

Empowering Knitting Artisans through Participatory Art and Design in Binong Jati Knitting Village, Bandung, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the empowerment of knitting artisans through participatory art and design practices in Binong Jati Knitting Village, Bandung, Indonesia. Using a qualitative practice-based participatory approach, artisans collaborated with academics, designers, and practitioners through contextual observation, knowledge exchange, material exploration, creative experimentation, and collective reflection. Data were obtained from participatory observations, visual documentation, creative artifacts, activity records, and participant reflections. The findings indicate transformations from production-oriented practices toward creative exploration, from instruction toward active participation, and from artisans as producers toward creative participants. The study identifies participation, knowledge exchange, creative experimentation, and creative agency as key dimensions of creative empowerment, demonstrating the potential of participatory art and design to strengthen community-based creative capacity.

INTRODUCTION

Craft-based creative industries play an important role in sustaining local knowledge, cultural practices, and community-based economic activities. Artisans possess knowledge that is developed through long-term engagement with materials, tools, techniques, production processes, and local social environments. Such knowledge should not be understood merely as technical competence, but as a valuable resource that can support creativity, innovation, and the continuous development of craft communities. In contemporary craft development, therefore, sustaining artisanship requires not only the preservation of existing skills but also opportunities for artisans to reinterpret their knowledge and respond creatively to changing social, cultural, and economic contexts (Tung, 2021; Banerjee & Mazzearella, 2022).

Binong Jati Knitting Village in Bandung, Indonesia, represents a distinctive community-based craft environment in which knitting knowledge and production practices have developed as part of the local creative economy. The area is characterized by the presence of artisans, small-scale producers, knitting skills, production facilities, and community networks that collectively form a local knitting ecosystem. Previous community-based initiatives in Binong Jati have demonstrated the importance of participatory approaches in strengthening community systems and developing experience-based programs that build upon existing local resources (Sudaryat et al., 2026). Nevertheless, the dominant orientation of knitting activities remains closely associated with functional products and commercial production. This condition creates an opportunity to explore whether established knitting knowledge can be repositioned beyond routine production and developed as a medium for artistic exploration, experimentation, and creative learning.

This issue is particularly relevant because craft innovation does not necessarily require the replacement of traditional or existing skills with entirely new forms of knowledge. Craft knowledge can become a foundation for innovation when artisans are provided with opportunities to reinterpret materials, techniques, and production experience through collaborative processes. Studies on craft-design collaboration have shown that interactions between artisans and designers can create reciprocal knowledge exchange, where experiential and tacit knowledge held by artisans interacts with design perspectives and methods (Arango Marin et al., 2023; Guo & Ahn, 2023). Such collaboration can expand the possibilities of craft while maintaining the significance of locally embedded knowledge.

Participatory design provides an important conceptual foundation for this process because it shifts the role of community members from recipients of externally developed solutions to active participants in design activities. Rather than designing for communities, participatory approaches emphasize designing with communities through shared exploration, decision-making, and knowledge creation (Sanders & Stappers, 2008). In craft contexts, this shift is particularly important because artisans possess tacit knowledge that cannot always be fully represented through formal instructions or transferred through conventional training. Recent research on co-design with craftspeople further

demonstrates that empowerment may emerge through participation, interaction, cognitive development, behavioral change, and strengthened relationships, although poorly structured collaboration may also produce disempowering outcomes (Wang et al., 2023).

Participatory art extends this perspective by positioning creative practice as a space for expression, dialogue, experimentation, and collective meaning-making. Its value is therefore not limited to the artistic artifact produced at the end of an activity. The process of making itself can create opportunities for participants to explore their capabilities, reinterpret experiences, and develop new forms of creative participation. Participatory arts have consequently been discussed as a potential mechanism for community empowerment when participants are provided with meaningful opportunities to contribute to the creative process (Hennessy et al., 2024). In this context, combining participatory art with participatory design provides an opportunity to connect artistic freedom with collaborative processes of exploration, development, and reflection.

For knitting artisans, this combination is particularly relevant because knitting contains visual and material qualities that extend beyond its conventional function as a production technique. Yarn, color, texture, structure, density, pattern, form, and composition can become elements of artistic and design experimentation. Design experimentation enables existing materials and technical knowledge to be reconsidered through iterative processes of trying, observing, modifying, and developing alternatives (Atamtajani & Chalikh, 2024a). This perspective allows knitting to be understood simultaneously as productive knowledge and as a creative medium capable of generating different visual, material, and experiential possibilities.

The empowerment perspective adopted in this study therefore does not assume that artisans lack creativity or technical knowledge. Instead, empowerment is understood as the process of creating conditions in which existing capabilities can be recognized, expressed, exchanged, and further developed. This distinction is important because externally driven interventions may unintentionally reduce artisans to technical executors, while collaborative approaches can strengthen their position as knowledge holders and creative decision-makers. Research involving artisan communities has similarly demonstrated that creativity develops through interactions between inherited knowledge, practical experience, changing contexts, and opportunities for experimentation (Atamtajani et al., 2025).

Despite growing research on participatory design, co-design, craft revitalization, and artisan empowerment, a specific gap remains in understanding how participatory art and participatory design can operate together as a process of creative empowerment within an established knitting-production community. Previous studies have extensively examined designer-artisan collaboration, craft sustainability, entrepreneurship, tacit knowledge exchange, and product innovation (Tung, 2021; Banerjee & Mazzarella, 2022; Guo & Ahn, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). However, less attention has been given to situations in which an established production skill is intentionally repositioned

as an artistic medium through participatory experimentation, and to how this process may transform artisans' roles from producers into active creative participants.

This study addresses this gap through a participatory art and design practice conducted with knitting artisans in Binong Jati Knitting Village, Bandung, Indonesia. Its contribution lies in examining empowerment not primarily through increased production or short-term economic outcomes, but through creative empowerment, particularly participation, knowledge exchange, creative experimentation, and creative agency. The study further proposes three interconnected transformations as an analytical contribution: from production to exploration, from instruction to participation, and from artisan as producer to artisan as creative participant. These transformations provide a framework for understanding how established craft knowledge can become a foundation for new forms of community-based creative practice.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine how participatory art and design practices contribute to the creative empowerment of knitting artisans in Binong Jati, particularly by investigating how collaborative activities facilitate knowledge exchange and creative experimentation, how artisans reinterpret knitting from a predominantly production-oriented practice into a broader creative medium, and how participation in the process contributes to the development of creative agency. Through this focus, the study seeks to contribute to discussions on participatory design, community empowerment, and craft-based creative development by demonstrating how locally embedded knowledge can be activated rather than replaced through collaborative creative practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Participatory Art and Community Empowerment

Participatory art emphasizes the involvement of individuals and communities in the creative process rather than positioning them solely as audiences or recipients of artistic outcomes. Within this perspective, the value of art is located not only in the final artifact but also in the interactions, experiences, negotiations, and meanings generated through participation. Creative practice can therefore function as a social process through which participants express ideas, recognize their capabilities, and develop new relationships with their own knowledge and experiences.

The relationship between participatory arts and empowerment is particularly relevant in community contexts. Hennessy et al. (2024) describe participatory arts as practices that can create opportunities for engagement, expression, social connection, and empowerment. Participation becomes meaningful when community members are able to contribute to the creative process rather than merely reproduce predetermined outcomes. Consequently, the facilitator's role shifts from directing what participants should produce toward creating conditions that support exploration, interaction, and shared learning.

For craft communities, participatory art offers an opportunity to reconsider established skills beyond their conventional productive functions.

Craft techniques are often embedded in repetitive production practices, quality standards, market expectations, and functional requirements. Artistic exploration can temporarily loosen these constraints and allow materials and techniques to be approached through experimentation, interpretation, and expression. In the context of knitting, yarn, texture, structure, color, density, pattern, and form can therefore operate not only as components of functional products but also as elements of creative expression.

This study adopts participatory art as a process through which artisans are encouraged to explore rather than simply execute. The artistic dimension is therefore not intended to transform artisans into professional artists, but to create a space in which familiar materials and techniques can be reconsidered through alternative creative possibilities.

Participatory Design and Co-Design

Participatory design developed from the principle that people affected by design decisions should have opportunities to participate in the process through which those decisions are made. This perspective challenges conventional expert-centered approaches and recognizes users and communities as holders of valuable situated knowledge. Spinuzzi (2005) emphasizes participatory design as an approach involving participants directly in design activities, while Sanders and Stappers (2008) position co-creation as a broader shift toward collective creativity in which people can become active contributors to design processes.

This change can be expressed as a transition from designing for people toward designing with people. The distinction is particularly important when working with artisan communities. Artisans already possess substantial knowledge of materials, techniques, tools, production limitations, and local practices. Consequently, an external designer cannot be assumed to be the sole source of expertise. Instead, the design process becomes a meeting point between different forms of knowledge.

Recent studies reinforce the importance of this collaborative position in craft contexts. Antunes and Nunes (2025) discuss participatory design methodologies within traditional craftsmanship and emphasize the importance of engaging craftspeople in processes of innovation rather than separating design development from craft practice. Similarly, Wang et al. (2023) demonstrate that co-design with rural craftspeople can generate empowering as well as disempowering outcomes depending on how participation, interaction, organizational structures, and collaborative instruments are configured.

Participatory design should therefore not be understood simply as the physical presence of artisans in a workshop. Meaningful participation requires opportunities to contribute knowledge, propose alternatives, negotiate ideas, make choices, and influence outcomes. In this study, these principles are applied to knitting exploration by positioning artisans as participants in creative decision-making rather than as technical executors of ideas developed by external practitioners.

Craft Knowledge and Knowledge Exchange

Craft knowledge is strongly connected to practice. It develops through repeated interaction with materials, tools, techniques, failures, adjustments, and production situations. Much of this knowledge is tacit: artisans may demonstrate or perform what they know more easily than they can fully explain it through verbal or written descriptions. This characteristic makes direct interaction and collaborative making particularly important in craft-based research.

Guo and Ahn (2023) highlight the importance of tacit knowledge sharing between artisans and academics in craft–design collaboration. Their study demonstrates that knowledge exchange can contribute to the sustainability of craft practices when experiential artisan knowledge and external academic or design perspectives are brought into meaningful interaction. Arango Marin et al. (2023) similarly describes collaboration between craft knowledge and design knowledge as a dialogue rather than a one-directional transfer of expertise.

This perspective changes the conventional concept of knowledge transfer. In community-based craft development, knowledge should not be conceptualized exclusively as something delivered by experts to artisans. Instead, knowledge exchange recognizes that each participant contributes a different form of expertise. Artisans contribute situated knowledge of materials, processes, and local conditions, while designers, academics, and practitioners may contribute alternative methods of exploration, visualization, interpretation, and development.

Such reciprocal learning is also evident in craft revitalization research. Tung (2021) demonstrates how collaborative processes can connect craft knowledge, design creativity, and entrepreneurial development in efforts to revitalize indigenous craft. Banerjee and Mazzarella (2022) further argue that the development of innovative craft enterprises requires approaches sensitive to the capacities, relationships, and contexts of artisan communities.

Within the present study, knowledge exchange is treated as one of the mechanisms connecting participation with empowerment. The interaction between local knitting knowledge and external perspectives creates conditions in which existing practices can be questioned, interpreted, combined, and developed without positioning local knowledge as inferior to professional design knowledge.

Creative Experimentation and Learning Through Making

Experimentation is central to creative development because it enables participants to move beyond predetermined solutions. In design practice, experimentation involves trying alternatives, observing results, identifying unexpected possibilities, modifying decisions, and developing new configurations. Atamtajani and Chalik (2024a) position experimentation as an important strategy in design research and product development, particularly for generating alternatives through iterative interaction with materials, processes, and ideas.

The educational value of experimentation can also be understood through learning through making. Martin and Betser (2020) demonstrate that

making activities can become environments in which participants develop knowledge through direct engagement with materials, actions, dialogue, and reflection. Learning therefore does not occur only before practice; knowledge can emerge through the act of making itself.

This principle is particularly relevant to artisans because their expertise is already strongly practice-based. Introducing additional theoretical instruction may not necessarily be the most effective means of expanding creative capacity. Instead, creating unfamiliar conditions for using familiar skills can stimulate new forms of learning. A knitting artisan who already understands yarn, machinery, tension, structure, and production may encounter new knowledge when those capabilities are used without the requirement to reproduce a predetermined commercial product.

Experimentation also changes the meaning of failure. In standardized production, deviations may represent defects, inefficiency, or material loss. In creative exploration, unexpected outcomes may reveal alternative textures, structures, forms, or visual effects. This transition from avoiding uncertainty toward investigating it is important for the development of creative agency.

Creative Agency and Artisan Empowerment

Empowerment is a multidimensional concept and should not automatically be equated with economic improvement. In craft communities, empowerment may include changes in knowledge, confidence, participation, relationships, decision-making capacity, and the ability to initiate new actions. Wang et al. (2023), in their study of co-design with rural craftspeople, identify cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and relational dimensions associated with empowering and disempowering processes.

For the present study, the concept is narrowed to creative empowerment. This refers to the strengthening of artisans' capacity to recognize creative possibilities within their existing knowledge, participate actively in creative processes, experiment with alternatives, and make decisions concerning the direction of their work. Creative empowerment therefore does not imply that creativity is externally given to artisans. Rather, it recognizes that creative capacity already exists within craft knowledge and can be activated or expanded through appropriate participatory conditions.

This interpretation is consistent with studies demonstrating the dynamic nature of artisan creativity. Atamtajani et al. (2025), in examining multiple generations of jewelry artisans, show how craft creativity is connected to inherited knowledge, aesthetic development, experience, and changing entrepreneurial contexts. Craft knowledge is therefore neither static nor restricted to the reproduction of inherited forms.

A key concept within creative empowerment is creative agency. Agency refers here to the capacity of artisans to act as decision-makers within creative processes: proposing ideas, selecting alternatives, interpreting materials, modifying approaches, and determining how their skills can be used. An artisan may possess excellent technical competence while having limited

opportunities to exercise such agency when production is determined entirely by orders, templates, or external instructions.

Participatory art and design can create conditions in which this relationship changes. As artisans move from executing predetermined instructions toward exploring and making creative decisions, their role can expand from skilled producers to active creative participants.

Participatory Art and Design as an Integrated Approach

Although participatory art and participatory design share an emphasis on participation, they contribute different strengths to community-based creative practice. Participatory art emphasizes expression, interpretation, experience, and collective meaning-making, whereas participatory design emphasizes collaborative problem framing, idea development, experimentation, decision-making, and evaluation.

Integrating these perspectives produces what this study refers to as Participatory Art and Design. The artistic component provides freedom to explore material and expressive possibilities without requiring an immediate commercial outcome. The design component provides a collaborative and iterative structure through which ideas can be developed, discussed, tested, and reflected upon.

In the context of Binong Jati, this integration is particularly relevant because the community already possesses established production knowledge. The purpose of intervention is therefore not primarily to teach artisans how to knit, but to create a different environment for using what they already know. Participatory Art and Design becomes a mechanism for activating existing craft knowledge through participation, reciprocal learning, experimentation, and creative decision-making.

Research Gap

Existing literature provides substantial evidence concerning participatory design, co-design, craft revitalization, knowledge exchange, social innovation, and artisan empowerment (Sanders & Stappers, 2008; Manzini, 2015; Tung, 2021; Banerjee & Mazzarella, 2022; Guo & Ahn, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). Recent research has also increasingly recognized the importance of participatory methodologies in traditional craft innovation (Antunes & Nunes, 2025).

However, three areas remain insufficiently connected. First, much of the craft-design literature focuses on product innovation, economic sustainability, entrepreneurship, or heritage revitalization. Second, participatory art literature emphasizes expression and community participation but is less frequently connected to established craft-production environments. Third, limited attention has been given to how an already-mastered production skill can be deliberately repositioned as an artistic and experimental medium to develop artisans' creative agency.

The present study addresses this intersection by examining Participatory Art and Design as a process of creative empowerment within an established knitting-production community. Rather than evaluating empowerment

primarily through economic outcomes, the study examines changes that can be observed through participation, knowledge exchange, experimentation, and creative decision-making.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature reviewed above, this study proposes the following conceptual relationship:

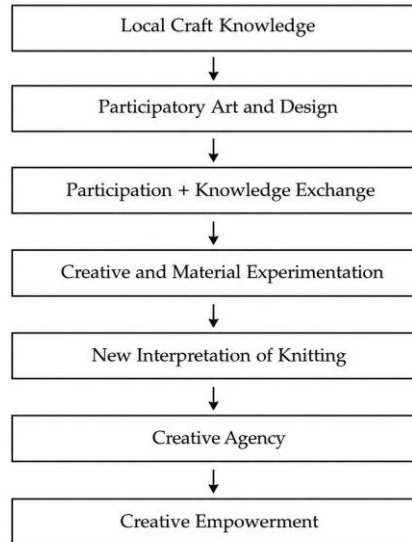


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The framework assumes that local craft knowledge is the starting asset rather than a deficiency that must be corrected. Participatory Art and Design creates the collaborative environment in which this knowledge interacts with other perspectives. Participation and knowledge exchange subsequently provide opportunities for material and creative experimentation. Through experimentation, artisans can develop new interpretations of familiar skills and materials. When artisans increasingly make their own creative choices, creative agency becomes visible, providing the basis for creative empowerment.

The framework can also be summarized through three transformations that guide the analysis in this study:

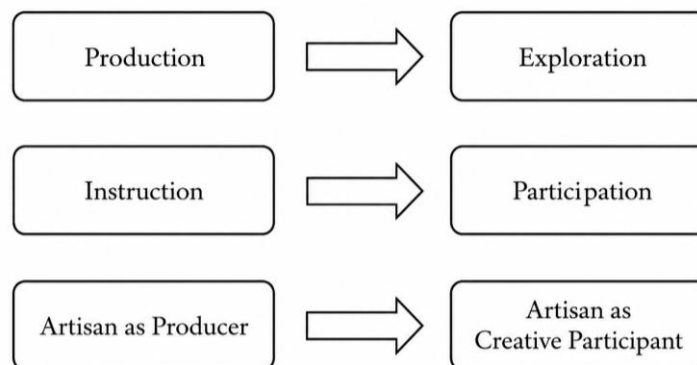


Figure 2. Three Transformations Guiding the Analysis

These transformations provide the conceptual lens through which the empirical findings from Binong Jati Knitting Village are subsequently analyzed.

METHODOLOGY

Provide clear and concise versions of your methods of conducting research, population and samples, and data analysis tools.

This study employed a qualitative practice-based participatory approach to examine how participatory art and design practices contributed to the creative empowerment of knitting artisans in Binong Jati Knitting Village, Bandung, Indonesia. The approach was selected because the study focused on creative processes, interactions, knowledge exchange, experimentation, and participants' engagement rather than on measuring predetermined quantitative outcomes. Creative practice was therefore treated both as an intervention context and as a source of empirical evidence.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Binong Jati Knitting Village, Bandung, Indonesia, a community-based knitting production area characterized by established knowledge of yarn, knitting techniques, machinery, production processes, and small-scale creative industry practices. The study involved a local artisan community consisting of 12 knitting artisans, all of whom participated in the PISN program. Therefore, the study included the entire artisan community involved in the program rather than selecting only a subset of its members.

In addition to the 12 artisans, lecturers and university students participated as facilitators and collaborative partners, resulting in a total of 20 participants involved in the overall activities. The artisans were positioned as the primary participants of the study, while lecturers and students supported the processes of facilitation, creative exploration, documentation, discussion, and collaborative learning. This distinction was maintained to ensure that the analysis of creative empowerment remained focused on the artisan participants.

The participatory activities were conducted once a week, every Saturday, from May to July 2026. This recurring format enabled the activities to develop as a continuous process rather than as a single workshop. Across the implementation period, participants engaged progressively in contextual observation, knowledge exchange, material exploration, creative experimentation, development of works, and collective reflection.

The artisans were not positioned merely as recipients of instruction or objects of research. Instead, they were treated as creative participants and knowledge holders, contributing their practical experience, technical skills, material knowledge, ideas, and creative decisions throughout the process. The lecturers and students facilitated opportunities for dialogue and experimentation while allowing the artisans' existing craft knowledge to remain the foundation of the collaborative activities.

Research Procedure

The research was implemented through a series of weekly Saturday sessions from May to July 2026. The process was organized into six interconnected stages rather than treating each meeting as an independent activity.

The first stage involved contextual observation, focusing on the artisans' working environment, existing knitting practices, materials, techniques, tools, and production characteristics. The second stage involved knowledge exchange, in which artisans, lecturers, students, and practitioners shared perspectives concerning knitting practices, materials, artistic possibilities, and design development.

The third stage consisted of material and technical exploration, during which participants experimented with yarn, color, texture, knitting structures, patterns, and other material characteristics. The fourth stage involved creative experimentation and development, in which the results of material exploration were transformed into visual compositions, experimental objects, or artistic works.

The fifth stage consisted of presentation and collective reflection, allowing participants to discuss their works, creative decisions, difficulties, discoveries, and possible further developments. The final stage involved documentation and interpretation, in which observations, visual documentation, activity records, participant reflections, and creative artifacts were organized as research evidence.

The overall process can therefore be summarized as:

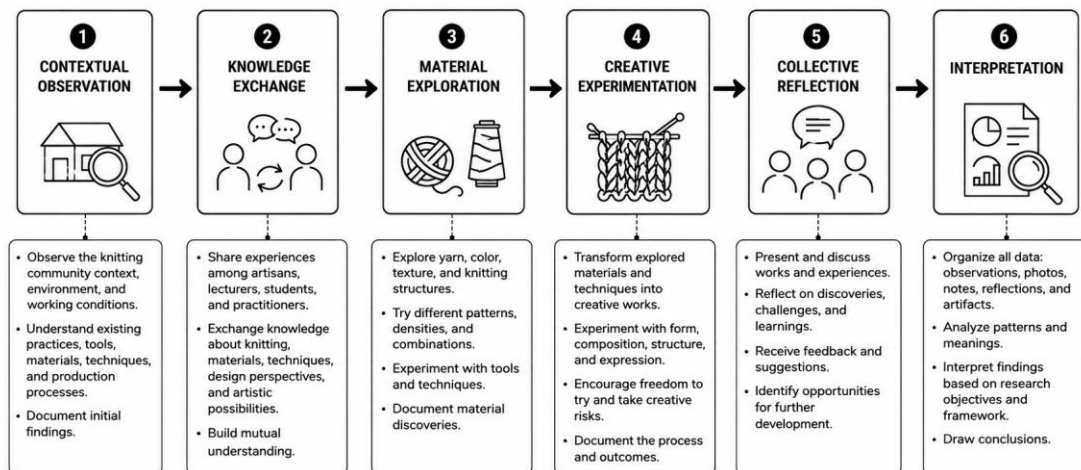


Figure 3. Overall Research Process of Participatory Art and Design

Data Collection

Data were collected through multiple qualitative sources to capture both the process and outcomes of the participatory activities. Participatory observation was used to record participants' involvement, interactions, responses to activities, experimentation processes, and creative decision-making. Visual documentation, including photographs of activities, material experiments, and completed works, was used to trace the development of the creative process.

The creative artifacts produced by participants were also treated as practice-based data. These artifacts provided evidence of variations in material use, texture, color, structure, composition, form, and presentation. Rather than evaluating the artifacts solely according to aesthetic quality, the study examined them as evidence of experimentation and creative decision-making.

In addition, collective discussions, participant reflections, and activity records were used to understand participants' experiences, difficulties, discoveries, and interpretations during the program. Combining these data sources enabled the study to examine what participants expressed, what occurred during the activities, and what was materially produced.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the general principles proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Observation records, participant reflections, activity documentation, and creative artifacts were reviewed iteratively to identify recurring patterns related to the research objectives.

The analysis involved organizing the collected evidence, identifying meaningful patterns, grouping related observations into themes, and interpreting these themes through the conceptual framework developed in the literature review. Four analytical dimensions were used: participation, knowledge exchange, creative experimentation, and creative agency.

Participation examined how artisans became involved in creative activities and decision-making. Knowledge exchange examined interactions between local craft knowledge and the perspectives introduced by academics, designers, and practitioners. Creative experimentation examined how participants explored materials, techniques, colors, textures, structures, and forms beyond routine production practices. Creative agency examined indications that participants increasingly proposed, selected, modified, and developed their own creative alternatives.

The analysis also examined three transformations derived from the conceptual framework:

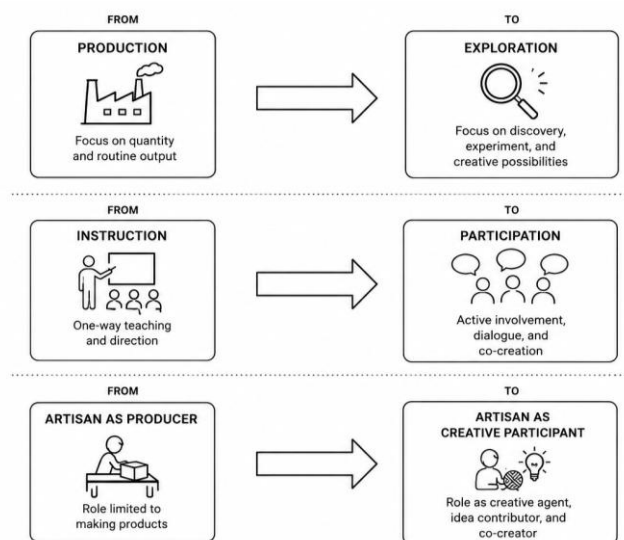


Figure 4. Three Transformations Guiding the Analysis

These transformations were used as analytical lenses rather than predetermined measures of success. Evidence from observations, documentation, reflections, and artifacts was compared to determine whether and how these transformations became visible during the participatory process.

Data Credibility

Data credibility was strengthened through triangulation of evidence from participatory observations, visual documentation, creative artifacts, participant reflections, and activity records. The use of multiple sources enabled interpretations to be compared across what was observed, expressed, and materially produced during the activities.

The study deliberately limits its interpretation of empowerment to creative empowerment observable within the context of the participatory activities. It does not claim that the intervention resulted in long-term economic empowerment or increased income because these outcomes were not measured within the scope of the study. This methodological boundary allows the findings to remain consistent with the available empirical evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The participatory art and design activities conducted in Binong Jati Knitting Village from May to July 2026 involved all 12 artisans belonging to the participating knitting community. Together with lecturers and university students acting as facilitators and collaborative partners, the activities involved 20 participants in total. The weekly Saturday sessions generated evidence through participatory observation, visual documentation, activity records, participant reflections, and creative artifacts. The results are presented according to four analytical dimensions: participation, knowledge exchange, creative experimentation, and creative agency.

Participation in the Creative Process

At the beginning of the activities, the artisans' experience was strongly connected to established knitting-production practices. Their expertise was evident in their familiarity with yarn, knitting techniques, tools, production processes, and the practical requirements of making knitted products. The participatory activities did not attempt to replace these existing competencies. Instead, they created a different setting in which the artisans could use their knowledge outside the usual requirements of routine production.

Participation developed through direct involvement in observation, discussion, material exploration, experimentation, presentation, and collective reflection. Rather than receiving a complete design to reproduce, the artisans were encouraged to respond to materials, discuss possibilities, and contribute to decisions during the creative process.

The weekly format was important because participation developed progressively across the implementation period. The process did not occur as a single workshop. Each meeting provided opportunities to continue previous

explorations, examine emerging results, discuss difficulties, and develop subsequent possibilities.

A visible change occurred in the relationship between facilitator and participant. The activities gradually moved away from a predominantly instructional structure toward a more participatory setting in which ideas could emerge from interactions among artisans, lecturers, students, and practitioners. This change can be summarized as:

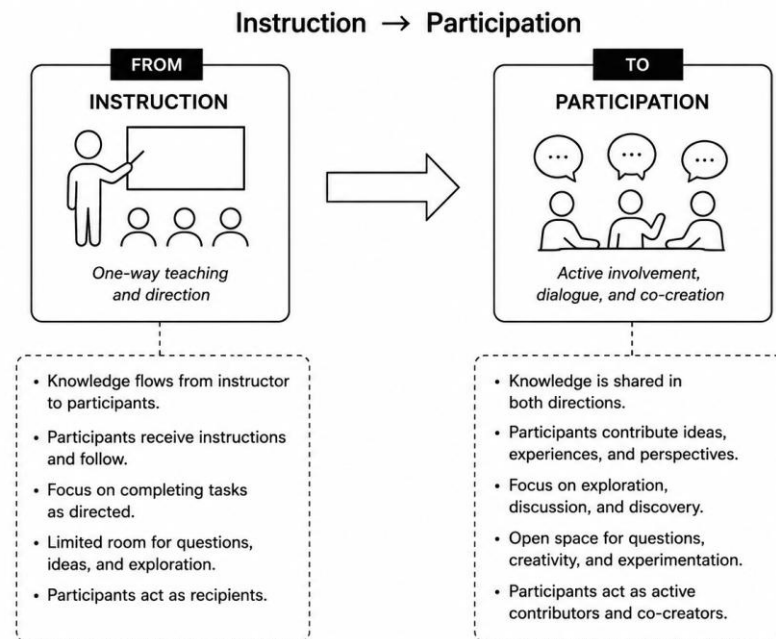


Figure 5. Instruction → Participation

The result indicates that participation was not simply represented by physical attendance. It became visible through involvement in discussion, experimentation, selection, modification, and reflection throughout the creative process.

Knowledge Exchange between Artisans and Academic Participants

Knowledge exchange emerged as an important component of the activities. The artisans contributed practical knowledge derived from their experience with knitting materials, techniques, tools, structures, and production conditions. Lecturers, students, and practitioners contributed perspectives related to art, design, visual composition, experimentation, and alternative ways of approaching materials.

The interaction did not operate exclusively as knowledge transfer from academic participants to artisans. Instead, the activities revealed a reciprocal relationship. Technical possibilities proposed during discussions had to be negotiated with the material and production knowledge held by the artisans, while established knitting practices were reconsidered through questions and perspectives introduced by other participants.

This reciprocal process was particularly visible during material exploration. Decisions concerning yarn, texture, pattern, density, structure, and possible combinations depended on the artisans' understanding of material

behavior. At the same time, discussions encouraged these technical considerations to be connected with visual and expressive possibilities.

Knowledge exchange therefore created a bridge between two forms of knowledge:

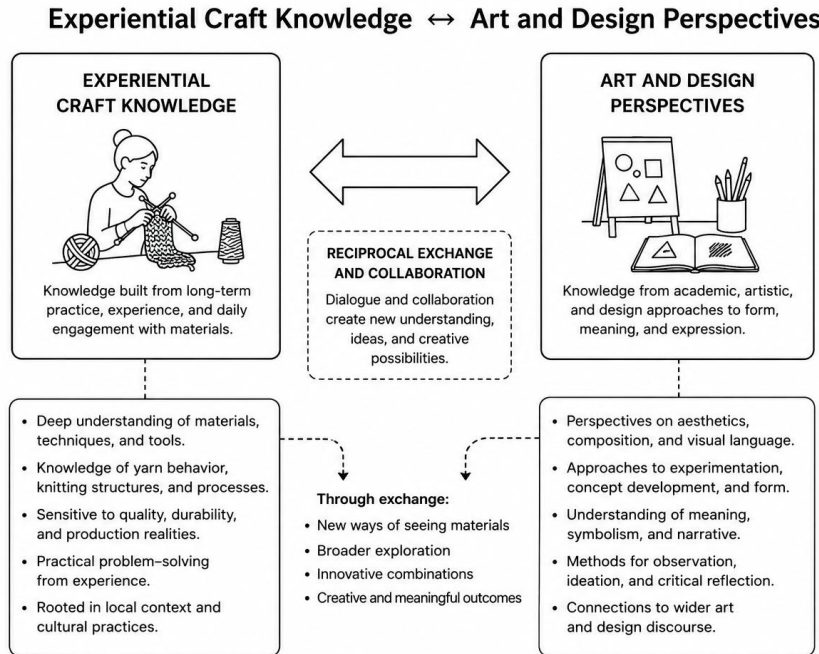


Figure 6. Experiential Craft Knowledge → Art and Design Perspectives

The result suggests that existing craft knowledge functioned as the starting resource for exploration rather than as knowledge that needed to be replaced. The participatory setting enabled different forms of knowledge to interact during the making process.

Material and Creative Experimentation

Material exploration represented one of the most visible outcomes of the program. Participants worked with familiar knitting materials but were encouraged to approach them outside the conventional objective of producing standardized functional products. Yarn, color, texture, pattern, structure, density, form, and composition became variables for exploration.

The activities encouraged participants to try combinations and arrangements without requiring every experiment to immediately satisfy commercial or production criteria. Consequently, the making process provided room for trial, adjustment, unexpected results, and further development.

This condition produced a significant change in the orientation of practice. In routine production, technical decisions are generally directed toward achieving predetermined outputs efficiently and consistently. During the participatory activities, the same technical knowledge could instead be used to investigate what else the material and knitting process might produce.

This transformation can be summarized as:

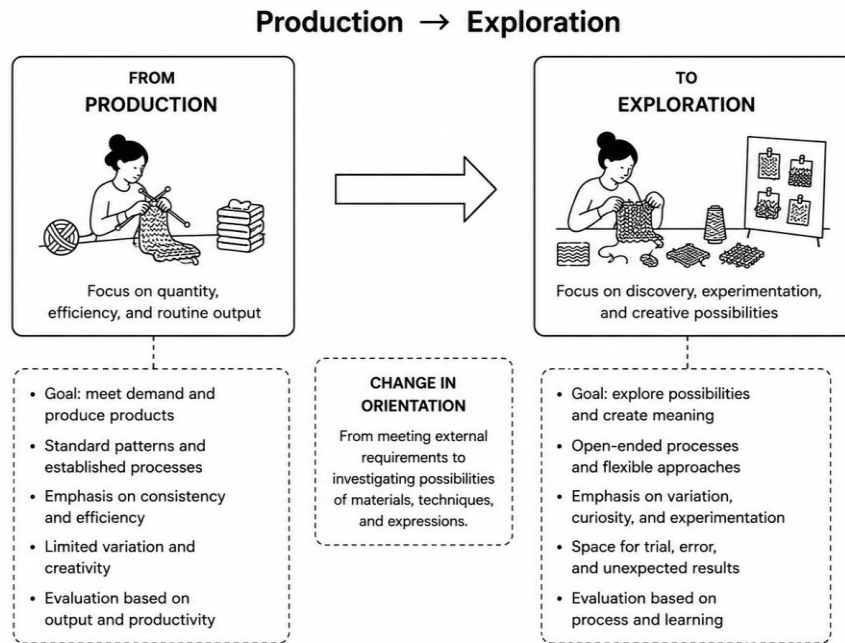


Figure 7. Production → Exploration

The creative artifacts produced during the activities demonstrated variations in material arrangement, visual composition, texture, structure, and form. More importantly, the experimentation process showed that familiar knitting knowledge could be repositioned as a resource for creative inquiry.

The findings therefore indicate that creative experimentation did not depend on introducing completely unfamiliar materials or techniques. New possibilities could emerge by changing the purpose and context in which existing knowledge was used.

Reinterpreting Knitting as a Creative Medium

The process of experimentation contributed to a broader interpretation of knitting. Within the community's established production context, knitting was strongly associated with the making of products. Through participatory art and design activities, however, knitting was approached not only as a production technique but also as a medium for visual, material, and artistic exploration.

This shift was visible when attention moved from questions such as what product should be made toward questions concerning what could be explored through yarn, structure, texture, color, pattern, and composition. The value of the activity consequently became associated not only with the finished object but also with discovery during the process.

The results do not indicate that the production function of knitting was abandoned. Instead, an additional interpretation emerged alongside it. Production knowledge became a foundation upon which artistic and experimental possibilities could be developed.

Thus, the program expanded the meaning of knitting from:

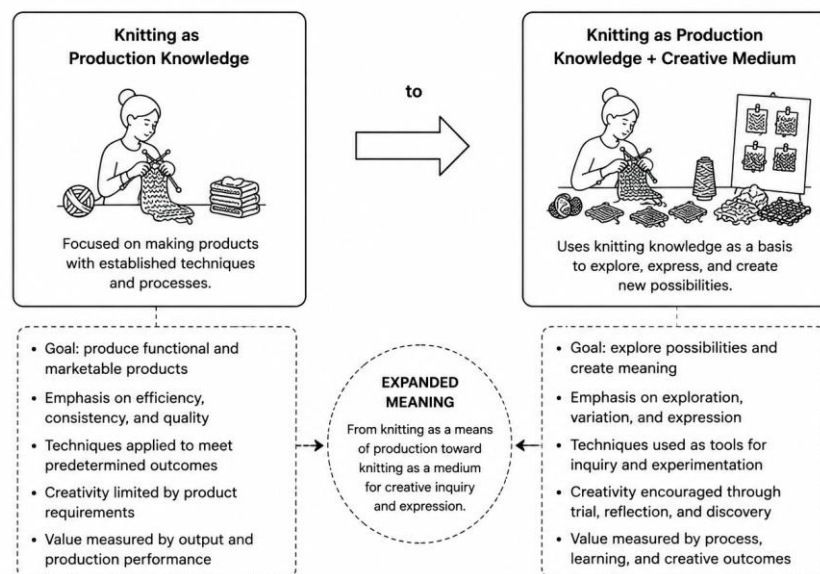


Figure 8. Knitting as Production Knowledge to Knitting as Production Knowledge + Creative Medium

This finding is important because it demonstrates that creative development within an established craft community does not necessarily require separation from existing technical expertise. The same knowledge can acquire different meanings when placed within a different creative context.

Development of Creative Agency

Creative agency became visible through the increasing role of artisans in making decisions during the process. Instead of being positioned solely as individuals responsible for executing predetermined outcomes, artisans participated in selecting materials, considering combinations, responding to experimental results, discussing alternatives, and developing their works.

The resulting transformation concerns the role of the artisan:

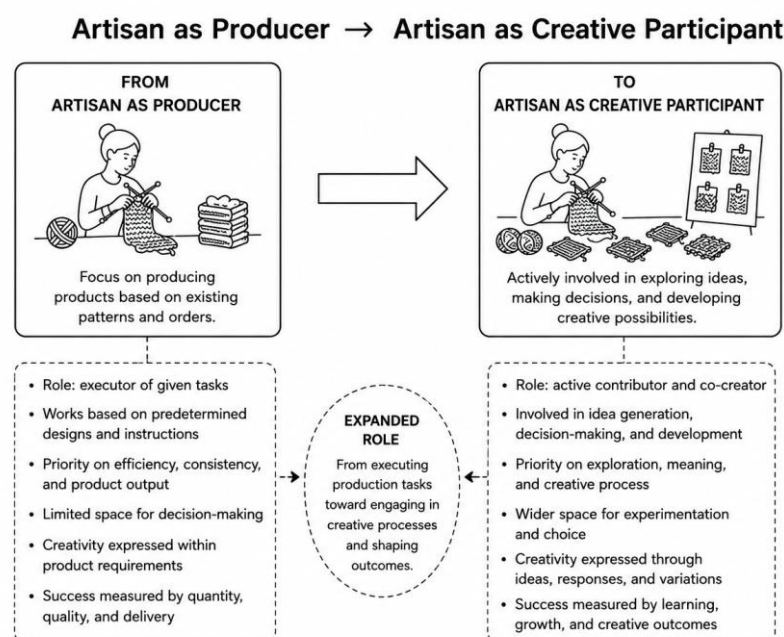


Figure 9. Artisan as Producer → Artisan as Creative Participant

This does not imply that artisans were previously without creativity. Rather, the participatory process created a context in which their creativity could become more explicitly expressed through decision-making and experimentation.

The distinction is important. Technical expertise allows an artisan to produce a high-quality object, while creative agency involves opportunities to determine what to explore, how to develop it, and how to respond when unexpected possibilities emerge. The activities provided space for both capacities to operate together.

The creative works therefore functioned not only as final outputs but also as evidence of individual and collective decision-making. Differences among the works reflected the possibility of multiple responses to similar materials and activities rather than a requirement to achieve identical results.

Collective Reflection

Collective reflection provided an opportunity for participants to examine the outcomes of their experimentation and to discuss the processes through which the works were developed. Works were presented not simply as finished objects but as records of decisions, discoveries, difficulties, and changes made during the creative process.

The reflective activities also enabled participants to observe differences among the works produced by others. Because the process did not require a single standardized outcome, variations became material for discussion rather than errors requiring correction.

Reflection therefore connected making with interpretation:

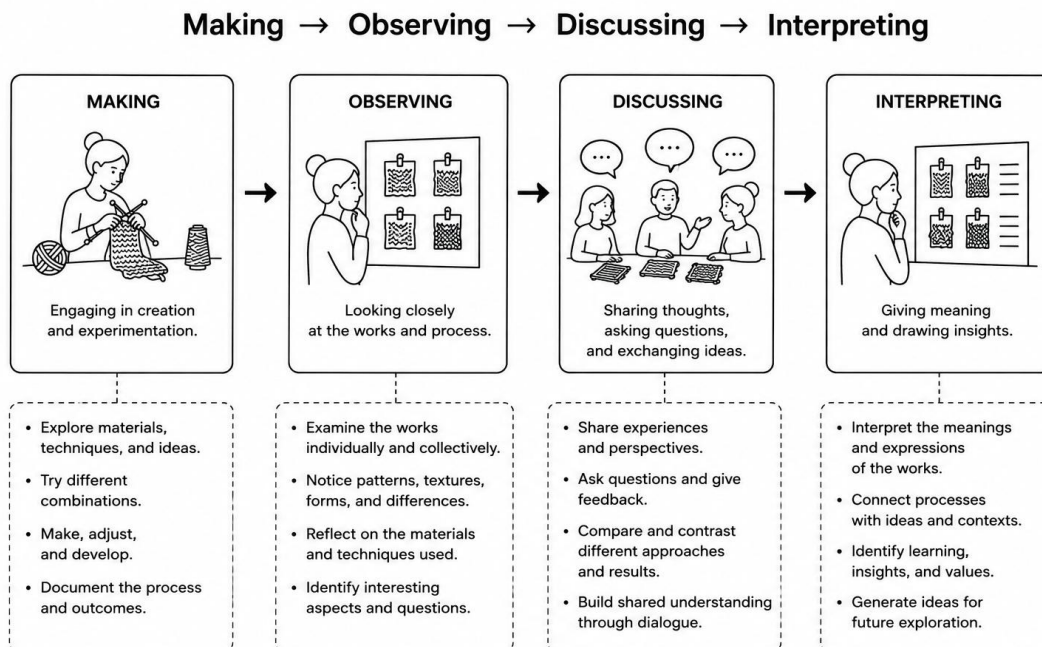


Figure 10. Making → Observing → Discussing → Interpreting

This process enabled the experience of experimentation to become shared knowledge within the group. It also provided research evidence for identifying

changes in participation, knowledge exchange, experimentation, and creative agency.

Summary of Research Findings

Across the weekly activities conducted from May to July 2026, four interconnected findings emerged. Participation expanded the artisans' involvement beyond attendance and technical execution toward dialogue and creative decision-making. Knowledge exchange created reciprocal interaction between experiential craft knowledge and art and design perspectives. Creative experimentation enabled familiar knitting materials and techniques to be explored beyond standardized production outcomes. Finally, creative agency became visible as artisans contributed ideas, selected alternatives, modified approaches, and developed individual creative responses.

Taken together, the findings reveal three central transformations:

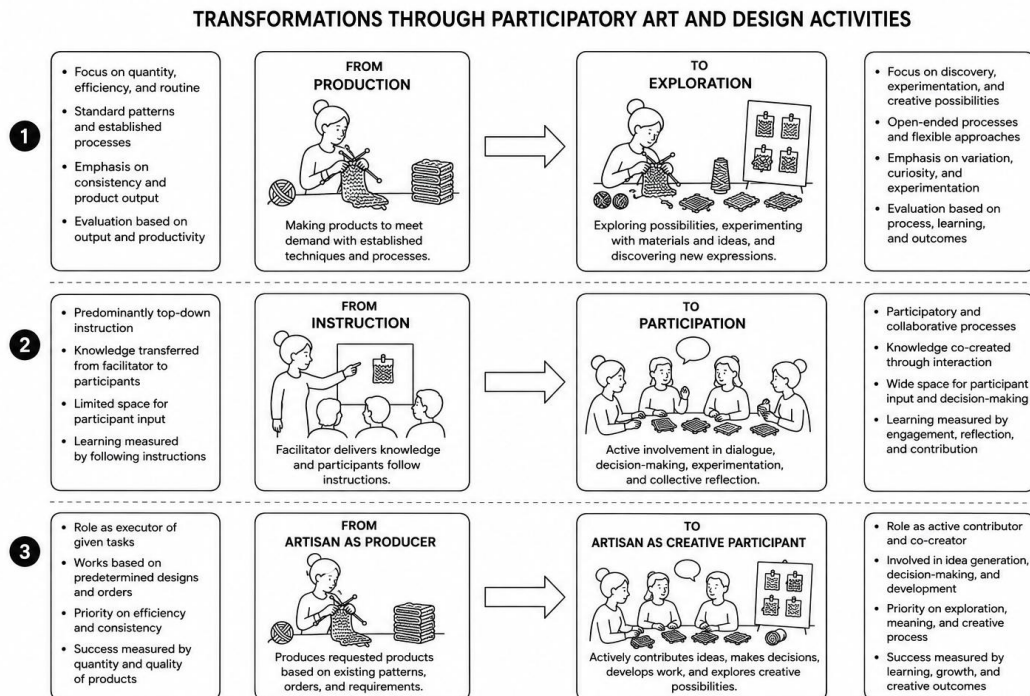


Figure 11. Three Key Transformations in the Participatory Art and Design Process

These transformations do not represent the abandonment of production, instruction, or artisan expertise. Instead, they indicate an expansion of practice. Production knowledge became a resource for exploration, instructional relationships developed into more participatory interactions, and the artisan's role expanded from technical production toward active participation in creative processes.

The empirical findings therefore suggest that the principal outcome of the program was not simply the production of artistic knitting works. More fundamentally, the process created conditions in which existing craft knowledge could be reinterpreted, exchanged, experimented with, and expressed through greater creative participation.

The findings demonstrate that participatory art and design activities in Binong Jati did not primarily introduce new knitting skills to the artisans.

Instead, the process created a different context in which their existing craft knowledge could be activated for exploration, dialogue, experimentation, and creative decision-making. This distinction is central to understanding the contribution of the study. The artisans entered the program with established technical competence; therefore, empowerment was not approached as the transfer of expertise from academics to a community assumed to lack knowledge. Rather, it emerged through the expansion of opportunities to use existing knowledge in new creative ways.

From Production to Exploration

The first transformation identified in the study was the shift from production toward exploration. This finding should not be interpreted as a rejection of production. Knitting production remains an important component of the artisans' professional practice and local economic activities. Instead, the participatory process temporarily changed the purpose for which existing knitting knowledge was applied.

In conventional production settings, decisions concerning yarn, structure, pattern, technique, and form are generally influenced by predetermined product requirements, consistency, efficiency, and market expectations. During the participatory activities, these same elements became variables for creative experimentation. Artisans were encouraged to investigate possibilities rather than immediately achieve standardized outcomes.

This finding supports Atamtajani and Chalik's (2024a) view of experimentation as a strategy through which interaction with materials, processes, and alternatives can generate new design possibilities. It also corresponds with craft revitalization research demonstrating that established craft knowledge can become a resource for innovation when it interacts with new creative perspectives (Tung, 2021).

An important implication is that innovation within craft communities does not necessarily require introducing completely new technologies or replacing established practices. Innovation can also occur through a change in orientation: from asking how existing knowledge can reproduce an expected outcome toward asking what other possibilities can emerge from that knowledge.

This finding is particularly relevant to Binong Jati because the artisans already possess substantial technical competence. Their production knowledge therefore becomes the foundation of exploration rather than an obstacle to creativity.

From Instruction to Participation

The second transformation concerns the relationship between instruction and participation. The weekly activities indicated that meaningful participation developed when artisans were provided with opportunities to contribute ideas, respond to materials, discuss alternatives, and make decisions rather than simply follow predetermined instructions.

This finding is consistent with the fundamental principle of participatory design: people affected by a design process should be actively involved in

shaping it. Sanders and Stappers (2008) describe the broader movement from designing for people toward designing with people, while Spinuzzi (2005) emphasizes the direct involvement of participants in participatory design processes.

In the Binong Jati context, however, participation has an additional significance. The artisans are not conventional users without specialist knowledge. They are themselves holders of extensive material and technical expertise. A purely instructional approach could therefore unintentionally position academic knowledge above local knowledge. The participatory approach changed this relationship by allowing different forms of expertise to interact.

This finding corresponds with Guo and Ahn (2023), who emphasize the importance of tacit knowledge sharing between artisans and academics in craft-design collaboration. Similarly, Arango Marin et al. (2023) conceptualize the relationship between craft and design knowledge as dialogue rather than one-directional transfer.

The findings from Binong Jati therefore suggest that the movement from instruction to participation is fundamentally a change in the structure of knowledge relationships. Academic participants contribute perspectives on art, design, experimentation, and interpretation, while artisans contribute experiential knowledge of yarn, knitting structures, material behavior, techniques, tools, and production realities.

Accordingly, the relationship can be expressed as:

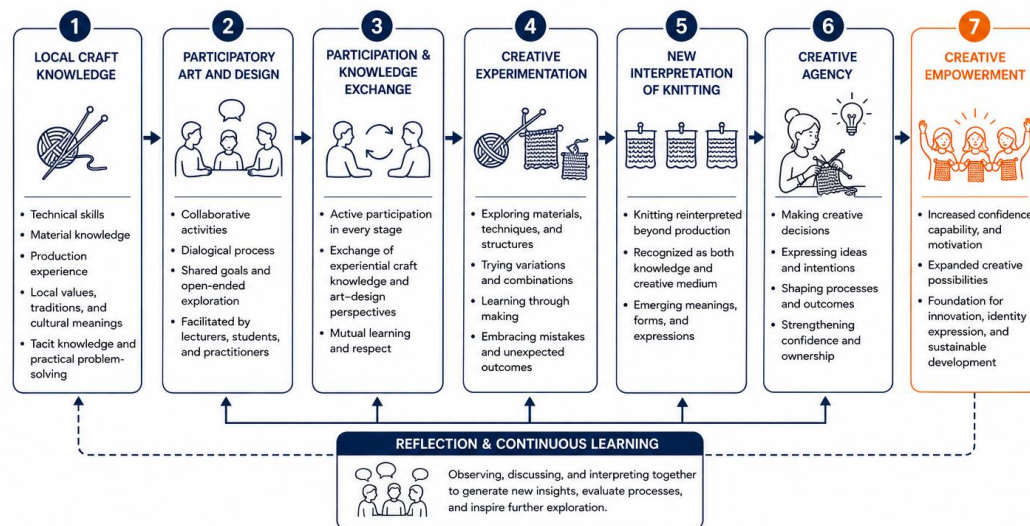


Figure 12.

Conceptual Framework: From Local Craft Knowledge to Creative Empowerment through Participatory Art and Design

The bidirectional relationship is important because it prevents community empowerment from being understood as experts “giving knowledge” to artisans. Instead, empowerment develops through recognition that artisans already possess valuable knowledge and should participate in determining how that knowledge is interpreted and developed.

Reinterpreting Knitting as a Creative Medium

A further finding concerns the reinterpretation of knitting itself. The participatory activities demonstrated that knitting could operate simultaneously as production knowledge and a creative medium.

This represents an expansion rather than a replacement:

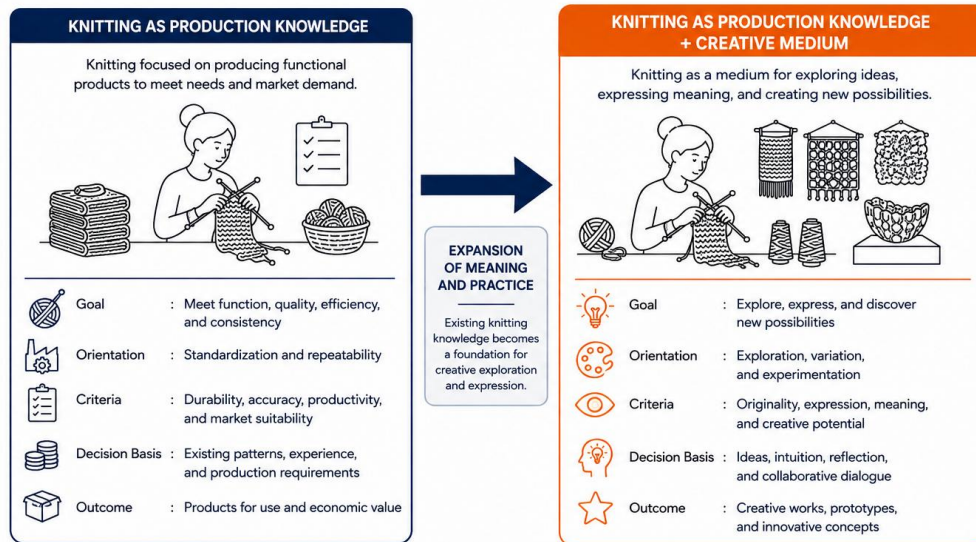


Figure 13.

Reinterpreting Knitting:

From Production Knowledge to Production Knowledge + Creative Medium

The distinction is theoretically significant. Craft practices are frequently discussed in relation to heritage preservation, product innovation, entrepreneurship, or economic sustainability. Banerjee and Mazzarella (2022), for example, demonstrate the importance of design in developing innovative craft enterprises, while Tung (2021) connects craft revitalization with creativity and sustainable entrepreneurial development.

The present study adds another perspective. Before knitting knowledge is translated into a new commercial product, it can first become a medium for creative inquiry. Yarn, texture, structure, density, pattern, color, and form can be explored because of their expressive and experimental possibilities, not only because they contribute to the manufacture of a predetermined product.

Participatory art is particularly relevant to this interpretation because its value is not restricted to the aesthetic quality of a final artifact. Participatory creative processes can create opportunities for expression, engagement, interaction, and empowerment (Hennessy et al., 2024). In Binong Jati, the artistic dimension created a space in which the familiar practice of knitting could temporarily be separated from immediate production requirements.

This does not mean that artistic exploration and economic production are oppositional. Creative experimentation may eventually contribute to product innovation, differentiation, or new market opportunities. However, such economic outcomes were not measured in this study and therefore cannot be claimed as direct results. What can be demonstrated from the available evidence is the expansion of knitting practice toward greater experimentation and creative interpretation.

From Artisan as Producer to Artisan as Creative Participant

The third transformation concerns the role of the artisan. The findings indicate a movement from artisan as producer toward artisan as creative participant.

This formulation requires careful interpretation. It would be incorrect to suggest that artisans were merely producers before the intervention or that they lacked creativity. Craft production itself involves substantial expertise, judgment, adaptation, and problem-solving. Research by Atamtajani et al. (2025) on jewelry artisans similarly demonstrates that artisan creativity develops through interactions among inherited knowledge, aesthetic experience, changing contexts, and entrepreneurial practices.

The contribution of the present study is therefore not the claim that participatory art and design “created” creativity among the artisans. Rather, the process provided a setting in which creative agency became more visible and could be exercised more explicitly.

This agency appeared through opportunities to propose alternatives, select materials, respond to experimental outcomes, modify approaches, discuss possibilities, and determine aspects of creative development. The distinction can be understood as a transition from executing an outcome primarily defined by external requirements toward participating in the definition of the outcome itself.

Wang et al. (2023) provide an important perspective for interpreting this result. Their study demonstrates that co-design with craftspeople does not automatically produce empowerment. Empowering and disempowering outcomes depend on how participation, interaction, relationships, and decision-making are structured. Therefore, simply inviting artisans to a collaborative activity is insufficient.

The findings from Binong Jati suggest that decision-making opportunity is particularly important. Participation becomes more meaningful when artisans are able not only to perform an activity but also to influence its creative direction.

Creative Experimentation as a Mechanism of Empowerment

Taken together, the findings suggest that experimentation operated as a connecting mechanism between participation and creative agency.

The process can be interpreted as:

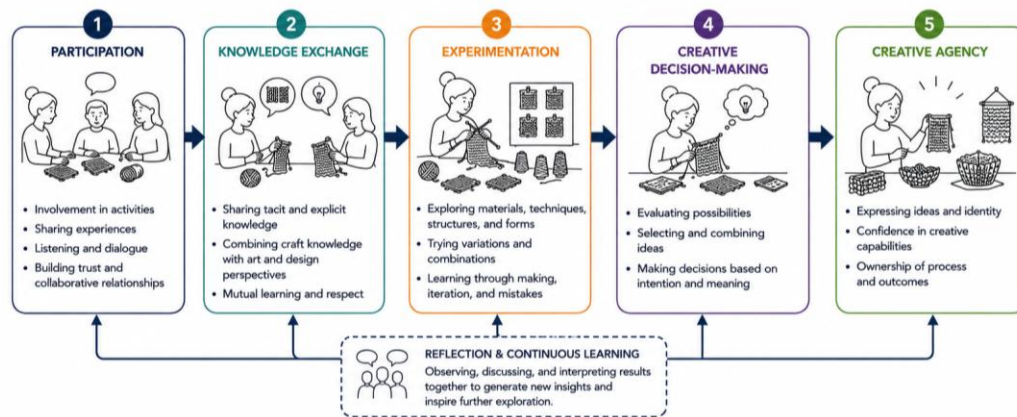


Figure 14. Creative Empowerment Pathway in Participatory Art and Design
 Participation → Knowledge Exchange → Experimentation → Creative Decision-Making → Creative Agency

Participation initially creates access to the collaborative process. Knowledge exchange allows different forms of expertise to interact. Experimentation then provides a practical environment in which participants can test alternatives. Because experimental outcomes are not completely predetermined, participants must observe, interpret, select, modify, and decide. These decisions provide opportunities for creative agency to develop.

This interpretation helps distinguish creative empowerment from conventional skill training. Training commonly begins with a defined competence and attempts to improve participants' ability to perform it. In contrast, the Binong Jati artisans already possessed the central technical competence of knitting. The participatory process instead expanded the contexts in which this competence could be used.

The resulting empowerment can therefore be understood not as:
 "Participants can now knit."

but rather as:

"Participants can recognize and explore more possibilities through what they already know."

This distinction represents one of the principal conceptual contributions of the study.

Reflection as Collective Knowledge Formation also demonstrates that creative learning did not end when an artifact was completed. Collective reflection transformed individual making experiences into opportunities for shared learning.

The making stage generated material experiences. Observation allowed participants to identify differences, unexpected outcomes, and emerging possibilities. Discussion enabled these observations to circulate among participants, while interpretation connected practical experiences with broader creative meanings and future possibilities.

This process is compatible with the concept of learning through making, in which knowledge develops through engagement with materials, actions, interactions, and reflection (Martin & Betser, 2020). For craft communities, such an approach is particularly relevant because a substantial portion of artisan knowledge is practice-based and tacit.

Reflection also strengthened the reciprocal nature of knowledge exchange. An experimental result produced by one participant could become a reference for discussion by others. Individual discoveries could therefore contribute to collective knowledge within the group.

Creative Empowerment as Expansion of Existing Capacity

The findings ultimately suggest that creative empowerment should be understood as an expansion of existing capacity rather than the correction of a deficiency.

This distinction is important both academically and ethically. Community-based interventions can unintentionally reproduce unequal relationships when external actors are positioned as knowledge providers and communities as recipients. The evidence from Binong Jati supports an alternative position: local craft knowledge should be recognized as an asset from which collaborative development begins.

The conceptual process proposed in the literature review can therefore be reconsidered in light of the empirical findings:

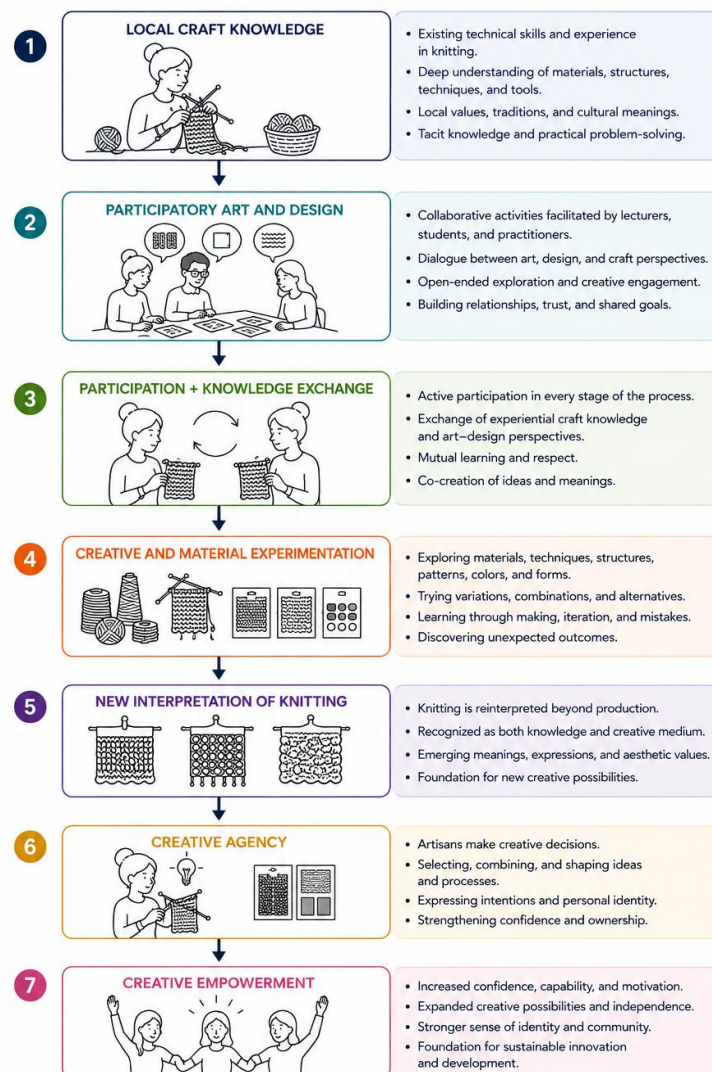


Figure 15.
Conceptual Framework: From Local Craft Knowledge to Creative Empowerment
through Participatory Art and Design

The empirical results support this sequence while also indicating that the relationships are not entirely linear. Knowledge exchange occurred throughout experimentation, reflection frequently generated new exploration, and creative decisions emerged at different stages. The framework should therefore be understood as a conceptual progression rather than a rigid step-by-step procedure.

Theoretical and Practical Contribution

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in connecting participatory art, participatory design, craft knowledge, and creative agency within the concept of creative empowerment. Previous studies have demonstrated the value of co-design for artisan empowerment (Wang et al., 2023), tacit knowledge exchange in craft-design collaboration (Guo & Ahn, 2023), craft innovation and enterprise development (Banerjee & Mazzarella, 2022), and participatory arts for empowerment (Hennessy et al., 2024). The present study connects these discussions within an established knitting-production community.

The study particularly proposes three interconnected transformations as an analytical contribution:

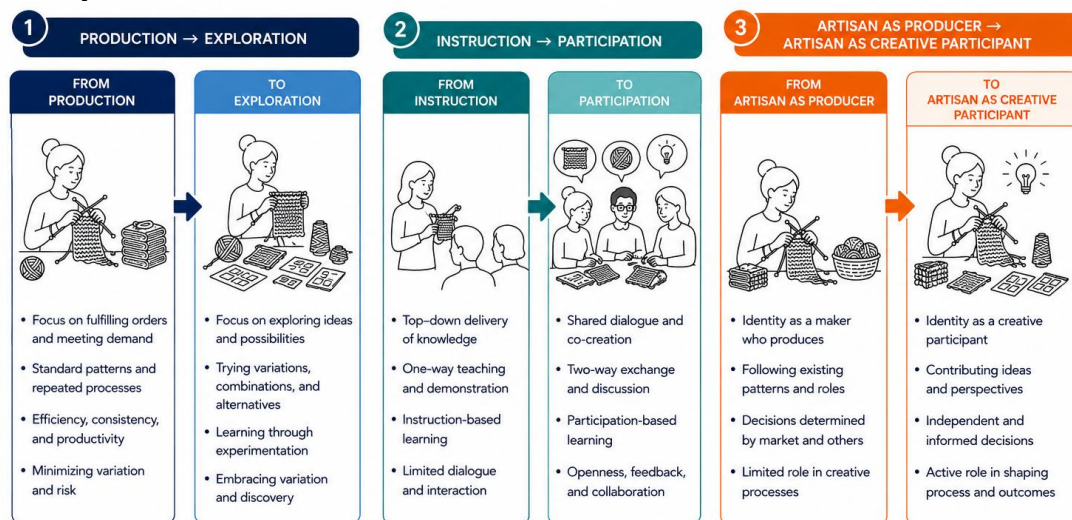


Figure 16.

Three Interconnected Transformations Identified in the Study

Production → Exploration | Instruction → Participation | Artisan as Producer → Artisan as Creative Participant

These transformations suggest that creative empowerment can occur through changes in the orientation of practice, structure of participation, and role of the artisan, without requiring the abandonment of existing craft knowledge.

Practically, the findings indicate that programs involving established artisan communities should begin by identifying what participants already know rather than assuming what they need to be taught. Facilitators can then create conditions for this knowledge to encounter new perspectives through dialogue, experimentation, collaborative making, and reflection. Such an approach may be particularly relevant to craft communities whose technical

capabilities are well developed but whose opportunities for open-ended creative exploration are limited.

At the same time, the findings should remain within the boundaries of the study. The research involved 12 artisans in one knitting community, with activities conducted weekly from May to July 2026. The findings demonstrate changes observable within this participatory creative process but do not establish long-term economic, organizational, or social empowerment. Longitudinal investigation would be necessary to determine whether creative agency developed through the program influences subsequent product development, independent experimentation, community practices, or economic outcomes.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the significance of participatory art and design in Binong Jati lies not simply in producing different knitted artifacts. Its more important contribution is the creation of a collaborative space in which existing craft knowledge could be recognized, exchanged, questioned, experimented with, and transformed into a basis for greater creative agency.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the role of participatory art and design in supporting the creative empowerment of knitting artisans in Binong Jati Knitting Village, Bandung, Indonesia. The study involved all 12 artisans in the participating community and was conducted through weekly activities from May to July 2026, with lecturers and university students participating as facilitators and collaborative partners.

The findings demonstrate that the main contribution of the participatory process was not the introduction of new knitting skills, but the creation of opportunities for artisans to reinterpret and expand the use of knowledge they already possessed. Existing knowledge of yarn, knitting techniques, structures, materials, and production processes became the foundation for dialogue, material exploration, creative experimentation, and collective reflection.

Three interconnected transformations were identified throughout the process: Production → Exploration, Instruction → Participation, and Artisan as Producer → Artisan as Creative Participant. These transformations indicate an expansion of existing practices rather than their replacement. Production knowledge remained important but was extended toward experimentation; instructional relationships developed into more collaborative interactions; and artisans were provided with greater opportunities to contribute ideas and make creative decisions.

The findings further indicate that knowledge exchange played an important role in this process. The artisans contributed experiential and technical craft knowledge, while lecturers, students, and practitioners introduced perspectives related to art, design, experimentation, visual composition, and creative development. The interaction between these forms of knowledge created a reciprocal learning environment rather than a one-directional transfer of expertise.

Creative experimentation also enabled knitting to be interpreted beyond its conventional role as a production technique. Within the activities, knitting functioned simultaneously as production knowledge and a creative medium. Yarn, texture, structure, pattern, color, density, and form became resources for exploration and expression. This expanded interpretation provided opportunities for artisans to exercise creative agency through selecting, modifying, combining, and developing their own alternatives.

Based on these findings, the study concludes that creative empowerment is best understood as the expansion and activation of existing capacity rather than the correction of a perceived deficiency. Participatory art and design can support this process when artisans are recognized as knowledge holders and active creative participants. The resulting process can be summarized as Local Craft Knowledge → Participatory Art and Design → Participation and Knowledge Exchange → Creative Experimentation → New Interpretation of Craft → Creative Agency → Creative Empowerment.

For implementation, community-based craft programs are recommended to begin by identifying and recognizing the knowledge already embedded within artisan communities. Activities should not be dominated by conventional training in which external facilitators determine both the process and expected outcomes. Instead, facilitators should create structured opportunities for dialogue, experimentation, collaborative decision-making, making, observation, discussion, and reflection. This approach can enable artisans to develop new possibilities from their existing expertise while maintaining the value of local knowledge.

For Binong Jati Knitting Village specifically, the experimental works generated through the program can be developed further as a creative archive and reference for future exploration. Selected experiments may subsequently be developed into artistic works, exhibition materials, design concepts, or innovative knitting products, while preserving documentation of the processes through which they were created. Periodic workshops and collaborative creative sessions involving artisans, academics, students, designers, and practitioners are also recommended to maintain the continuity of knowledge exchange and experimentation.

However, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the study. The research focused on 12 artisans within one knitting community over a three-month participatory period and examined creative rather than economic empowerment. Therefore, the study does not claim that the activities directly increased income, market performance, or long-term community sustainability. Further implementation and longitudinal evaluation are required to determine whether the creative agency developed during the program leads to sustained independent experimentation, product innovation, organizational development, or economic benefits.

Overall, participatory art and design offer a promising approach for craft-community development when intervention begins with the recognition that artisans already possess valuable knowledge and creative potential. The role of collaboration is not to replace this knowledge, but to create conditions in

which it can be exchanged, explored, reinterpreted, and developed into new creative possibilities.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that provide opportunities for further research. First, the study was conducted within a single knitting artisan community in Binong Jati, Bandung, involving 12 artisans over three months from May to July 2026. The findings therefore represent a specific community, craft practice, and participatory context and should not be generalized directly to other artisan communities without considering differences in materials, skills, production systems, social structures, and local cultures.

Second, the study focused specifically on creative empowerment, particularly changes related to participation, knowledge exchange, creative experimentation, and creative agency. It did not quantitatively measure economic outcomes such as increased income, sales, productivity, market expansion, or business performance. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence of economic empowerment resulting from the program.

Third, the study primarily examined changes occurring during the participatory activities. The three transformations identified—Production → Exploration, Instruction → Participation, and Artisan as Producer → Artisan as Creative Participant—represent changes observed within the implementation period. Whether these transformations continue after the facilitated program has ended remains to be investigated.

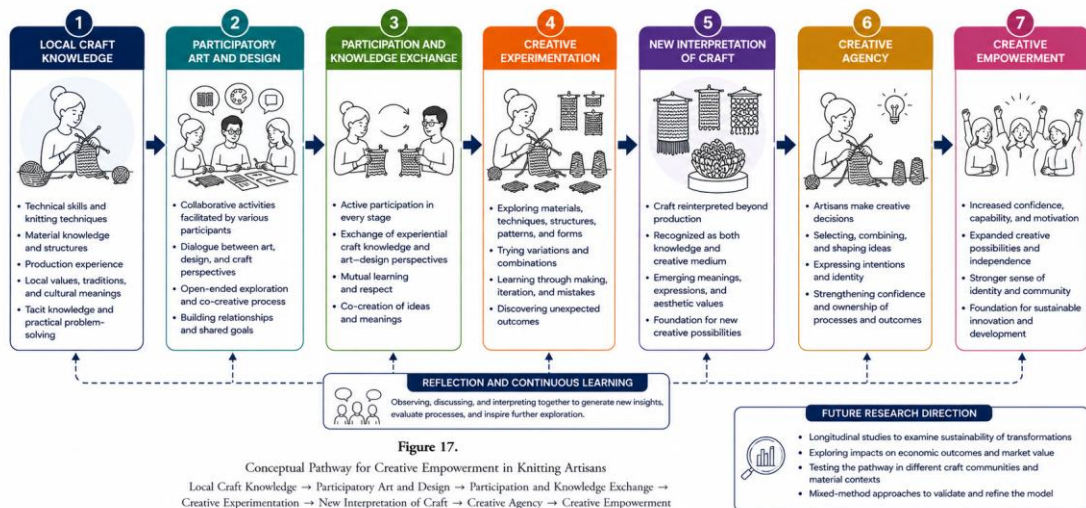
Future research should therefore employ a longitudinal approach to examine whether artisans continue experimenting independently, develop new artistic or product concepts, collaborate with other participants, or incorporate exploratory practices into their regular production activities. Follow-up studies conducted several months or one year after the intervention would provide stronger evidence regarding the sustainability of creative agency.

Further studies could also examine the relationship between creative empowerment and economic development. Experimental works generated through participatory activities could be developed into prototypes, limited-edition products, exhibition works, or new market offerings. Subsequent research could then investigate whether increased creative agency contributes to product differentiation, innovation capability, market value, or additional sources of income for artisans.

The approach should also be tested in different craft communities and material contexts, such as weaving, embroidery, ceramics, bamboo, wood, metal, or other textile-based practices. Comparative studies would help determine which aspects of the proposed approach are context-specific and which can be adapted as broader principles for community-based craft development.

Finally, future research may further develop and validate the conceptual pathway proposed in this study:

Finally, future research may further develop and validate the conceptual pathway proposed in this study (Figure 17).



Testing this framework across different communities, longer implementation periods, and mixed qualitative-quantitative research designs could strengthen its theoretical and practical applicability. Such research may contribute to the development of a more comprehensive model of participatory art and design for sustainable creative empowerment in artisan communities.

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The authors also acknowledge the contributions of the lecturers, university students, designers, and practitioners who participated as facilitators and collaborative partners during the participatory art and design activities. Their involvement in discussion, documentation, material exploration, creative experimentation, and collective reflection contributed significantly to the implementation of the program.

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The authors hope that the collaboration established through this program will continue to support knowledge exchange, creative experimentation, and the sustainable development of the Binong Jati knitting artisan community.

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