

# Enhancing Students' Creative Thinking Skill through Tourism Community Engagement

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**Abstract**—Students are ‘engaged’ in the community when they play a significant part in the discussions, considerations, decision-making, and implementation of a program that is designed to be closely related to the concerns of both the students and the community. The study describes the implementation of creative thinking skill as a foundation in designing a community engagement project. The project was conducted in a tourism village in Purwakarta, Indonesia and the objective of our study is to employ the creative thinking skill principles to design a familiarizing program for rejuvenating the tourism promotion system in the area. By implementing the creative thinking elements, the students are assigned to analyze the existing system and proposes alternatives for improving the tourism promotion in the area. Also, a grounded study was implemented to analyze and observe the current issues and the potential of the village. Key informant interviews, focus group discussions and secondary data gathering were also conducted as parts of the study. As the results, social capital and professional linkages play a prominent role in familiarizing a tourism object. The reflective paper also argues that by implementing creative thinking principles, the students are able to address the emerging issues and lead to a better understanding to where they focus in improving the tourism village.

**Keywords**—community engagement; community based tourism; handycraft tourism

## I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of tourism villages in Indonesia firstly sparked in 2000, and currently the archipelago has hundreds of tourism villages that have been established for tourists who want to experience the culture and the beauty of each village. Aside from accommodation and the natural beauty, these villages were initiated to offer various and exciting activities to keep visitors engaged during their stay [1]. These villages are particularly developed for visitors who wish to explore the experience of how Indonesian locals live their daily lives and learn about the various cultures of each regions in Indonesia offer. Tourism villages can be economically capitalized in the form of their traditional objects, traditional architecture, folk costumes, sculptures and instruments, folklore manifestations, traditional gastronomic products, and eco-friendly products [2].

However, among hundreds of those villages, not all the tourism villages meet the ideal standards or definition of a decent tourism village. The issue of equitable development and well-being of communities who live in rural areas are still marginalized from the urban development. The rural communities are still underdeveloped, especially regarding to economic resources, transportation access, education, technological literacy and environmental sustainability [3]. In order for tourism villages to be able to withdraw visitors' attention and have a high value, it is necessary that the economic value of the villages' proximate activities should be ushered at a high level.

Based on the rationale above, this paper attempts to describe the developmental efforts conducted by students within a community engagement project. The project was aimed to combine the local economic interests, the development of communities, and enhance students' critical thinking by exploring and solving problems occurred at a tourism village. Furthermore, this reflective paper presents results of an exploratory study of tourism village community needs, university-community interactions, interventions designed on new understandings toward an ideal rural tourism, challenges, outcomes (both intended and unintended), and insights learned from the engagement experience.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Community Engagement in Academia Setting

Community engagement is a process of involving students in community service activities combined with facilitated means for applying the experience to their academic and personal development. It is similar to service learning in sense of enhancing and enriching student learning experience in course material that emphasizes the development of the students so they can give back to the community [4].

Previous studies have shown that community engagement in academia setting has been considered as a proper additional element in educating the students [3], [5]–[7].

Community Engagement can be considered as a form of collaboration between higher education institutions and

broader communities for the mutual exchange of knowledge and resources. The objectives of such kind of engagement activities are to raise positive effects on personal and interpersonal development, increase the sense of social responsibility, citizenship, and commitment to serve the society, and to improve students' academic knowledge through "real world" implementation [8].

#### *B. Critical Thinking Skills and Community Engagement*

In performing a community engagement project, one must not only have the willingness to serve, but also the skills to contribute positively in the community. This is important because all community project is always about contributing to the community's sustainable economy, social, environmental and cultural prosperity. Hence, one of the skills to support the project facilitators is the critical thinking skill.

This skill can be defined as the mental processes, strategies, and representations that a person uses to solve problems, make decisions, and learn new concepts. Other than that, having a critical thinking skill means being open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts to solve problems [9]–[11].

Regarding the community engagement program, critical thinking skill serves as a foundation for students to analyze problems in the community and then the students can find various ways to cope with the problems and offer various applicable solutions. This is in line with [12] who stated that to be successful in encouraging the development of critical thinking skills, explicit instruction in critical thinking needs to be included in the curriculum, whether that instruction occurs as a stand-alone course, is infused into subject-matter content or in this context, the instructions are infused in the community engagement project. Hence in this community project, the students were guided to elaborate their critical thinking ability in solving issues raised in the targeted community.

#### *C. Community-based Tourism*

This study has similarity and was conducted as a series of special interest travel planning process-based education to community-based tourist attraction. Community-based tourism is a tourism in which local residents (often rural, poor and economically marginalized) invite tourists to visit their communities with the provision of overnight accommodation. The residents earn income as land managers, entrepreneurs, service and product providers, and employees [13].

The community participation in the tourism planning process is advocated as a way of implementing sustainable tourism [14]. Eventually, many studies argued whether the concept was really implemented and the actual benefits to local communities remain largely not quantified [15].

### III. METHOD

#### *A. The Project Site*

The name of the community engagement program is the International Community Engagement Program with the theme "Rejuvenating Plered Tourism Village". The project was conducted in Anjun, Purwakarta, West Java, Indonesia.



Fig. 1. Plered tourism village as a project location, (<http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/pendidikan/2018/08/23/hidupkan-wisata-kriya-plered-tel-u-dan-upi-gandeng-tiga-kampus-luar-negeri>), accessed 12 November 2018, official publication image

The authors chose the site due to the fact that Anjun village is known as one of the largest and oldest pottery and ceramics based tourism village in Indonesia [16]. However, due to the inability to cope with the technological advancement and infrastructure development, the tourism village starts to lose its popularity.

In fact, the new highway built near the tourism village makes it worse, since visitors tend to miss the place because most of the commuters do not pass the road to the village. Agricultural activities and ceramics handicrafts in this area become the main source of community livelihood. The decrease in pottery and ceramics industry has negatively impacted their main economy. Therefore, an immediate engagement in community development was important in supporting a sustainable environment where the spirit of partnership, mutual sharing and self-determination can again make a difference.

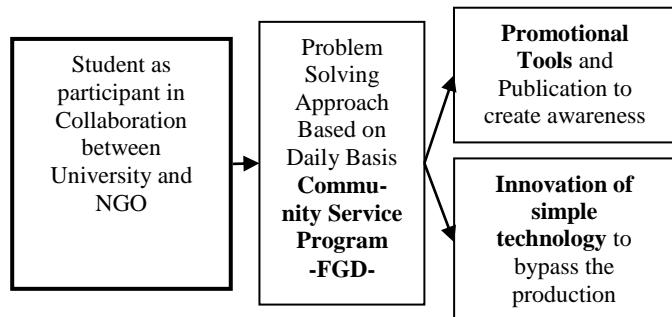


Fig. 2. Critical thinking process

According to Figure 2, The participants of the project were students from three countries (Indonesia, South Korean, and Malaysia). It will be described next.

### B. The Participants

The project itself was conducted as part of a collaboration between four universities and an NGO (Telkom University, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Pusan National University, and Bee Project, Korea). The total number of participants are 60 students and 14 Advisors.

In conducting the project, critical thinking skills was embedded into the project mission, the students should work in groups and they decided what kind of contribution they should give based on the critical thinking foundations: conceptualizing, analyzing, synthetizing, and evaluating. The foundations of the project plan came from direct sources by observing, experiencing, reflecting, and communicating with the local community.

A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted after the commencement of the project. The students and local community were involved in the FGD to discuss and evaluate both outputs and outcomes from the community engagement program. The data gathered from the FGD were subjected to descriptive analysis such as finding patterns and insights to develop the project site and the program in the future.

## IV. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND DISCUSSION

### A. Implementation Process

Rejuvenating a village from being collapsed was quite challenging, especially when the rapid development of massive infrastructure was built. In 2008 Plered as a District, was getting worse because the ceramics industry as primary industry, no longer existed. It was inevitable because the infrastructures are needed to disperse equality of the economics from many strategic areas. To answer those dilemmatic issues, Telkom University collaborated with Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) to build the Plered Purwakarta ceramic industry through innovation, technology and tourism transfers. Plered, as a tourism village was already launched brochures to attract tourists/ visitors with the name of Ceramics Tourism as depicted in Figure 3.

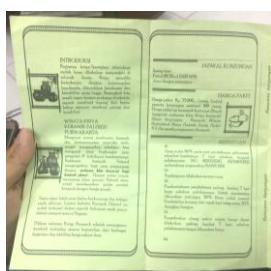


Figure 3. Brochure as Previous promotional tool

Together with a number of international students such as from Pusan National University, Daegu Catholic University, and Universiti Teknologi Mara Malaysia, they made tools to increase pottery and ceramic production capacity, and promote Plered with craft tourism modifications

As well as transferring technology as an immediate effort. Regarding to the technology, the students designed a tool to shorten the process of making ceramics.



Figure 4. Students final product to promote tourism village

Figure 4 is the final product of the project and we have had an approach promoting Plered with modifications to craft tours, Familiarization Trips, redesigning brochures in multiple languages based on existing market of international tourist, making tour guide vests, and inventorying activities on social media. "We gave a welcoming drink with ginger coffee from pottery, traditional food from Purwakarta like wajit or aliagrem," that was the welcoming snacks.

Afterwards, they made brochures with four kinds of languages, namely Indonesian, Korean, Malaysian and English. In the brochure there is a brief history of ceramics production in Plered, interesting facts, ceramics making processes, other nearby destinations, and information related to craft tourism prices. The Faculty of Engineering, Telkom University and Pusan National University make a refiner which makes the process of making ceramics from bamboo to stainless steel. Then, they made a ceramic carrying cart that was originally carried by workers, now they can get a wheelbarrow to make it more effective and not have much chance of broken ceramics. This renewal makes the process of ceramic and earthenware become increasingly fast and effective. In addition, the tool becomes more durable than bamboo.

### B. Student's Critical Thinking Approach

Students gathered ideas for tourism modification with the knowledge that had been obtained in college. Students began to improve and add some of the elements needed to develop Plered as a craft tourism destination. Among other things, they redesign brochures as promotional tools, make vests for tour guides, and manage social media to interact with tourists. In addition, this craft tour package is also equipped with improved services for tourists.

For example, they provide aprons and sandals for tourists who try to make ceramics, provide typical local food and drinks, as well as souvenirs that tourists can take to their home. The craft tour package has also been introduced to the public through a familiarization trip (famtrip) that involves business travelers. All these efforts are expected to be able to attract tourists to Plered.

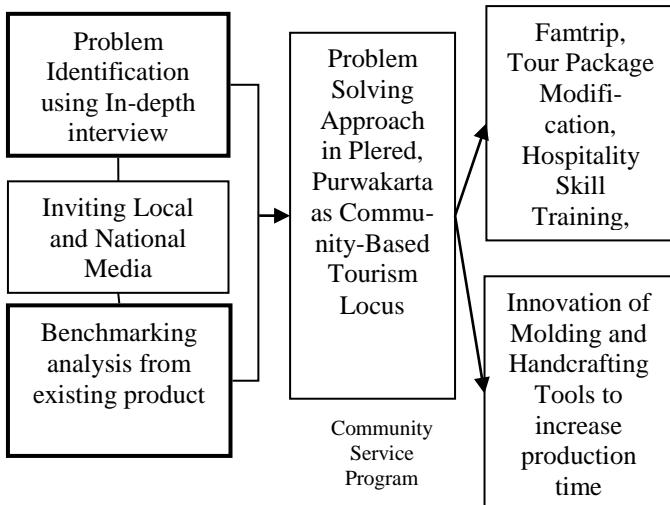


Fig. 5. Implementation of student critical thinking to engage tourism community

The figure 5 showed students workflow of critical thinking skills. They used in-depth interview to 15 small-medium ceramics enterprise as respondents and identified the problems based on daily basis. All of the craftsmen replied they were having difficulties at selling the products, promotion, as well as public awareness that they were still exist crafting traditional ceramics. However, the Purwakarta government already coordinated a ceramic center to facilitate the local product collections. It is operated during weekdays, and the student could gather many specific data from the government staffs such as ceramics design issues, how it is marketed, fulfilling demand, production difficulties and the competition between the craftsmen.

Afterwards, the students were inviting local and national media to participate on Familiarization Trip in order to create public awareness. It should be on the series of program activity planning based on itinerary [17]. The journalist eventually tasted the experience of modification tour package as well as creating the original story. This technique was effective, because the journalists were having critical point of view to improve the quality of tour package.

The students were most likely to generate ideas from benchmarking other handcrafting tourist attractions. There were many similarities in having visitor, including the way of how a tour package is delivered. Other tourist attractions needed Online and Conventional Travel Agent to increase the number of visitors. It was inevitable that the village must stay close with technology in term of creating tourism reservation.

Problem solving based on student critical thinking was not easy from the beginning, because they need a direct advice from the supervisor. In this project, the supervisor must create the core product (innovation technology) such as engineering modification to create tools to shorten the ceramics production process.

The innovation technology was created in the form of simple tool. It consists of toolbox, molder, conveyor belt, display rack and drying platform, all of them were granted by the universities as gifts of the project.

## V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the project was having dynamical changing, due to the time limitation provided by the local handcraftsmen. They were busy, because most of them should finish the demand from the market. The design was quite simple, but the number of quantities was very high. They are still using traditional ways such as burning the oak tree to dry off the ceramic and then storing to warehouse to be colored as finishing session.

Overall, the whole project used many approaches to guide the student to have critical mind, and also ranging option to solve the problems. Afterwards, the students and the supervisors could design the promotional tools and technology innovation based on the best real practice.

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