

**Economic and Tourism Empowerment of Rawa Pening  
Supported by Local Culture and Wisdom (A Study on Rawa  
Pening, Ambarawa)**

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**ABSTRACT**

Rawa Pening Lake is a natural lake that offers a beautiful tourist destination with various kinds of food and souvenirs of Rawa Pening Lake in which these products become the superior products of the community and Local Government of Semarang Regency. Rawa Pening Lake does not only present natural beauty scenery but also provides various aquatic animals that bring economic welfare. By managing the potencies of natural resources while preserving ecosystem of the environment and the lake as well; then the community may obtain their welfare economically, socially, and culturally. This research will describe efforts of the community of Rawa Pening Lake in improving their economic and in developing tourism area of Rawa Pening Lake as the commodity for their welfare. This research uses qualitative method by using data collection technique through in-depth interview and involved observation. The community of Rawa Pening Lake becomes the main subject in the data collection. The research result shows that the dynamics of Rawa Pening Lake community in social, economic, and cultural life have important roles in realizing the improvement of economic and tourism in Rawa Pening Lake area. Community empowerment in entrepreneurship and tourism has increased the numbers of tourists who visit Rawa Pening Lake. Local culture and wisdom of the local community have supported tourism and entrepreneurship which in turns improve community welfare.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, empowerment, Rawa Pening Lake, local wisdom

**INTRODUCTION**

Local wisdom is a part of cultural systems that usually appears in forms of prohibitions which manage social and human relationship with the nature. Every community has cultural elements such as social system, livelihood system, religion system, language and art, and carries out their own lifestyle. Therefore, those elements show cultural characteristics of the community. Every community will develop local wisdom according to the environment condition and knowledge system that they possess. Local wisdom

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has a function to maintain the nature and the balance of the assets owned by a community to meet their needs from generations to generations without spending those assets (Nasriddin:2008). Hence, local wisdom always becomes a guideline or reference of the community in taking action or behaving in their life; it is an awareness toward causality law (cause and effect) that has symbiotic mutualism characteristic (Dahuri 1999). People of Rawa Pening Lake depends their life fully to natural resources. Every day they earn their living from the natural resources that is available around the lake. Rawa Pening Lake provides various aquatic animals that bring life and welfare to the community from time to time and they are never run out to be consumed. Besides the aquatic animals, water hyacinth also grows on the lake and it can be used to make woven crafts that have been exported to foreign countries. Most members of the community have used water hyacinth and aquatic animals in this area. These chances become the community income because many visitors of the lake like the products from these aquatic animals. It needs continuous attention to maintain the natural resources of the lake to avoid ecosystem damage. It demands roles from the community and local government of Semarang Regency in attempting lake sustainability. This research is conducted in Rawa Pening Lake, Banyubiru, Semarang Regency to observe directly the dynamic of social, economic, and culture and also efforts of the community who lives around the lake in maintaining their life, by using existing natural resources. Besides that, this research will also explain the roles of the community and local government in giving policy and application on the integrated development area of fishing communities among the development actors. Meanwhile, for the sustainability of social economy activity of the community who lives in Rawa Pening Lake, it requires consistent production quality of the aquatic animals and other natural resources around the lake. Local culture and wisdom of the community also support the economic and social activities for their life continuation. Based on the above background problems, the research questions that will be explained in this research are:

1. How does the community conduct economic activity for their family welfare?
2. How does the community keep production consistency of the aquatic animals for their life continuity?
3. How does the community maintain and preserve local culture of Rawa Pening Lake for natural and environmental preservation?
4. What kinds of local culture and wisdom that are held by the community up to this present time?
5. What kind of local values that the community uses to maintain social solidarity and kinship in the community?
6. What are the strengths of local culture and art so that they are able to be the social identity of Rawa Pening Lake?

Based on the above research problems, this research wants to explain and analyze community roles in managing and preserving the nature of Rawa Pening Lake that is supported by traditional culture and local wisdom owned by the community. Economic and tourism empowerment of Rawa Pening Lake community may be improved through this research by using the nature and the environment to meet their daily life without necessarily exploiting or damaging the nature. Approach on local culture and wisdom becomes a method to keep the ecosystem balance and welfare of the nature and human.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research will use qualitative method. This method is used to understand, describe, and explain the social phenomenon. It can be reached by analyzing individual's or group's experiences. The experiences can be related with the life or practices that emphasize on the analysis of knowledge, account, and story. This can be obtained through analysis of interaction, communication, and documents. Because the research goal is to describe social, economic, and cultural life of the community in Rawa Pening Lake, the qualitative method is more appropriate to be used in this research. Data become the base of a research. Data in a qualitative research are derived from involved observation and deep interview. In this research, the data sources come from observation and interview that are used to have better and more comprehensive understanding about social, economic, and cultural life of the community in Rawa Pening Lake completely and thoroughly.

### **Research Urgency**

Specifically, benefits of this research are as follows:

**1. For community.**

This research is expected to motivate the community to keep developing entrepreneurship and to maintain local culture and wisdom of Rawa Pening from generations to generations.

**2. For Local Government of Semarang Regency.**

This research may identify the chances and strategies to develop local culture and wisdom in the community of Rawa Pening Lake as one of ancestral inheritances. The local government will gain the highest benefit in tourism development of Rawa Pening Lake by promoting various local cultures and wisdom through tourism.

**3. For universities.**

It may develop potencies of the universities in supporting the availability of facilitators and encourage development of natural resources and community that is directed to local culture and wisdom and development of capacity building of the involved universities

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Social, Cultural, and Economic Life of Rawa Pening Lake Community**

Livelihood of the people in Rawa Pening Lake area is fishermen, farmers, and entrepreneurs who sell typical food and souvenirs of Rawa Pening Lake. Besides that, they also take water hyacinth to improve their family economy. For generations, community of this area continues their life by relying on natural resources. Various fish and aquatic animals are taken from the lake to be consumed by these families and to be sold for the economic improvement of the community. Therefore, Rawa Pening Lake has natural potencies that highly support community entrepreneurship by processing the available natural resources. Several entrepreneurship activities that are done by the community as their livelihood are fishermen, aquaculture, fish and other aquatic animals processing. Local Government of Semarang Regency has the importance to provide various community empowerment programs through education and health. It also creates investment climate for the business world. Besides that, Local Government of Semarang Regency develops local economic potency by guaranteeing partiality to small people such as fishermen, improves availability and quality of infrastructures, develops religious, culture, and equality which are

environmentally friendly and develops tourism field that is based on utilization of Rawa Pening Lake as a tourist destination for domestic and foreign people. There are several traditions that are related with human resources management of Rawa Pening Lake community, therefore there are not customary rules and written rules. The rules are implemented verbally and they are done by generations to generations without coercive pressure, but they are performed with awareness as a member of the community. There is not any legal sanction if a member of the community breaks the collective rules. The local people only rely on social sanctions in forms of verbal warning and reprimand if there are members of the community who do not obey the collective rules or break the rules that have been agreed together in that local community (Kristanto (1997)). Some traditional rituals that are related with birth performed in the community are: *brokohan* (a gratitude for being born healthy and safely), *puputan* (a ritual when the baby's umbilical cord dries out from the baby), and *selapanan* (a ritual when the baby is 35 days old). A tradition that is related with death is performed spontaneously and voluntarily; the community members come to the house of them who are in grief. They help by providing tables, chairs, and other pieces of funeral equipment. Meanwhile the examples of tradition that is related with religion activities are religious study, celebration of *Isra' Miraj* (the second part of journey of Prophet Muhammad that is done only in one night) and *Maulud Nabi* (birthday of Prophet Muhammad). Furthermore, whenever there is a wedding in the community, the members of the community will come to help for the wedding preparation before the wedding day. They also perform sea alms tradition or other traditions that are related with conversion. As Koentjaraningrat (1990) said local wisdom that exists in the community is a kind of cultural form that is taken place for generations and becomes a habit that should not be broken. Local wisdom has important roles in the daily life of the community. Therefore, the relationship among community members is performed well, harmoniously, and continuously. It is because they respect each other. Awareness to obey the norms and traditions has been planted and runs well from generations to generations. Local wisdom is functioned to keep the sustainability and balance of the assets owned by the community; therefore, the community may meet their needs for generations without running out the assets. In order to maintain and to preserve local culture, *Sedekah Rawa* – lake alms is held annually. The tradition is begun by torch ignition ceremony as unity spirit sign of the local people in the development process. Some elderlies of the local villages pray to God and ask for safety, health, and abundant blessings for all of them and along with the prayer there are offerings too. The next procession is sowing flowers and washing out the offerings right into the middle of the spring of Rawa Pening Lake. Washing out procession symbolizes gratitude of the people around Rawa Pening Lake for blessings and safety that God has granted to them. The lake alms are ended by eating meals together that these people have brought before and as the closing of these series of rituals a puppet shadow show is held all night long. It is attended by thousands of local people and visitors who come from other places. The lake alms also have a goal to balance the fish ecosystem in Rawa Pening Lake by feeding the fish there. This hereditary ritual is believed by the community as a gratitude and prayer for the continuity life of the lake and that it may bring benefits and advantages for the people around the lake because most of these people depend their life on the goodness of the lake. These people of Rawa Pening Lake work as fishermen, farmers, sellers, or in tourism field. The ritual of lake alms is also a tradition that may attract visitors' attention and becomes an annual cultural attraction that is included in the cultural agenda of Semarang Regency Local Government. There is a model of Rawa Pening Lake management that is based on local community tradition and the other one is formed formally by the government. Local community tradition has known wisely about Rawa Pening Lake management by

using cultural approach. Local wisdom is built based on a myth toward the formation of Rawa Pening Lake that is related with Baru Klinting legend. By doing the alms activity in the lake, it creates social interaction in the community social life and attitude of working together, helping each other, and social solidarity among the community members. Working together for the alms activity can be seen when they prepare the offerings for the ceremonies and cultural traditions that are held annually, such as *sedekah bumi* – earth alms, etc. However, in its development, social integration and activity are not related only with ritual needs but it also develops in the community social life. There are also economic groups in the community where their orientation is to use the resources of Rawa Pening to support family economic life. This economic groups include fisherman groups, floating net fisheries, farmers, duck breeders, small and medium enterprises of water hyacinth crafts, groups of boat rental owners, and other groups. Every village in Rawa Pening Lake area has economic groups that are based on the similar work. These economic groups will be mentored and developed by the government. Furthermore, they are united in “Sedya Rukun” Farming-Fisherman Group. Earlier, its orientation is for the welfare of its members. This group has agreed to preserve the natural resources of Rawa Pening Lake and to prevent it from ecological damage. Then the role of this group in managing Rawa Pening Lake is legalized to be a more formal institution. It is based on the Decree of Central Java Governor No. 610/VI/2004. Leader of the group is appointed to be the Leader of Rawa Pening Lake Forum Rembug (Forum of Discussion) in which he supervises 31 elements that consist of local government officers and community figures. Formation of this group improves the economic welfare of Rawa Pening Lake community. Besides that, social kinship and solidarity in the community also becomes stronger. Daily activity pattern of this community is working activities, either catching fish or other lake animals, fish processing or cultivation. The community also has non-working activities such as take a rest, sleep, and social activities. This community activity pattern may describe working hours of the fishing community in general (Kristanto, 1997). Meanwhile, the role of fishermen’s wives is generally on domestic functions and economy. They do not take active part in social politic areas. However, actually these women are creative in producing social institutions and their roles are important for the social and economic stability of the fishing community. Therefore, in several places, where Rawa Pening Lake is included in them, the wives of the fishing community become one consideration for every empowerment program (Nurmalasari, 2005). Most of the young people study and work outside the area of Rawa Pening Lake, either in Semarang or Jakarta as migrant workers. Cultural dimension of the fishing community and local wisdom around the lake is a part of cultural system; there are prohibitions which manage social life or human relationship with nature (Nababan (1995). Every livelihood, belief system, language and art are performed accordingly along with guidelines of life and pattern of the community itself. It shows the cultural characteristic of the fishing community. Every village in the lake area develops local wisdom that is appropriate with their social environment or knowledge system that they have. Function of the local wisdom is to keep the assets balance owned by a community so that they can meet their needs from generations to generations, without running out of those assets. Because of that, local wisdom always becomes a guideline to act or to behave in their daily life; it is also awareness toward causality law (cause and effect) and understanding for symbiotic mutualism relationship (Duhari, 1999).

#### **Tradition and Culture of the Community**

The alms culture of Rawa Pening Lake is held in Bawen, Ambarawa, Banyubiru, and Tuntang Sub-Regency. It is a cultural show that is able to attract tourist attention in Semarang Regency. Usually, this annual cultural show is held together with the

celebration of the Republic of Indonesia Independence Day. It has a potency to be a cultural agenda, similar with Five Mounts Festival in Magelang Regency which may invite people from outside of the lake area to visit Rawa Pening Lake. This activity is a form of gratitude of the people around Rawa Pening Lake for blessings and safety that God has granted them. It is implemented through eating meals together where the meals have been brought by the community members previously. Furthermore, there is a puppet shadow show that is performed all night long and there will be thousands of people watching this show. The main goal of the lake alms is to balance the fish ecosystem in Rawa Pening Lake area by feeding them. Another procession is washing out the offerings and it is started with praying that is led by elderly people of the villages, asking God for safety, health, and abundant blessings. Then they will sow flowers and wash out the offerings right in the middle of the lake spring. This tradition has been done for generations and they believe that it is a form of their respect and gratitude to God, therefore the life of Rawa Pening Lake may sustain and continue to bring benefits for the people around the lake because most of them rely their lives on the lake as fishermen, farmers, or in tourism field. Lighting the torch is a beginning of this event; it implies the spirit of unity and togetherness of the local people in developing, preserving, and maintaining the natural resources, cultures, and kinship in the community. Whenever this annual ritual is held, the community and art groups are highly interested to participate in the ritual. The community of Rawa Pening Lake roles as the initiator and implementer of this event. The cultural alms are a manifestation and local wisdom of the people who live around Rawa Pening Lake that covers Bawen, Ambarawa, Banyubiru, and Tuntang Sub-Regency. Therefore, this event is held in turns in every of those four sub-regencies. The second event of lake alms was held in Sepakung Village, in which there were 25 traditional art groups around Rawa Pening Lake and other art performers came from outside of Semarang Regency to participate in this event. The event, that was held in the valley of Telomoyo Mountain, was able to create very big power. This cultural event did not only show the spirit of the community in Rawa Pening Lake and the effort to preserve their culture and art, but this cultural variety also became an indicator that local cultural show was very potential to attract tourist attention which brought high economic income. In these cultural alms event, there was a big open stage to perform traditional arts and local cultures supported by some art performers such as *rhodat*, mouse deer puppet shadow, *glenikan*, *kotekan lesung*, etc. This increasingly rare local culture event is held as realization of local wisdom of the community in Semarang Regency. It is also a cultural show that may invite people to come to visit Semarang Regency which continues to develop and improves its quality from year to year.

### **Rawa Pening Lake Festival and Bukit Cinta Tourist Village**

Every year community of Rawa Pening Lake holds an activity which aims to show off their superior products from each village. The products vary from agricultural product, various art and culture products, and culinary products especially from aquatic animals such as crispy *wader* fish, tilapia fish, *wader* chips, etc. Every village also performs its potencies in the festival and one interesting thing is the demonstration of various products and local wisdom from the villages around Rawa Pening Lake and the tourist villages. The celebration is held in Bukit Cinta by Rawa Pening Lake in Kebondowo Village, Banyubiru, Semarang Regency. Bukit Cinta is a tourist destination area that presents natural beauty of the lake and ancestral heritages, reliefs, a fish museum, boat tour, and beautiful parks. Visitors of Bukit Cinta may enjoy fresh air and beautifully arranged parks and shady trees that are completed with benches to sit on to see the natural scenery and breathe cool mountain air. The tourists can also fish in the lake by renting boats or just walking around the lake. In the middle of the lake, there are some

floating food stalls that sell various kinds of food and beverages, such as boiled noodle, tea, coffee, ginger ale, hot milk, etc., or the tourists can order special food such as tilapia fish, gold fish, or *wader* fish in which the fish are taken directly from the lake and cooked there. Enjoying a plate of hot fried fresh fish that is completed with hot rice and tomato & chili sauce presents a special atmosphere of Rawa Pening Lake that is difficult to get in other areas. Because of that, this place becomes an option for the tourists who come to Semarang Regency. Every day, many tourists come to this place, and in weekends or public holidays there will be more people to come. Bukit Cinta Festival which is held annually is also visited by many tourists from various other places. In this event, there won't be fewer than 32 stalls from the villages in Semarang Regency that sell various food and snacks of Rawa Pening Lake that may attract attention of the tourists. Every stall will display the village's superiority along with their products, such as agricultural products, art and cultural products, culinary products, and local wisdom of those villages. All chains of the event are wrapped in one theme, Rawa Pening Festival and Tourist Villages, where the community always waits for this event because of its interesting package and performance. This event is signed with washing out the offering to the middle of lake. These offerings are prepared by the community together and after that they are placed in a bamboo set to wash out. The offerings consist of various food, such as cone-shaped rice, a whole cooked chicken, vegetables, *opor* - chicken cooked in coconut milk, etc. and all of the food is released into the middle of the lake which is witnessed by thousand people who attend the festival and prayer goes along with the offerings. In order to reach the middle of the lake, the offerings should be brought by boats of the local fishermen. This event is routinely held to introduce Rawa Pening to the community as a tourist destination area and to maintain the cultural tradition. Every year, Rawa Pening Festival is held in different theme. Various activities that can be found in the festival may invite many tourists to come and certainly it improves economic and welfare of the surrounding people.

#### **Develop Entrepreneurship and Tourism in Rawa Pening Area**

When the tourists come to Rawa Pening Lake, Semarang Regency, they may down the lake by the boats that are provided there and enjoy the beautiful scenery. The community who lives around the lake believes in a legend that forms the lake for generations. Once upon a time, there was a village which was called Rawa Pening and the village was preparing for a party. When the people of the village were cooking meals for the party, a bad looking young man came and asked for meals to them. Instead of giving him the meal, these people mocked him, except an old widow who welcomed him to her house and gave him meals. After finishing his meals, he said to the old widow to prepare a mortar whenever there was flood. This young man was called Baru Klinting. He then came to the people who were on the party. He asked if anyone could pull out the stick that he plugged into the ground. None of the village people was able to pull out the stick. Finally, Baru Klinting pulled out the stick by himself and then water gushed out from the hole. The water then sank the whole village along with all the people there and created a lake, which later on was named Rawa Pening Lake. The word Rawa Pening is derived from the word *wening* (Javanese Language) which means clear. Rawa Pening Lake is an ancient lake, in a basin that is similar with a giant bowl with 2,670 hectares width. This giant bowl is flanked by three big mountains: Merbabu, Telomoyo, and Ungaran. From these three mountains there are 21 big and small rivers that flow water to Rawa Pening Lake. Rawa Pening is a natural lake that has potencies to improve welfare of the people who lives around it. As a tourism area which is visited by many tourists, the legendary Rawa Pening Lake presents beautiful natural scenery. Rawa Pening Lake also brings

abundant blessings for the community around it. However, it also has problems in which when these problems are ignored, they will threaten sustainability of the ecosystem and safety of the people who live around the lake. One problem that needs an urgent solution is water hyacinth as it threatens the lake sustainability and health although it also brings blessings and benefits for the community of Rawa Pening Lake. Stems of the water hyacinth can be sold for the material of woven crafts and it certainly improves family economy. Up to this current time, the government along with the community keeps on their effort to balance the ecosystem of Rawa Pening Lake to prevent it from the damage and to avoid it from losing its function for human life and balance of the nature. Similar to other tourist destinations, Rawa Pening Lake as a tourist destination area also provides various typical cuisines of Rawa Pening Lake that are rare or even can't be found in other areas. There are kinds of food and souvenirs that are sold in reasonable prices. There are food stalls that serve typical cuisines of Rawa Pening Lake such as fried *wader* (a kind of small fish), *manuk rowo goreng* - fried lake bird, *manuk paruk ungkep* – boiled lake bird, *manuk nyamnyaman panggang* – grilled lake bird, fried rice-field bird, green chili tilapia fish, *jangan iwak loh* – boiled *loh* fish, *kutuk* fish in yellow seasoning, green frog *swieke* – green frog cooked in fermented soybean, *rawon dieng*, *kendo urang* – shrimp cooked with shredded coconut, fried shrimp, shrimp chips, *tahu gimbal* – fried tofu mixed with vegetable and peanut sauce, *pecel welut* – fried eel served with chili, fried baby fish, fried eel, *kerang rowo tuntang* – clams from Tuntang lake, *tongseng bulus* – *bulus* (a kind of reptile) cooked in coconut milk and vegetables, various fish *pepes* – fish cooked in seasonings and wrapped in banana leaves: parrot fish, tilapia fish, and cork fish; *plelas welut*, *gatot keong* - snail, fried *wader*, etc. All of these foods are the mainstay cuisines of the lake and the tourists love it. The fish to cook these meals come from the lake and the fishermen can take it every day from the lake in abundant amount. Therefore, it becomes a promising commodity. The mostly taken fish is *wader* fish. Commonly it is sold as *wader* chips in which previously it is cooked with typical seasonings of Rawa Pening Lake. This *wader* chips are packaged as typical souvenir of Rawa Pening Lake. *Wader* fish is a kind of baby fish. It is only about half of an adult's small finger. That's why it is appropriate for chips. One person from Banyubiru has successfully developed *wader* fish business by processing it into various snacks and it is included as a small and minor enterprise to improve the family economy and a source of family earning. The *wader* fish is routinely bought from the fishermen which is being processed to be salty and crispy *wader* chips. This product is named "2 Putri Crispy Fish." Besides that, he also processes shrimp, eel, tilapia fish, and baby fish to be worth selling food in which all of the raw materials come from Rawa Pening Lake. Based on this description, the lake is known to be able to provide various natural resources that can be taken by people who live around the lake and then process it to be consumable products and finally the products can be sold to improve their economy. The community around Rawa Pening Lake has succeeded in developing their businesses in form of souvenir stores, food stalls and restaurants that sell various typical foods of Rawa Pening Lake and they can be found in the surrounding area of Rawa Pening Lake, Ambarawa, Tuntang, Semarang Regency.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Rawa Pening Lake is a natural lake that becomes a habitat of flora and fauna. The flora that can be found in Rawa Pening Lake are such as *Salvinia* and *Hidrilla* which previously dominated the lake while nowadays water hyacinth dominates the lake. Meanwhile the fauna is dominated by various fresh water fish. There are also many kinds of birds are that easily found such as grouse and crane. In certain seasons, there



are also migrant birds. Rawa Pening Lake currently is a famous tourism area in Semarang Regency and it becomes world class tourist destination area. This natural lake, which is also surrounded by several mountains, presents beautiful natural scenery. Tourists of the lake may go down the lake by renting boats that are offered by the people of Rawa Pening Lake for 45 minutes to enjoy the beauty of the lake. There are people who live around Rawa Pening Lake that earn their living from boat rent and parking service. Rawa Pening Lake also provides various culinary delights of the lake. The tourists also may enjoy many kinds of food that are produced by local entrepreneurs. The pier of Rawa Pening Lake currently becomes favorite spots for the tourists; even it becomes an icon of Central Java Province. However, this natural lake still needs continuous management to prevent decreasing quality of the lake. One problem that still occurs in this area is the massive growth of water hyacinth. Water hyacinth has the potency to decrease water quality of the lake whereas the water is highly needed by the people of Rawa Pening Lake for their daily life. On the other hand, water hyacinth also brings benefit for them. They use it as material for woven crafts that are exported to foreign countries in high price. Rawa Pening Lake also has various culture and art that serves as the community identity. Therefore, local culture and art which are the ancestral heritage in this area should be preserved. One method of local culture and art preservation is by holding an annual cultural festival. The goal of this festival is to maintain the relation among human, nature, and God. The cultural festival is also aiming to improve social solidarity, kinship among the villagers and balance of the lake ecosystem. The community expresses their gratitude for their daily blessings as farmers, fishermen, and entrepreneurs. Culinary business of the community is developed by selling food from the fish of Rawa Pening Lake that is taken every day and it will never run out. This local wisdom has brought welfare for the life of people in Rawa Pening Lake and the surrounding areas.

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