

Art and Activism; Empowering Batik Skills for Disabilities by Contemporary Batik Artisan

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ABSTRACT

The current trend of artists, both individually and collectively, is to try to carry out activism-based art practices as an effort to explore themselves regarding their role in the ecosystem of their supporting community. In craft art, there is the term Craftivism which was first discovered by a craftsman Betsy Greer in 2007. An actor and activist in Sukabumi City who is a craftsman and owner of Rumah Batik Lokatmala named Fonna Melania, presents typical Sukabumi batik motifs to bring sustainable benefits to the community and the surrounding environment, craftsmen try to respond to social problems that are present in their environment using batik art media as a method. The existence of people with disabilities who do not have the opportunity to work, craftsmen try to invite and offer batik training as well as the opportunity to become jobs. Until collaborating with the Sentra PHALA MARTA Foundation (social rehabilitation center), the aim is to increase the skills of people with disabilities. This research is the result of an analysis of an art-activism movement carried out by a batik craftsman in solving problems that are present in his environment. By using the Craftivism analysis method by Alyce McGovern, there are three aspects that need to be considered, the first aspect is the personal aspect of batik craftsmen who try to respond to social problems in their environment, the second aspect of the Lokatmala Batik community which is a forum or institution led directly by craftsmen in creating an ecosystem of relations or cooperation between craftsmen and people with disabilities in the production process at Rumah Batik Lokatmala, and the third aspect is politics (power), namely how craftsmen present solutions, make statements and take a stand on problems in their social environment while fighting for a better change in life. The activism fought for by craftsmen through batik art is carried out for the purpose of change for the better, improving the standard of living and welfare of disabled groups in their social environment, especially in Sukabumi.

KEYWORDS

Art and Activism
Empowering
Disabilities
Contemporary Batik
Artisan
Batik Sukabumi

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INTRODUCTION

Activism is an action that aims to bring about change in society. What defines social activists as a group that cares about an issue and organizes an activity to achieve goals related to the issue (Nurbani & Sabilla, 2020). The issues raised can refer to problems related to social, cultural and environmental conditions in a society. Seeing this, art has the potential to be a medium as well as a method for solving a problem (Marianto, 2023). In this context, art is used as a medium to overcome problems through an activism movement. An artist presents a work of art with their respective intentions and goals to become a work of art or masterpiece that they want to be known to the wider public, some of them reinterpret traditional art with the spirit of today's era, not a few also present visual aesthetic ideas that

have undergone a shift (transformation) namely from formalism to conceptual with the hope that the message conveyed in the work of art can be well received by the appreciators. The current trend is how artists, both individually and collectively, try to make a movement for change through activism-based art practices as an effort to explore themselves regarding the role of the artist in the community that supports them (Swastika, 2015). Today's artists, some involve themselves through their work on daily socio-cultural issues, based on personal experiences or showing great interest in the social culture of their community. The term art can be a method in solving a problem that is often discussed today. Artists try to present art-activism as a medium of work because it is believed to be more effective and in accordance with the problems around socio-culture in their community (Wijayanti, 2016). This is an effort to achieve a better life, in this context, it is simply able to overcome common problems in community groups, both in socio-cultural and environmental aspects.

Every Indonesian citizen basically has the right to have a decent life, especially for people with disabilities regarding the implementation of social welfare, besides that they also have the right to decent work and livelihood (Alvian, 2022). Efforts to explore the potential possessed in the form of skills can be useful for self-development, so that people with disabilities should get empowerment facilities. Sukabumi City had 707 people with disabilities in 2018, the number has increased until 2021 with a total of 1,131 people (Maharani, 2023). The variety of people with disabilities includes physical, intellectual and mental or sensory. Sukabumi City is an area with a fairly high number of people with disabilities (Maharani, 2023). As a vulnerable society, people with disabilities often experience discrimination and unfulfilled rights because they cannot carry out activities without the help of others or tools that support them in carrying out independent activities. An actor and activist in Sukabumi City, a female craftsman and founder of Rumah Batik Lokatmala named Fonna Melania (48 years old), presents typical Sukabumi batik motifs to bring sustainable benefits to the community and the surrounding environment, craftsmen try to respond to social problems that are present in their environment using batik as a method.

Rumah Batik Lokatmala is a place for production, marketing and development of Sukabumi's distinctive batik motifs and other batik derivative products. The presence of batik art culture in Sukabumi is an innovation in an effort to preserve intangible cultural heritage (batik) in Indonesia. Therefore, craftsmen not only strive to present representative batik motifs that depict the identity of Sukabumi's local wisdom, but can also provide many benefits for the social and environmental aspects of Sukabumi. In responding to the problems that arise in their environment, craftsmen use batik as a medium to solve these problems. Both in efforts to develop culture in Sukabumi and social and economic problems in the surrounding community. Therefore, craftsmen try to carry out a movement to provide empowerment through batik skills training activities for people with disabilities. In Sukabumi there is a Foundation called Sentra PHALA MARTA (Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs) which is a center for rehabilitation and social protection in the Cibadak Sukabumi area. Craftsmen work together with the institution to provide training on the batik process, the aim is to increase the skills of people with disabilities.

This paper will discuss several important points regarding art-activism in empowering batik skills for people with disabilities by craftsmen at Rumah Batik Lokatmala, Sukabumi. These points include; first, what form of empowerment is carried out by batik craftsmen for people with disabilities in Sukabumi, second, what aspects influence the existence of the art-activism movement of batik craftsmen towards efforts to empower people with disabilities in Sukabumi and third, what are the results obtained in the process and third, regarding the assessment of the impact of empowering the art-activism movement of batik craftsmen.

Furthermore, these questions will be discussed using several analytical theories regarding art-activism (*craftivism*), classification of social movements and analysis of indicators of the impact of empowerment in a community group or individual. Thus, this study will analyze an art-activism movement carried out by a batik craftsman in solving problems that are present in his environment. One of them is through empowerment efforts for people with disabilities around his batik production house, so that they can improve their skills in batik. Batik art can be one way to change the lives of people with disabilities for the better by improving skills and living standards to the welfare of the disability group.

METHOD

This research was conducted at Rumah Batik Lokatmala, on Jalan Kenarie No.20-Z Kel. Selabatu Kec. Cikole, Sukabumi City. The research informant is a batik craftsman from Sukabumi who founded the first batik production house in Sukabumi, namely Rumah Batik Lokatmala in 2010 (Interview FM, 2023). Rumah Batik Lokatmala is a place for production, marketing and development of Sukabumi's typical batik motifs, the batik motifs presented are not only beneficial for the Sukabumi community but also nature and the entire ecosystem in it. The approach used is a descriptive qualitative case study as conducted by Creswell (2013). This study will explain; 1) The form of empowerment carried out by batik craftsmen for people with disabilities in Sukabumi; 2) Aspects that influence the existence of the art-activism movement of batik craftsmen towards efforts to empower people with disabilities in Sukabumi to the results obtained in the process; 3) assessment of the impact of empowering the batik artisan art-activism movement, to bring about better changes for people with disabilities in Sukabumi.

The theory of Craftivism will be used in analyzing the aspects that influence the existence of an art-activism movement by craftsmen of Rumah Batik Lokatmala. Craftivism is an abbreviation of the words *craft* and *activism*, which was first put forward by Betsy Greer in 2007. Craftivism carried out by Greer is intended to voice anti-war slogans with the position of a craftsman who acts as an agent of change. He also wants to invite fellow artists, especially craftsmen, to be able to voice their expressions more through visual means without having to shout and act anarchically (Buszek in Lufiani, 2018). The term craftivism was later developed by Fitzpatrick, '*both a strategy for nonviolent activism and a mode of DIY citizenship that looks to influence positive social and political change*' which is defined as a strategy of non-violent activism and an 'independent' way carried out by the community with an effort to influence social and political change (Wulandari, 2019). Fitzpatrick (in Wulandari & et al., 2022) added that craftivism is present when the craftwork created contains a message. There is a Craftivism analysis method by Alyce McGovern which consists of three aspects, including personal community and politics (power). 1) Personal aspect; 2) Community aspect; 3) Political aspect (power). These three aspects will be used in analyzing the art-activism movement by the craftsmen of Rumah Batik Lokatmala, the craftivism theory is used in studying or analyzing craft artwork. Batik is one of the craft products, so it will be relevant if in analyzing the aspect of the influence of the art-activism movement of batik craftsmen using the craftivism theory.

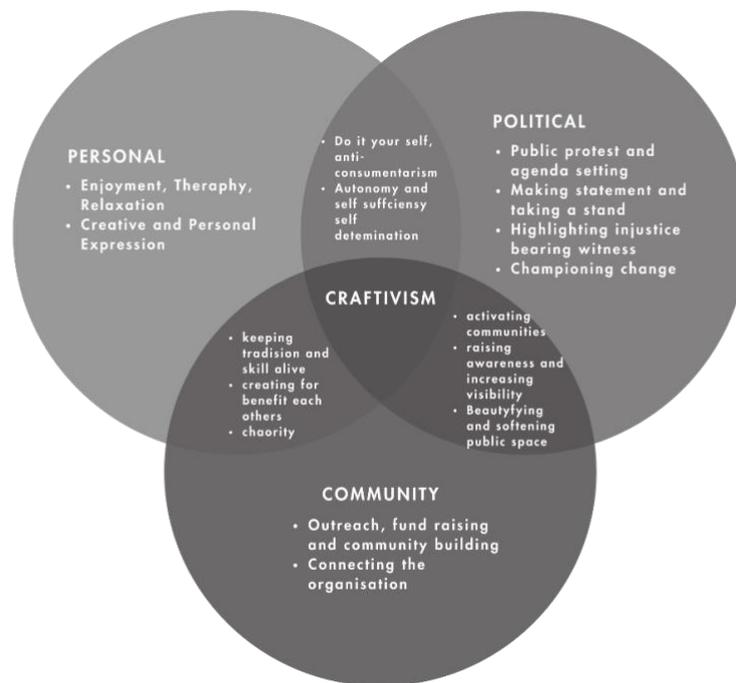


Figure 1. McGovern Craftivism Analysis Method (Source: Isma, 2024)

In addition, the theory of approaches to social movements. In sociological references, there are various opinions about the meaning of social movements. Social movements are organized actions by a group of people to change or maintain certain elements in society (Cohen, 1983). Social movements have characteristics such as clear goals, planning, and an ideology. Furthermore, there are 7 types of social movements (Cohen, 1983). Two of them are 1) Progressive movements that aim to improve the standard of living and welfare of groups representing individuals in society. 2) Reformist movements that are oriented towards the formation of change and renewal regarding certain factors in society. According to Haris (2019), a social movement is a movement carried out by a number of people who are planned and organized so as to achieve certain goals in accordance with the mission of the movement. The theory of social movements was chosen because it was used to classify the form of art-activism movements carried out by craftsmen at Rumah Batik Lokatmala in an effort to empower people with disabilities in Sukabumi. Craftsmen believe that the speed or slowness of social movements can be influenced by the strength of the intensity of social interaction between craftsmen and people with disabilities, so that they can build a sustainable movement and have a broad impact on achieving targets, goals, and objectives in accordance with the mission that craftsmen have determined. Art functions as a form of culture in social movements to change society in various ways (Reeg, 2005). The functions in question are to: encourage social change; empower and deepen commitment; provide information to the wider community about social issues, align social activists in the movement; provide information internally to express or strengthen values and ideas; provide information externally as a more effective way to communicate the ideals of the movement to people outside the movement; carry out the goals of the movement directly; create history to find, tell, and retell the history of the movement; set a new emotional tone; criticize the ideology of the movement; and provide elements of pleasure and aesthetic experience.

Data were collected through several stages, including observation of the research location of Rumah Batik Lokatmala and Yayasan Sentra PHALA MARTA Cibadak, Sukabumi Regency, in addition to participant observation, namely researchers directly observing by seeing and experiencing the empowerment process carried out by craftsmen for people with disabilities in the surrounding environment and at the Foundation. In this case, researchers directly follow the batik training process carried out by craftsmen, ideally the training is carried out for two hours, starting from the process of delivering batik material by craftsmen to the process of making batik which is directly taught to people with disabilities. Then, through photos of the results of activities and batik works produced by people with disabilities, researchers collect them for analysis. Some of the data displayed has received permission from the relevant parties. In-depth interviews and exploring image documentation and literary sources. Interviews were conducted in an unstructured manner while observing the approach process carried out by craftsmen to how craftsmen are able to teach the stages of the process in making batik. The main informant in the study was Fonna Melania (48 years old) as a craftsman/owner of Rumah Batik Lokatmala, several additional informants were several people with disabilities who still work at Rumah Batik Lokatmala. Documentation was carried out by searching for data related to the conditions of people with disabilities in Sukabumi and literature sources related to the topic.

The data analysis process was carried out by referring to the Creswell (2013) analysis model through three stages of analysis, including; First, the process of reducing data by rearranging the collected data into a systematic form based on the categorization that has been designed, second, the process of verifying data in order to conclude data based on the categorization of data that has been reduced, third, the process of displaying data through descriptions of data that has been obtained and then displayed in the form of interview quotes and photo images as important findings in this study. From these three processes, the next step is the inductive data analysis process as a basis for interpreting the data. The stages and analysis techniques used in this study allow for the formulation of a conclusion that the art-activism movement carried out by craftsmen at Rumah Batik Lokatmala is able to provide an influential impact on improving the standard of living of people with disabilities in their social environment. These efforts are not only carried out as an effort to develop batik culture in Sukabumi, but can also provide wider benefits, especially in the development of local products that can improve the skills and economy (income) of the Sukabumi community in various circles.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Empowerment of Batik Craftsmen

The rise of activism tendencies among artists is able to present various creative solutions to problems in society. Through the projects they present inside or outside a community, some artists feel the need to take over the role of activists and become part of social change. The process is not only done alone, but organically or structured to attract other parties to get involved. So that the context of art-activism in social and cultural aspects is able to create a strong bridge to achieve public awareness and action on socio-cultural issues that are present in their environment. Artists' awareness of art-activism and choosing this path as a medium in their work is a long testing process, if done seriously by fighting for change and social interests in art, it can provide a good mediation path. Social problems will be better addressed through art that prioritizes harmony and art as an aesthetic medium. The combination of the two is a middle way for artists who raise social issues in their work.

The term artist refers to batik craftsmen who choose the path of art-activism as a medium of work with the understanding that the process will be more effective and closer to social or daily problems in their community. In addition, other factors that allow the issue of proximity or society can be directly involved in the process of creating works of art. The concerns of craftsmen about the function of art which tends to only be created and enjoyed by the upper class can be refuted. Because in the end art plays a much more effective role in art activism in lower-middle class society. In this case, craftsmen can be said to be social activists if they have strong guidelines in responding to social problems around them with creative solutions and have sustainable benefits for their immediate environment. In addition, craftsmen can understand their position in the midst of society, presenting batik artwork as the result of a long journey of reflection on the socio-cultural conditions in their supporting community and the surrounding environment. That way the vision of presenting batik artwork that can provide benefits will be realized.

The impact generated from each movement presented by one of the batik craftsmen refers to changes in the mindset and behavior patterns of society towards better conditions. The aspects of awareness, change, empowerment and preservation are indicators of the goals of art-activism. Craftsmen can be said to be social activists if they have strong guidelines for responding to existing social problems. This ability to respond is not merely a momentary and reactive response to issues that are present in society. A strong foundation can be used as capital to work for artists who raise certain social issues. That way, the work presented is the fruit of a long journey of reflection on the socio-cultural conditions around them. So as craftsmen, they should understand their position in the midst of society by not just leaving their socio-cultural problems behind. Art-activism is chosen as the best alternative path for craftsmen to work in responding to social problems that have not been revealed or even resolved. The role of an actor or driving force of artists is very much needed in the activism movement, especially in efforts to empower and present innovation in the field of Indonesian textiles, namely batik. The case raised in this study is one of the batik craftsmen in Sukabumi City who tried to carry out an activism movement using batik as a medium.

Empowerment of people with disabilities is also carried out by a batik craftsman from Sukabumi named Fonna Melania (48 years old). Craftsmen often find people with disabilities in their neighborhood who do not have the opportunity to work and just stay at home. When craftsmen are in need of workers to help with the batik production process, craftsmen try to invite and offer training and work, namely batik (Interview with Craftsman, 2024). People with disabilities who are willing to be trained, some of them are people with physical disabilities who have deficiencies in their limbs due to illness, accidents or birth defects. Gradually the process was carried out well, some work could be done at home (hand-drawn batik) and some were done in workshops for those using stamp techniques. In 2020, craftsmen visited a Sentra PHALA MARTA Foundation (Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs) which is a rehabilitation and social protection center in the Cibadak Sukabumi area (Interview with Craftsman, 2024). As one of the disability centers being prepared for the development of the ATENSI creative center, this center provides services and protection to people with disabilities. The craftsmen finally worked together with the institution to provide training on the batik process, the aim being to increase the skills of people with disabilities. Not only the batik process but also training in tie-dye batik and training in the application of natural dyes. Until now, the PHALA MARTA Foundation has developed its own traditional cloth business produced by people with disabilities and has worked together with Rumah Batik Lokatmala in the batik cloth production process.



Figure 2. Stamp Batik Making Process (Doc. Isma, 2024)

Aspects of the Influence of the Art-Activist Movement of Batik Craftsmen

Based on the research results that have been explained, the researcher used the Craftivism analysis method by Alyce McGovern (Wulandari, S. & et al., 2024) in examining the aspects of the influence of the art-activism movement. There are three aspects that need to be considered, 1) The personal aspect of batik craftsmen who try to respond to social problems in their environment, so that the goal of establishing the Rumah Lokatmala Batik which can benefit the surrounding community can be realized, so the craftsmen carry out an empowerment activity for batik skills for people with disabilities in Sukabumi; 2) The community aspect of the Rumah Lokatmala Batik which is led directly by the craftsmen in creating an ecosystem of relations or cooperation between craftsmen and people with disabilities in the production process at the Rumah Lokatmala Batik and at the PHALA MARTA Foundation; and 3) The political aspect (power), namely how craftsmen present solutions, make statements and take a stand on problems in their social environment while fighting for change for people with disabilities. In the craftivism theory analysis chart, the three aspects above are the subject of research, interconnected and even intersecting. Between the personal and political aspects, how initially the craftsmen themselves carried out the process until finally they received assistance from various parties, between personal and community, namely the efforts of craftsmen in preserving the cultural heritage of batik in Sukabumi, improving skills in developing existing potential and providing many benefits including for the batik production team, empowering people with disabilities, and finally between politics and the community indirectly activating the Rumah Batik Lokatmala community as a batik production house in Sukabumi which is also involved in the socio-cultural sector.

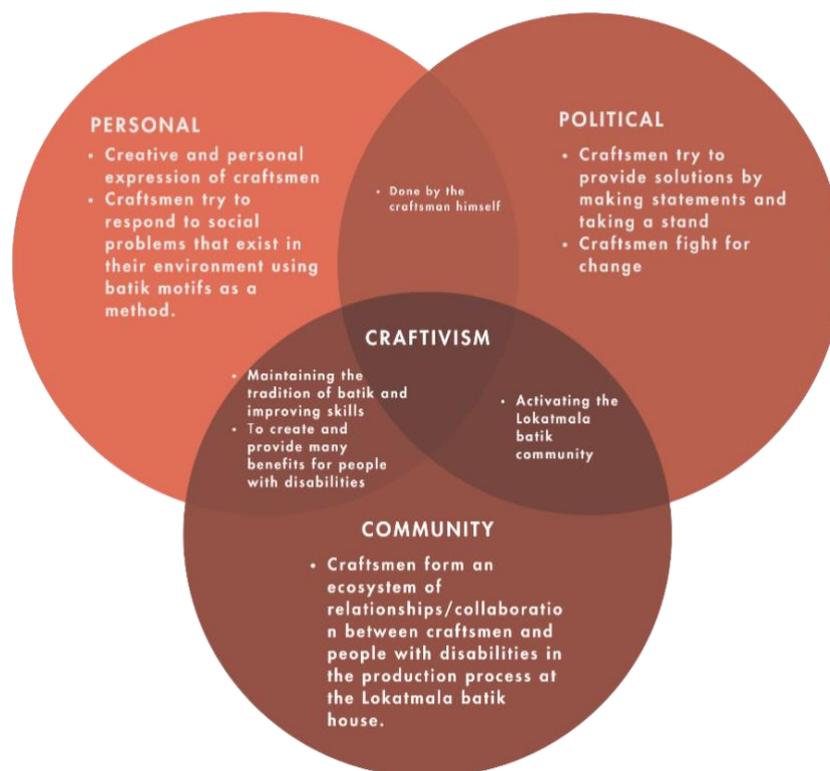


Figure 3. Three Aspects of McGovern's Craftivism Analysis Method, Case Study of Rumah Lokatmala Batik Craftsmen (Source. Isma, 2024)

The communication approach used by craftsmen (Interview with Craftsmen, 2024) in conveying information, is first carried out through a process of awareness about developing self-potential and rights to something, the process of being able to 'become' is not an instant process. Then the craftsmen visit several homes of people with disabilities to be invited to small-scale training, then the craftsmen create batik training on a larger scale, namely creating batik coaching at the PHALA MARTA Foundation. The craftsmen create a batik training activity, convey information about batik in general, in the form of understanding, history, tools, media to the process of creating batik cloth, in addition to jumputan cloth to the application of natural dyes to cloth, craftsmen also donate several tools and materials (wax, cloth, canting, stamp, dye) as initial capital to produce batik. Involvement with the target directly is also considered by the craftsmen, people with disabilities directly try the batik process, are taught one by one so that the people experience the artistic experience of batik. In the batik process, people with disabilities must not only understand the technical issues and the manufacturing process, but also the aesthetic aspects are taught by the craftsmen, the composition and pattern of motif placement to the combination of colors in batik are taught to train their sensitivity to beautiful batik artwork. Some of the motifs used are typical Sukabumi batik motifs that highlight elements of local wisdom, then developed through symbolic visual motifs, so that this can also be a new knowledge or reminder of the narrative or story of local wisdom elements in their own area (Sukabumi).



Figure 4. Batik Coloring Process Using Natural Dyes (Doc. Isma, 2024)

Based on the explanation above, there are three styles of communication approaches (learning) carried out by craftsmen, Rose Colin in Malcolm Nicholl (Herianto, 2019) mentions several types of communication approaches in learning. First, regarding visual, where the vision of craftsmen in developing the potential and skills of people with disabilities in Sukabumi, by showing how batik cloth is physically, tools and materials for making batik to showing how the process of realizing batik cloth as a whole is shown. Second, auditory which relies on the sense of hearing, the target craftsmen listen and receive well the training explanation regarding the procedures for the batik process, by explaining the batik training material to people with disabilities. Third, kinesthetic or learning through physical activity and direct involvement of target craftsmen, people with disabilities directly try the batik process, both stamped batik, written batik to jumputan cloth. Through these three styles, the communication or reciprocal process will be easily accepted and understood by people with disabilities.

The type of art-activism movement carried out by the craftsmen of Rumah Batik Lokatmala is a progressive movement type. The type of progressive social movement is carried out by a batik craftsman with the aim of improving the standard of living and welfare of certain groups in society. The activism movement through the medium of art crafts (craftivism) includes community empowerment efforts, presenting efforts to preserve local traditions or artifacts, namely batik in Sukabumi. Overall, it is an activity that aims to improve the living conditions of the community and is one of the movements in the socio-cultural field. A socio-cultural movement is a movement carried out by a number of people who are organized with the aim of changing or maintaining certain elements in the wider community and has an impact on the advancement of culture. The newly developing batik culture in Sukabumi can provide many benefits for its supporting community. One of them is becoming a medium for education, both about traditional technology (batik), narratives about local wisdom that are visualized in motif symbols and also about the process of manifestation that can be carried out in all levels of society. One of them is people with disabilities who can improve their skills and improve their standard of living, through batik activities. In this way, the process of developing batik culture can be maintained and also become a source of pride for the people of Sukabumi towards their local batik products.



Figure 5. PHALA MARTA Foundation Disability Training & Batik and Tie-dye Products Marketed in the Gallery (Doc. Isma, 2024)

Impact Indicators of Empowerment of Batik Artisans' Art-Activism Movement

The purpose of the craftsmen in carrying out the empowerment movement is to jointly fight for a better and more prosperous life, especially for people with disabilities. In the empowerment process, the main effort that can be made is that the target community must be able to achieve human capacity development that encompasses personality, skills and abilities in the world of work (Purwanto, 2017). The success of empowerment can be seen through several indicators of empowerment shown in an individual or group (Suharto, 2005), in the case of the Rumah Lokatmala Batik craftsmen, there are indicators of educational improvement in the form of materials, methods and relationships between facilitators and recipients, craftsmen are able to provide new knowledge to people with disabilities. Second, improving actions, people with disabilities have skills and abilities in themselves (batik) towards a better life. Third, improving business, craftsmen empower people with disabilities so that they can develop a batik business together. Fourth, improving income, after doing business, the income obtained increases which can help meet their needs, if the needs are met properly, the living conditions of each individual with disabilities will be good.



Figure 5. Article about Rumah Lokatmala Batik Craftsmen Fostering People with Disabilities (Source. Isma, 2024)

CONCLUSIONS

The form of social and cultural art-activism plays an important role in encouraging positive social change and preserving cultural heritage. Based on the cases that have been presented, there are aspects that influence the existence of the art-activism movement carried out by the craftsmen of Rumah Batik Lokatmala, the type raised in each of their activism movements, namely, the personal aspect of the craftsmen who try to provide empowerment of batik skills for people with disabilities in Sukabumi; the aspect of the Rumah Batik Lokatmala community which is led directly by the craftsmen in creating an ecosystem of relations or cooperation between craftsmen and people with disabilities in the production process at Rumah Batik Lokatmala and at the PHALA MARTA Foundation; and the political aspect (power) namely how craftsmen present solutions, make statements and take a stand on problems in their social environment while fighting for change for people with disabilities. Based on this, the form of the craftsmen's art-activism movement is included in the type of progressive social movement that can improve the standard of living and welfare of certain groups. Includes activities that can have an impact on social change and movement, both changes in mindset, mentality, to movement towards better social conditions in society. The social art-activism movement changes cultural codes that bring about social change. As a society, we need individuals who have the will and passion to intentionally make an act of change through art. Art has a continuing function in facilitating change in society. Viewing and thinking critically about contemporary visual art prepares us to be more thoughtful about the messages it communicates and to understand the power of its character in shaping a just and equitable society.

The process carried out by the craftsmen of Rumah Batik Lokatmala is still carried out until now, the craftsman's activism is a form of action to achieve a goal, change to a solution where the craftsman uses art as a method. The craftsman said that the guidance given to the disabled was a manifestation of the motto of the Sundanese people, namely, *silih asah* (reminding each other), *silih asih* (loving each other) and *silih asuh* (guiding each other). This term is the motto of the Sundanese people who prioritize the value of togetherness, advancing together in intellectuality, a sense of love created from all forms of relationships between individuals and an attitude of protecting one another. The craftsman applies this concept in his process and feels the need to take over the role of activists and become a direct part of social change. The craftsman believes that the approach to art can be subtle because there are artistic elements and aesthetic elements to attract attention and can achieve targets easily. The activism fought for by craftsmen through batik art is carried out for the purpose of change for the better, improving the standard of living and welfare of disabled groups in their social environment, especially the benefits of the existence of the Rumah Lokatmala Batik can be felt by people from all walks of life, including people with disabilities in Sukabumi.

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