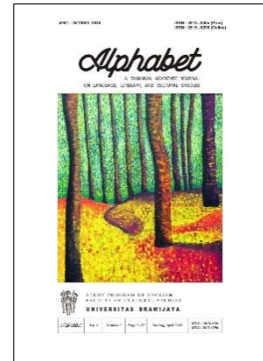


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Abstract

As an archipelago, Indonesia is rich in cultures that exist and grow in its unique regions. It could be influenced by people's habits, thoughts, acts, and geographical characteristics, creating certain values, recognized as local wisdom. Gresik, a small city at the edge of East Java northern coast, has distinctive features; one of them is its traditional snack: Pudak. Traditional snacks are typical because they can be found only in specific regions. As a traditional snack, Pudak has a unique package made of natural material, that is ope. As a cultural product, Pudak and its packaging have interesting local values. This research shows that the making process, packaging materials, and packaging process of Pudak which are the local wisdom and the identity of Gresik. This identity is important because in this globalization era, many people do not know or even care about the cultural meaning of traditional snacks.

Keywords:

local wisdom, traditional snack, pudak, natural packaging, identity

As an archipelago, Indonesia has diverse cultures originating from the people's habit, mindset, as well as beliefs. With thousands islands and tribes, Indonesia has remarkable cultures which can be valuable assets. One of the cultural assets is traditional food. Food is a cultural product that is basic to human life. Traditional foods are made from natural ingredients which are widely available in the areas. For example, an area where coconut is widely grown will produce more coconut-based food. On the other hand, areas with abundant marine resources will use the marine produce in many of their foods. From generation to generation, local people have used certain ways in making the traditional snacks. That is why traditional food becomes the characteristic of a region because it is linked to the community.

Traditional foods can be divided into main dishes and snacks. The main dish is often eaten with rice, as the majority of Indonesian population consumes rice for their staple food. The main dishes include *rendang*, *gudeg*, *kramu*, curry, and etc. Snacks such as *getuk*, *nagasari*, *wingko*, spring rolls, etc are usually consumed outside the main meal times. Some snacks have specific characteristics, which show the conditions of the local environment and communities. The relatively small and handy size makes them as souvenirs, which is typical and regraded as the representative of the area.

As traditional foods, both main dishes and snacks are attached to the mindset of the local knowledge and wisdom. Permana (in Alfian, 2013) said that local knowledge is concerning the way of life, knowledge and coping strategies of the local community in their effort to answer

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their day-to-day problems. Here exists a question of how people think about meeting their physical needs by using the existing resources in their area. It is the traditional foods, which reflect the differences and the existing local knowledge’.

The use of local and natural materials in packing the food products is an example of the local wisdom. However, the advanced technology and industry offer convenience and practicality that makes it not easy to maintain the local wisdom because the technology has an impact on cost production and time efficiency. In turn, advanced technology requires an adjustment in the making of the traditional foods such as in the replacement of natural wrapper with non-natural materials. For example, *banana leaves which used to wrap lempur* (food made from sticky rice) has now been replaced by green plastic wrap. The green color is used to remain associated with the banana leaves. It is also found that a cardboard box packaging adds graphical elements such as banana leaf or woven bamboo picture and texture. The use of plastic in food wrapping does not only provides time and cost efficiency but at the same time also imposes challenges in preserving the local wisdom.

Gresik is a region in East Java, which is known for a traditional snack called *Pudak*, made from rice flour, white or brown sugar and coconut milk, and sometimes vanilla extract for flavor. *Pudak* is uniquely packed with *ope* (mid-rib of areca palm). It is packaged in the form of

a quarter of a circle. In general, *Pudak* with this form is specific to Gresik, not other areas. That is the reason that *Pudak* is often used as souvenirs. Because of rapid industrial development marked by rampant land clearing, *ope* is increasingly becoming rare. As a result, one of *Pudak* producers in Gresik has to go as far as to Jember, in the eastern part of East Java to buy *ope*. In the near future, it is likely to affect the use of *ope* as the wrap of *pudak*, and in turn, give impact on the *Pudak* itself. Therefore, this study is aimed to explore the local wisdom that is manifested in the making of *Pudak*.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Scope of the Study

The object of this research is *Pudak*, a typical snack from Gresik. *Pudak* is selected as the research object due to its uniqueness as a traditional snack. In addition, its package and packaging process maintain traditional values. It becomes interesting, in the advancement of technology and industry today, *Pudak* survives in its traditional form. Geographically, Gresik is located on the north coast of East Java which has different characteristics from other areas, in which it affects the pattern and behavior of local residents in response to the things around. Moreover, the north coast of Java is the main point of trade, which has a strategic position in the economic domain. Traditional snacks have contributed significantly to the local revenues and residents.



Figure 1. *Pudak*

Data Collection

In the initial stage, we read journals, newspapers, and books to collect data on traditional snacks and local wisdom. The next step, we collected data about the condition of *Pudak* by observing and interviewing the sellers in Gresik. *Pudak* producers were interviewed. We also interviewed Suharsih, the pioneer producer of *pudak* in Gresik. The interviews were conducted to find out the traditional production process *pudak*, the role of *ope*, and to collect information about *Pudak* developments in Gresik.

In addition, experts were interviewed to provide information on the culture of Gresik and on the traditional and modern packaging.

Data Analysis

The collected data were then analyzed to produce a description of the material, the shape of packaging, the packaging process, and to explore the values of local wisdom of *pudak*.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Packaging plays an important role for a product. The primary function of packaging is to wrap and protect a product. Along with the development of technology and industry, the packaging functions also evolve, adapt to the demands, especially the needs of the people and economic interests. Packaging is also expected to have an additional function to store, transmit, differentiate products among competitors, give the identity of the product, as well

as give an incentive to encourage sales (Klimchuck & Krasovec, 2007; Roth, 1990; Wirya, 1999). The material used for packaging can vary. In ancient times, people tended to use natural materials that were all around them. Abundant natural resources in Indonesia has a wealth of material that can be used to package food, especially traditional snacks. The natural resources which are widely used for packaging are parts of plants or trees. In Indonesia, banana stem and leaves, the rind of corn, guava and coconut leaves, cordyline and teak tree leaves are widely used. Palm tree leaves and stems can be used as well (Sabana, 2000).

Pudak packaging uses *ope* which is sewn curled into quarter circles of which the tip is tied with a string.

The Local Wisdom in the production of *Pudak*

Reading a local wisdom in *Pudak* packaging is inseparable from its production and packaging process. The following values are found:

Persistence

The production to the packaging process is a long process. The ingredients of *Pudak* are rice flour, coconut milk, brown sugar, and vanilla. According to Suharsih, to get the maximum results, she uses self-made rice flour instead of buying it from the market. The steps of making *Pudak* are as follows.



Figure 2. *Ope* Sewing Process

Firstly, the rice is washed until completely clean. This process will affect the quality of *pudak*. If the rice is not clean, *Pudak* will spoil easily. After being washed, the rice is soaked in water, dried, and pounded into flour. *Pudak* also uses red coconut milk. The red color comes from the husk of reddish brown coconut infused into the coconut milk. Peeling off the coconut husk should be done carefully. In a different skillet, brown sugar is heated until it caramelizes. Then all the ingredients are stirred together, added with vanilla essence. In the past, the stirring process used a manual mixer, but now it uses electrical one. The next step is pouring the batter into *ope* (the stem of areca palm/areca nut palm). To prepare *ope*, first, it is cleaned and cut into pieces (approximately 15 x 15 cm). Furthermore, a single sheet of *ope* is folded longitudinally (in the direction of the fiber) and sewn with thread making a shape similar to a small purse (inigresik.com, 2015). In the past, this *ope* sewing process was done manually by using needle and thread, but nowadays, sewing machine is used. *Ope* that has been sewn is ready to be filled with the batter. Once filled, they are steamed. After that, the *Pudak* is packed and tied with rope. Because of its long process, the whole process of making *Pudak* requires persistence.

Functional (Intellectual Property)

An interesting thing about *Pudak* is the packaging, of which the *ope* is irreplaceable. *Ope* uniqueness lies in the structure of the inside

layer which is smooth (but not sticky) and porous. This makes *Pudak* not sticky and can be easily removed from the package. The pores allow *Pudak* to last longer. At room temperature, *Pudak* can last for two to three days although it contains coconut milk duration of decomposition.

Generally, snacks containing coconut milk can only last for only one day. Suharsih stressed the importance of using *ope* as:

That is the *pakem* (standard). *Ope* cannot be replaced by banana leaves because banana leaves can be easily broken. It cannot be replaced by *bakcang* leaves either because they have plastic-like layers and pores. Palm leaf is similar to *ope*, but there is no plastic membrane or pore. By using other wrappings, *Pudak* will be wet and stale faster." (Suharsih, 2016).

Another benefit of *ope* is the distinctive aroma and flavor produced during the steaming process. This gives *Pudak* a unique aroma and makes it more delicious. Suharsih said, "If *ope* is replaced by plastic, it does not have pores, so *Pudak* stales quickly. Other materials are not strong; therefore, they cannot be sewn. The smell is like corn's, but it is not corn's." (Suharsih, 2016). The packaging as well as the entire process of making *Pudak* show local residents' response to natural materials and their benefits or uniqueness.



Figure 3. The process of pouring the batter into the *ope*

Environmental Factors

Ope's package is also environmentally friendly because it leaves organic waste, unlike the artificial materials such as plastics that are difficult to decompose. In other words, *ope* is also energy efficient because it does not require a special process to decompose. This may give a positive impact on the ecosystem. However, the expansion of residential and industrial space results in the reduction of areca palm areas, so that *Pudak* producers are difficult to obtain *ope*.

Currently, *ope* is obtained from suppliers in Jember, South Malang, or Blitar. It should be a concern in given the function of *ope* which is difficult to be replaced by other materials.

Aesthetics

In terms of form, *Pudak* has a unique look. *Ope* that is sewn in the shape of a quarter of a circle, will look fuller when it is filled with the batter. The shape and the packaging materials become synonymous with *Pudak*. Although there is another snack having the similar shape and using the similar material, e.g. arem-arem, which is similar to rice cake, *Pudak* has an exclusive and aesthetic shape.

Another uniqueness is its display when it is sold. *Pudak* is sold in a group or batch. One batch consists of five or ten pieces, which are tied and hung together. This marks the distinctiveness of *Pudak*. Functionally, the hanging is intended to avoid damp, because moisture can bring mold and make *Pudak* stale faster.

Local Wisdom as Identity

Identity is an important thing for everyone as to differentiate one from the others. Identity is a mental construction, a social product, the power to take action that seems stable, while malleable. The concept of identity is not just easy to shape, but rather a dynamic construction, which has implications for the concept of how people think and what they do. (Leary & Tangney, 2012). Base on this insight, local knowledge that is contained in a batch of *Pudak* reflects the identity of Gresik. The values that exist in *Pudak* along with the packaging are a

reflection of how the local community responds to nature in their surrounding areas. Similarly, the visual is an important factor in forming an identity. The shape of *Pudak* naturally represents the whole identity of Gresik as a coastal city.

Interestingly, the issue of the environment can also be attributed to the existence of *Pudak*. It is not just a typical Gresik souvenir but also illustrates social and environmental changes. For example, the way to obtain *ope* has become difficult, while it is also used to be one of the icons of Gresik through *Pudak*. It may become a factor contributing to the construction of identity of being close to nature (symbolized by the areca palm), to become something different.

CONCLUSION

A cultural practice is significant in shaping the concept of the identity of a specific region, through the values of local wisdom, which is contained therein. Local knowledge is unique and distinctive so that it can be a differentiator, which is a key element in the identity. In this case, the traditional *Pudak* snack, along with its packaging, can play a role in shaping the identity of Gresik.

Yet, identity is not static but rather dynamic. The existing concept of identity can be changed or remained the same; it depends on the social, economic, and cultural dimensions and other factors that occur in the society and its region. The increasing difficulty to obtain *ope* of areca palm could be a warning of a potential extinction of *Pudak*, a feature of Gresik.

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