



# Walasuji's Transformation Opportunity in Today's Life

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**Abstract.** The existence of tradition in today's life faces many challenges to be able to continue to live. Likewise, with Walasuji, a tradition that was born from the Bugis Makassar community, carries a number of local wisdom values that should be preserved. This research was conducted to find out how Walasuji's transformation opportunities are based on the characteristics of his current condition. This study uses the Innovation Guiding Pyramid method. All data gathered qualitatively using interviews, observations, and literature studies. The results show that there are 3 factors intervening Walasuji tradition. Based on that, transformation strategy given as follow: (1) Maintaining its Culture's Material, (2) Adding its traditional environment, (3) Removing/replacing the old Artefacts, (4) Changing its teaching's tradition. The strategies can be used as "Design Guide" for designer in order to create innovative solution for the tradition. Hence, we suggest to consider the "maintained" area first, then the other elements follow.

**Keywords:** Innovation, Tradition, Transformation, Walasuji

## 1 Introduction

Walasuji is a tradition that was born from the Bugis people of Makassar, South Sulawesi. This tradition has been passed down from generation to generation as a sign as well as a celebration for Bugis Makassar residents who are getting married. Unfortunately, the large gate which is a Walasuji artefact is becoming increasingly rare at weddings for Bugis-Makassarese youths. One reason for this is due to the times and the impact of the disruption era [1]. Today's youth prefer the trend of modern wedding decorations, along with the easier exchange of information in cyberspace. In fact, this tradition has a number of values that should be preserved such as Gotong Royong, Communicative, and Honesty so it certainly needs to be preserved [2]. The challenge is how to make this tradition adaptable to changing times which is a necessity?

In fact, traditions are flexible and can develop between generations [3]. On this basis, it is necessary to consider the aspects of modernity, novelty, or interventions that occur so that these traditions can adapt and survive. Several researchers in Indonesia have tried to formulate various methods so that traditions can transform. For example, A. Nugraha formulated the ATUMICS method, by combining elements of modernity, tradition, and motivation for the transformation [4]. This method can be used from the point of view of designers who want to use tradition with various motivations, such as for the sake of artistic expression, business, social, and others. However, this method

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does not consider the intervention that occurs, but rather the subjective motivation of the designer or researcher. By considering the interventions that occurred, F. Ciptandi formulated the Pyramid Guide Innovation method as a guide for designers or researchers who want to try to transform a tradition [5]. Because the problem of the Walasuji tradition is closely related to intervention due to the times, this method is considered suitable for use as an analytical method. The output of this study is a proposed transformation strategy for the Walasuji tradition that designers can use as a guide for designing innovative products at the next research stage.

## 2 Method

Data collection methods included literature studies, observations, and in-depth interviews with 1 Bugis Makassar elder figure and 6 Bugis-Makassar residents which lived in Mattiro Sompe subdistrict, Pinrang regency, Makassar City, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The respondent's data are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** List of respondents of the research

Respondent	Status	Age
Mr. A. Ongkeng	Elder	40-50
Nursyamsi Sulaeman	Denizen, will held a marriage	20-30
Ima Devianti	Denizen, will held a marriage	20-30
Nur Alfian	Denizen, will held a marriage	20-30
Hariani Talib	Denizen, will held a marriage	20-30
Ical	Denizen	20-30
Suparman	Denizen	30-40

All the collected data will be discussed in triangulation way, in the frame of Innovation Guiding Pyramid method. This method aims to create innovations in traditional products with reference to the ideology that traditions can transform so that they can adapt to changing times [6]. This method has several stages, namely [7]:

1. Identification of the "4 fundamental ground" of the Walasuji tradition;
2. Analyze what factors are interfering with the current Walasuji tradition;
3. Analysis of cross design hybridity on the structure of the Walasuji Innovation Pyramid. Design's hybridity is 4 labels namely: modified, added, maintained, deleted. These 4 labels will be assigned to each 4 fundamental grounds of Walasuji. In the end of those steps, we will get a set of strategy as alternative to "transforming" the Walasuji tradition.

### 3 Result and Discussion

#### 3.1 4 Fundamental Grounds of Walasuji Tradition

**Traditional Artefact.** The typical artifact form of this tradition is a large gate (commonly called Baruga) made of bamboo and installed at the gate of the house of the residents who are getting married. The word Walasuji itself means "protector of Bugis princesses", which is related to the meaning of marriage. This is manifested in the form of gate artifacts and "sulappa eppa" pattern arranged along the Baruga Walasuji. The layered structure of bamboo in Baruga Walasuji has the meaning of social strata. The denser the number of folds in Walasuji, it shows that the family that is getting married has a high social stratum. Historically, Walasuji is the forerunner of *Lontara* or *Lontarak* writing [8]. Because in those days there was no such thing as pens, pencils and other types of writing instruments. The Lontara letters were originally used to write government and social regulations. Manuscripts are written on palm leaves using a stick or *kalam* made of coarse palm fiber.



Fig. 1. Sulappa eppa pattern

There is something unique in the making of this artefact. Mr. Ongkeng (an elder figure in subdistrict Mattiro Sompe) said, originally, Bugis Makassar people only make this gate using bamboo without any additional materials. They have certain techniques used to assembly each partition to form the big gate (see Figure 1) without any glues or nail, but using bamboo *pasak* (bolt or peg made from bamboo). As for the tools, they are using general carpenter tools such as saw, chisel, saw and blade [8]. As we can see in Fig. 1, the gate also has specific pattern called "sulappa eppa" which is Bugis Makassar cultural identity. Based on interview to Mr. Ongkeng, the making of walasuji has certain rules including strata statues of the brides, and people who can make the gate also certain rules and must work together in a team, ruled by the elder. The elder usually is a royal lineage of Makassar Kingdom.

**Tradition's Environment.** Based on observation, the Bugis community in Makassar (South Sulawesi) live in both coastal and upland areas. Most of them work as farmer, fisherman and merchant. In ancient times, this area was rich in bamboo plants. Many people's daily products are made of bamboo. However, modernization has made many changes to the ecological environment of the site. Based on interview, housing developments, transportation facilities such as toll roads have reduced the area for bamboo to grow. The same thing was also conveyed by Litbang Makassar (2021) which said that bamboo forest in Tana Toraja were urgently needed to be preserved. It is said that one of the factors of bamboo land reducing is because of the infrastructure development such as airport. This phenomenon of course has a great impact on the tradition, as we know that bamboo is the main material for the making of baruga Walasuji. One of the informants whose their family did not held Walasuji Tradition said it was because of bamboo material hard to find, and if they want to held it then they need to buy bamboo which is quite expensive for them. As a replacement, the family used local wedding decoration service which is cheaper and interesting for them.

Similar fact also reported in Adam's research [8] which said that the making of Walasuji will cost much money because it should be made by a large of people. For those who still want to hold walasuji, they would hire few people to reduce costs. But this act somehow changed some original value in the tradition. In the other side, the Walasuji Tradition originally only held in "marriage ceremony", not in other events. Based on this observation, we can see that there are some complex problems intervening the tradition, one of them started through its traditional environment.

**Teaching's Tradition.** Based on interview with Mr. Ongkeng, the method of transmitting tradition originally designed through the process of making baruga walasuji in a collaborative way. This is why the making of baruga Walasuji should be made by many people. Young people are invited to participate in making walasuji, starting from collecting bamboo to the manufacturing process guided by elders. During the manufacturing process, the elders will teach the manufacturing techniques as well as the philosophical meaning, symbolic meaning and teach some character values to the youths who help. Other research also said that there are several jobs divided to the team such as: cutting job, bamboo's sorting job, smoothing the bamboo's job, and assembling job. The people who are helping in the making of baruga Walasuji will be divided based on the knowledge and experiment they have before, because different family status will have different shape of the gate.

The problem is, Mr. Ongkeng said, that nowadays youths are less interested in participating the tradition. He said that young people in old time had big interest in the tradition. They will gather initiatively to help and are respect each other. Unlike young people nowadays, they prefer with their gadgets and have different interest, somehow because of technologies. Knowing this fact, the question arises whether this phenomenon has any effect to the young people of the community? Then, interview moved to the six denizens, two of them said that they know about Walasuji but not much, whereas 4 of them said they know about the symbol only but did not know about the meaning. This issue also stated in Carles's research [1] about existence of walasuji in disruptive era. He said that one of factor responsible to the diminishing understanding of the

walasuji's meaning is disruptive phenomenon. He explained that disruptive phenomenon appears because of development of information technology that effect to most of youth. Whereas, Mr. Ongkeng said that there are several values are taught to the youth represented through the process in the making of baruga Walasuji.

**Culture's Material.** Regarding to Ciptandi [7], culture's material is the meaning or spirit behind the tradition which are believed by the people. It can also be defined as any philosophical meaning in the tradition. First, we will talk about the term of "Walasuji" itself. Linguistically, Walasuji comes from the word *wala* which means separator, fence, or guard. While *suji* means princess (Bugis woman or princess). Adam also explained that Walasuji is a symbol of chastity [8]. It is expected that the Bugis people who are getting married in that house (in which the baruga Walasuji established) will be clean from religiously prohibited acts.

Along with the baruga Walasuji building, we can see rhombus pattern as shown in Fig. 1. This pattern usually called Sulapa eppa (four sides) by the community. Sulapa eppa is a mystical form of classical Bugis-Makassar belief, which symbolizes the 4 elements that make up the universe, namely water, fire, wind, and earth. Mostly people understand this symbol is what they called "Walasuji", same as all the denizen respondents answered in interview. They assume this symbol – what they called Walasuji, is the identity of their tribe, Bugis Makassar without knowing what is the meaning behind it. Although, the original Walasuji is supposed to be the making of baruga Walasuji itself in the context of celebrating marriage. So what are the values behind the making of baruga Walasuji tradition in marriage ceremony of Bugis Makassar people?

Referring to Carles's research [1], there are 5 values of character education in the Walasuji tradition, namely: Mutual cooperation, Hard Work, Discipline, Communicative and Social Care. Mutual cooperation represented in nature of activity in the making of baruga Walasuji. He explained that this process should be voluntary, while in the process many people will interact each other which will facilitate communicative manner. As we know, the making of baruga has certain rules that require discipline manner through all participants. Lastly, all the activity itself is a form of social care. From the researcher's point of view, based on observations and interviews, we conclude that the disciplinary values can be categorized as hard work, represent how the process of making a Baruga Walasuji has a number of rules and sequences that need to be carried out so that it is "legitimate" to become a Walasuji artefact. As for social care can be included in the value Gotong royong as this tradition is carried out jointly by residents. Based on this explanation, it seems that all values in cultural's material of Walasuji Tradition has likely the way of Bugis ancestors to teach some character values to their youth, which held in marriage moment.

### 3.2 Intervention Factors

In Innovation Guiding Pyramid method, there is "intervention" concept. It is believed that there is always problem intervening a tradition as life changed in modern era. So this part will talk about what are factors that intervening Walasuji tradition based on

the discussion above? In general, at least 3 intervention factors were found which caused the community to practice the Walusuji tradition less and less, namely:

**Less Bamboo Lands.** The massive Infrastructur development in past years had consumed much of bamboo land. This condition effects in less bamboo supplies the community can get. Besides, the materials will become more expensive and people will find other alternatives to replace baruga Walusuji. They feel no longer a must to held Walusuji tradition as realistic and economic factor intervered their decision.

**Modern Wedding Decoration.** Wedding decoration trend has attracted the attention of Bugis-Makassar youth. They prefer the modern decoration instead of Walusuji's gate. In addition, youth have a few understandings about Walusuji tradition.

**Passive Character of Youth.** Based on interviews, we found that youth and elders have different characteristics. While Elders in their young ages tend to be more active in learning and doing the tradition, the new generation seems to have less interest in the tradition. Yet, they still have pride in wearing Walusuji's symbol as their attributes, but they don't really know about the details.

### 3.3 Design's Hibridity Analysis

This part is the last step in Innovation Guide Pyramid method. Design's Hibridity [5] has 4 Product's Elements that will work as sign tools in innovation design. The 4 labels are namely: modified, added, maintained, deleted. Each element is "guide" to designer so that they will know what to do with the parts of tradition. This will help designer in the making of innovative product of tradition, because the labelling process are affected by Interventions factors (current conditions of tradition). As for Walusuji's case, we can see suggested transforming strategies using the method as in Fig. 2 shown.

First, the changes of environment are external factor that hard to fix. The development of infrastructure in Makassar har greatly effected in reducing of bamboo land, and this problem can be fix in other discipline and authority. If we lean to this condition then it is certain that Walusuji will disappear in the next few years. So, we need to find a "new environment" for this tradition to survive.

Second, we have found that youth generation has different characteristic which are affected by the development of information technology. It means that nowadays youth live in exactly different era than their ancestor. Considering this condition, it seems that we need to change how the tradition serve and the values are teached.

Third, the noble values from Walusuji are important values that need to be teached to our youth, so we must maintain these values. Lastly, it seems that the artefact can't survive as it is due to the interventions of the tradition in nowadays life. We need to develop a "new artefact" (delete old artefact) as a tool to maintain the values in youth generation.

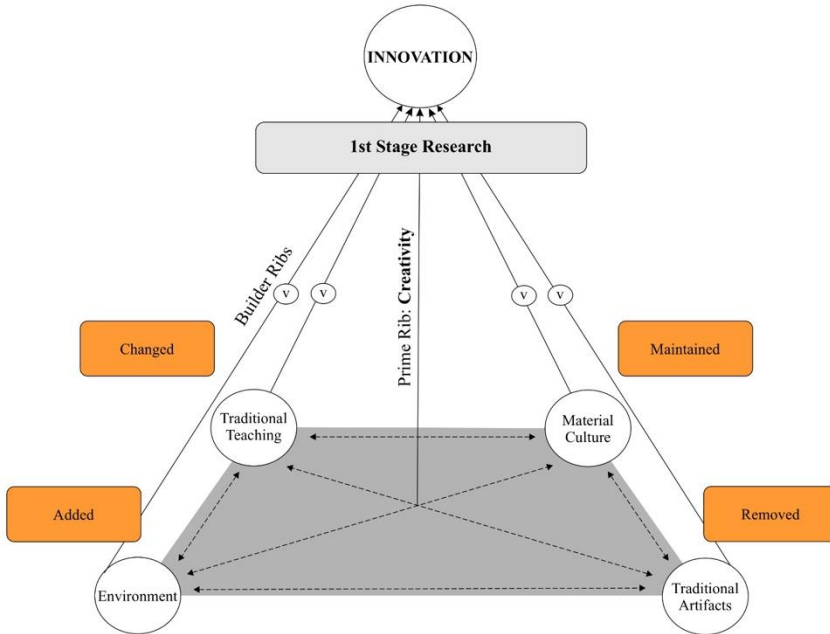


Fig. 2. Recommendation of transformation strategy for Walasuji Tradition

These 4 strategies are a set of strategy that cannot be separate, which mean we cannot do only one or half of them. Besides, this strategy also expected as alternatives, with the goal to preserve the existence of Walasuji Tradition. As we can see in Figure 2, the main bone of the Pyramid is creativity. So, we suggest that this research can be done by designer as they have perfect role in using creativity. Designer's role also believed can give more appreciation to the product [9], so that the acceptance level of the innovation hopefully can grow larger.

#### 4 Conclusion

There are 3 factors that interrupt Walasuji's Tradition continuity: (1) Modern Wedding Decorations, (2) Less Bamboo Land, and (3) Passive character of youth. Based on these factors, we can conclude transformation strategies of Walasuji as follows: (1) Maintaining Culture's Material, (2) Adding New Tradition's Environment, (3) Removing the Artefact, (4) Change Teaching's Tradition. The strategies can be used as "Design Guide" for designer in order to create Innovative solution for the tradition. Therefore, further research is needed. Hence, we suggest considering the "maintained" area first as stated in step strategy number 1, then the other step follow.

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