

Leisure product development and worker income sustainability: a case study of batik gedog in rural Indonesia

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Abstract

Batik Gedog, a traditional handwoven textile following a popular batik pattern from Tuban, East Java, represents both a cultural heritage and a livelihood source for rural communities. This study investigates how Batik Gedog has been developed as a culturally embedded leisure product and examines its implications for worker income sustainability in Kedung Rejo Village. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through field observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis with the business owner and 40 participants. The research highlights how product diversification, institutional market targeting, and participation in exhibitions have strengthened the enterprise's value-creation model and expanded short-term revenue capacity. At the same time, reliance on piece-rate compensation tied to production output creates income volatility, with earnings fluctuating according to order volume and cash-flow cycles. While batik production provides accessible employment opportunities—particularly for women artisans—income stability remains constrained by concentrated demand, limited digital market integration, and traditional production methods. This study contributes to leisure and creative industry scholarship by shifting attention from consumption behavior toward production-side economic outcomes. It demonstrates that culturally grounded leisure product development can generate employment and income opportunities, but sustained worker prosperity requires structural improvements in wage systems, financial management, and market diversification.

Keywords: leisure products, woman entrepreneurs, women artisans, batik, rural economic development.

Introduction

Batik is widely recognized as an Indonesian cultural heritage transmitted across generations, particularly within Javanese society (Wijayati & Fakhriati, 2024). Traditionally associated with clothing, batik has evolved into a broader lifestyle and creative product, now applied to tablecloths, bed covers, and various decorative items (Poon, 2017). Beyond its functional role as a fashion commodity, batik also represents a leisure experience, both in terms of aesthetic appreciation and in the artisanal process through which it is produced (Pöllänen & Weissmann-Hanski, 2020). Etymologically, the term batik derives from the Javanese words *mbat* and *tik*, referring to the repeated application of dots on fabric (Endyarto & Kabelen, 2020). In this sense, batik embodies a meticulous and repetitive artistic practice that transforms plain cloth into a culturally meaningful product.

At a national level, Indonesia's Batik contributes significantly to employment and exports, with exports reaching over US\$532.7 million in 2020 and continued global demand, showing batik's role in both domestic income and international markets (Muthiariny, 2021). In East Java alone, batik-related enterprises number in the tens of thousands, with handicraft clusters such as those in Madura, Surabaya, and Tuban attracting tens of thousands of visitors annually through cultural fairs and batik festivals. These figures illustrate the socio-economic footprint of batik as both a cultural and commercial industry, highlighting its potential role in rural employment and household income generation.

From an economic perspective, the production of batik as a culturally embedded leisure product provides livelihood opportunities for local communities. The development of small-scale rural industries plays a crucial role in reducing unemployment and mitigating poverty in surrounding areas (Sarjiyanto, 2023). One region in East Java where batik-based micro and small enterprises continue to grow is Tuban. Although not as widely recognized as other batik-producing regions, Tuban possesses distinctive characteristics, including relatively free-form motifs and the use of bright color combinations such as red, blue, and green. Batik Gedog, produced in Kedung Rejo Village, represents a prominent example of this local creative industry. The majority of its workers are residents of the surrounding community, and batik-making activities reflect locally embedded knowledge systems and cultural traditions. As one of the largest centers of Gedog artisans in Tuban, Kedung Rejo has been designated as a "batik village" by the

local Department of Industry and Trade. For many residents, batik production constitutes a primary source of income, linking cultural preservation with economic survival.

Accordingly, this study examines the development of the Batik Gedog creative industry in Kedung Rejo and its implications for worker income from an economic perspective. While a growing body of literature focuses on leisure product consumption, purchase intention, and even the potential negative impacts of certain leisure industries, considerably less attention has been directed toward the positive economic consequences of producing and upgrading culturally grounded leisure goods (Bamidele et al., 2022; Forte et al., 2023; Rahaman et al., 2022). A clear gap, therefore, persists regarding how the development of leisure-based creative industries translates into tangible income improvement for workers and local communities, especially in rural areas such as Tuban (Kunjuraman et al., 2025). By analyzing Batik Gedog as a case of a culturally embedded leisure product, this study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how leisure industry development can function as a mechanism for local economic strengthening and worker income enhancement.

Literature Review

Leisure Products and Cultural Consumption

Leisure products are goods and services consumed during discretionary time and are often associated with symbolic, experiential, and identity-related value (Dalal et al., 2025; Dominko & Verbič, 2022; Xie et al., 2024). Unlike purely utilitarian goods, leisure products carry emotional and cultural meanings that shape consumer behavior beyond functional utility (Azzouz et al., 2026). Cultural goods such as handicrafts, fashion artifacts, and traditional textiles operate within this domain because their consumption reflects lifestyle expression, aesthetic appreciation, and social positioning.

Batik, particularly in its contemporary adaptation into fashion and lifestyle products, fits within this framework. Its value lies not only in material quality but also in cultural symbolism, craftsmanship, and authenticity (Lai et al., 2025). The experiential dimension of batik production, including manual *canting* processes and motif storytelling, enhances its positioning as a culturally embedded leisure product. Thus, batik operates simultaneously as a creative good and a leisure-oriented consumption artifact.

Creative Industry and Woman Micro-entrepreneurs in Rural Economy

The creative industry has been recognized as a driver of regional economic development, particularly in emerging economies (Domenech et al., 2023). Creative

sectors combine cultural capital with market mechanisms, generating income through innovation, design, and symbolic differentiation. In rural contexts, small-scale creative enterprises play a significant role in employment generation and income diversification (Imanuella et al., 2025).

Micro and small enterprises in handicraft industries often function as labor-intensive sectors, absorbing local workers who may have limited access to formal employment (Yadav et al., 2022). The development of such industries can stimulate local multiplier effects, including supply-chain activities, tourism attraction, and increased household spending. However, the extent to which creative industry upgrading translates into worker-level income improvement remains uneven and context-dependent.

Women's participation in informal creative industries and artisan production is widely documented as both economically significant and socially complex (Haram et al., 2025; Krishnan, 2026). Informal employment, which encompasses activities not regulated by formal labor protections, remains a major source of livelihood for women in developing economies, particularly within craft and home-based production sectors (Dadheech & Sharma, 2023). Informal work often provides flexibility and accessibility for women who balance domestic and community responsibilities, yet it also exposes them to lower wages, limited protections, and marginalization within labor hierarchies (Bonnet et al., 2019; Meagher, 2018).

Academic reviews on female entrepreneurship in the informal economy highlight the resilience and agency of women micro-entrepreneurs, who leverage artisanal skills and creative competencies to sustain households (Dwivedi & Dwivedi, 2022). These studies note that women's empowerment through informal enterprise is shaped by access to resources, social capital, and institutional support, with greater market access and skills training associated with improved economic outcomes (Arshad et al., 2024; Lingappa et al., 2023). For instance, research on informal, small-scale entrepreneurship among women in emerging economies demonstrates that participation in craft and creative sectors can enhance economic agency and income generation, especially when supported by inclusive policy frameworks and community networks (Khan et al., 2023). Within the Indonesian context, empirical evidence also suggests that women craft workers contribute significantly to household welfare and local economic activity even when operating in informal settings (Anggadwita et al., 2023).

Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine the development of Batik Gedog as a culturally embedded leisure product and its implications for worker income in Kedung Rejo Village, Kerek District, Tuban Regency. A qualitative approach is appropriate when the objective is to understand social and economic phenomena within their natural context and to capture participants' lived experiences and meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study strategy allows for an in-depth exploration of contemporary events within real-life settings, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). In this research, Batik Gedog is treated as a bounded case representing a rural creative industry whose development is closely intertwined with local labor dynamics and community livelihood structures.

The research was conducted at UMKM Batik Gedog "Sekar Ayu" located in Kedung Rejo Village, which has been recognized as a batik-producing center in Tuban. The participants consisted of the business owner and workers directly involved in various stages of production and operational activities, including drawing, canting, dyeing, weaving, and sales support. Participants were selected purposively, meaning that individuals were chosen based on their knowledge, experience, and relevance to the research objectives (Patton, 2015). This sampling approach ensures that the data collected reflect informed perspectives regarding business development strategies, wage mechanisms, and income generation processes. A total of 40 participants were involved in the study, representing both managerial and worker viewpoints within the enterprise.

Data were collected through field observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Direct observation enabled the researcher to examine production processes, division of labor, and workflow organization in their natural setting, allowing for contextual understanding beyond verbal accounts. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the owner and workers to explore themes related to business development strategies, marketing practices, wage systems, production capacity, and economic challenges. This approach provides flexibility while maintaining thematic focus, which is essential in qualitative inquiry (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Documentation, including organizational records, production data, photographs, and relevant archival materials, was also examined to complement and triangulate primary data. The use of multiple data sources enhances credibility and supports methodological triangulation, thereby

strengthening the validity and trustworthiness of findings (Denzin, 2017). Primary data were obtained directly from field interactions, while secondary data included business documents and contextual information related to creative industry development in Tuban.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a descriptive qualitative procedure involving iterative coding and thematic interpretation. Interview transcripts, originally conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and later translated into English, were read multiple times to gain familiarity with the content. Initial codes were developed inductively from participants' narratives, focusing on recurring ideas related to wage systems, market strategies, and income challenges. These codes were then grouped into broader categories such as "income volatility," "gendered labor roles," and "market dependence." Through constant comparison, categories were refined into themes that captured the structural relationship between Batik Gedog's development and worker income sustainability. To enhance credibility, themes were triangulated with field observations and business documents, and peer debriefing was used to check consistency in interpretation. This process ensured that findings were grounded in participants' lived experiences while connected to theoretical discussions on creative industries and informal labor economics.

Result

Profile of Batik Gedog Creative Industry

In Tuban, Batik Gedog is not only a cultural artifact but also a local economic driver. The industry is predominantly organized around home-based production, where most artisans and workers are local residents who engage in batik making as part of household livelihoods. Approximately 85% of production units in Kedung Rejo remain small-scale home industries, and women constitute a significant portion of the workforce due to longstanding artisanal skills passed through generations. Batik Gedog in Kedung Rejo operates as a small-scale, community-based creative enterprise rooted in traditional *batik tulis tenun* techniques. The production process remains largely manual, involving stages such as motif drawing, canting, dyeing, and finishing. The enterprise employs local residents, the majority of whom are women, reflecting the gendered nature of craft-based labor within rural creative industries.

Initially operating with a limited number of workers and primarily selling batik cloth, the enterprise has expanded its product offerings to include ready-to-wear garments,

tablecloths, and decorative items. This diversification indicates a strategic shift from pure craft production toward a broader lifestyle and leisure market positioning. Marketing activities are predominantly conducted offline, targeting institutional buyers such as schools, village offices, and regional officials. Although social media platforms are utilized, digital sales remain limited and serve primarily as promotional support rather than a primary revenue channel.

Business Development and Market Expansion

The development trajectory of Batik Gedog reflects a strategic shift from subsistence-oriented craft production toward a more structured value-creation model within the leisure-product market. Product diversification has enabled the enterprise to move beyond selling unfinished batik cloth toward finished fashion and lifestyle goods, thereby capturing greater downstream value in the production chain. By integrating traditional motifs into ready-to-wear apparel and decorative items, the enterprise aligns itself with leisure consumption patterns characterized by aesthetic appreciation, symbolic meaning, and identity expression (Richards, 2018). This repositioning enhances margin potential and strengthens differentiation within competitive cultural product markets.

Participation in exhibitions and government-sponsored events further reinforces reputational capital and market legitimacy. These platforms function as both commercial outlets and symbolic arenas where Batik Gedog is framed as part of the regional creative economy. Institutional targeting, particularly toward schools and local government offices, has facilitated bulk purchasing arrangements that increase production volume and short-term revenue flows. However, reliance on institutional buyers also concentrates demand and creates periodic revenue cycles tied to procurement schedules (Kraus et al., 2020). While this strategy stabilizes short-term cash inflows, long-term sustainability would benefit from broader consumer diversification.

Production capacity remains constrained by artisanal intensity. Output varies depending on motif complexity, dye application stages, and weaving processes, with collective production averaging approximately 10–15 pieces per week. Pricing differentiation based on motif intricacy, color layering, and product form allows the enterprise to segment its market and establish tiered revenue streams. This pricing structure reflects the translation of aesthetic and cultural complexity into economic value, reinforcing Batik Gedog's positioning as a culturally grounded leisure product rather than a purely utilitarian textile (Batat, 2019).

Regarding experiential dimensions, the current business model demonstrates limited integration of structured cultural tourism experiences (Richards, 2018). Although the production process itself embodies cultural authenticity and could potentially function as a live craft attraction, formalized tourist engagement mechanisms such as workshop participation, guided demonstrations, or experiential batik-making programs remain underdeveloped (Campos et al., 2018). Visitors may observe production informally, yet there is no institutionalized leisure experience design that converts cultural craftsmanship into immersive tourism value (Chang, 2018; Helal et al., 2026; Prince, 2017). This absence suggests an unrealized opportunity to expand revenue beyond product sales into experience-based offerings (Duxbury et al., 2021). Integrating structured cultural experiences could diversify income streams, enhance brand storytelling, and strengthen Batik Gedog's position within the broader leisure and cultural tourism ecosystem (Bui et al., 2020; Khater & Faik, 2025).

Collectively, the strategic developments demonstrate intentional market strengthening through value-added upgrading and segmented pricing, yet the limited experiential integration indicates that the leisure dimension remains predominantly product-based rather than experience-based. Expanding into cultural immersion activities could further enhance both enterprise resilience and worker income stability by generating complementary demand channels beyond traditional retail transactions.

Workers' Income

Worker compensation in Batik Gedog follows a piece-rate system tied directly to production output. This compensation structure is consistent with patterns observed in labor-intensive craft and global production chains, where performance-based pay links income directly to volume and throughput rather than fixed wages (Babbitt, Brown, & McCormick, 2021). While such systems can incentivize productivity during high-demand periods, they also transfer market risk from the enterprise to workers. In Batik Gedog, income increases during institutional bulk orders, yet declines when demand slows, illustrating the income volatility associated with output-based compensation models. As one participant explained during interviews conducted in Bahasa Indonesia (later translated into English):

“If there are many orders, we can earn enough for the household. But when orders stop, this stream of income disappears. Usually, institutions who order quite much for our household come from governmental institutions during special events.”

This vulnerability is further intensified by cash-flow constraints. Small and micro enterprises operating with limited working capital buffers are highly sensitive to delayed customer payments, which can directly affect wage distribution timing (Ndoen, 2025). The findings in Batik Gedog reflect this pattern, where delayed payments from buyers occasionally disrupt regular wage cycles. The International Labour Organization (2021) similarly notes that informal and small-scale enterprises often face financial fragility due to irregular revenue streams, reinforcing the precarious income conditions experienced by workers in such settings.

The gendered composition of Batik Gedog's workforce also aligns with broader literature on women in informal creative industries. Home-based handicraft and artisan sectors frequently rely on female labor due to flexible work arrangements that accommodate domestic responsibilities (Adhikari, 2024). However, this flexibility often comes at the cost of income stability and formal labor protection. In Batik Gedog, batik production provides meaningful income access and household diversification for women, yet earnings remain contingent on demand cycles rather than institutionalized wage security. This duality reflects what informal economy scholarship describes as "empowered precarity," where economic participation expands but structural vulnerability persists.

From a structural development perspective, limited digital marketing capability and underdeveloped online sales channels constrain demand diversification. Research on MSME digital adoption demonstrates that access to digital platforms significantly enhances market reach, revenue stability, and resilience against localized demand shocks (Juita et al., 2026). Batik Gedog's reliance on offline institutional buyers, while effective for short-term revenue surges, maintains exposure to concentrated demand risk. Broader digital integration could mitigate this vulnerability by expanding customer bases beyond local networks.

Similarly, reliance on traditional production tools restricts scaling capacity and productivity growth. Studies on technological innovation in handicraft enterprises show that gradual technology adoption, even without eliminating artisanal authenticity, can improve efficiency and financial sustainability (Shafi et al., 2025). Productivity improvements at the enterprise level are often positively associated with income growth among MSME actors (Suminah et al., 2022). In the case of Batik Gedog, manual processes preserve cultural authenticity and leisure value, yet also limit throughput and income expansion potential.

Taken together, the integrated evidence suggests that the development of culturally embedded leisure products can generate employment access and income opportunities, particularly for women in rural settings. However, the translation of business growth into sustained worker prosperity is mediated by compensation structures, financial liquidity, market diversification, and technological upgrading. Without structural improvements in these domains, income enhancement remains cyclical and demand-dependent rather than institutionally secured.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Batik Gedog operates as a culturally embedded leisure product whose development contributes to local employment generation and income opportunities. As a leisure-based creative good, its market value is not solely derived from functional utility but from symbolic meaning, cultural authenticity, and experiential craftsmanship. This aligns with theoretical perspectives on leisure products, which emphasize aesthetic, identity-based, and experiential consumption dimensions. The ability of Batik Gedog to command differentiated pricing based on motif complexity and manual production techniques reflects its positioning within symbolic and cultural value markets.

However, while product upgrading and market expansion enhance enterprise revenue potential, the results indicate that revenue growth does not automatically translate into stable income security for workers. This supports broader literature on informal and small-scale creative industries, where income improvement is mediated by internal wage systems, demand volatility, and cash-flow structures. The piece-rate compensation model observed in Batik Gedog creates a direct linkage between order volume and worker earnings. Consequently, worker prosperity remains contingent upon sustained demand rather than guaranteed contractual income.

The predominance of women workers in Batik Gedog further reflects patterns commonly identified in informal artisan industries. Women participate actively in labor-intensive stages such as canting and dyeing, contributing substantially to production output while operating within flexible yet economically vulnerable employment arrangements. Although the enterprise provides accessible livelihood opportunities, particularly for women balancing domestic responsibilities, the absence of formal wage stability mechanisms limits long-term economic security. This finding reinforces existing scholarship on women in informal creative economies, where empowerment through participation coexists with structural precarity.

The study also reveals that institutional buyers and offline market targeting significantly shape revenue dynamics. Bulk purchasing from schools and local government offices functions as a stabilizing force for short-term income increases. In contrast, limited digital market penetration constrains broader scalability and diversification of demand sources. This suggests that upgrading strategies within leisure-based creative industries must extend beyond product diversification toward market and technological modernization to strengthen income sustainability.

Importantly, this research contributes to an underexplored dimension within leisure studies. While substantial literature examines leisure consumption behavior and purchase intention, fewer studies investigate the production-side economic implications of leisure goods for workers. By analyzing Batik Gedog as both a leisure product and a rural creative enterprise, this study highlights the structural relationship between leisure market value creation and grassroots income generation.

Overall, the discussion suggests that culturally grounded leisure product development can function as a mechanism for local economic strengthening. Yet, without structural improvements in wage systems, financial management, and market diversification, income enhancement remains opportunity-based rather than structurally secured.

Conclusion

This study examined the development of Batik Gedog as a culturally embedded leisure product and assessed its implications for worker income in Kedung Rejo Village, Tuban. The findings indicate that the transition from subsistence-oriented craft production toward a structured value-creation model has expanded employment opportunities and enhanced income-generating capacity for local workers, particularly women engaged in artisanal production within Batik Gedog workers. In this context, various strategic moves such as product diversification, institutional targeting, and participation in exhibitions have strengthened market positioning and increased short-term revenue potential.

However, the study's object in Tuban also demonstrates that revenue growth does not automatically translate into income stability. The piece-rate compensation system has been shown to expose workers toward demand volatility, while reliance on institutional bulk buyers creates cyclical revenue patterns. Limited digital market integration and traditional production methods further constrain scalability and long-term income security. As a result, worker earnings remain opportunity-based rather than structurally guaranteed in this observation.

This study illustrates how culturally grounded leisure goods can generate value through localized labor systems, while also revealing structural vulnerabilities that limit sustained worker prosperity. The insights are specific to Kedung Rejo but may resonate with similar rural creative industries facing comparable challenges. Practically, strengthening digital marketing capability, diversifying demand channels, improving financial management, and gradually upgrading production efficiency are critical steps for converting enterprise growth into more secure livelihoods. Future research could adopt comparative or longitudinal approaches to examine whether similar dynamics occur across different regions, thereby deepening understanding of the relationship between leisure product development and grassroots economic welfare.

Future research may adopt longitudinal or comparative approaches to examine whether similar leisure-based creative industries produce sustained income improvements across different regional contexts, thereby deepening understanding of the relationship between leisure product development and grassroots economic welfare.

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