

SUSTAINING WAYANG TOPENG MALANGAN (MALANG TRADITIONAL PUPPET MASK DANCE) THROUGH ASMOROBANGUN'S STRATEGIES

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Abstract: This study aims to see the strategies of Asmorobangun art studio in preserving the existence of Wayang Topeng Malangan. This study uses the descriptive qualitative method with phenomenology approach. Phenomenology shows a philosophical approach to understand human experience based on the idea that human experience can not be separated from their subjectivity itself and it is determined by the context in which human lives (Zigmund and Babin, 2007: p.136). The finding shows that in terms of maintaining the existence of Wayang Topeng Malangan, Asmorobangun art studio applies these following strategies: 1). Shortening the dance performance; 2). Developing the marketing media using the internet; 3). Product diversification of Topeng Malangan Souvenirs; and 4). Providing a learning lesson about Wayang Topeng Malangan.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Strategy, Cultural Preservation, Art Studio, Wayang Topeng Malangan

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In Malang, exists A cultural heritage known as Malangan Mask Dance (MMD) which combines the style of Central Java art (Solo, Yogya) with South-East Java art (Ponorogo, Tulungagung, Blitar) and Blambangan art (Pasuruan, Probolinggo, Situbondo, and Banyuwangi).

Malangan Mask Dance art studios in Malang Regency reached their peak of

glory in around 1970s when the demands were huge, and many artists traveled from one village to another just for performing. Back then, the performance was shown at the village hall or the square, and it would last for all night. However, along with the advance of technology, people's entertainment choices are getting more various. Nowadays, the existence of this performance is slowly forgotten. This performance is pushed away by television and the internet. With those people can get their entertainment needs just by sitting comfortably in their own houses without going out or going to the square to see the performance. When it comes to MMD, we will not just talk about the dance performance

but also the making of the mask itself. This performing art even has more than forty different characters based on their masks.

Based on the data from Government Tourism Office of Malang Regency, in 2005, there are three MMD active art studios spread in some regions in Malang Regency. The first is located in Pulongdowo village, Tumpang sub-district, called Paguyuban Wayang Topeng Sri Marga Utama led by Rasimoen. The second one is called Paguyuban Wayang Topeng Wira Bakti led by Pardjo in Jabung village, Jabung sub-district. The last studio is Paguyuban Wayang Topeng Asmarabangun led by Karimoen, located in Kedungmonggo hamlet, Karangpandan village, Pakisaji sub-district.

Asmorobangun has existed for five generations, and it has made some changes and developments in the dance and the making of the mask. Asmorobangun even visited Thailand to perform MMD in some art festival. This art studio, up to now, is still actively performing MMD in every certain Monday night – so called Malam Senin Legi in Javanese beliefs. This is a very interesting fact to review how a small art studio can still exist and sustain the existence of this traditional Malang Mask Dance.

This study aims to explain the strategies of Asmorobangun art studio in keeping up the existence of MMD in this modern era.

Organization Development

Organizational development is a reaction to change, a complex learning strategy aimed at changing the beliefs, behaviors, values, and structures of an organization so that they can adapt better to new technologies, markets, and challenges and the degree of confusion of change itself (Benni in McLean, 2007). The levels of organizational change consist of three. They are changes at the individual level, changes at the group level and the last, changes at the organizational level are generally stated as organizational development.

Organization Development Strategy

One of an expert in strategic planning, Steiner (1986), in his book “Strategic Planning,” which is

considered as the Holy Book of this subject, defines some important points related to strategies. The first point is Strategy is everything done by the top management for the sake of the organization; the second is Strategy refers to the basis of directional decisions which are called goals and missions; next, strategies consist of important acts aiming to fulfill the directional decisions mentioned before. The fourth point is that strategies answer the question: “what will an organization do?” and the last point stated that strategies are the answer for the question: “what result we want and how to get it?”

In his book “Strategic Planning in Art,” Kaiser stated that to start strategic planning in art, we need a first step called “mission statement” or mission planning. For organizations which are working in art and for every non-profit organization, defining a mission which must be done in the future is not an easy task. We know that the initial reality of their organizations is not for making a profit, but the next question is, why do they exist and how do they exist for quite a long time? Are they established only to deliver world class performances? Or to provide learning and educational facilities? Or probably only to sustain or keep up what was given by their ancestors? When an organization has put aside their desire to make a profit, it will be more difficult for them to determine their mission, yet it will be more important for them to do so (Kaiser).

Preservation of Arts and Local Culture

Soeroso and Susilo (2008) asserted that there two substantial factors in preserving local culture, the first in the form of the culture, the urgency of keeping the amity between citizens (to create a conducive atmosphere), promoting spirituality in the form of education and faith, involving all elements of society to respect art and culture, introducing Javanese culture from an early age while promoting the use of Javanese language in non-formal events, looking for stimulants that can offset technological progress by revitalizing Javanese cultural ritual customs, and conducting healthy communication between fellow citizens; the second factor is the physical culture. In this factors, it is important to explore again the values contained in society’s

arts, maintaining progression in performing arts, modifying the way to organize and to learn performing arts, preserving the heritage, sustaining the use of maintain the use of clothing with batik and lurik motifs, maintain discipline, order and manners, and preserving traditional and musical dance. Besides those things, it is also important to apply two substantial policies which are education — both cognitive, effective, and conative — and finding the best stimulant to counter the invasion of western technology.

METHOD

In this research, prepositions raised are based on the previous researches regarding the formulation of strategies for the development of small-medium Malang traditional mask enterprises which stated that there are six essential development strategies for small-medium Malang traditional mask

enterprises, they are : first, designing an integrated and comprehensive centre for Malangan mask industry in Kedungmonggo hamlet, Pakisaji; the second, creating a tourism industry that synchronizes with the production of Malangan Mask; Next strategy is formulating a good marketing strategies, including by utilizing information technology; the fourth is market expansion; after that motif and product diversification; and the last is involving local government.

From the six strategies, we will see which strategy will be in accordance with the development strategy of Asmorobangun art studio in sustaining MMD.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this study, interviews were conducted with several interviewees related to the Asmorobangun studio and also MDD art. The list of informants will be presented in the following Table1.

Table 1 Informant Identities

No.	Name	Address	Informant Status
1.	Tri Handoyo	Kedungmonggo Pakisaji	Owner of Asmorobangun
2.	Saini	Kedungmonggo Pakisaji	Member of Asmorobangun
3.	Haryati	Kedungmonggo Pakisaji	Member of Asmorobangun
4.	Bayu	Kedungmonggo Pakisaji	Engraver and Mask Dancers
5.	Bambang Supomo	Singosari Malang	Head of Malang Regency cultural and a tourism arts section
6.	Suzie	Chicago, USA	Foreign Student
7.	Eki	Malang	UM Students and Foreign Student Companions
8.	Raimun	Kedungmonggo Pakisaji	Mask Engraver

Asmorobangun art studio is developing karawitan art, handicraft mask Malangan, and Malangan Mask Dance (both mask puppet and mask creation). People around the studio are also members of the studio, and they are open for everyone who loves this art to learn about MDD. They provide some facilities such as gamelan –Javanese traditional musical instrument—, the stage for dance practice which is usually used for dancing.

In dancing, this studio gets their fund from some donators, Education Service, Tourism and Culture Service (not routine) and personal funds. This art

studio has been working with various parties and artists, some of them are Malang Artists like Mr. Charam AR, Mr. Robby Hidajat, Mbah Madya Jatigui, then with Garmina Jakarta, Koma Theatre, ISI Jogjakarta, Design and Art Major Malang State University, Dance Major Semarang State University, and Surabaya Art Vocational School. This art studio does not make art as the main income but only as a cultural forum. Income distribution after the show is managed by a skipper based on their group classification (musician, dancer, crew (Kamal, 2010: 56).

In their journey to show MMD, Asmorobangun art studio even has been asked to perform in Thailand in some Traditional Performing Art Week there. The invitation from Thailand was obtained independently and without help from the government. In sustaining the existence of MDD, Asmorobangun Studio plays a lot of its active role in finding opportunities to introduce and display the special arts of Malang Regency.

Over the years serving as a dance puppet association and mask-making artist, Asmorobangun studio has experienced several changes that have kept them survive until now.

The changes made by Asmorobangun to develop its studio are their strategies to sustain the existence of MMD. The strategies include shortening the show time, usually, the puppet dance show performed all night, but now it has been shortened only around 2-3 hours. In abridging the show time, no basic values are cut and changed based on informant 1. Splitting the story into some separate episodes is a breakthrough for audiences who can not watch the performance all night.

The next strategy is improving MMD marketing method, the owner of Asmorobangun with the help of students who have visited the studio made some internet sites providing information for everyone who wants to visit and know MMD closely. Then, product differentiation becomes the next marketing strategy for the masks made by Asmorobangun. In late 1987, this studio started to make souvenirs, and first informant explained how their product diversification started in his father era. So, at first, the souvenirs considered as the form of diversification are only making the masks into different sizes because back then making the masks only in big size had limited fans, and the use is limited as well – only for performing MMD.

In response to consumer tastes, Asmorobangun then developed their mask variants. Asian consumers who order mask products from Asmorobangun tend to choose good-character figures, while European consumers love antagonist characters more. Nowadays, mask product motifs are quite various, starting from the regular mask for dance, wall decoration, appreciation frame, to the key chain.

After transforming the masks into various kinds and sizes, Mr. Han claims that the demands are starting to increase. Today, the highest demand coming to Asmorobangun is from mask souvenirs because they are easier to find and easier to carry as a Malang Special Souvenirs for the traveler. While the demand for regular masks is still seasonal. The making of regular masks is still really traditional because –based on the studio owner— the masks made by wood are way better than those made by fiber, which is fragile.

Another strategy from Asmorobangun is providing MMD Art Learning Program. Mask making learning program and dance learning program are only available in Asmorobangun studio. Asmorobangun designs this learning program by giving mask making — starting with painting the mask —, dance, and traditional instrument lesson. These lessons are given to local and foreign tourists who want to know deeper about mask making and dancing. For mask crafting, informants often find interesting experiences, especially if those who are taught are foreigners. Mr. Han teaches mask making not only in the studio but also in a Polytechnic institution in Malang. Suzie is a student from the US who is studying about Indonesian language and culture admits that the learning program provided by Asmorobangun Art Studio is very beneficial for her.

Asmorobangun Art Studio also provides a weekly dance lesson for free on every Sunday starting at 09.00 to 11.00 morning. The more people who learn this traditional art, the more famous this art will be.

Research Proposition

After the data reduction process, there were several themes related to the development of Asmorobangun Studio. They are product differentiation, product quality, marketing method development, market development, and culture learning program.

Based on the themes above, minor propositions can be raised as follows: first, product differentiation is an important factor which formulates the strategy in the development of Asmorobangun Studio as an effort to preserve MMD art. Next, maintaining

product quality has an important role in formulating the strategy in the development of Asmorobangun Studio as an effort to preserve MMD art. The third, the development of marketing methods plays an important role in forming the strategy for developing Sanggar Asmorobangun in the effort to preserve MMD arts. The last proposition is that culture learning program is an important factor in forming the strategy of Asmorobangun development as an effort to sustain MMD art.

Major Proposition

From those several minor propositions above, we can raise a Major Proposition as follows :

“product innovation and culture learning program are important factors which form Asmorobangun development strategies as an effort to sustain MMD art.”

Minor Proposition Analysis

Minor Proposition Analysis Number 1

“product differentiation is an important factor which formulates the strategy in the development of Asmorobangun Studio as an effort to preserve MMD art.”

The Malangan Mask products which were originally only a form of the mask now are developed by making it into several forms as souvenirs like key chains, frames and wall decorations.

Not only in terms of mask craftings, even in terms of traditional dance, but the owner of Asmorobangun art studio also makes some innovations by splitting that long Pandji Story into several short episodes that can be performed only around 2-3 hours while the original story used to be performed for a whole night.

Differentiation can be included in innovation item by Asmorobangun art studio.

Minor Proposition Analysis Number 2

“maintaining the product quality has an important role in formulating the strategy in the development of Asmorobangun Studio as an effort to preserve MMD art.”

All mask products made by Asmorobangun art studio use wood as the raw material and they were crafted manually by knife without using the machine at all. All mask is crafted manually by professional sculpture hands at Asmorobangun art studio.

Masks made from wood are known to last longer and are not easily broken when dropped or bumped. Besides, wooden mask carvings are more detail than masks made from fiber and cast.

Minor Proposition Analysis Number 3

“the development of marketing methods plays an important role in forming the strategy for developing Sanggar Asmorobangun in the effort to preserve MMD arts.”

Helped by students who regularly visit the art studio for researching or accompanying foreign student visit, Asmorobangun art studio can have some social media to help them introduce and promote MMD art.

Besides, many students record the performance and then upload it on some video sites so people can know and enjoy this Malang art.

Minor Proposition Analysis Number 4.

“culture learning program is an important factor in forming the strategy of Asmorobangun development as an effort to sustain MMD art.”

Culture learning program provided by Asmorobangun art studio becomes a breakthrough for everyone who wants to learn more about this MMD art. Asmorobangun provides free dance learning program every Sunday morning for everyone without any conditions and masks painting lesson also becomes a good strategy to attract local and international tourists.

The visitors who want to learn how to paint the mask can paint the mask, and they can take their own finished work home.

Then, for mask carving lesson, usually, the owner or the crew of Asmorobangun art studio is asked to come to several universities to teach. If the lesson is to be held at the studio, the meetings will be split into several days or weeks because the mask carving lesson needs longer time and more accuracy.

This learning program has such a good purpose that every young generation can be interested in learning this traditional art.

Major Proposition Analysis

Major Proposition:

“product innovation and culture learning program are important factors which form Asmorobangun development strategies as an effort to sustain MMD art.”

Based on the results of interviews with several informants which include the studio owner, customers, students, and the representative of Malang Regency Culture and Tourism Office, we can understand that in sustaining Malang Traditional Puppet Mask Dance, Asmorobangun art studio developed the studio and applies some strategies which focus on the organization growth. This growth of the organization prioritizes the use of all existing organizational strengths to take advantage of the opportunities available.

Answering consumer anxiety about the time of the show that is too long and to adjust to the conditions of modern society, Asmorobangun art studio split the long story into some episodes, so the performance only lasts for 2-3 hours. The marketing method is also done modernly through the internet and social media. The studio already has an internet site where people can easily gain information about MMD art.

From the above explanation, for the artist, especially MMD art, which is now dying, innovation in business is the first step that can be taken to revive this traditional art. If this art vanishes, many people will regret it. Innovation and strategy offered by Asmorobangun art studio can be a guide to develop the traditional art, although there is standard for this traditional art, development must be carried out during this dynamic age development.

Proposition and Proposition

From the exposure of the prepositions and the result of proposition analyses, it can be found that the developing strategies using by Asmorobangun studio are only three from six strategies formulated in the previous research. Those strategies are build-

ing a good marketing strategy, market expansion, products, and mask motifs diversification. The three are classified in Major proposition regarding innovation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In facing the environmental changes, Asmorobangun art studio applies several strategies to develop the studio itself and to sustain the existence of MMD. The change and development strategies used by Asmorobangun are cutting the performance duration, developing marketing media through the internet, product diversification into some souvenir forms, and providing culture learning program.

Based on those strategies, it can be concluded that innovation and culture learning program are the strategies used by Asmorobangun art studio in sustaining the existence of MMD art.

The strategy that must be prioritized is a strategy that supports organizational growth. It is that Asmorobangun in implementing its conservation strategy will focus more on improving the organization, or in other words, the strategy will prioritize the maximum use of all the strength of the organization to take advantage of the opportunities that exist.

That way, Asmorobangun Studio will focus on two important things, namely to preserve traditional arts and also to market local cultural products so it can be enjoyed by the general public.

Recomendations

Referring to the results of observations and interviews with internal parties of Asmorobangun Studio, the author found that there are some weaknesses of the studio management system itself. Therefore the suggestions that can be given by the author in this study include the following: better financial records. At the Asmorobangun Studio, there is no adequate and appropriate financial recording system. The second, A more structured dance learning system. During this time if anyone wants to learn WTM dance, they may come directly every Sunday and immediately attend the training and learn-

ing held, so some people can not learn the basic and only get to learn some parts. Next suggestion is building better coordination with government officials. So far, the management of the studio seems to be running well alone, and the government also considers the studio to be running independently. Next, Making a Mask Gallery to store products. It is really necessary because sometimes there are consumers who want to buy masks directly but because the stocks are lacking so the consumer must wait for some time to get their orders. And the last is an active internet site for conveying the information related to studio activities such as the performance and the mask stocks.

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