



Iron Melodies From Kusumodilagan: An Exploration

Sugiyanto ✉¹

Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

Aris Setiawan

Institut Seni Indonesia, Surakarta

Article Info

Received : December, 2024

Approved: December 2024

Published : February 2024

Keywords:

Iron Music; Social;
Organizational culture;
Kusumodilagan

Abstract

Kusumodilagan is an area renowned for its iron market, where the livelihoods of the community predominantly rely on iron processing. The various types of iron produced reflect the character of individuals within the society, along with the accompanying phenomena and challenges. Community activities, characterized by the sounds of iron work, have served as a source of inspiration for musical creation. This study aims to explore how to develop a musical presentation that encapsulates the lives of iron workers in Kusumodilagan. The methodology employed in this research is participatory observation, which seeks to understand and recognize the diverse sound characteristics and their social phenomena as the primary approach in the preparation of musical compositions. The findings indicate that the sounds of iron can serve as a compositional idea for musical harmony, while also engaging iron workers in the creative process. The objective of this study extends beyond artistic experience; it emphasizes the recognition of community members' existence and fosters a sense of togetherness among them.

✉ Corresponding Author:

Email : 1. sugivanto79@mail.unnes.ac.id
2. arissetiawan@isi-ska.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Kusumodilagan Village is renowned for its vibrant iron market, where daily buying and selling activities take place, showcasing a rich tradition of iron-based tool production characterized by diverse motifs and techniques. The village's name, like many others in the Surakarta region, is derived from a prominent historical figure, specifically GPH Kusumodilaga, the son of Paku Buwana IX, who resided in the area. This connection to historical lineage not only highlights the cultural significance of the village but also underscores its role as a center for artisanal craftsmanship in ironwork. The unique blend of traditional practices and contemporary market dynamics in Kusumodilagan Village presents a compelling case for further exploration of its socio-economic impact and cultural heritage within the broader context of Indonesian craftsmanship.

The Kusumodilagan iron market, located in the Surakarta region of Indonesia, possesses a unique history intertwined with the village's social and economic development. Prior to a significant flood event, the nascent iron trade centered around Ndalem Nitipuran, the residence of the Nitipuro family, descendants of Surakarta Palace servants. This area, sparsely populated and locally known as barongan (a bamboo grove), provided the initial setting for the market's formation. The foundational activity involved mayèng, scavengers who collected discarded iron scraps from the surrounding area. These scraps were then sold to wholesalers located in the southern square of the Surakarta Palace, marking the earliest stage of the iron market's development.

The demographic composition of Kusumodilagan Village is a blend of indigenous residents and in-migrants. While the majority of shop and workshop owners within the iron market are newcomers, a smaller number represent the village's original inhabitants. The workforce, however, is predominantly

comprised of local residents, encompassing both older and younger generations from Kusumodilagan. Their daily activities involve a range of specialized tasks: refurbishing rusted iron (*menyelep*), sorting, cutting, forging, welding, and assembling iron components according to customer specifications. This ironworking tradition has become a primary source of livelihood for numerous families within the village.

Iron, a ubiquitous material with diverse applications, forms the core of Kusumodilagan's economic activity. Its use spans a wide spectrum, from weaponry and construction materials to machinery components and household tools. The market caters to a broad range of needs, offering iron products in various sizes, weights, and forms, reflecting the adaptability of the craft to diverse demands.

The daily operation of the iron market is characterized by the constant sounds emanating from the workshops and warehouses. The rhythmic clang of hammers, the hiss of welding torches, and the grinding of metal create a unique soundscape. This seemingly chaotic auditory environment, however, reveals an underlying structure. The repetitive and coordinated actions of the artisans generate a complex interplay of sound sources, tempos, and rhythms, forming an unintentional, yet compelling, sonic composition. This naturally occurring musicality, born from the artisans' collective work process, warrants further investigation into its potential as a form of vernacular music, reflecting the genetic and cultural heritage of the Kusumodilagan ironworkers. Future research could explore the acoustic properties of this environment and analyze the rhythmic patterns inherent in the artisans' work.

a. Iron as a musical presentation

Human life is surrounded by sound, which serves as a significant source of

inspiration for the development of musical instruments. From the very beginning, humans have utilized their intellect and creativity to create musical tools. The evolution of sound-producing instruments is rooted in human expression, evident in activities such as shouting, conversing, and clapping. Additionally, the sounds generated during daily activities, particularly those related to work, have contributed to the creation of musical instruments. Initially, these tools were employed as expressions of the soul and means of livelihood. However, over time, the function of musical instruments has evolved into a more complex medium for communication and expression.

In the second stage, humans utilize their natural environment by employing natural signs and everyday tools to produce sound. Based on this understanding, a framework for a musical performance can be delineated, consisting of four distinct sections:

1. The first section. Involves the exploration of sounds derived from thoughts and ideas observed in a workshop setting. This is expressed through the creation of a new composition that combines sound phenomena with dialogues among individuals. In this section, greater freedom is allowed for interpreting objects, particularly various types of metal and sheets. This freedom, however, remains within a structured framework. The creativity manifested here focuses on sound exploration from sheet metal and the utilization of scrap metal found in the workshop, incorporating techniques, rhythms, and tempos that allow for some flexibility. Additional sounds generated from welding, cutting saws, and scraping tools contribute to the ambiance, which aims to evoke the bustling, noisy atmosphere of a workshop.

2. The second section, conveys ideas inspired by the activities of workers in a scrap metal market, structured around

themes of both sadness and joy. This is expressed through simple musical dialogues and vocal presentations devoid of lyrics, capturing a melancholic essence. The materials used are relatively straightforward, presented with careful attention to rhythm, tempo, and dynamics. This section serves as a representation of the daily activities occurring in the scrap metal market, reflecting the diverse emotions brought by each individual.

3. The third section, depicts the phenomenon of transactions and the conflicts between brokers and consumers in the scrap metal market. The creativity in this segment lies in developing techniques and short patterns through rhythmic, tempo, and dynamic manipulation, resulting in a musical presentation that demands concentration from the performers. This is achieved by employing counting patterns, both even and odd, akin to the process of negotiation and bargaining. The atmosphere portrayed is initially tense, gradually transitioning to a calmer state.

4. The fourth section, expresses the sense of community among the residents of the scrap metal market. The musical arrangement combines instrumental elements with songs that convey themes of harmony and collective spirit. The materials presented often utilize similar patterns while still exploring rhythm, tempo, and dynamics. The atmosphere intended for this section is one of joy and celebration.

The entire presentation encapsulates the social life, labor, competition, and conflicts experienced by the Kusumodilagan community, while also highlighting the harmony present in the scrap metal market. This expression is translated into a musical composition that utilizes metal as its primary medium. The composition embodies four distinct atmospheres: bustling and lively,

simultaneously sad and joyful, assertive yet calm, and cheerful and jubilant.

The musical aspects explored include the utilization of sound sources derived from various types of metal. The composer skillfully manipulates these metals musically by employing simple patterns and subsequently developing them further. This includes the unique sounds produced from metal being scraped, sorted, compressed, thrown, assembled, cut, welded, and struck. Each of these actions generates distinctive sounds that contribute to the overall auditory experience. All of these diverse sounds are then expressed musically, taking into account the elements of tempo, rhythm, dynamics, and harmony.

This creative project encompasses several key ideas: (1) Tuning various types of metal as sound sources, which are then categorized into musical instruments. The tuning process aims to explore harmonious pitch differences; (2) Sorting instruments according to their functional roles within the composition. This categorization is based on sound characteristics, specifically differentiating between soft, medium, loud, and piercing sounds. This consideration is intended to distinguish the tonal colors and character of the sounds presented in each section of the work; (3) The musical composition consists of four aspects of development.

First, melody and pitch form the foundation for creative work, utilizing pitches that approximate the "pelog" scale found in Javanese Gamelan. This choice is made because this scale is most familiar to the Kusumodilagan community. Conversely, when the scale deviates from its conventional form, it creates a unique experience, potentially leading to the emergence of a "new" scale. Consequently, both instrumental and vocal melodies are structured to align with this scale.

Second, rhythm is processed in this musical work to be both consistent (*Javanese: ajég*) and irregular, tailored to the

atmosphere intended for each section. Third, tempo is designed to follow the narrative flow of the piece. A calm atmosphere is presented at a slow tempo, while tense and energetic moments are conveyed at a faster tempo. Fourth, dynamics (loud and soft) are also carefully considered in this musical work. The distribution of dynamics is based on the character that tends toward loudness, aiming to achieve the desired ambiance. For instance, in vocal performances, there must be a harmony between musical dynamics and vocal delivery to ensure a pleasant listening experience.



Figure 1. Pokocil (It is called Pikocil because this instrument is made from a small, square pipe)



Figure 2. Pikodang (The name of this instrument is based on its shape, namely a medium square pipe)



Figure 3. (Pibundang is a medium round pipe)



Figure 4. Pibundes (Large round pipe)



Figure 5. Siku. (The naming of instruments is based on the name of the type of iron, namely the elbow type)



Figure 6. Platis (Naming is based on the type, namely thin size plates)



Figure 7. Streplat (The name is based on the type of iron, namely the Streplat type)

The scrap metal market has served as a profound source of inspiration for creating aesthetic works, leading to the innovative use of available metals that are engineered into musical instruments. Several instrument designs crafted from metal include the following:



Figure 8. Performance of exploration of iron tools with supporters of the Kusumodilagan Village Community.



Figure 9. (The performance utilizes a workshop which is arranged into a performance stage, using instruments made from engineered iron)

The various types of metal that have been transformed into musical instruments present an opportunity to explore the sound elements they produce. In terms of shape, size, and sound, metal instruments possess distinct characteristics that pose an intriguing challenge for their artistic development into musical presentations. The design of these instruments is carefully crafted, taking into account their inherent qualities and the determination of pitch. Additionally, the use of recycled metal is incorporated, with methods developed to produce sound from these materials. The selection of different types of metal in this aesthetic endeavor is aligned with the theme and the environment of the performance space, ensuring that the intended impressions and messages are effectively conveyed. As illustrated in the image below:

b. Music as A Social Study

Anthropological studies have shown that various societies and cultures in the Indonesian archipelago possess a foundation of ethics and local genius that has accumulated as economic, social, and symbolic capital. Religious ethics have established faith institutions as manifestations of spiritual intelligence. Artistic ethics have fostered aesthetic institutions as expressions of emotional intelligence. Social ethics have built solidarity institutions as representations of social intelligence. Scientific ethics have accelerated knowledge institutions as a dynamic of intellectual intelligence. Environmental ethics have developed

ecological institutions as embodiments of cosmic intelligence.

Indonesian communities demonstrate a holistic approach to needs fulfillment, encompassing all aspects of life. Their systems of understanding, programs, activities, and implementation are geared towards maintaining, improving, and developing these essential elements. This process considers the entire ecosystem—flora, fauna, minerals, and human resources—within their own communities. This reveals that art arises from fundamentally cognitive activities and the methods employed by humans. The existence of art is deeply rooted in the collective life of these societies. Art functions as an intense form of communal expression, thereby amplifying its communicative power and expanding its meaning. Consequently, diverse art forms flourish within each distinct Indonesian community.

Traditional Indonesian art forms exhibit a strong correlation between societal values and religious beliefs. This relationship underscores the enduring social bonding power of traditional performances, a power intrinsically linked to the spatial organization of settlements. These settlements often feature open-air spaces serving as social gathering points, fostering intimate connections among community members across socioeconomic strata. Traditional art performances, therefore, represent a vital form of cultural expression (Halim, 2007).

According to M.A. Rahim, the anthropological study of art should view art as a product resulting from technical processes mastered by individuals within a community—the artists. The focus of art anthropology lies in examining the artist's skill and proficiency in translating their ideas into artistic products. Whether aesthetically pleasing or not, these products are integral to the community's activities (Rahim, 2009).

At its core, music is a product of the mind. Physical and cosmological vibrational elements—frequency, amplitude, and duration—do not become music until neurologically transformed and interpreted by the brain into pitch, timbre, dynamics (loudness/softness), and tempo. This transformation into music and the resulting human response (behavior) are uniquely cognitive, as the human brain's development is significantly shaped by prior musical experiences.

Historically, music served two primary functions: *nemesis* (Greek: transformation and imitation from the external world into the self) and *catharsis*, the purification of the soul through emotional experience. Therefore, a primary function of music is emotional reflection, often expressed indirectly. According to Eagle, defines music as organized sound and silence unfolding through time (within space) (Salim, 2005). This leads to some preliminary conclusions and questions: Music – Sound – Vibration (?). Vibration (energy) is the essence of all things (matter). However, if music is organized sound, we gain a clearer perspective on its essence (Wafa, 2020).

The theory of "Music Psychology" proposed by Djohan identifies three main concepts regarding the influence of music: (1) Music is significant because it embodies something inherently good; (2) Music is an integral part of life and represents one of the beauties of human culture, alongside possessing highly beneficial positive values; (3) Developing musical abilities leads to accompanying advantages. Engaging in activities such as practicing, listening to, and appreciating music enhances cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development. Furthermore, music is aligned with other essential learning disciplines that should be incorporated into education.

This argument is supported by the following reasons: (1) Music can make individuals feel more alive; (2) Music combines behaviors and other thinking

skills; (3) Music opens pathways for imagination and creativity, contributing to self-expression and creativity; (4) Music enriches life as a means of understanding cultural heritage; (5) Music enhances sensitivity; (6) Music develops cognitive and motor perception; (7) Music stimulates creativity and individuality; (8) Music boosts self-esteem; (9) Music fosters intelligence. These aspects are represented in the musical expressions of the iron craftsmen community in Kusumodilagan, Surakarta.

CONCLUSION

Music is an art form that expresses human thoughts and feelings through the beauty of sound. Just as humans use words to convey concepts, they also employ sound compositions to articulate their inner emotions. Like other forms of art, music serves as a reflection of the feelings of individuals or communities. It is a product of human creativity and sensitivity towards life and the world around them.

Through its magical effects, music can liberate individuals from the constraints of inner turmoil, loneliness, panic, and various other mental disturbances. Consequently, numerous research centers and music therapy practices have emerged in various countries. Music, with its specific arrangement of intervals and rhythms, possesses unique reflective qualities that can stimulate nerve cells, thereby modulating human emotions—either alleviating, intensifying, or redirecting them. This influence has been scientifically validated throughout the human life cycle, from the embryonic stage to old age. Moreover, it has also been shown to affect other living organisms, such as plants.

Borrowing the analogy from Anya Peterson Royce, the emphasis is placed on the value of social engagement rather than individual artistic merit. Art, in essence, is a creative endeavor rooted in social action, which involves interactions among individuals within a community. When viewed contextually, art is an immanent

and integral part of the socio-cultural dynamics of society (Hadi, 2007).

In this context, both elements are intertwined in an artistic experience presented in a setting filled with warmth and intricate aesthetic expressions that consistently elicit responses from the audience gathered in the performance space. The proximity of the stage to the audience transforms the performance into a fluid and dynamic interaction.

The interaction that emerges between performers and the audience can be considered one of the defining characteristics of traditional performances in Indonesia. As stated, "Art and culture play a crucial role in strengthening community identity. Community identity refers to the unique characteristics, values, traditions, and cultural heritage that distinguish a particular group or community. Through various expressions of art and culture, a society can explore and reinforce its identity, preserve its cultural heritage, and promote diversity and unity among its members"(Anugrah, 2023).

The artistic works that arise within the ironworking community in Kusumodilagan, Surakarta, serve as an effort to reflect on the journey of an artist and the challenges encountered along the way. This project reexamines the role of the artist and art within society, seeking to define the boundaries of cultural intersections while also attempting to evaluate the social dynamics at play.

In line with this, there is a significant relationship between the development of art and the advancement of society. As Soedarsono noted, a region can be considered to be experiencing positive development when its art evolves in accordance with the progress of its supporting community. Similarly, the development of art in Indonesia is an integral part of the social system of community life (Benton, 2001; Moore et al., 2003; Parson, 1964; Taiwo, n.d.).

Therefore, as an expression of art, it possesses not only individual significance but also collective meaning, as explained by Sumaryono:

The presence of art within our communities can be recognized in two forms of expression: collective expression and individual expression. Collective expression refers to traditional art forms that originate from ethnic communities spread across all provinces of Indonesia. In contrast, art as an individual expression is more oriented towards the pathways of creation or artistic production, emphasizing the subjective aspects of the artist's experience.

Regarding the musical performance art created from iron in Kusumodilagan, it reminds us that iron, often perceived as an ordinary object devoid of significance, serves as a marker of identity and a reflection of the surrounding community's phenomena. Iron transforms into a compositional idea for musical harmony, while also fostering engagement and, more importantly, connecting the ironworking community to participate in this artistic expression. The objective extends beyond mere artistic experience; it emphasizes existential recognition and a sense of togetherness, which have become increasingly foreign and rare in our diverse nation.

REFERENCES

- Anugrah, Z. (2023). *Peran Seni dan Budaya dalam Memperkuat Identitas Masyarakat*. Pustaka.
- Benton, T. and I. Craib. (2001). *Philosophy of Social Science New York: Palgrave*. Palgrave.
- Hadi, S. (2007). *Sosiologi Tari*. Pustaka.
- Halim, H. (2007). *Festival dan Infrastruktur Kesenian*. Rumah Dunia.
- Moore, D. G., Burland, K., & Davidson, J. W. (2003). The social context of musical success: A developmental account. *British Journal of Psychology*, 94(4), 529–549. <https://doi.org/10.1348/000712603322503088>
- Parson, T. (1964). *The Social System*. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Rahim, M. A. (2009). *Seni Dalam Antropologi Seni*.
- Salim, D. (2005). *Psikologi Musik*. Buku Baik.
- Taiwo, R. (Ed.). (n.d.). *Handbook of Research on Discourse Behavior and Digital Communication: Language Structures and Social Interaction*. Information Science Reference.
- Wafa, M. U. (2020). *Kreasi-Musik-Teknologi? Pendidikan Seni Drama Tari dan Musik Unnes*.