

Pematang Johar Creative Village: Developing a Creative Village through Local Wisdom – Based Economic Empowerment

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Abstract: *This community service program was implemented by lecturers and students of STIE Eka Prasetya in Pematang Johar Village, North Sumatra, in response to the underutilization of local products (various rice, duck eggs, tempe, and its derivatives, batik, and recycled crafts) for creative economic development and sustainable tourism. The program aimed to empower the community by strengthening entrepreneurial capacity, product innovation, and the use of local wisdom as the identity of a creative village. The approach used included workshops, participatory training, business mentoring, and hands-on digital marketing practice over one month. As a result, local producers improved product quality and variety, enhanced design and packaging, began using social media for promotion, and developed a better understanding of basic business management. This program demonstrates the important role of higher education institutions in knowledge transfer and in supporting the development of creative, locally rooted village economies.*

Keywords:

Community Empowerment; Creative Product; Creative Village; Economic Development; Local Wisdom; Sustainable Tourism Development

Introduction

Rural communities in Indonesia continue to face structural challenges such as poverty, limited access to decent work, and dependence on low value-added primary commodities. National data in March 2025 show a poverty rate of 8.47%, with rural poverty remaining higher than in urban areas (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025). In North Sumatra, the poverty rate reached 7.36% in March 2025, with rural poverty at 7.71%, indicating that many village economies remain vulnerable (Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Sumatera Utara, 2025). International and national policy documents

increasingly present the creative economy as a feasible development option that can diversify rural livelihoods and reduce structural inequalities (Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif Republik Indonesia, 2014; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2010). The creative economy is understood as a new economic paradigm in which ideas, culture, and creativity become key sources of value creation (Howkins, 2002; Suryana, 2013). In Indonesia, tourism villages have been promoted as concrete manifestations of this paradigm, combining tourism, local culture, and creative industries to enhance rural welfare (Latif, 2018; Yunani et al., 2024).

Recent studies emphasise that the development of creative economy and tourism villages is most effective when it is rooted in local wisdom, inclusive education, and community empowerment. Research in Bantul, Yogyakarta, for example, shows that creative economy initiatives based on local wisdom, supported by education and empowerment, can strengthen rural resilience in the era of digital transformation (Rahman & Hakim, 2024). Other work highlights that local wisdom-based creative industries, when linked with innovation and market access, can generate employment and increase income for rural communities (Rakib et al., 2018; Widyanti et al., 2022). System dynamics modelling and reviews of tourism-village research further underline that tourism villages require integrated approaches that connect agro-tourism, creative products, and village innovation systems to support long-term sustainability (Santoso et al., 2022; Yunani et al., 2024). At the micro level, community perception, emotional solidarity, and community support are also central to sustainable tourism development in village destinations, as demonstrated in Green Talao Park, West Sumatra (Mentari, 2023).

Pematang Johar Village in Labuhan Deli Sub-District, Deli Serdang Regency, is a peri-urban agricultural village known for its extensive paddy fields and the development of paddy field tourism as a community empowerment instrument since 2020 (Mujahiddin, 2024). Earlier work shows that the village government has positioned rice field tourism as a way to open new employment opportunities and strengthen community participation in development (Mujahiddin et al., 2022). Community service activities in the village also report that local actors are actively involved in pioneering integrated thematic tourism village initiatives (Kamtini et al., 2023). Alongside its agricultural landscape, the community produces various local products such as multiple rice varieties, duck eggs, tempe and chips, batik with paddy field and mangrove motifs, and recycled-material handicrafts, including women's groups engaged in mangrove batik as a form of local knowledge-based empowerment (Kamtini et al., 2023). These resources reflect strong cultural capital and creativity, yet many products are still marketed in simple forms with limited branding, packaging,

financial management, and digital promotion.

Previous studies and community partnership programs in Pematang Johar identify several issues: weak information and promotion of tourism potential, the absence of integrated media to showcase attractions, suboptimal educational and supporting facilities, and constraints in product innovation and marketing (Kamtini et al., 2023). These local constraints mirror broader national findings that many rural MSMEs face barriers related to digital literacy, branding, and market access despite the rapid growth of digital platforms (Hisyam & Fitriyah, 2024). Systematic reviews of digital transformation among Indonesian SMEs note that adoption is still uneven, constrained by limited skills, infrastructure, and organizational readiness (Muis, 2025; Tambunan & Busnetti, 2024). Recent work also shows that sustainable digital marketing strategies need to integrate local wisdom and green innovation if MSMEs are to remain competitive while staying embedded in local values (Sustainable Digital Marketing Strategy Based on Local Wisdom and Green Innovation, 2025). The central issue addressed in this community service program is therefore the gap between the strong cultural and creative potential of Pematang Johar and the community's limited capacity to transform that potential into competitive creative products and sustainable tourism services.

The community service program focuses on the development of **Pematang Johar Creative Village**, with two interconnected emphases: (1) strengthening the local creative economy through product innovation, improved packaging, branding, and digital marketing, and (2) supporting sustainable, culture-based tourism by positioning local products and local wisdom as core elements of the visitor experience. Pematang Johar was chosen as the subject because it already has an established paddy field tourism icon, active collaboration between the village government and local communities, and an articulated aspiration to develop into a creative and tourism village (Kamtini et al., 2023; Mujahiddin, 2025). Community assistance activities and this program's internal documentation indicate that the village has ongoing initiatives that require follow-up through capacity building, mentoring, and market access (Mentari, 2025). Studies on tourism village development in Indonesia emphasise that such community empowerment-based approaches and inclusive institutional arrangements are crucial for long-term sustainability (Normelani et al., 2023; Prayitno et al., 2023). Research on local wisdom-based creative economy and tourism villages also suggests that an integrated approach to agro-tourism, creative products, and branding is needed to build a distinct and competitive village identity (Rakib et al., 2018; Santoso et al., 2022; Romadhan & Yuliani, 2025).

Expected social changes from this program include increased entrepreneurial

skills among local producers, improvement and diversification of local products, wider and more strategic use of social media and digital platforms for marketing, and a stronger identity of Pematang Johar as a creative and sustainable tourism village. In the medium term, these changes are expected to increase household income, reduce youth out-migration, and strengthen community participation in village development. This design is consistent with literature showing that local wisdom-based creative economies can increase income and employment when supported by structured empowerment efforts (Rahman & Hakim, 2024; Widyanti et al., 2022). Research on tourism villages similarly finds that community participation, digital transformation, and inclusive governance are key to enhancing socio-economic resilience (Yunani et al., 2024; Pramono & Juliana, 2025). In addition, studies of tourism villages underline that residents' perceptions, emotional solidarity, and support are central to sustaining tourism development over time (Mentari, 2023; Cenizal, 2024).

Within this framework, the Pematang Johar Creative Village program is structured as a one-month participatory intervention combining workshops, mentoring, and collaborative practice in creative product development and digital marketing. By integrating local wisdom, creative economy principles, and community-based tourism, the program aims to support Pematang Johar's transition from a primarily agricultural village toward a resilient creative village that contributes to Sustainable Development Goals related to poverty reduction, decent work and economic growth, sustainable communities, and responsible consumption and production.

Method

This community service program used a community organizing and participatory action approach in collaboration with the residents of Pematang Johar Village. The subjects of the program were: (1) micro and small entrepreneurs producing rice, tempe, snacks, batik, and recycled handicrafts, (2) women's groups and youth groups involved in creative activities and tourism, and (3) village government representatives and the tourism village management team. The activities were carried out in Pematang Johar Village, Labuhan Deli Sub-District, Deli Serdang Regency, using village halls, community houses, and production sites as learning spaces.

The planning process was conducted jointly with the community. First, the team held initial coordination meetings with the village head, village officials, and the

tourism village team to introduce the program and agree on the general focus. Next, a participatory situation analysis was carried out through field observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions with local entrepreneurs, women's groups, and youth. From this process, the community identified priority issues, such as limitations in product innovation, packaging, branding, and digital marketing, which then became the basis for designing the action plan.

Based on this joint analysis, the team and community co-designed the program agenda, including the selection of training topics, grouping of participants, scheduling, and division of roles. Community members were involved as hosts, co-facilitators, and resource persons who shared local knowledge about production processes, local motifs, and village narratives. The main methodological strategy combined participatory action research with training and mentoring: short conceptual inputs were followed by practice sessions, product trials, and reflection on results together with the participants.

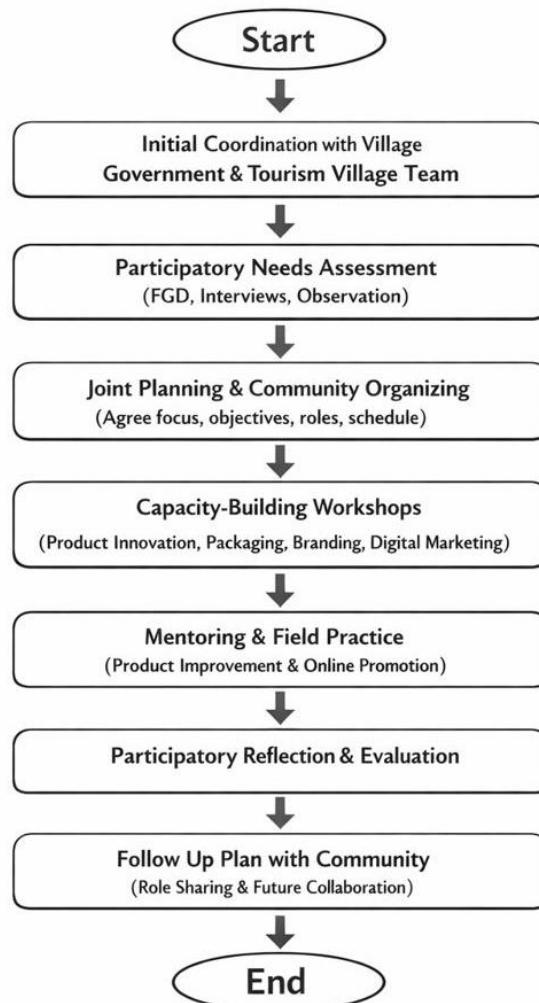


Figure 1. Flowchart of community service planning and implementation in Pematang Johar Village

The stages of the community service activities can be summarized as follows:

1. Preparation and community organizing

- a. Coordination with village government and tourism village team.
- b. Mapping of potential partners and community groups.

2. Participatory needs assessment and joint planning

- a. Observation of production and marketing practices.
- b. Focus group discussions and interviews to identify problems and opportunities.
- c. Co-design of objectives, outputs, and activity schedules.

3. Capacity-building workshops

- a. Training on creative product development and diversification.
- b. Training on packaging, branding, storytelling, and basic business management.

4. Mentoring and field practice

- a. Hands-on practice improving products, designs, and packaging.
- b. Assistance in taking product photos and using social media for promotion.

5. Reflection and evaluation

- a. Group reflection on changes experienced by participants.
- b. Identification of remaining obstacles and improvement ideas.

6. Follow-up planning with the community

- a. Agreement on follow-up actions by local groups and village government.
- b. Identification of potential collaborations and further mentoring needs.



Figure 2. Capacity Building Workshop



Figure 3. Mentoring and Field Practice

Result

The implementation of the Pematang Johar Creative Village program generated a series of concrete changes in the community, both at the level of technical

skills and at the level of social dynamics and collective awareness. The mentoring process moved gradually from information sharing by the team toward active participation and initiative from local actors.

At the beginning of the program, community members tended to take a “participant” role and waited for instructions. During the first workshops, the team still led most of the sessions: explaining concepts of creative economy, local branding, and basic digital marketing, followed by demonstrations of product improvement. However, as activities progressed, participants started to ask more questions, propose their own ideas, and share experiences between groups. For example, producers of tempe chips and handicrafts began to exchange packaging suppliers and discuss how to combine batik motifs with product branding. This interaction showed that the mentoring process was gradually transforming into a space for mutual learning rather than one-way teaching.

In terms of technical and programmatic actions, several types of activities were carried out to address the main problems identified in the needs assessment. First, product development sessions focused on improving and diversifying existing products. Participants experimented with new variants of tempe chips, more consistent cutting and frying techniques, and better selection of materials for handicrafts. Second, packaging and branding actions were implemented through hands-on design trials, label creation, and simple brand naming that highlighted local identity (such as references to rice fields, mangroves, or the village name). Third, digital marketing actions were introduced by helping participants create or optimize social media accounts, take simple but attractive product photos, and write short promotional captions that emphasised local stories and uniqueness.

The mentoring process also included on-site visits to production houses, where the team and participants jointly observed workflow, storage practices, and quality control. These visits provided an opportunity to discuss practical solutions, such as arranging workspace to separate raw materials and finished products, placing products more attractively for visitors, or preparing small product displays for tourism spots. In several cases, the mentoring team and participants immediately tested changes on the spot, so that the impact could be seen and evaluated directly together.

Through this series of activities, several forms of social change began to emerge in the community. One visible change was the shift in mindset of local producers regarding their products and their role in the tourism village. If initially many producers saw their work as “ordinary household activities,” by the end of the program they started to view their products as part of a larger creative village

ecosystem. Some participants expressed pride when their improved products were photographed and used as examples in training. This showed the emergence of new awareness that their local knowledge and creativity have economic and symbolic value.

In addition, new patterns of collaboration and informal institutions began to form. Previously, the producers of rice, snacks, batik, and handicrafts worked more independently. During the mentoring process, they were often grouped in mixed teams during workshops and discussions. Over time, these mixed working groups continued outside the formal sessions. For example, batik artisans began to coordinate with snack producers to prepare souvenir packages combining food products and small batik items, which are more suitable for tourists. This indicates the emergence of new cooperative arrangements and the early stages of product bundling as a joint strategy.

The program also encouraged the appearance of local leaders or "champions" who played an important role in sustaining the changes. In each main group (rice/food, batik, handicrafts, youth), one or two individuals emerged who were more active in asking questions, organizing peers, and communicating with the mentoring team. These local leaders took the initiative to remind other members of meeting schedules, share information through messaging groups, and continue practicing product improvements between sessions. Their presence is important as a social mechanism that drives continuity after the program period is over.

Another important social change was the strengthening of communication between community groups and the village government. During the joint reflection session, representatives of women's groups, youth groups, and producers were given the opportunity to present the results of their learning and their expectations for follow-up. The village government responded by opening space to integrate creative village activities into village-level plans and by encouraging the use of village facilities for future training or exhibitions. This process helped create a new pattern of dialogue in which the community did not only "receive programs," but also contributed ideas and proposals.

From the perspective of awareness and behaviour, there were indications of more proactive attitudes toward learning and marketing. Several participants reported that they had begun to upload product photos more regularly on social media, respond more quickly to inquiries from potential buyers, and pay attention to consistency in packaging. Youth participants, in particular, appeared keen to take on the role of "digital promoters" for village products by managing accounts, creating short videos, and experimenting with hashtags related to Pematang Johar and its rice

field tourism.

Overall, the results of the community service program in Pematang Johar can be seen in two interconnected dimensions. Technically, there was an increase in skills related to product development, packaging, branding, and simple digital marketing, accompanied by initial improvements in product appearance and promotional practices. Socially, there were signs of new institutions and dynamics: emerging local leaders, stronger cooperation between groups, more open communication with village government, and growing collective awareness that creative products and local wisdom are important assets for building a creative village and supporting sustainable tourism. These changes form a foundation for further transformation and deeper institutionalisation in subsequent programs.

Table 1. Emerging social changes and indicators in Pematang Johar

Aspect/ Indicator	Initial Condition (Before Program)	Condition During/After Program Period	Type of Social Change Observed
Role of participants in activities	Mostly passive, waiting for instructions from the external team	More active in asking questions, proposing ideas, and sharing experiences across groups	Increased participation and confidence
Collaboration between producer groups	Producers worked separately by sector (rice, food, batik, and handicraft)	Mixed groups formed; collaboration on souvenir packages combining food and small batik/handicraft items	New informal cooperative arrangements
Local leadership ("champions")	No clear individuals are taking coordinating roles across groups	1-2 active individuals per group emerge, coordinating peers and communicating with the team	Emergence of local leaders/community champions
Perception of own products	Products are seen mainly as "side income" or routine household activities	Products increasingly viewed as creative village assets linked to tourism and local identity	Change in mindset and sense of pride
Use of digital media for marketing	Irregular posting, limited or no product photos,	More regular posts, better product photos, basic captions	Behaviour changes in marketing practices

Aspect/ Indicator	Initial Condition (Before Program)	Condition During/After Program Period	Type of Social Change Observed
	the account is soft inactive	emphasising local stories; youth act as informal “digital team”	
Relationship with the village government	Community is more of a program recipient; dialogue is often one-way	Community groups present results and follow-up proposals; the government responds by opening space in village planning	More dialogic relationships and a stronger community voice
Collective awareness of creative village	Idea of “creative village” still abstract and not part of daily language	Term “creative village” used more frequently in discussions; participants link their activities to this shared narrative	Emergence of shared narrative and new collective identity

Discussion

The results of the Pematang Johar Creative Village program indicate that even a relatively short one-month intervention can generate meaningful shifts in community capacity when it is designed as a participatory and empowerment-oriented process. At the beginning, activities were still dominated by explanations and demonstrations from the facilitating team, but over time participants became more active in asking questions, proposing ideas, and co-producing solutions. This trajectory reflects the logic of community empowerment in tourism villages, where communities gradually move from being objects of intervention to co-actors in diagnosis, planning, and implementation (Normelani et al., 2023). It also aligns with findings that tourism-village development works best when residents are actively engaged in the planning and management of tourism activities rather than only receiving top-down programs (Latif, 2018).

The emergence of stronger collaboration among producer groups, youth, and village government in Pematang Johar is consistent with evidence that social capital is a key factor in sustaining tourism-village initiatives. Activities such as joint

packaging design, group photo sessions for digital catalogs, and collective reflection meetings helped build trust, shared norms, and denser communication networks. These dynamics echo research from Sidomulyo Tourism Village, which found that social capital significantly improves community quality of life and supports tourism-village development (Prayitno et al., 2023). In Pematang Johar, informal coordinators and “local champions” appeared within producer groups and youth circles, taking responsibility for communication, scheduling, and follow-up. This pattern supports the view that local leadership is crucial for sustaining community-based tourism and empowerment processes beyond the direct presence of external facilitators (Normelani et al., 2023).

From the perspective of creative economy and local wisdom, the observed changes in product development, packaging, and branding in Pematang Johar correspond with theoretical and empirical work on local wisdom-based creative industries. The shift from plain packaging to more distinctive, story-based designs for rice, tempe chips, and mangrove batik is in line with the argument that creative products rooted in local culture can gain added value when their cultural specificity is clearly communicated to consumers (Widyanti et al., 2022). Similar conclusions are found in studies of local wisdom-based creative economies in other Indonesian villages, which show that linking local culture with innovation, entrepreneurship training, and market access can strengthen village competitiveness and household income (Rakib et al., 2018; Romadhan & Yuliani, 2025). The way producers in Pematang Johar began to associate their products with the village’s rice-field landscape and mangrove ecosystem suggests a growing ability to treat local wisdom as a strategic resource for creative branding rather than merely as background tradition.

The program’s focus on digital marketing responds directly to gaps identified in the literature on MSMEs in Indonesia. Prior to the intervention, online promotion in Pematang Johar was limited and irregular, mostly relying on personal WhatsApp networks. Through mentoring on product photography, caption writing, and basic content planning, especially with youth involvement, the community started building a more coherent digital presence for Pematang Johar Creative Village. This experience supports findings that digital marketing strategies can significantly increase MSME competitiveness and marketing performance when they are actively and consistently implemented (Hisyam & Fitriyah, 2024). Reviews of digital marketing practices among Indonesian SMEs show that digital tools expand market reach but are often underutilized due to limited capacity and strategy (Wiweko & Anggara, 2025). Empirical studies also demonstrate that digital marketing has a positive effect on

MSME marketing performance, particularly when combined with innovation and market orientation (Nofrisel et al., 2023). The emerging “digital team” in Pematang Johar, formed mainly by youth, illustrates how targeted capacity-building can help bridge the gap between traditional producers and digital markets.

The findings of this program can also be understood through the lens of community perception and emotional solidarity in tourism villages. Research in Green Talao Park, West Sumatra, shows that positive perceptions of tourism benefits, emotional solidarity with visitors, and community support are crucial determinants of sustainable tourism development (Mentari, 2023). In Pematang Johar, repeated cycles of dialogue, visible short-term improvements (for example, better packaging and initial online orders), and direct involvement in decision-making appeared to strengthen residents' sense of ownership and perceived benefits. This helps explain why participants became more willing to invest time in training, experiment with new product ideas, and accept new roles in marketing and coordination. The process observed in Pematang Johar therefore reinforces the argument that empowerment-oriented community service can contribute to the formation of supportive community perceptions and solidarity that underpin sustainable tourism and creative village initiatives.

Changes in the relationship between community groups and village government are also notable. Through joint reflection sessions, community representatives presented their learning and expectations, while the village government responded by opening access to facilities and signalling willingness to integrate creative-village activities into village planning. This emerging pattern of more dialogical interaction is consistent with studies emphasizing that inclusive governance and clear institutional linkages between community groups and local government are essential for sustainable tourism-village development (Normelani et al., 2023; Prayitno et al., 2023). In Pematang Johar, the program contributed to clarifying roles, creating shared agendas, and strengthening communication channels, which are important preconditions for longer-term institutionalisation.

Overall, the case of Pematang Johar Creative Village extends existing literature on creative economy, tourism villages, and MSME digitalisation by illustrating how technical interventions (on products, packaging, and digital marketing) and social processes (community organising, leadership formation, and institutional dialogue) can reinforce one another in a peri-urban agricultural context. It supports the broader argument that creative-economy development is not only about introducing new products or technologies, but also about building social capital, local institutions, and supportive community perceptions (Rahman & Hakim, 2024; Widyanti et al., 2022;

Yunani et al., 2024). At the same time, the program underlines insights from creative-economy policy and theory that ideas, culture, and local knowledge can become significant drivers of rural development when combined with appropriate governance, empowerment, and digital capabilities (Howkins, 2002; Suryana, 2013; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2010).

Conclusion

The implementation of the *Pematang Johar Creative Village* program shows that strengthening a village creative economy cannot be separated from community organizing and the development of social institutions at the grassroots level. The combination of participatory needs assessment, workshops, field mentoring, and joint reflection encouraged residents to gradually shift from being “program recipients” to becoming active subjects who diagnose problems, formulate solutions, and test collective actions. The findings support the theoretical view that a local wisdom-based creative economy is only effective when local knowledge is treated as cultural capital rather than obsolete tradition, when technical improvements in products, packaging, branding, and digital marketing are consistently linked to the formation of a shared “creative village” identity, and when social capital is strengthened through cross-group collaboration, the emergence of local leaders, and more dialogical communication with village government. Behavioural changes in digital marketing, the appearance of local champions, and new forms of cooperation among producers suggest that technical and social interventions can reinforce one another, and that community service in a tourism village context should be understood as a gradual social transformation process rather than a short-term training event.

Based on these results, several recommendations can be put forward. First, capacity-building and mentoring should be continued periodically with more focused themes such as financial management, product diversification, and pricing strategies, while local champions are further prepared as community facilitators so that they can sustain and expand the organizing process. Second, the idea of a creative village needs to be institutionalized through formal forums or working groups and integrated into village planning documents so that it receives consistent policy and budget support. Third, the local creative economy and tourism ecosystem should be strengthened by developing thematic tour packages that integrate local products with rice-field and mangrove-based experiences, and by expanding collaboration with external partners such as creative communities, digital platforms, and other educational institutions. Finally, systematic documentation and follow-up research are needed to measure

economic and social impacts over time and to refine this model so that it can be adapted and replicated in other villages. Overall, the program demonstrates that when local wisdom, creative economy principles, and participatory methods are combined, community service can act as a catalyst for new awareness, new social arrangements, and a more just direction of rural social transformation.

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