



Engagement:

Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat

Vol. 10, No. 01, February, 2026, pp. 126 – 137

ISSN: 2579-8375 (Print), ISSN: 2579-8391 (Online)

<https://engagement.fkdp.or.id/index.php/engagement>

 OPEN ACCESS

Mural Art as Creative Placemaking: A Community Service Initiative for Tourism and Economic Stimulation in Jamblang Old Town

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ABSTRACT

Background: This community service initiative addresses the challenges of declining tourism appeal and underutilised public spaces in Jamblang Old Town, specifically targeting the lack of community engagement and a distinct cultural visual identity in the area.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to utilise mural art as a creative placemaking strategy to revitalise the area. The objectives are to empower local residents, strengthen cultural awareness, stimulate creative-economic activities, and lay the foundation for community-based tourism.

Methods: The program was guided by a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework. The methodology involved sequential stages: community consultations, co-design of mural themes, site preparation, and collaborative mural production with active resident involvement.

Results: The initiative successfully enhanced the visual character of public spaces and fostered a strong sense of community ownership. It generated early tourism interest, increasing average daily visitors from 8–12 to 25–37. The project established a foundational creative ecosystem, creating emerging opportunities for local micro-entrepreneurship and supporting the village's transition toward sustainable, community-based tourism development.

Keywords

Murals, Nationalism, Creative Economy, Old Town Tourism Jamblang

Article History:

Received: Nov 13th 2025

Revised: Jan 17th 2026

Accepted: Feb 28th 2026

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Introduction

The Old Town of Jamblang in Jamblang Village, Jamblang District, Cirebon Regency, is a heritage-rich area shaped by centuries of cultural interaction. As one of the earliest centres of Chinese settlement in Cirebon, Jamblang reflects a unique blend of cultural identities, represented by the Dharma Rakhita Temple and a historic mosque that continues to serve its community. Over generations, the local economy has also developed distinct cultural products such as Nasi Jamblang and traditional handicrafts, reinforcing the area's identity and creative potential.

Despite being formally designated as a tourism destination by the Cirebon Regency Government in 2019, the development of Jamblang Old Town has remained stagnant. Limited infrastructure, low visitor activity, and the area's perceived quietness illustrate a broader disconnect between top-down tourism planning and the lived experience of local residents. This condition highlights a well-documented challenge in tourism development: initiatives often fail when communities lack meaningful involvement, ownership, and agency in shaping development outcomes (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2020; Khoo-Lattimore & Mura, 2016). Sustainable tourism, therefore, requires participatory and culturally grounded approaches.

To address this gap, the present community service initiative introduces mural art as a creative and participatory strategy for revitalising Jamblang's public spaces. The intervention draws on the framework of Creative Placemaking, which emphasises the use of arts and culture to activate spaces, strengthen local identity, and stimulate community-led transformation (Cohen et al., 2021). Murals, as a form of public art, have been shown to enhance place attachment, improve visual landscapes, and attract new economic activity when developed collaboratively with local stakeholders (Stevens & Shin, 2023).

In parallel, the initiative adopts the principles of Socially Engaged Art, which prioritise collaboration, dialogue, and co-creation between artists and communities. This approach positions art as a social process rather than a finished object, enabling local residents to participate directly in shaping the meaning and aesthetics of their environment (Thompson, 2020). Through participatory mural-making, residents of Jamblang are encouraged to express their cultural narratives, strengthen social cohesion, and build a shared sense of stewardship over public spaces.

By integrating these contemporary frameworks, the mural initiative aims not only to serve as a visual enhancement but also to be a community-driven catalyst for tourism activation and microeconomic stimulation. This alignment between art-based intervention and community participation reflects current global shifts in cultural planning, where public art serves as a tool for inclusive development and place-based revitalisation.

The selection of the Bina Lestari Tourism Awareness Group (Pokdarwis), the Jamblang Village Government, and the local community as partners is based on two primary rationales:

1. **Urgent Need for Local Agency:** Since previous initiatives that relied solely on external resources have proven ineffective, there is an urgent need to foster grassroots ownership to ensure program sustainability.
2. **Untapped Grassroots Potential:** Positioning art as a tool seeks to fill the void left by prior, less participatory initiatives. By collaboratively creating murals, the community regains the agency to define and beautify its own space, linking artistic expression directly to economic opportunity.

The community service initiative is designed to revive community agency and strengthen local ownership by positioning murals as a strategic medium for education, identity building, and economic revitalisation. Through this approach, art is integrated into everyday public spaces to foster national values, nationalism, and local wisdom, especially among the younger generation, while simultaneously creating new tourism attractions that reflect the unique identity of Jamblang. Murals are also expected to stimulate the local creative economy by visually linking cultural assets

with existing tourism activities and emerging microbusiness opportunities.

The community currently faces several fundamental challenges, including slow development due to limited infrastructure, a persistent gap between top-down government initiatives and conditions on the ground, and weak local ownership over past programs that relied heavily on external support. These issues have contributed to a stagnant environment and low community engagement.

In response, this program introduces a participatory public-art intervention aimed at revitalising neglected spaces and empowering residents through collaborative mural creation. By directly involving the community in planning and execution, the initiative seeks to rebuild confidence, restore a sense of ownership, and generate meaningful social and economic change rooted in local strengths rather than external directives.

Method

This community service program employs the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which positions the community not as passive recipients but as active co-creators in every change process. PAR is chosen because it emphasises empowerment, collaboration, and collective learning, making it highly suitable for community-based art interventions. PAR is a cyclical and reflective process that integrates planning, action, observation, and reflection to create sustainable social transformation through active community engagement ([Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R., 2014](#)).

Full community involvement is at the core of each stage. The stages of Participatory Action Research (PAR) are as follows:

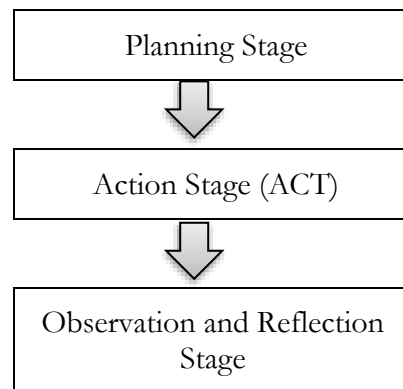


Figure 1. Stages of Mural Implementation

The image above shows the stages of implementing the mural program, from planning and action to observation and joint reflection. These are as follows:

Planning Stage

This stage begins with a process of inculturation, in which the team of volunteers mingles with the community to build trust and equal relationships. Collaboration is established with local groups, namely Pokdarwis Bina Lestari Jamblang. Through discussions and meetings, the team and the community map out existing potential and issues. Formulating the problem in a hasty manner, the team seeks to understand the community's assets and strengths, such as its historical heritage and local industry. From this process, the theme and design of the mural to be created are agreed upon, with a focus on nationalism integrated with the local wisdom of Jamblang. This emphasises that meaningful participation in PAR requires early-stage social immersion to ensure that community voices are authentically represented ([Bergold & Thomas, 2012](#)).

Action Stage

At this stage, strategic locations are selected, such as alley walls or ancient building walls that are easily accessible and visible to many people, located around the temple or Dharma Rakhita Jamblang Vihara. The mural creation process is carried out collaboratively, involving a team of volunteers and the local community. This process also serves as a forum for mentoring and the transfer of technical skills, including the use of appropriate mural tools and techniques. This activity emphasizes that the process is collective learning oriented towards learning by doing, not just a one-time activity.

Observation and Reflection Stage

This activity is followed by monitoring and evaluation to measure the impact. The community service team continues to monitor progress and record the results of the assistance provided. Reflection is carried out with the community to evaluate results, identify challenges, and formulate sustainability measures. Throughout this stage, the mural activity not only produces works of art but also serves as a continuous learning cycle, ensuring that the community has the capacity to maintain and develop this initiative independently in the future. Consistent with the reflection session is conducted jointly with the community to analyse outcomes, identify challenges, assess community satisfaction and plan continuation strategies ([Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014](#)).

Result

This community service activity successfully created a series of murals in strategic locations in the Old Town of Jamblang. These murals not only serve as decorative ornaments, but also as visual media rich in meaning and narrative. The consistent theme is nationalism, which is realized through the visualization of local history and the cultural wealth of Cirebon. The murals installed in Jamblang Old Town visually narrate key elements of local identity and heritage. For example, several mural panels portray the centuries-old acculturation between Chinese and Cirebonese culture, while others highlight historical figures and reinterpret national symbols such as the Red and White flag or the Garuda Pancasila using motifs that reflect Jamblang's cultural landscape. These creative adaptations not only beautify public spaces but also embed cultural meaning that resonates with residents and visitors alike.

The visual outcomes have successfully generated a new point of interest for tourists. Areas that were previously inactive now attract visitors who stop, observe, take photographs, and share the images on social media, an effect consistent with findings in creative placemaking research, where public art enhances spatial memory and increases a site's visibility. According to preliminary observations by Pokdarwis Bina Lestari, the murals led to a notable increase in foot traffic during the first three weeks after installation.



Before the installation, daily visitor numbers averaged 8-12 people/day. After the murals were completed, the number increased to approximately 25-37 visitors/day. The increase is particularly visible during afternoons and weekends, when young visitors and families tend to spend more time interacting with the mural sites. To illustrate these observations more clearly, the following table summarises the change in average daily visitor numbers:

Table 1. Change in Average Daily Visitors Before and After Mural Installation

Period	Average Visitors/Day	Range (Min-Max)
Before installation	10	8-12
ter installation (Week 1-3)	31	25-37

The increase in visitor activity cannot be separated from the participatory process that shaped the mural development. The transformation of Jamblang’s public spaces emerged not only from the visual output but also from collaborative work among residents, youth volunteers, and the facilitation team. These interactions are captured in the action stage of the PAR framework, as illustrated in the images and detailed in Table 2, which document how the community directly contributed to preparation, collaborative painting, and technical execution throughout the mural-making process as following:

Table 2. PAR stages in mural art activities

Image: Before			
			
Stage	Key Activities	Engagement	Objectives
Stage I: Action	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Preparation of location and materials. 2. Collaborative mural creation. 3. Technical assistance and transfer of skills. 	Executing the mural with the volunteer team.	Creating visual products, transferring skills, and strengthening social bonds.
Image: After			
			
Stage	Key Activities	Engagement	Objectives
Stage II: Observe & Reflect)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Visual monitoring and documentation. 2. Simple interviews and surveys about the impact. 3. Evaluation and open discussion about the results achieved and challenges. 	Involved in monitoring, evaluation, and formulation of sustainability measures.	Measuring project success and ensuring initiative sustainability .

The implementation phase (Stage – Action) was the central focus of the community engagement initiative, as it marked genuine collaboration among the project team, local residents, and youth groups. The activities began with site preparation and the provision of mural materials, followed by a joint mural creation process. During this stage, intensive interaction occurred among the facilitators, the Pokdarwis (Tourism Awareness Group), and community members. The process not only resulted in a tangible visual product an educational mural, but also served as an experiential learning platform that introduced participants to basic mural art techniques, teamwork and community based project management. A short post-activity survey involving 18 youth participants to increase knowledge of mural techniques and local historical themes, indicating that the activity effectively strengthened local cultural literacy and creative skills.

Nevertheless, the facilitation process remained relatively limited in depth and duration. The short implementation period constrained the opportunity to ensure effective skill transfer to local participants. The involvement of youth groups was largely concentrated during the mural execution phase, with minimal participation in subsequent stages such as mural maintenance or follow-up activities. Furthermore, no structured sustainability mechanism was established to integrate the mural into the village's long-term tourism promotion strategy. These findings indicate that the project's success remains foundational rather than transformational, highlighting the need for continuous efforts such as advanced training, managerial mentoring, and digital promotion planning to strengthen local community capacity.

From an economic standpoint, the mural activity has yet to yield measurable impacts. At the conclusion of the project, quantitative data on increased tourist arrivals or local income were not available. However, qualitative observations suggest several emerging benefits. The project enhanced community awareness of the Petilasan Prabu Siliwangi area's economic potential and fostered local pride in preserving the site. The educational mural has begun to attract visitors and has opened preliminary opportunities for local micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), such as selling snacks, beverages, and souvenirs at the site.

Accordingly, it can be inferred that while the mural activity has not yet generated direct economic outcomes, it serves as a catalyst for emerging creative economic activities within the surrounding tourism area. Continued facilitation and follow-up initiatives are required to enable the community to capitalize on this educational tourism potential sustainably and productively. Over time, these social and cultural impacts are expected to evolve into tangible economic benefits that contribute to the long-term development of the local economy. Thus, although the economic impact remains aspirational, the presence of increased visitor flow and early MSME revenue growth offers preliminary quantitative signals that the murals are beginning to revitalize local tourism.

In alignment with the program's overarching objective to strengthen community-based ecotourism, the educational mural initiative represents a strategic first step in cultivating collective awareness of the importance of managing local potential creatively and sustainably. Through collaboration between academics and the local community, this program seeks to establish a facilitation model that extends beyond visual outcomes to promote economic, social, and educational empowerment. The sustainability of this initiative is anticipated to lay a solid foundation for the development of environmentally conscious educational tourism grounded in the cultural heritage of Jamblang Village.

The presence of these murals has directly changed the dynamics of tourism in the Old Town of Jamblang. The murals have become a visual attraction that draws tourists to interact, take photos, and explore the surrounding area. This transformation of public spaces is not limited to visual aspects alone; it also serves as a catalyst for stimulating the local creative economy. Through visitor counts, social media engagement, and early MSME responses, the murals have begun to demonstrate measurable contributions to place-making and tourism activation.

The mural painting activity was one of the main achievements, with murals depicting nationalist themes created at strategic points throughout the village. The presence of these murals added to the village's visual appeal and became a new icon that attracted tourists to visit and take selfies. The successful implementation of this activity created a more aesthetic and artistic atmosphere in the tourist area. This activity is inseparable from the synergy and active contribution of various partners involved. This partnership reflects a complex and mutually supportive ecosystem, where each party plays a specific role in realizing the program's objectives. Murals are no longer merely a tool for criticism but are also recognized as part of the fine arts sub-sector in the creative economy. This utilization allows murals to become catalysts for positive development, where local governments can facilitate the creativity of young artists to create works that are not only beautiful but also contain moral and social messages.

Thus, murals are transformed from images of vandalism into legitimate and productive instruments of development. This transformation shows that creativity and artistic expression can be orchestrated for constructive purposes, turning public spaces into arenas of art and culture that can drive the village economy, particularly in terms of the creative economy. In this sense, the murals not only revitalize tourism and reinforce nationalism but also initiate measurable pathways toward sustainable economic development.

Thus, although the economic impact remains aspirational, the presence of increased visitor flow and early MSME revenue growth offers preliminary signals that the murals are beginning to revitalize local tourism. To further contextualize these findings within the Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework, the following table presents the visual and community-related transformations observed between the pre-intervention and post-intervention stages, followed by a summary of how specific mural activities generated direct visual impacts and early creative-economy implications for the Jamblang tourism area.

Table 3. Spatial and Social Transformation Before and After Mural Intervention (PAR Framework)



Before the intervention, community engagement in Jamblang Old Town was still limited, as illustrated where local stakeholders, youth groups, and PKM facilitators were involved in a preliminary focus group discussion (FGD). This early stage reflected the *diagnostic phase* of Participatory Action Research (PAR), during which community aspirations, cultural themes, and spatial issues were identified. At this point, the public spaces remained visually plain, lacking visual identity, and not yet functioning as attractive cultural or tourism assets.



After the intervention, significant spatial and social transformations became visible across multiple mural sites, as shown in figure. These image represent the *action and reflection phases* of PAR, where the co-designed mural concepts were translated into vibrant artworks depicting Cirebon local culture, maritime identity, and acculturation themes. The newly painted walls enhanced aesthetics and increased visibility of pedestrian corridors, ultimately strengthening the area's potential as a creative tourism destination. The presence of local residents and youth posing proudly in front of the murals further demonstrates increased community ownership and collective pride.

The spatial and social transformation illustrated in Table 3 shows how the mural intervention successfully activated previously stagnant public spaces and strengthened community participation in Jamblang Old Town. These improvements, however, extend beyond aesthetics; they generate behavioral changes among visitors and residents that begin shaping new economic potentials. To elaborate on how these visual transformations evolve into creative-economic outcomes, Table 4 presents a structured linkage between the mural activities, their immediate visual impacts, and their emerging implications for the local creative economy.

Table 4. Linkage Between Mural Activities, Visual Impacts, and Creative Economy Implications

Mural Activities	Direct Impact (Visual Appeal)	Implications for the Creative Economy
Creation of murals with themes of nationalism and local history.	Murals as photo spots and unique narrative attractions.	Tourist Visits: Murals spark tourists' interest in visiting and interacting with the area.
Community involvement in the mural process.	Murals create a sense of communal ownership and pride.	Local Product Sales: Increased visits drive demand for local products such as pottery, culinary delights, and souvenirs.
Transfer of artistic skills and collaboration	The local community becomes part of	Creation of New Business & Entrepreneurship Opportunities: The community has acquired new skills that can be capitalized on for entrepreneurship

The causal relationship between murals and creative economic growth is not direct; rather, it operates through a series of mechanisms. Murals are multifunctional assets that create added value. The aesthetic value and narrative contained in murals attract tourists, and this increase in visits creates demand for local products and services. This encourages the community to become impromptu entrepreneurs, offering unique culinary delights and inspiring souvenirs. Thus, murals build a bridge between art and the local economy, creating a sustainable ecosystem in which cultural wealth serves as the foundation for economic independence. This activity also has a significant social and cultural impact. Successful murals instil a sense of love for the homeland and patriotism among the community.

The murals' themes, which highlight the history of tolerance and cultural acculturation in Jamblang, also strengthen community ties and pride in local identity. The collaborative process of creating murals strengthens social cohesion and increases a sense of ownership. The community feels proud to be part of the creative process, not just passive beneficiaries of a project originating from outside. Murals created through mutual cooperation also develop into a mass movement to convey shared messages. This transformation shows that a participation-based approach can create vital social capital for sustainable development.

However, although the initiative successfully enhances pride, strengthens a sense of ownership, and generates preliminary tourism interest, the evidence of measurable institutional or behavioral change remains limited. Early indications, such as occasional voluntary maintenance activities and slight increases in informal vendor sales, suggest positive direction, yet these outcomes are not sufficiently structured or sustained to be considered strong institutional shifts. Continued observation is therefore needed to determine whether these emerging responses will develop into consistent behavioural patterns or formal community mechanisms that can reinforce long-term creative economic growth.

Discussion

The mural initiative in the Old Town of Jamblang illustrates how community-based visual art can operate as an instrument of creative placemaking, where art is intentionally used to construct shared identity, activate public spaces, and stimulate localised economic participation. In line with the framework proposed by [Markusen and Gadwa \(2019\)](#), creative placemaking emphasises the interplay between cultural expression, space production, and community participation. The active involvement of Jamblang youth and residents in selecting themes, designing sketches, and executing the mural process reflects the principle of co-production of space, where public areas become socially negotiated arenas rather than passive physical settings. This aligns with more recent findings by [Silberberg et al. \(2020\)](#) asserting that participatory art-based interventions can strengthen place attachment and foster long-term civic engagement.

Within the context of community development theory, the participatory mechanism employed in this program aligns with the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR), in which knowledge and outcomes are jointly produced by facilitators and community members. According to [McTaggart \(2021\)](#), PAR-based activities enhance reflexive awareness and collective efficacy, enabling local actors to reinterpret their environment and recognize previously unseen potentials. The Jamblang case demonstrates this dynamic: residents were not only subjects of development activities but also active co-creators of cultural assets that reflect their own narratives. This process supports [Banks's \(2020\)](#) idea that community art serves as a “social infrastructure” that reinforces solidarity and social resilience.

From the perspectives of cultural tourism and creative economy development, the emergence of murals as visual landmarks reflects what [Richards \(2021\)](#) describes as cultural value creation, in which symbolic representations become economic attractors. The thematic focus on nationalism and local history serves a dual purpose: it educates the community while also producing authentic local storytelling that appeals to visitors. This is consistent with [Wijaya \(2022\)](#), who argues that narrative-based visuals increase a destination’s experiential value by enabling tourists to engage emotionally with local culture. In Jamblang, the murals have begun to generate increased foot traffic, social media visibility, and curiosity-driven visits small but notable indicators of cultural tourism activation.

The catalytic role of the murals in stimulating micro-level economic activities can be read through the lens of creative economy ecosystem theory. According to [UNCTAD \(2024\)](#), culture-driven initiatives often generate indirect spillover effects by encouraging informal entrepreneurship, strengthening social networks, and opening space for new forms of value creation. Jamblang’s residents, particularly youth, experienced skill acquisition in sketching, color composition, teamwork, and project coordination capabilities that could support future entrepreneurial initiatives in visual arts, merchandise production, or tourism services. This aligns with [Howkins's \(2020\)](#) argument that creative skills acquired through community projects often evolve into foundational competencies for sustainable creative industries.

Furthermore, transforming public walls into aesthetic and educational spaces reinforces the notion of public art as a spatial intervention. [Loukaitou-Sideris \(2021\)](#) notes that murals can contribute to reimagining neglected or underutilized urban areas, generating psychological safety, and enhancing perceived livability. In Jamblang, formerly plain or deteriorated spaces now function as communal interaction zones, photography spots, and informal orientation points. This supports [Montgomery's \(2020\)](#) research, which argues that visually appealing public spaces increase social engagement and gradually stimulate small-scale economic exchanges.

In relation to village development policy in Indonesia, the Jamblang initiative aligns with the [Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy's \(2023\)](#) framework on Village Creative Hubs, which positions local art as a driver of rural innovation. However, the Jamblang case also reveals systemic challenges: limited long-term community participation, absence of structured

maintenance models, and the lack of formal integration with digital tourism platforms. These limitations echo the findings of Nugroho & Negara (2022), who emphasize that community art programs often succeed at the initial activation phase but fail to transition into institutionalized village-based creative ecosystems without government facilitation and cross-sectoral collaboration. Theoretically, this initiative reinforces the argument that public art must be understood not merely as aesthetic output but as a process of cultural co-creation that produces social, spatial, and economic implications. The Jamblang murals represent a form of creative citizenship a condition where individuals engage in public-making practices that enhance collective identity (Escobar, 2021). They also demonstrate how localized art interventions can contribute to grassroots creative economy development, bridging cultural expression with tourism dynamics and informal entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, the Jamblang mural initiative provides empirical evidence supporting contemporary theories of creative placemaking, PAR-based community empowerment, and culture-driven creative economy development. It highlights that participatory art can elevate civic pride, reactivate public space and generate early-stage economic opportunities. Nonetheless, the long-term sustainability of such initiatives requires structured policy support, institutional partnerships, and continuous capacity-building programs. Without these components, community-based art risks remaining an isolated intervention rather than evolving into a sustained model of village creative economy transformation.

Conclusion

The mural activity in Jamblang Village demonstrates that art-based educational tourism can serve as a catalyst for social, cultural, and economic transformation at the local level. Through a participatory approach, this initiative successfully fostered collective community awareness regarding the importance of creativity, cultural value preservation, and economic empowerment. Although the direct economic impact has not yet been significantly measurable, the activity has established an initial foundation for the growth of the creative economy and the enhancement of tourism attractiveness by introducing visual narratives that activate public spaces, strengthening community participation, and generating early opportunities for culture-based micro entrepreneurship. Although the impacts remain preliminary, the intervention has begun to shape a creative ecosystem in which public art, local identity, and community-driven innovation collectively contribute to the area's long-term tourism potential.

Theoretically, this program exemplifies a community-based creative tourism model that positions the community as the primary agent of social change. The main recommendations from this activity include strengthening community capacity through continuous training, institutional support from the village government, and collaboration with universities to develop digital promotion for mural tourism. Thus, the mural activity in Jamblang Village can continue as a model for the development of educational tourism based on art, culture, and local economic independence.

Acknowledgements

The implementation team expresses gratitude to the Jamblang Village Government, Pokdarwis, the youth, local mural artists, as well as the surrounding community, who have actively participated in all stages of the activities. Appreciation is also conveyed to Muhammadiyah University of Cirebon, which has provided academic support and funding in the implementation of this program. Not forgetting to express appreciation to the Program of the Directorate of Research and Community Service (DPPM) of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (Kemdiktisaintek). Collaboration with the sustainable tourism awareness group in

Jamblang Village, Jamblang Subdistrict, Cirebon Regency. Organized by LPPM Muhammadiyah University Cirebon. This Community Service activity is conducted under the Community-Based Empowerment Scheme, within the scope of Community Partnership Empowerment, and focuses on the field of defense and economic security in line with the DPPM 2025 framework.

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