed with the involvement of traditional leaders, artists, religious scholars, government officials, and business actors show greater potential for achieving this balance compared to approaches solely oriented towards commercial interests.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the commodification of culture-based tourism assets in Demak Regency between 2009 and 2021 has progressively progressed through three distinct development phases: initiation, development, and transformation. This process has had a significant positive impact on strengthening the creative economy, reflected in a substantial

increase in the number of creative entrepreneurs, community income, and the diversification of culture-based creative products.

However, this commodification process also presents a number of challenges and risks, particularly related to the potential degradation of cultural authenticity, the unequal distribution of economic benefits, and vulnerability to external disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The success of sustainable commodification requires a more holistic and balanced approach, oriented not only toward optimizing the economic value of cultural assets but also ensuring the preservation of cultural values themselves as a foundation for the development of long-term community identity and well-being.

The "cultural tourism-based commodification" model, which positions local cultural products as active subjects in the commodification process, supported by responsive policies and inclusive governance, is the most promising approach to optimizing the potential of Demak Regency's cultural-based tourism assets. Consistent adoption of this model is expected to strengthen Demak's position as a religious and cultural tourism destination that is not only commercially attractive but also culturally authentic and socially just.

The results of the commodification of cultural tourism to strengthen the creative economy are considered successful because they can help increase the regional income of Demak Regency which can be seen from the contribution of income in the tourism and Creative Economy sectors to regional income, the number of tourists visiting Demak Regency is increasing, and creative products made by creative economy business actors can be marketed more widely and reduce poverty rates in Demak which makes Demak Regency not a poor area.

This study makes a theoretical contribution by operationalizing the concept of commodification in the context of historical Islamic cultural tourism in Java, a context that has received less attention in the academic literature than the case of Bali. From a policy perspective, this study recommends revising Demak Regency's regional regulations to explicitly integrate the principles of an inclusive creative economy and mechanisms for protecting cultural values from excessive commercialization. The main findings confirm that cultural commodification can be an effective instrument for strengthening the creative economy, but only if managed within a framework oriented towards distributive justice and the sustainability of cultural values.

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