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Synergy of religion, culture, and arts: Meeting point model of religious education for ustadz, cultural, and artists in Garut district

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ABSTRACT

Garut Regency is a religious area with good Human Resources (HR) potential, including many religious instructors, religious teachers, cultural figures, and artists. They became community figures who were influential enough to move the wheels of development in Garut society with a spiritual, arts, and cultural approach. However, their current existence has not been able to motivate people to improve their quality of life. The root of the problem is misperceptions among community leaders, especially religious counselors, religious teachers, artists, and cultural figures. They view that religious education or Islamic da'wah and the development of arts and culture are two different things and even tend to be contradictory. A qualitative research approach using descriptive analysis methods from field studies by synergizing and discussing with religious, arts, and cultural figures, then conducting workshops, preparing and disseminating model drafts in the form of limited training as a trial of the cultural approach to religious education model for religious instructors, Ustadz, Artists and Cultural People in Garut Regency. This activity aims to equalize perceptions about Islam and arts and culture and to create good synergy between religion, arts, and culture. This community service produces new ideas and models of religious education with an arts and culture approach that elevates and socializes local wisdom.

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ABSTRAK

Kabupaten Garut dikenal sebagai daerah religius dan memiliki potensi Sumber Daya Manusia (SDM), yang cukup baik, di antaranya banyak penyuluh agama, ustadz, budayawan dan para seniman. Mereka menjadi tokoh masyarakat yang cukup berpengaruh untuk menggerakkan roda pembangunan di masyarakat Garut dengan pendekatan agama dan seni budaya. Namun keberadaan mereka saat ini belum mampu memotivasi masyarakat untuk meningkatkan kualitas hidup mereka. Akar persoalannya adalah karena adanya kesalahan persepsi di kalangan tokoh masyarakat, khususnya para penyuluh keagamaan, para ustadz, seniman, dan budayawan. Mereka memandang bahwa pendidikan keagamaan atau dakwah Islam dengan pengembangan seni budaya merupakan dua hal yang berbeda bahkan cenderung kontradiktif. Pendekatan penelitian secara kualitatif dengan metode deskriptif analisis dari studi lapangan dengan melakukan sinergi dan berdiskusi dengan tokoh agama, seni dan budaya, kemudian melakukan workshop, penyusunan dan sosialisasi draf model dalam bentuk Pelatihan terbatas sebagai uji coba Model pendidikan keagamaan pendekatan budaya bagi para penyuluh keagamaan, ustadz, seniman, dan budayawan di Kabupaten Garut. Kegiatan ini bertujuan untuk menyamakan persepsi tentang Islam dan seni budaya serta terjadi sinergitas yang baik di antara agama, seni dan budaya. Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat ini menghasilkan gagasan-gagasan baru dan model-model pendidikan keagamaan dengan pendekatan seni budaya yang mengangkat dan mensosialisasikan kearifan lokal.

Kata Kunci: Budayawan; kearifan lokal; model pembinaan keagamaan; penyuluh agama; seniman; ustadz

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INTRODUCTION

Garut Regency is renowned for its rich religious heritage and strong human resource potential, boasting a diverse array of spiritual teachers, ustadz, artists, and cultural figures. They are influential community leaders who drive development in Garut through a combination of religious and artistic approaches. However, their role has not been fully utilized in raising public awareness about religious obligations and improving the quality of life in various aspects (Rohmaniah, 2018). They have not yet synergized and have not been able to serve as both motivators and facilitators for community development in their respective areas. They often become part of the problems in community life; yet, the integration of religion, art, and culture can be achieved through an integration-interconnection approach to minimize attitudes of feeling superior or being a “single entity” intellectual arrogance, or being isolated entities (Setyowati, 2022).

The root of the problem lies in the misperception among community leaders, particularly religious leaders, ustadz, artists, and cultural figures. They view religious education and Islamic preaching, as well as the development of arts and culture, as two separate things that are even contradictory (Soehadha, 2016; Syarifah & Wahyudi, 2016). Religious educators and ustadz present religious material that is often immersed in ritual worship routines and tend to view cultural arts as something forbidden by religion (Mahmudin, 2018; Rohmad, 2019), resulting in the delivery of religious material to their congregations that appears monotonous and devoid of cultural values (Safliana, 2008). This condition has created a significant gap in how religion and culture are perceived, practiced, and appreciated within the same social space. Meanwhile, artists and cultural figures view religion as sacred and untouchable by art and culture, let alone mixing it with cultural art (Parhan, Rofiudin et al., 2022). They are unable to freely express their best works because, as Muslims, they feel constrained by religious leaders’ fatwas declaring cultural art as forbidden (Rifai, 2021). Ultimately, both of these development potentials are wasted and may even lead to social conflicts and conflicts of interest among them (Fernandez & Tirto, 2021; Halim et al., 2023). Religion, art, and culture are holistic and interconnected elements that present values of goodness and beauty, which are beneficial to society and serve as guidance, not merely entertainment, because culture and art are deeply rooted in religion (Parhan, Sukma, et al., 2022). This must be stopped immediately, and they must be empowered to contribute to development in their respective regions collectively (Khomaeny, 2018). One way to achieve this is by designing religious education models for the community using a cultural approach (Khairusani, 2020; Muslim, 2013).

This is important because religious leaders, religious counselors, artists, and cultural figures in the region, who are community leaders and potential human resource developers, have not been optimally utilized, and their potential has not been fully realized for the overall development of the community. Furthermore, religious leaders and religious counselors have been unable to harness the potential for the development of arts and culture in the community. At the same time, artists and cultural figures are also aware of and recognize the importance of religion in life and tend to want to develop their professions in line with the religious values they believe in. Additionally, there is a dichotomy in understanding the relationship between religion, arts, and culture among religious leaders, religious counselors, artists, and cultural figures, particularly in terms of recognizing their respective expertise and applying it in the context of community empowerment through religious and cultural approaches. In light of these overlapping concerns and missed opportunities, a more integrated and dialogical approach becomes necessary. Furthermore, there are no campus intellectual groups capable of mediating between two potential development forces, namely religious leaders/Ustadz and religious counselors, and artists and cultural figures, to sit together and build a grand vision and mission for development in rural areas and seek an approach to religious learning through the language of arts and culture. Additionally, there are no campus intellectual groups capable of designing religious development models with a cultural approach, exploring

the rich cultural potential rooted in religious values as a form of local wisdom, and socializing it to the millennial generation. Therefore, the researcher feels compelled to address these issues and incorporate them into community service activities.

This community service activity is divided into three main stages: 1) Consist of workshop on the concept of religious education and the development of religious-based arts and culture, 2) Involves drafting of a cultural approach to religious education model, 3) Dissemination of the draft model in the form of limited training as a trial of the cultural approach to religious education model for religious counselors, Ustadz, artists, and cultural figures in Garut Regency. The specific objectives of this community service activity are to align perceptions about Islam and the arts and culture among religious leaders, artists, cultural figures, and government-appointed religious educators, while simultaneously identifying local wisdom as a form of local cultural heritage that aligns with religious values.

This activity is expected to generate new ideas and models of religious education with a cultural approach as a new form of Islamic preaching in rural areas. Additionally, this activity is also expected to highlight and promote local wisdom rooted in the local culture that has existed for generations but is now threatened with extinction due to the unstoppable tide of globalization (Sugiyarto & Amaruli, 2018). As a result, there will be a shift in the values of local wisdom rooted in local culture, in line with the development of the times in this millennial era (Faiz & Soleh, 2021; Nadlir, 2016).

The workshop and training on cultural approaches to religious education for religious teachers, artists, and cultural figures in Garut Regency is one of the activities aimed at aligning perceptions regarding the relevance of religious values to arts and culture. Through this workshop, it is hoped that new ideas will emerge regarding innovations in Islamic preaching, based on a culture rich in local wisdom. This model will be tested with a limited number of participants as a pilot program. Suppose the evaluation results are positive and inspiring. In that case, the next community service activity will be a workshop to refine the model and provide more extensive training to young religious teachers, artists, and cultural figures. This community service activity by UPI faculty members will be divided into three phases: 1) A workshop featuring religious experts who understand art and culture, and art and culture experts who understand religion, both from UPI faculty members and external sources, 2) Discussion and development of a Cultural-Based Islamic Da'wah Model, and 3) Limited pilot testing of the model.

METHODS

This service project employs a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis, presenting data in a narrative format after analysis. This research employs field research methods through phenomenological studies, utilizing three data collection techniques: 1) Lecture and question-and-answer methods. This method was employed during the initial stage, specifically in a workshop to explore the potential, challenges, and perspectives of the target community service participants. This workshop invited resource persons from religious leaders who are knowledgeable about culture and cultural figures who are knowledgeable about religion. 2) Discussion, question, and answer method. This activity involved discussing and reviewing draft models within a limited group of potential participants, including religious leaders, artists, and cultural figures from each sub-district. They were selected based on their representation of each group and their expertise in their respective fields. 3) Individual assignment and guidance, as well as group guidance. This assignment activity is conducted after participants complete the training as a pilot test of the religious education model with a cultural approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This community service program was conducted at the Office of the Ministry of Religion of Garut Regency, located in Sukagalih Village, Tarogong Kidul Subdistrict, which is at the administrative center of Garut Regency. The facilities and infrastructure for the activity were supported by a hall or representative room equipped with tables, chairs, a sound system, and other necessary equipment to facilitate the workshop. The implementation of the activity proceeded smoothly, thanks to the support of competent human resources who were well-suited to their respective fields. There were some changes between the plan and the actual implementation. Initially, the invited participants were community leaders from religious, cultural, and artistic circles in the northern part of Garut District. However, the actual participants in the workshop were religious leaders representing several religious organizations in Garut District, as well as kyais, cultural figures, and artists from Garut. This was due to the relevance of the workshop theme. Additionally, the event was supported by the presence of the Deputy Regent of Garut District, Mr. Dr. Helmi Budiman, MM. In principle, the Community Service activities have been carried out smoothly as planned, with some adjustments to the schedule and number of participants. These changes were made to accommodate the needs and high enthusiasm of the community. Therefore, the approach taken was to accommodate and address the emerging aspirations and suggestions.

The area covered by this Community Service program is six subdistricts in northern Garut Regency with 30 participants. The target audience comprises representatives from various fields, including religious teachers, ustadz/Quran teachers, artists, and cultural figures, from six subdistricts, as listed in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Distribution of areas and participants in Community Service activities

No	Subdistrict	Religious Counselor	Young religious teacher	Artist	Cultural figure	Total
1	Selaawi	1	2	1	1	5
2	Limbangan	1	2	1	1	5
3	Kersamanah	1	2	1	1	5
4	Malangbong	1	2	1	1	5
5	Cibatu	1	2	1	1	5
6	Cibiuk	1	2	1	1	5

Source: Service 2023

Based on the data in **Table 1** above, it can be seen that five people with different backgrounds represent six subdistricts in Garut Regency.

Roadmap Community Service

Community Service activities involve positive communication and dynamic cooperation between universities (UPI) and religious leaders, as well as arts and cultural figures. These activities have led to continuity in the Community Service activities of UPI lecturers in specific communities that are considered to have untapped development potential due to the absence of innovators to harness this potential. Based on this, the Roadmap for Community Service activities is implemented in three phases, as illustrated in **Image 1** below.

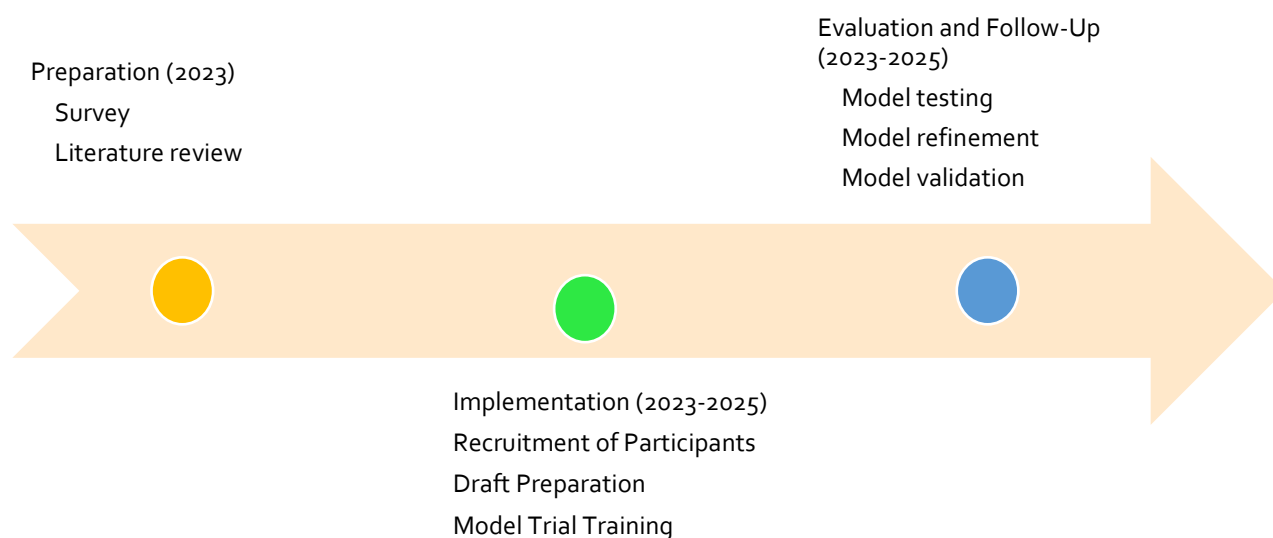


Image 1. Roadmap PkM
Source: Author's Documentation 2023

Preparation

This stage is carried out by conducting surveys and referring to the results of research on rural development. The results of the study are then incorporated into a community service proposal with a program of activities as outlined in the proposal and TOR for this research-based Community Service.

Implementation

This implementation phase began with the recruitment of prospective workshop participants and training participants from four different communities: religious counselors, religious leaders and teachers, artists, and cultural figures in the region. This initial phase is crucial for ensuring balanced representation and inclusivity across various segments of the community's stakeholders. The details of the activities are as follows: 1) The first stage of the workshop involves drafting a religious education model with a cultural approach, which will be developed in collaboration with 15 UPI lecturers, religious leaders, and cultural figures. 2) Training to test the workshop model, involving 30 participants from religious educators, young religious leaders, artists, and cultural figures.

Evaluation and Follow-Up

The evaluation and follow-up stages of this community service activity, conducted by UPI lecturers, will be carried out over three years, with the following details: 1) In the first year, a workshop will be conducted, followed by a pilot test of the workshop model. The model will then be tested and trained on participants from four communities. 2) In the second year, the model will be refined, and the second batch of training will be conducted. This stage also aims to gather more nuanced feedback from participants to enhance the model's contextual relevance and practical impact. 3) In the third year, the model will be further refined, the third batch of training will be conducted, and the model will be fully validated.

Discussion

The target/output of this activity is positive communication and dynamic cooperation between universities (UPI) and religious leaders, as well as arts and cultural figures. This activity will ensure continuity in the Community Service Program of UPI lecturers in specific communities that are considered to have untapped development potential due to the absence of innovators to empower this potential. In essence, religion, art, and culture complement and depend on one another. Religion, art, and culture are closely interconnected and mutually reinforcing (Yudi, 2020) and can support development across various aspects of life (Al-Fozai, 2023), thereby fostering an Islam that is compassionate, flexible, and inclusive, where the presence of religion is not to eliminate culture, but rather to strengthen, guide, and provide direction for culture that aligns with religious values (Bashori, 2017; Jayana, 2018).

Religion can be defined as a set of laws or rules revealed by God for humans to serve as guidelines for life and living, enabling them to attain happiness and salvation, both in this world and in the hereafter (Amallia, 2019; Maulida, 2019; Zamakhsari, 2020). Meanwhile, culture is formed from the words *budi* and *daya*, where *budi* is interpreted as a feeling in the chest (heart), while *daya* is a feeling in the chest that is then drawn into thoughts that give rise to good deeds that apply in society (Panji et al., 2023; Firdaus, 2022; Putra, 2017), so that the combination of *budi* and *daya* becomes a force that gives birth to *akhlakul karimah* when wrapped in religious values, which pay attention to morals towards Allah, humans, and nature with the basis of *Rahman* and *Rahim* as manifestations of Allah's attributes inherent in humans which are actualized through *wiraga*, *wirahma*, and *wirasa*. In this sense, culture becomes not merely a system of behavior, but a dynamic expression of moral consciousness shaped through reflective, emotional, and social engagement. Meanwhile, art is a human activity that is born by paying attention to the values of harmony and beauty, which show the visualization of events in the world by glorifying the signs of God as a manifestation of human creative works (Parhan, Sukma et al., 2022; Wildan, 2018; Rizali, 2012; Safliana, 2008).

Community service carried out in Garut involved discussions and sharing of information about religion, culture, and art. The discussions were fascinating and complementary. Before the discussions and the alignment of perceptions, a dichotomous understanding existed between religion, culture, and art, which even seemed contradictory. There was a perception that religious educators and clerics tended to present religious teachings that were deeply rooted in ritualistic worship routines, and they often viewed art and culture as something prohibited by religion. This led to the perception that the religious teachings within their congregations were monotonous and lacked artistic and cultural value. Meanwhile, artists and cultural figures view religion as something sacred and rigid, untouchable by art and culture, let alone mixed with them. They are not free to express their best works because, as Muslims, they feel constrained by religious edicts from religious leaders declaring cultural arts as forbidden. If this situation persists, it will lead to social conflicts and conflicts of interest among them, which, instead of uniting people and touching their humanity, will distance them from universal human values. The presence of religion, art, and culture should build better attitudes and character in people, who should love beauty, and even lead to acculturation and harmony between the three, so that they can be integrated and realized in the lives of the surrounding community and accommodate local culture (Gunada et al., 2023; Khairusani, 2020; Mariani, 2021; Zainuri, 2021).

There is a common perception that religion, art, and culture all pay attention to universal human values, which is the essence of the presence of religion, aiming to humanize humans, or, in other words, to promote good norms in society (Amanah, 2019). The universal essence of religion is translated into various dimensions, applied in cultures rooted in religion, and actualized through beautiful forms known as art, thereby conveying cultural values and beautifully presenting them—this is the realm of art. The values of

Islam, which are rich in meaning and the beauty of God, can be easily felt when combined with elements of art and culture (Mariani, 2021; Suabuana et al., 2021).

This synergy between religion, culture, and art can be incorporated into Sufism, which combines *al-dzauq* (aesthetic sense) that is an accumulation of art and religion, as well as morals or ethics that originate from religion and culture, thereby producing individuals who are comprehensive in terms of their physical and spiritual bonds, combining aesthetic sense, culture, and religion (Fauzi, 2019; Hudha, 2020). Such integration nurtures a deeper internalization of spiritual experience through expressive, symbolic, and ethically grounded cultural forms. From a cultural perspective, the synergy between religions is significant. Something that cannot be reached by religion can be embraced through culture, as discussed by Rahman and Rahim. Of course, this culture originates from religion, which is presented by combining the culture conveyed through beauty (art). Thus, when Rahman is presented with sincerity, it will give birth to love from Allah or Rahim; conversely, when Rahman is presented with conditions, what happens is Rajim, or being cursed and hated. In the context of art, it is not merely understood as guidance; this is an incomplete understanding of the concept. Art, as a form of entertainment, also serves as a means of guidance in human life. Thus, art presents values of goodness (on stage), and culture presents the good things in society, all of which originate from religious values (Nurhidayah, 2017; Warsini, 2022). When Religion, Culture, and Art synergize well, they can build a good society and appreciate beauty in practicing religious teachings with love, kindness, and compassion.

Religion, culture, and art must be in harmony and intertwined, so that no society or group of people discriminates between religion, culture, and art, or even pits them against one another. Because, at their core, religion, culture, and art complement and depend on one another, we know that good culture stems from religion and does not contradict it. Each of these domains carries its own symbolic and practical significance, but their most significant impact is realized when they operate in mutual reinforcement and shared purpose. In other words, religion is the source of culture, and when expressed through beautiful forms, it becomes the realm of art. Thus, a civilization that presents new cultural traditions that are good and in harmony with religion, and conveyed through art, will bring goodness into life, fostering love and instilling a sense of God's presence in all aspects of life. However, it is essential to remember that there are limits to which culture and art can be considered civilization and goodness. These limits must be observed in culture and art, including: Culture and art must not contradict religious values; Culture and art must not cause harm; Culture and art must not cause destruction; Culture and art must not lead to sin against God; and Culture and art must not distance oneself from God.

CONCLUSION

Community service resulted in harmony of thought and understanding between religious leaders, cultural figures, and artists. This led to the creation of a draft model for religious education that complements the three elements, with the leaders providing perspectives on religion as the core and guidelines for development in the fields of culture and the arts. After conducting studies and discussions, a common ground was found between religious leaders, cultural figures, and artists; they share the same objective, which is humanity, and the universal core values of humanity are love and kindness. Therefore, these three elements place serious emphasis on the essence of humanity that must be developed to become religious and cultured individuals, and this is conveyed through art without conflicting with one another, but rather complementing and synergizing effectively.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

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