

POWER DYNAMICS IN THE ARTS SPONSORSHIP: ACTIVITIES IN BANDUNG AND YOGYAKARTA DURING COVID-19

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Received: 19th January 2024/ **Revised:** 31st March 2024/ **Accepted:** 17th April 2024

How to Cite: Aviandy, M., Fajarwati, A. A. S., Alkatiri, Z., Yulianto, K., & Setiawan, H. (2024). power dynamics in the arts sponsorship: Activities in Bandung and Yogyakarta during COVID-19. *Humaniora*, 15(1), 11-20. <https://doi.org/10.21512/humaniora.v15i1.11164>

ABSTRACT

The research objectively analyzed artists' actions and strategic reactions in the urban areas of Bandung and Yogyakarta in Indonesia during the extremely turbulent COVID-19 pandemic from March 2020 to early 2021. The pandemic greatly impacted the lives of artists and practitioners because of stringent governmental prohibitions that prohibited public art events. The research examined practitioners' experiences concerning their reliance or autonomy from government funding when engaging in arts-related endeavors. The research methodology was based on gathering data from social media and field investigations; a comprehensive collection of posters, photos, and relevant notes was compiled using a cultural studies framework. In addition, interviews were performed with arts practitioners and communities, specifically examining their involvement on social media platforms. A detailed investigation was conducted by carefully analyzing the interview data to clarify the differences between art practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta. It is found that the research distinguishes between individuals who receive government sponsorship and those who operate independently. It enhances the overall comprehension of power dynamics between arts practitioners and the government in the distinct setting of the COVID-19 epidemic, including those who operated autonomously. The research utilizes a cultural studies framework to examine the power dynamics between artists and the government in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: power dynamics, arts sponsorship, art practitioners

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic entered Indonesia in March 2020 (WHO in Rum, Adiputera, & Nandyatama, 2020). In response to this global pandemic, like many countries, Indonesia is taking diverse measures to prevent COVID-19 from spreading on a massive scale by minimizing and regulating social mobility (Olivia, Gibson, & Nasrudin, 2020). This significantly impacts all sectors, including the arts in Bandung and Yogyakarta (Supriatna, 2020). The research aims to explore the strategies of arts practitioners in navigating

through the pandemic. The research emphasizes how art communities use existing platforms to strengthen and elaborate their creative pursuits without the support of the central or local governments.

Before the pandemic, various art practitioners and communities throughout Indonesia receive regular financial assistance from the central and local governments to support their activities. Despite this, many of them refuse government sponsorship. One reason is to avoid government intervention or influence on their creative work. Besides this, bureaucratic obstacles prevent some practitioners from receiving

government sponsorship. Another reason is to avoid the social label of fund beggars.

Bandung and Yogyakarta are chosen as the research sites because these two cities are well-known in Indonesia for their thriving art-related activities organized by both individual art practitioners and members of art communities. Furthermore, there are numerous public spaces such as the museums, studios, galleries, performance buildings, and cafés for arts activities in both cities (Panjaitan, Pojani, & Darchen, 2022). Meanwhile, UNESCO has recognized the Special Region of Yogyakarta as a creative city due to its rich culture and the existence of many arts communities (Wahyudi & Ratnasari, 2016).

The research is essential because very little attention is given to the arts and culture sector during the pandemic compared to the health sector. The objective of the research is to question several phenomena regarding the activities of arts practitioners during the pandemic in relation to the following research questions: (1) What driving factors and strategies have contributed to the ongoing existence and sustainability of arts-related activities during the COVID-19 pandemic? (2) How do power relations play out between art practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta and the authorities during the pandemic? To answer those research questions, data on arts-related activities are collected from the two cities from March to the end of October 2020. The informants who participated in the research are fine arts practitioners who work as individuals and on behalf of communities.

The creativity of a city depends on several factors, including a good economy, professional community structure, public infrastructure, transportation network, higher education institutions, consumer and producer services, and the establishment of networking communities (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2004). Some of these factors can be found in Bandung and Yogyakarta. In addition, these two cities meet the requirements for a creative city: the presence of creative entrepreneurs, a creative environment, and a network of creative workers (Gu, Domer, & O'Connor, 2021). Both cities, indeed, have a long history of developing their creative economies based on their own principles. In fact, over the years, arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta have worked independently without the involvement of authorities in the arts and culture sector. Both cities have well-established networks of arts practitioners and have even been successful in building performance venues without government support. Regional arts councils exist in these cities, but these state-established institutions are deemed less prestigious than independent arts practitioners who work beyond their reach; rather than the regional arts councils, universities can be said to play a more important role in developing the culture of a creative city. Students have a vital role in ensuring a city's liveliness and disseminating knowledge to stakeholders. Thus, compared to regional arts councils, the involvement of students must be more significant for developing a creative culture (Musterd

& Ostendorf, 2004).

Located in West Java Province, 180 kilometers away from the capital city of Indonesia, Bandung is often referred to as the home of popular arts (Lengauer, 2021; Martin-Iverson, 2021). In general, both the students and alums of the Fine Arts Study Program of Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) have contributed ideas and artworks to the modern art scene in Bandung and Indonesia. As a city that frequently presents various creative events and cultural products loved by Indonesian youths, Bandung is known as a creative city and a smart city (Larasati & Gu, 2020). Yogyakarta is located 565 kilometers away from Jakarta. The Special Region is reputable for its traditional arts heritage, mainly because the Palace of Yogyakarta Sultanate stands tall and remains a cultural symbol. At the same time, this city has demonstrated its uniqueness in revitalizing traditional arts in a modern context.

In their latest research, Gomer, O'Connor, and Gu (2021) have drawn a line between independent and major-label musicians (Gu, Domer, & O'Connor, 2021). These two groups of musicians have been impacted differently by the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on musicians in China, their case study shows that musicians belonging to major record labels are not significantly impacted because they were supported by the government; in fact, they are state employees who share a space in official online channels. In contrast, independent musicians are left with neither access to income nor the opportunity to express themselves in either private or public spaces. Their room for creativity will shrink further if their works criticize the government or cross the cultural lines regulated by the Chinese government. During the COVID-19 pandemic, such dichotomy is clearly identifiable in their roles, art expressions, and identity.

According to Hall (2020), power is not always bound to the concept of state; instead, it can spring out of various community practices. In Indonesia's arts landscape, art power is highly associated with the recognition of artistic works by 'the people in Jakarta'. This is understandable as this capital city has many arts-related institutions established by the central government, including prestigious art spaces such as the state-owned National Gallery, which is dominantly highlighted in Indonesian art discourses. Other than that, mainstream media publications consistently focus on Jakarta-related coverage. Hence, in practice, Jakarta-based arts practitioners earn more power than their counterparts in Bandung and Yogyakarta. In this case, Hall's concept of the 'black man burden' is applicable to power relations in the Indonesian scene, albeit with a loose translation into 'non-Jakartan burden'. Consistent with what Hall (2020) has suggested, power, hegemony, and discourses are constantly related. More specifically, power is related to historicity. In the context of arts, Jakarta's status as the center of the country implies its power and representative position of the state, as evident in the ubiquitous presence of institutions established by the

authorities. Jakarta's influential power is constructed by Suharto's New Order's patronage model and resembles the authoritarian regime in South Korea (Lee, 2019).

Currently, the central power of authority (Jakarta) participates in enabling arts-related activities. However, assistance from Jakarta is exclusively granted to activities of national cultural interests as well as arts practitioners who maintain close relationships with their power networks. The locus of the research is arts practitioners who avoid any intervention or co-optation from the central power of authority. This is observable in the absence of the government sponsor's logo on the posters of arts-related activities organized by art practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta.

On a related note, the pandemic has forced musicians and artists to move to online media to showcase their works. Seetharaman (2020) has pointed out that various online platforms have been used by musicians. His research also unveils that the factor of adaptive ability determines how arts practitioners survive the COVID-19 pandemic. Platform shifting, as studied by Vandenberg, Berghman, and Schaap (2021), is not merely about moving music performances from stages to online channels, but also about carrying the spirit of collective consciousness from art enthusiasts.

The ongoing pandemic can be regarded as both a disruption and a revolution in music creation, marketing, distribution, and consumption (Urkevich, 2020). This disruptive period affects the music industry and other forms of arts, but it somehow brings about an opportunity for arts practitioners to 'reclaim' public spaces and encourage a transformation in either authority-supported or independent art creation processes. In one research, Comunian et al. (in Vincent, 2023) have found that the pandemic caused financial losses for stakeholders of the Melbourne music performance industry, particularly stakeholders of classical music concerts. On that basis, the Australian Federal Government helps ease their difficulties by providing a digital platform to continue their activities during the pandemic (see Bannet et al. as cited in Vincent, 2023).

Several research works have suggested that the art world remains resilient during the COVID-19 pandemic because artists support each other during such a difficult period. The case of Bandung and Yogyakarta art scene resonates with the research findings, where local artists support each other without receiving governmental assistance. Bonin-Rodriguez and Vakharia (2020) have suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic has proven that the art world is resilient to face the crisis, specifically in the context of arts entrepreneurship, which is over time considered the source of resilience, optimization, and opportunity for art creation. Scott Blackshire asserts that the pandemic has encouraged arts practitioners to improve and maintain their content by using media technology to reach their audience (Bonin-Rodriguez & Vakharia, 2020). The pandemic has also given birth to a new trend of artists supporting their fellow artists

by working pro bono in crowdfunding campaigns. In Linda Essig's opinion, art workers in Europe have been collectively involved in a variety of social actions more for the welfare of the members of their network rather than for championing market exchange (Bonin-Rodriguez & Vakharia, 2020). A similar phenomenon is evident among Indonesian arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta. The difference is that they are independent arts practitioners who work without any help from the central government or the local authorities.

Those factors is underscored throughout the research, in addition to the significant differences in practices and strategies taken by art practitioners in different countries as reported in the current literature body. The literature reviews result in two major findings: (1) There are social, political, and cultural differences between creative culture communities in European, Australian, and Asian cities and those in Indonesia (represented by Bandung and Yogyakarta); and (2) there are similar situations and conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic that have impacted arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta, but the way they fight for their existence in arts can differ from those of arts practitioners abroad. Furthermore, the research observes the power relations in the art sphere through case studies in Bandung and Yogyakarta during the pandemic.

METHODS

The qualitative research gathers data from various sources related to arts activities in Bandung and Yogyakarta during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those sources include news stories, posters, audio-visual materials, books, notes, artwork, and recordings of online performances. Over seven months, 226 posters relating to fine arts, music, and performing art events are collected in Bandung and Yogyakarta. To narrow down the scope of analysis, the researchers focus on fine arts, which constitutes the majority of the data.

Data are also collected from social media, field observations, and in-depth interviews with 15 arts practitioners, consisting of individuals and members of arts communities. Eight respondents from Bandung and seven from Yogyakarta participated in the research (Table 1).

They represent arts practitioners in the two cities, including those who receive government sponsorship and refuse funding from the central authority or the local governments. Most informants are visual artists, so the observations revolve around fine arts activities compared to other art forms. Semi-structured and open-ended interviews are conducted in the informants' residences, many of which also frequently function as art studios and galleries. The analysis applies a cultural studies approach focusing on the power relations between the central authority of art and arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta.

Table 1 List of Respondents

No.	Profession	City
1	Painter and academic	Bandung
2	Traditional musician	Bandung
3	Theatrical actor and academic	Bandung
4	Fine artist and academic	Bandung
5	Street artist	Bandung
6	Fine artist and art gallery owner	Bandung
7	Fine artist and organizer	Bandung
8	Fine artist and writer	Yogyakarta
9	Art project organiser	Yogyakarta
10	Fine artist and head of an art community	Yogyakarta
11	Fine artist and art gallery owner	Yogyakarta
12	Community-based fine artist	Yogyakarta
13	Owner of a gallery	Yogyakarta
14	Bureaucrat in tourism sector	Yogyakarta
15	Academic and curator	Yogyakarta

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

One of the most significant changes that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to people's lives is the restrictions on direct interactions. In this case, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed people's lifestyles, and such a change is not brought about by the power of authority but by natural law (Reyes-Martínez & Andrade-Guzmán, 2023). In response to the pandemic, arts practitioners devise their own strategies, including using digital media technology. During the pandemic, they safely continue their activities and production by working from home, following the new form of global lifestyles. Digital technology has provided alternative solutions for arts practitioners during the pandemic (Seetharaman, 2020; Vandenberg, Berghman, & Schaap, 2021). Despite the restrictions on social mobility, by working from home and using cutting-edge information technology, arts practitioners could solve many problems. They are easily connected, and working from home is more practical because it is cost-effective and time-efficient, as well as needing only limited human labor. Besides, face-to-face interaction is unnecessary for millennial and Gen Z arts practitioners.

The use of internet-connected applications enabled Work-from-Home (WFH) and e-learning policies. The Fourth Industrial Revolution has changed how people communicate through chatting and conferencing apps, such as WhatsApp Group, Google Meet, Google Classroom, Zoom, and WebEx, which are suddenly being used globally. The internet has saved human beings from the adverse effects of isolation. Even though it is a virtual activity, communication can still be maintained. Social media superiority is supported by three essential infrastructure elements: technology connectivity, virtual (cloud-based) data storage, and mobile devices. Almost all human activities now depend heavily on these cutting-

edge communication technologies.

Thus, it is understandable that the development of contemporary art is heading towards virtual art on cell phone or laptop screens. Everything is foldable using media such as sounds, images, space, time, distance, and texts to express emotions. The screen offers the possibility to accommodate arts practitioners' creative ideas with its representative and simulative nature. Representative screens offer different realities with clearer and broader visuals. Screens, simulatively, also omit the borders of virtual reality, leading to the reciprocal connection between people and technology. The communication between users and art objects is then mediated by icons, graphics, designs, colors, light, and animation, which constitute the virtual language.

Arts practitioners use at least three digital-based art variants during the pandemic: (1) social media-based arts, (2) showroom digital multimedia (SDM), and (3) virtual reality. Social media-based art events are usually operated using the platform's features, such as likes, comments, images, audio-visual files, and texts. Meanwhile, virtual reality is the development of Showroom Digital Multimedia (SDM), which leads to pseudo-reality, emphasizing the simulative aspect more. For instance, a design may imitate the room's interior, and the audience may feel as if they are inside the accurate display of a room or in front of a stage. The upcoming sections will elaborate on how arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta use digital media technology to operate during the pandemic.

Although art practitioners utilize technology, the pandemic impacts the staging of events, including musical performances, literary discussions, and fine arts exhibitions. Those events have to be postponed or even canceled entirely. However, arts practitioners see this situation as challenging in maintaining their practice. They also realize that collaborative working is equally essential, and it would be better to involve practitioners of other kinds of art in their creation process.

From the researchers' observations in the field, there are several phenomena. First, there is a shift in the use of platforms from physical to virtual media; second, the shifting nature of arts-related programs towards charity; and third, the challenge to reformulate creativity in arts by not only considering arts as tools for aesthetic expressions but also giving attention to their social functions. Some online collaborative art performances are held. For example, activists from the Bandung Drawing Institute, whose members are graphics artists, arranged online exhibitions. The total sales obtained from these exhibitions are distributed to their fellow artists in their network. Some other exemplary art practitioners also arrange similar activities.

Another example is set by Herry Dim, an arts practitioner who carries out a series of activities titled *Sehati Bagi Seniman* (One Heart for Artists). Through this program, he distributes nine basic needs to almost 200 arts practitioners in Bandung. The donation is collected from donors through the fundraising platform

Kitabisa.com. Other arts practitioners organize an 'Art Quarantine' exhibition as a social care program for the practitioners of their fellow artists. Nevertheless, they provide a platform to share the experience of responding to the pandemic instead of material support. This program, which ran thrice, encourages arts practitioners to keep recording live events and motivating people from their homes through *'Pameran Online Senirupa Karantina'* (Quarantine Fine Arts Online Exhibition). Interestingly, these joint activities are carried out without the help of the city council or the central government.

Hence, it is evident that arts practitioners in Bandung keep themselves involved in arts-related activities despite the pandemic. For instance, Sastra Buruan.co, a Bandung-based literature/art media, organizes a colossal poetry reading involving 70 arts practitioners, writers, musicians, actors, fine arts artists, and videographers based on a poem titled 'The Great Silence of Human Beings' written by Faisal Kamandobat. Revolving around the poem's straightforward reference to the pandemic, the event is held for two months. The final work, titled *#bertahandirumah*, is aired on Buruan.co's YouTube channel. The researchers' fieldwork has found that this activity is a direct response to the low number of arts-related activities sponsored by the central power of authority during the pandemic, mainly the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, the Directorate General of Culture at the Ministry of Education and Culture, and Jakarta Arts Council.

Similar collaborative projects are also conducted in fine arts, thus signifying solidarity among arts practitioners who share the same artistic interests. One of the projects' initiators is Isa Perkasa, who initiated an exhibition titled 'Artists Impacted by Pandemic: West Java's Fine Arts for West Java Artists'. Aired from the Cultural Centre Building, this online event is held on 26 June-26 July 2020 and attended by 125 fine art artists from all over West Java. The displayed works are oil and non-oil paintings. This program is a charity event; thirty percent of the sold works are donated to local fine artists severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and seventy percent goes to the fine artists whose works are sold during the exhibition. Similar to the previously mentioned event, this project is not supported by either the local authority or the central government.

The research reveals how art practitioners reflected on economic conditions and responded to real-life conditions during the pandemic. For instance, based on the accounts of theatre artists and musicians of the modern genre, it is discovered that art practitioners managed to survive by doing any available commission works. Furthermore, the examples show different responses to the challenging economic situation. On one hand, some people opt for a temporary change of profession, while others remain in their profession while looking for other financial opportunities from external sources of income. There is also an attitude distinction between the pre-digital

generation and digital natives. More specifically, the former group appears to have a more pessimistic outlook. However, in general, arts practitioners manage to adapt to communication-related changes brought about by the development of technology.

Moreover, the research finds that the activities of arts practitioners pivoted to the struggles to survive and their unwavering ability to inspire and entertain. There is a sense of independence and solidarity among them, as shown by a fine artist who created masks using the pattern of the Indonesian national flag to be distributed to his neighbors. Along with his friends, he also initiates two online exhibitions titled 'Artists Supporting Artists' and shares their earnings from the exhibitions with their fellow artists. Initially, some arts practitioners believe that the local government would provide them with financial assistance, but they have yet to receive the aid. They understand that they have to rely on their strength and quality. Thus, this pandemic-driven situation has also influenced how artwork is produced, particularly with the absence of sponsorship from local authorities.

The field observations in Bandung also show that art practitioners could survive without the support of the provincial or municipal government. Before the pandemic, they have always been independent in organizing their activities. Although a provincial art council has been established, its tasks are wide-ranging, focusing more on traditional arts. This condition encourages modern urban arts practitioners in Bandung to work independently without involving the local government, as implied by the non-existent government logo among the list of donors. Instead, they are usually sponsored by private parties, allowing them more flexibility and freedom to voice their artistic expressions.

With the help of private donors, art events are made possible. Amidst the pandemic, Bandung-based arts practitioners organize their annual Bandung Art Month fine arts exhibition for a month (20 August-20 September 2020) with the theme '*Edankeun*' and involving 58 fine artists. This exhibition showcases the collaboration of fine artists (i.e., design, painting, craft, and sculpture) in numerous online and offline locations. The central and local authorities supporting this event are the Directorate General of Culture and the Bandung Office for Culture and Tourism. Meanwhile, the musicians held a music event called *Home Music Festival* on 14-23 August 2020, involving 56 musicians from a few cities (mainly Bandung), and the event is broadcast daily on YouTube.

The pictures, videos, interviews, and related documents collected for the research reveal that arts practitioners in Bandung could solve the obstacles they face due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Those data sufficiently prove a 'new normal' to which arts practitioners are accustomed. For example, information on their activities is delivered in diverse poster formats. It can be concluded that arts practitioners could keep their creativity alive despite the pandemic, as Bonin-Rodriguez and Vakharia

(2020) asserted, by using information technology and playing a role in charity. They also embrace similar slogans on their events, such as 'online performance', 'race with the pandemic', 'because we are families', 'COVID-19 Art Virtual Museum', 'quarantine', and 'online seminar series'. Additionally, the interviews reveal that for some arts practitioners, the pandemic is not an obstacle but a challenge that could pave the way to new forms of creativity.

Like their counterparts in Bandung, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, arts practitioners in Yogyakarta do not lose their creativity. Although numerous arts practitioners complain about the lack of creative space due to the pandemic, such complaints are only heard initially. Over time, fine arts activists have adapted to the situation by revitalizing the fine arts in Yogyakarta. They have tried to find strategies that enabled them to practice arts through online platforms. Their goal is to keep arts-related activities running.

From April to October 2020, as many as 78 fine arts and performing arts activities in Yogyakarta are documented. Most of them, particularly the ones held between March and August 2020, are conducted online. However, as of September 2020, a few artists and arts-related activists have returned to offline programs with strict health protocols. In general, arts practitioners prefer to do online exhibitions on social media, such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Meanwhile, arts-related activities that require frequent interaction with the audience are carried out through video conferencing platforms, such as Zoom and Google Meet.

A fine arts activity titled '*Pitulungan*', held in Yogyakarta on 7 March 2020, uses an offline format by adhering to health protocols. The organizer has stated that despite its offline format, there are no serious obstacles, and the audience is as enthusiastic as before the pandemic. This fact is validated in the statistics of the audience count until the last day of the exhibition on 21 March 2020. Two other arts-related activities, namely 'Sense of Artitude' and 'Exhibition of Abalokuswa' are also conducted offline with no obstacles reported. Although the first wave of the pandemic is at its peak then, the audience's enthusiasm does not wane. Unfortunately, an exhibition organized by Sangkring Art Project titled 'The Beauty of Art' is held almost concurrently, garnering a different enthusiasm, as the number of visitors declined significantly towards the end. This situation leads the organizer to look for alternatives to make the artwork available to the public. They then decided to provide an exhibition catalog on Sangkring Art Project's website so that the public could appreciate the artists' works from the comfort of their homes.

The change in people's attitude at the beginning of the pandemic compels arts practitioners in Yogyakarta to search for the right strategies to deal with the pandemic. The fact that the number of audiences gradually declines during offline programs finally makes art practitioners expand their exhibitions to the online scene. Social media platforms are the

most viable alternatives because most audiences are users.

Entering April 2020, when the number of COVID-19 cases in Yogyakarta escalates, social gatherings are strictly banned. Some of the public prefer to isolate themselves at home, moving the space for their activities to online communication platforms. Although the pandemic has affected arts-related activities, arts practitioners need to keep making art for several reasons: the publication of their works, the continuation of artwork creation in Yogyakarta, and economic sustenance. In other words, they need to maintain their productivity in the middle of the pandemic with the support of IT-based promotional activities.

Presenting arts-related activities online can help them overcome obstacles. The researchers' interviews with art event organizers reveal technical constraints, such as the events' limited duration, the Internet's high cost, and the lack of promotions. Consequently, the organizers often have to re-connect with the audience to arouse their interest. Additionally, internet signal disruptions were unavoidable as not all audiences or resource persons had a stable Internet connection. Such frequent occurrences of internet issues also directly impact the number of participants.

From field observations and interviews, it is also found that online exhibitions affect the interest of art collectors. In terms of artworks, virtual fine arts exhibitions cause curators to lose interest in appreciating or collecting artworks. As a result, the purchasing power weakens, obstructing fine artists' potential earnings. One reason for less curatorial interest is the inability to check the artwork in person. The quality of visual appearance is highly affected by the quality of devices and networks being used.

Due to the fading enthusiasm from visitors, since July 2020, arts practitioners and event organizers in Yogyakarta have been conducting offline arts-related activities while applying strict health protocols. Unfortunately, the events are unsuccessful, as there is no substantial quantitative improvement in the number of audiences or the number of sold artworks.

The organizer of the Yogy Annual Art #5 (ArtJog Resilience), an event conducted from August 2020 to November 2020, faces the same problem. Despite the health protocol and the arrangement for three batches of carefully scheduled programs per day, their audiences seem to have lost interest, so the number of visitors is equally low. In contrast, in the previous year, the same event managed to attract thousands of visitors even during its opening program. Due to this circumstance, the organizing committee recommends the audience who remains interested in the event programs run through the exhibition catalog posted on their website. The organizer of Nandur Sawung #7 encounters the same experience. It is essential, though, to note that the central and regional authorities sponsor those significant art exhibitions.

Fine arts activists mainly utilize virtual reality. 'The Rona Rana 19 Exhibition held in July 2020

displays 169 artworks designed by Photography students from the Faculty of Arts and Recording Media, Yogyakarta Institute of the Arts. The FKY 2020 Exhibition titled ‘Silent Roots amidst the Noise’ showcases 33 artists’ works across generations and media. The exhibition is open to virtual visitors and limited to offline visitors who must comply with health protocol regulations. A similar path is taken by the organizer of the Sumonar 2020 Exhibition: Art Festival of Light titled ‘Mantra Lumina’. Semantically, the spell symbolizes the hope uttered, visualized, and voiced, while Lumina refers to the light unit. Semantically, ‘Mantra Lumina’ would mean ‘hope for the new light to come’. All artists involved in this exhibition display works exploring light. The platform for the art performances, which is developed during the pandemic, plays its role in filling the hollow space in virtual arts. Digital platforms have accommodated the showcase of new works.

A different kind of event is ‘Monopoly: Asylum Edition’, an exploration of virtual dramaturgy created by Andreas Dwianto as part of the celebration of the ‘UrFear Huhu and Multitude of Peer Gynt’. The emphasis on more intimate relations between the audience and the screen has captivated the audience as they are actively participating throughout the performance. The art exhibitions and performances in Yogyakarta during the pandemic benefit from utilizing virtual technology. The same effort is made for the Jogja Net Audio 2020. This music event is initiated by a group of fine artists named ‘Wock the Rock and Friends’ following the electrifying emergence of cross-art expression media. The screen functions as a substitute for a natural stage in this performance, creating a new experience different from an offline performance. Nearly all the arts activists are students and alumni of the Yogyakarta Institute of the Arts. Like prior events being discussed, they organize this event independently without the government’s support.

Furthermore, field observations and interviews disclose that a few galleries, such as Gallery Lorong and Ruang Mess 56, continue organizing workshops, discussions on artwork, artwork sales, and visitations to artists’ studios through 3D videos. Langgeng Art also initiates similar activities. Cemeti Gallery organizes a series of discussions divided into six episodes and a joint activity called ‘Keep the Fire on #6’ with the theme ‘Huru Hara: Public Pandemic!’. The discussions are held on Instagram from June to August 2020. In line with their counterparts in Bandung, Yogyakarta arts practitioners use certain slogans to name their events, for example, ‘Unload the Inventory Room’, ‘Masker for All’, and ‘Survive Garage’. All the events held by the galleries and studios run without the government’s support, as evident in the non-existent governmental organization logos among donors showcased in the event posters. This is understandable since galleries are owned and operated by individuals and independent organizations, especially after the New Order Era (1968-1998), which witness objections against the intervention from the power of authority

towards arts-related activities. Despite the limitations during the pandemic, arts practitioners still work hard to maintain their existence and be independent of the influence of the central power of authority, particularly in the arts and culture sector.

Table 2 Arts-Related Activities during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Bandung and Yogyakarta

No	City	Fine Arts	Performing Arts	Film and Photography
1	Bandung	24	44	6
2	Yogyakarta	78	16	9
Total		102	52	15

Table 2 shows the dynamics of arts-related activities in Bandung and Yogyakarta. It reveals that fine arts activities are more prominent in Yogyakarta than in Bandung. In contrast, more activities pertaining to performing arts, specifically music, are organized in Bandung than in Yogyakarta.

Applying the cultural studies framework, this discussion revolves around how arts practitioners in the two cities generate their own ‘centers’ and choose not to become the periphery of the power of authority. For them, Bandung and Yogyakarta art practitioners regard government organizations as institutions that operate aloof from the practitioners’ activities, as these powerful institutions offer almost no contribution to their welfare, regardless of whether a pandemic is ongoing or not, which offers almost no contribution to their welfare, before or after the pandemic.

Arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta display their agency in creating a unique positioning in the arts field in Indonesia. Some of them position themselves as arts practitioners who are not controlled by the power of authority. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Industry and the Directorate General of Culture, two institutional extensions of the central government, tend to provide grants to arts practitioners in Jakarta and other cities in other provinces with patrons who significantly influence each region’s art scene. Regardless of the lacking amount of governmental assistance, arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta do not see grants from the Directorate General of Culture (at the national level) and the Offices of Culture (at the provincial level as the central government’s collaborators) as something they ought to obtain.

The grants are seen as financial support only, while the aspect of cultural direction (i.e., the adherence to the ‘national culture’) is not sacred for arts practitioners in those two cities (Gu, Domer, & O’Connor, 2021). It suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic positions arts practitioners as evaluators of art values, both on the commercial side and as the ‘state’ arts. The arts practitioners in the research are independent from the authorities (i.e., the Directorate General of Culture and local governments). Instead,

they choose to lean towards the opposition side and create new centers of arts-related activities during the pandemic, without any intervention from the government's power (the state) in terms of either financial assistance (e.g., grant funds) or cultural directions (i.e., the adherence to the 'national culture').

With their independent initiatives, arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta have proven to be able to voice their criticism to the central government. They continue to work, exist, survive, and even support each other in solidarity by disregarding state intervention. One notable example is the 'Charity Concert of Didi Kempot' (held on 11 April 2020) in Yogyakarta, which is organized without the support of the local government but sponsored by a private broadcasting company (i.e., Kompas TV) that manages to gather funds amounting to IDR5.3 billion (approximately £285,000).

The art practitioner's initiative is understandable as it is in accordance with the spirit of the Reformation Era (1998-present), during which arts practitioners in the two cities never asked for any direction, in terms of either moral support or financial assistance, from the state. Art practitioners' independence from the state has developed since the start of the authoritarian New Order Era and further thrived in the Reformation Era, with a more democratic and flexible culture in the society. As self-supported movements, Indonesian art practitioners' initiatives have long been a part of independent undercurrent arts practitioners; they do not need to ask for protection from the central authority or local governments in showcasing their artistic expressions and creations.

When art is practiced independently, the role of the central and local governments becomes irrelevant. Here, art practitioners continuously attempt to liberate themselves from the central periphery and the patron-client relationship with authority. Instead, their arts-related activities have become a periphery that advances towards new art centers, which must compete directly with the art power holders in Jakarta. The power of the state, characterized by grants and the national culture, seems to be losing its relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the two cities being studied. Unfortunately, since the Reformation Era, the state has sustained its old paradigm in understanding the trajectory of the development of arts-related activities in Indonesia by acting as mere patrons of culture. The arts practitioners challenge this old paradigm in their own way, especially through veiled resistance, as found in their event posters, which do not include the logo of the governments among the list of benefactors.

A few events mentioned as examples in this article are initiated by independent galleries in Bandung and Yogyakarta, which further confirms that the state has gradually been losing its relevance for arts practitioners during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is almost definitive that they are new competitors in the arts field in Indonesia. For them, the state's role (i.e., central and local governments) is inferior and even irrelevant to the undercurrent culture, which obviously

does not need the government's intervention as either the benefactor or the main determinant of mainstream cultural direction. For those arts practitioners, the COVID-19 pandemic bestows an opportunity into their eager hands to prove their relevance and existence outside the state's corridor.

The COVID-19 pandemic that first entered Indonesia in March 2020 has significantly impacted people's lives. The government's decision to implement large-scale social restrictions, which essentially forbade activities with any potential of gathering crowds, has affected arts practitioners from diverse fields, including those who work and live in Bandung and Yogyakarta. From in-depth interviews with a few arts practitioners, it is revealed that they devise their own strategies to respond to this pandemic.

Once the art practitioners become aware that the pandemic would significantly decrease their income and present them with unending uncertainty, they decide to enact creative strategies to respond to such difficult conditions. Interestingly, these art practitioners' creativity during the pandemic is channeled not only for economic purposes but also as a source of enjoyment for the arts practitioners and the people around them. Despite being geographically separated, art communities in Bandung and Yogyakarta have similar ways and mechanisms of responding to the limitations they have to adapt to. During the pandemic, they are able to transform public art spaces into virtual performances using social media. The challenging condition encourages these art practitioners to develop innovations and creations relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic at the grassroots level.

Assessment of the promotional materials of the events reveals that performances and discussions on arts-related issues are held almost every week in the two cities. On average, arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta conduct two to three events per week in each field of arts, with or without sponsorship. Although they can be considered informal workers, they generally belong to the urban middle class, which has access to the use of information technology and social media. They also have valuable sources of social capital in the form of essential connections and their art community. Unfortunately, the advantages of art practitioners with technological proficiency and social capital are not shared by traditional artists who heavily depend on patrons and have a limited social network. Being dependent on patron invitations, traditional artists face the serious impacts of the pandemic, especially considering that most of them belong to a pre-digital generation who obviously cannot compete with urban millennial arts practitioners accustomed to using cutting-edge digital technology.

CONCLUSIONS

The research finds that arts-related activities pertain to the COVID-19 pandemic comprise approximately 75% of cases. The events orchestrated

by arts practitioners have consistently demonstrated more creativity. Several of them are able to collaborate within or across disciplines of artistic expression, as evidenced by the operations of a limited number of galleries and independent arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta. Cultural products are produced due to their collective utilization of digital platforms, including webinars and live and recorded versions of musical performances.

In the absence of assistance from corporate social responsibility initiatives, philanthropists, or local governments, arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta who do not wish to be intervened must rely on one another for solidarity in the face of an uncertain situation and strict health protocols and social distancing policies. Arts practitioners in these two cities have exhibited a persistent reluctance to accept government grants for quite some time. They exhibit a preference for collaborating with private or independent entities. They argue that accepting government sponsorships, including the authority's logo on promotional posters and banners for their events, could incite suspicion among arts practitioners that central or local authorities have appropriated their artworks or that the events are orchestrated to further the government's political objectives.

The art practitioners' responses vary, as shown by their artwork. However, almost all of them are concerned about how the government's COVID-19 pandemic crisis management neglects humanity, and they criticize the government's unresponsiveness. Such concerns and criticisms are evident in the themes and topics of the events represented in the posters. The creative phenomena of arts practitioners in Bandung and Yogyakarta during the pandemic can be understood as their creative capacity to deal with the obstacles surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic with their strategies, and independent from any support from the authorities.

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