

Creative Economy Collaboration in Enhancing the Global Competitiveness of Solo City as an International MICE Destination

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Abstract: This study examines how creative economy subsectors in Solo City collaborate to strengthen the city's global competitiveness as an international MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) destination. Previous studies have largely examined creative economy subsectors separately and have paid limited attention to the integration of collaborative governance and Global Value Chain (GVC) perspectives within the context of MICE development. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected from seven key informants through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that Solo's creative economy subsectors significantly strengthen the city's cultural identity and attractiveness as a MICE destination. However, collaboration among stakeholders remains fragmented and largely event-based, while integration into the global MICE value chain is constrained by weak institutional coordination, limited international networking, and insufficient digital capacity. The study further demonstrates that collaborative governance contributes to value chain upgrading by strengthening institutional coordination, knowledge sharing, and cross-sector collaboration, thereby creating opportunities for process and functional upgrading within the MICE ecosystem. The main contribution of this study lies in integrating Collaborative Governance and Global Value Chain perspectives to explain how collaborative mechanisms facilitate value chain upgrading and enhance the international competitiveness of medium-sized culture-based MICE destinations.

Keywords: *collaboration, creative economy, global competitiveness, MICE industry, Solo*

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the creative economy has become an increasingly important part of global economic transformation. According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD, 2024), the creative economy contributes around 7.5% of global GDP and provides employment for around 12.5% of the workforce in many countries. Exports of creative goods and services also increased by nearly 29% between 2017 and 2022, reflecting the growing role of creativity and cultural value in the global economy. This trend shows a broader shift from resource-based industries toward knowledge- and innovation-based economic development.

Within the tourism sector, the Meeting, Incentive, Convention, and Exhibition (MICE) industry has become one of the sectors that strongly benefits from the expansion



of the creative economy. Today, successful MICE destinations rely not only on infrastructure, but also on cultural uniqueness and authentic local experiences to attract international visitors (Sirivadhanawaravachara, 2025). In this context, creative economy activities such as performing arts, culinary heritage, crafts, and digital media help shape destination identity and strengthen tourism competitiveness. As a result, many cities now integrate creative economy activities into their MICE strategies to improve their visibility and competitiveness in global tourism networks.

Solo City, also known as Surakarta, represents one of Indonesia's culturally distinctive cities with strong potential for creative economy development. The city is widely recognized for its rich Javanese cultural heritage, including wayang kulit, karawitan, traditional dance, batik, handicrafts, and culinary traditions (Sudarsi & Yuliyani, 2025). This cultural richness has contributed to Solo's recognition as one of Indonesia's creative cities by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (Kemenparekraf, 2022b). In recent years, Solo has also hosted various national and international events, such as Solo International Performing Arts (SIPA), the International Mask Festival (IMF), the ASEAN Para Games, and the G20 Trade, Investment, and Industry Working Group (TIIWG). These events demonstrate the city's growing capacity to position itself as a culture-based MICE destination (Kemenparekraf, 2022a).

The development of MICE tourism is strategically important because of its substantial economic contribution. In Indonesia, the MICE sector contributes significantly to tourism revenue and generates higher visitor spending compared to conventional leisure tourism (Wardhani et al., 2023). Moreover, MICE activities create opportunities for local creative industries and small-medium enterprises (SMEs) to participate in broader economic networks through the promotion of cultural products, culinary experiences, and creative services (Wijayati & Murdani, 2021). In this regard, the creative economy can function not only as a supporting element of tourism but also as a strategic component of urban economic competitiveness and city branding.

Previous studies have widely discussed the role of creative industries and MICE development in supporting regional economic growth. Kalfas et al., (2024), for instance, emphasize the contribution of cultural and creative industries to regional revitalization, innovation, and sustainable urban development in Europe. Similarly, Sirivadhanawaravachara (2025) highlights the role of cultural heritage in strengthening Thailand's competitiveness within the global MICE industry, while Sah et al., (2025) examine how Malaysia utilizes MICE as part of its post-pandemic economic recovery strategy. Other studies have specifically explored the contribution of individual creative economy subsectors, such as performing arts in cultural tourism (Chen, 2022; Mazlan et al., 2025; Muhammad, 2023; Yang et al., 2023) and culinary heritage in tourism branding and destination identity formation (Gallego et al., 2024; Htet et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2021).

Despite these contributions, existing studies still reveal several important limitations. First, most studies tend to examine creative economy subsectors separately rather than as an integrated collaborative ecosystem. Second, limited attention has been given to how local governments coordinate and facilitate collaboration among creative actors in supporting MICE development. Finally, previous research rarely connects the creative economy ecosystem with the Global Value Chain (GVC) perspective to explain how local cultural assets can be integrated into international MICE competitiveness. As a result, the interaction between creative economy collaboration, collaborative governance, and MICE internationalization remains underexplored, particularly in medium-sized cultural cities in developing countries such as Solo.

Solo represents a particularly relevant case for examining these issues because it differs from Indonesia's primary MICE destinations, such as Jakarta and Bali, which rely heavily on large-scale convention infrastructure and international connectivity (Gultom et al., 2025). Instead, Solo is a medium-sized cultural city whose competitiveness increasingly depends on the integration of creative economy assets, cultural heritage, and collaborative governance. While several Indonesian cities, including Yogyakarta and Bandung, have also developed creative economy initiatives (Suryaningtyas & Djuni, 2022), Solo provides a distinctive context due to its strong cultural identity, growing portfolio of national and international MICE events, and active local government efforts. Examining Solo therefore contributes not only to understanding local development dynamics but also to generating insights into how medium-sized cultural cities in developing countries can strengthen their international competitiveness through collaborative governance and value chain upgrading.

Unlike previous studies that examine creative economy subsectors separately, this study integrates collaborative governance and GVC perspectives to explain how cross-subsector collaboration contributes to the international competitiveness of a medium-sized cultural MICE city. To address these gaps, this study examines how creative economy subsectors in Solo collaborate within the city's MICE ecosystem and how the local government facilitates this collaborative process. This study offers three main contributions to the literature. First, it analyzes creative economy development through an ecosystem-based perspective that highlights the interaction among performing arts, culinary industries, crafts, fashion, digital media, and event management. Second, the study integrates Collaborative Governance Theory and GVC Theory to explain both the institutional dynamics of collaboration and the structural position of Solo within the international MICE industry. Third, previous research rarely connects the creative economy ecosystem with the GVC perspective to explain how medium-sized cultural cities can transform local cultural assets into internationally competitive MICE destinations.

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to the broader discussion on creative economy governance, collaborative governance, and city diplomacy by demonstrating how local cultural assets can be transformed into sources of global competitiveness through collaboration and value chain upgrading. Practically, the study provides insights for policymakers regarding the importance of institutional coordination, cross-subsector collaboration, and digital innovation in developing sustainable culture-based MICE destinations.

Based on this background, this research aims to: (1) analyze the patterns of collaboration among creative economy subsectors in Solo City in supporting its development as an international MICE destination; and (2) examine the role of the Surakarta City Government, particularly the Department of Culture and Tourism, in facilitating and coordinating collaborative governance within the city's creative economy ecosystem.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design with an explanatory orientation, aiming to understand the patterns of collaboration among creative economy subsectors in strengthening Solo City's position as an international MICE destination. The research utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. Data were collected through four methods: (1) literature review, (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews, (3) focus group

discussions (FGDs) to capture the perspectives of multiple actors, and (4) non-participant observation conducted during cultural and tourism events in Solo.

Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions involving seven key informants representing government institutions, event organizers, performing arts scholars, and cultural practitioners. Informants were selected purposively based on four criteria: (1) direct involvement in the development of Solo's creative economy or MICE activities; (2) institutional authority or professional expertise relevant to the research topic; (3) practical experience in organizing, managing, or supporting creative economy initiatives; and (4) willingness to participate and provide in-depth information regarding collaborative governance practices. These criteria ensured that the selected participants possessed sufficient knowledge and experience to address the research objectives.

The seven informants consisted of representatives from the Surakarta City Tourism Office (specifically the Heads of HR & Creative Economy and Destination & Marketing Divisions), event organizers, performing arts scholars, as well as dance and cultural practitioners. Field observations were also conducted to document ongoing creative economy activities, such as culinary events, cultural performances, tourism festivals, and digital media promotions associated with the city's creative subsectors.

Secondary data were gathered through a comprehensive literature review on the creative economy, collaborative governance theory, global value chain (GVC) theory, and the MICE ecosystem. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, targeting individuals considered to possess relevant knowledge, authority, or experience related to the development of the creative economy and MICE activities. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of three main stages:

- (1) Data reduction, which involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents to align with the research themes.
- (2) Data display, which organizes information into descriptive narratives, matrices, or tables to facilitate understanding of the interconnections among creative economy subsectors within Solo's MICE ecosystem.
- (3) Conclusion drawing and verification, where research findings are formulated based on emerging patterns, relationships, and meanings, followed by re-verification with field data to ensure validity.

Fieldwork was conducted between July and November 2025, including interviews, observations during cultural and tourism events, and document collection. To enhance the credibility of the findings, this study applied source and method triangulation. Information obtained from interviews was compared with data from focus group discussions, field observations, official government documents, and relevant literature. The consistency of findings across multiple data sources was used to strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of the analysis. Through this analytical approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive depiction of the collaborative dynamics among the performing arts, culinary, and digital promotion subsectors in enhancing Solo City's attractiveness as a culture-based MICE destination.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cultural festival and performing arts remain as the strongest cultural assets supporting Solo's MICE ecosystem. Traditional performances such as wayang orang,



gamelan, kethoprak, and classical Javanese dance are frequently incorporated into national and international events as cultural showcases. In addition, culinary products such as nasi liwet, tengkleng, timlo, and serabi enrich visitors' experiences by providing distinctive local gastronomy. The city's batik industry, handicrafts, and creative communities further strengthen Solo's image as a cultural destination with strong creative characteristics. These align with previous studies emphasizing the role of cultural heritage and creative industries in enhancing destination attractiveness and regional competitiveness (Darlenis, 2021; Kalfas et al., 2024).

The development of Solo's creative economy ecosystem is supported by interactions among multiple actors, including creative communities, artists, culinary entrepreneurs, event organizers, local government institutions, academics, and tourism stakeholders. These interactions demonstrate that Solo's creative economy is not solely dependent on cultural resources but also on collaborative relationships among supporting actors and institutions. As stated by the Head of Human Resources and Creative Economy Division of the Surakarta Department of Culture and Tourism, creative economy actors in Solo have increasingly become part of the city's event ecosystem, particularly in providing cultural content and local experiences for visitors: "Creative economy actors have become an integral part of every major cultural event in Solo. Their involvement is no longer limited to performances but extends to creating visitor experiences and strengthening the city's cultural identity." (interview, 2025).

The strengthening of Solo's creative economy ecosystem has also contributed to the city's post-pandemic economic recovery. During a meeting with the President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2023, the Walikota Solo emphasized that cultural events, music festivals, and sports activities had significantly revived local economic activities and increased tourism mobility (Setda Solo, 2023). This illustrates how creative economy activities function not only as cultural expressions but also as strategic economic instruments that support urban competitiveness and tourism development.

Although Solo has successfully mobilized cultural assets for MICE events, collaboration among actors remains largely transactional rather than institutionalized. Most collaborations are still event-based and temporary rather than institutionalized within a sustainable ecosystem framework. Interactions among performing arts, culinary industries, digital promotion actors, and event organizers often occur only during festivals or government-sponsored events. In addition, several interviewees highlighted the absence of an integrated collaborative platform capable of connecting creative actors, educational institutions, local government agencies, and private stakeholders in a long-term development strategy.

Overall, Solo possesses substantial cultural capital to strengthen its position as a culture-based MICE destination. Nevertheless, the sustainability and global competitiveness of the city's MICE ecosystem depend not only on cultural richness but also on the capacity to institutionalize collaboration, strengthen cross-subsector integration, and expand connections with broader national and international networks. In this regard, the creative economy ecosystem serves as both a source of cultural identity and a strategic foundation for enhancing Solo's competitiveness within the global MICE industry.

The Position of Solo within the Global MICE Value Chain

Within the context of the global MICE industry, Solo currently occupies a position primarily as a provider of cultural content and authentic local experiences. The city's



performing arts, culinary heritage, batik industry, handicrafts, and cultural festivals function as distinctive attractions that enrich MICE activities and differentiate Solo from other destinations in Indonesia. Field observations conducted during cultural festivals and tourism events indicate that local cultural elements are increasingly integrated into conferences, exhibitions, government events, and international gatherings through artistic performances, culinary services, and creative exhibitions. These findings support previous studies emphasizing that cultural and creative industries play an important role in strengthening destination attractiveness and urban competitiveness within the tourism sector (Kalfas et al., 2024; Kim & Ko, 2020).

Compared with Indonesia's leading MICE destinations, such as Jakarta and Bali, Solo possesses relatively smaller convention infrastructure and fewer direct international connections. Within the national context, Solo shares several characteristics with Yogyakarta as a culture-based tourism city, although Yogyakarta has achieved a more established position in cultural tourism and business events (Yuniati et al., 2025). At the regional level, Solo also resembles secondary cultural cities such as Chiang Mai, Thailand, where local heritage, creative industries, and cultural experiences constitute key sources of destination competitiveness (Warintarawej et al., 2025). These comparisons indicate that Solo competes not through infrastructure scale but through the strategic integration of creative economy assets and cultural identity. Consequently, the collaborative governance model identified in this study may provide insights for other medium-sized cultural cities seeking to strengthen their position within international MICE networks.

Interviews with cultural practitioners and creative economy actors further reveal that each subsector contributes differently to the city's MICE ecosystem. Performing arts such as wayang orang, gamelan, and kethoprak provide cultural differentiation and strengthen destination identity. Culinary products offer experiential value that enhances visitor engagement, while batik and handicrafts serve as symbolic representations of local culture through souvenirs and exhibition products. This is consistent with previous studies highlighting the strategic role of performing arts and culinary heritage in shaping tourism identity and cultural branding (Chen, 2022; Gallego et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2021; Mazlan et al., 2025). In addition, digital media communities and local event organizers have increasingly contributed to destination promotion through social media campaigns, online publications, and event documentation, reflecting the growing importance of digital visibility in the contemporary MICE industry.

Viewed from a Global Value Chain (GVC) perspective, Solo currently operates mainly in the upstream segment of the MICE industry by supplying cultural content and creative products. According to Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark (2011), participation in global value chains involves the distribution of production, services, and value creation across interconnected actors and markets. In Solo, creative economy actors contribute significantly to the experiential and cultural dimensions of MICE activities. However, their participation remains concentrated in cultural provision rather than higher value-added functions such as international branding, intellectual property commercialization, or global event management. This condition reflects the structural position commonly experienced by creative actors in developing countries, where local cultural resources often generate value for broader tourism networks without enabling local actors to fully capture the economic benefits (Gehl Sampath & Vallejo, 2018; Gereffi, 2015).

Although Solo possesses strong cultural assets, the findings indicate that integration into the broader global MICE network remains relatively limited. Interviews with local stakeholders reveal several constraints, including limited international partnerships,

weak digital innovation capacity, inconsistent product standardization, and insufficient global promotion strategies. These conditions reduce the ability of local creative actors to compete within international MICE markets and limit opportunities for broader value capture. Similar challenges have also been identified in studies on creative economy development in emerging countries, particularly regarding institutional limitations, fragmented ecosystems, and unequal access to global networks (De Beukelaer, 2014).

Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate significant opportunities for upgrading within the global value chain. In terms of process upgrading, the Surakarta City Government has initiated various training programs related to event management, digital promotion, branding, and creative entrepreneurship aimed at improving the professionalism of creative actors. Product upgrading can be observed through efforts to develop culture-based tourism packages, creative culinary branding, and integrated cultural event experiences tailored to MICE visitors. The findings indicate evidence of early process upgrading through training, digital promotion, and capacity building initiatives implemented by the local government. However, functional upgrading, including international branding, intellectual property commercialization, and hybrid MICE services, remains largely prospective and has not yet been fully institutionalized. These areas therefore represent future strategic opportunities rather than demonstrated outcomes. These upgrading pathways are important because, within the GVC framework, competitiveness increasingly depends on the capacity of local actors to move beyond production-oriented roles toward strategic functions with greater economic value (Wijayati & Murdani, 2021; Zhao et al., 2024).

The increasing use of digital platforms by local communities and government institutions further indicates the potential for broader integration into international networks. Several initiatives, such as online event promotion, digital tourism campaigns, and social media-based destination marketing, have contributed to expanding Solo's visibility beyond domestic tourism markets. However, these initiatives remain fragmented and have not yet formed a comprehensive international branding strategy capable of positioning Solo more strongly within the global MICE industry. One interviewee explained: "Our training programs are not only intended to improve technical skills but also to encourage collaboration among young entrepreneurs, creative communities, and MSMEs so they can actively support tourism events and the creative economy ecosystem in Solo." (interview, 2025).

Solo's main challenge is not the absence of cultural resources, but rather the limited institutional and strategic capacity to transform cultural assets into sustainable global economic value. In this regard, the GVC perspective provides an important analytical framework for understanding how local cultural assets can be upgraded into higher-value economic functions through stronger collaboration, digital innovation, and international connectivity. Therefore, enhancing Solo's position within the global MICE value chain requires not only cultural uniqueness but also more integrated governance mechanisms capable of connecting local creative actors with broader global markets and international MICE networks.

Collaborative Governance and Institutional Challenges

The Surakarta City Government plays a central role in facilitating the development of the creative economy ecosystem that supports MICE activities. Through the Department of Culture and Tourism (Disbudpar), the local government has implemented various training programs, workshops, promotional activities, and event facilitation initiatives targeting creative economy actors between 2020 and 2024. These programs



involve multiple subsectors, including performing arts, culinary arts, fashion, crafts, digital content creation, and event management. Such initiatives demonstrate the government's active effort to strengthen local creative capacity and improve the participation of creative actors within Solo's tourism and MICE ecosystem.

Table 1. Creative Economy Training Programs by Disbudpar Surakarta (2020–2024)

No.	Program / Training	Subsector / Participants
1	Tourism Destination Management (2020)	Museums, tourism awareness groups, traditional markets, batik villages, tourism parks
2	Destination Development and Management (2021)	Urban tourism managers, creative communities
3	Craft & Culinary Training (2021)	Batik, craft, and culinary MSMEs
4	Digital Marketing Training (2022)	MSME owners, fashion, craft, and culinary entrepreneurs
5	Photography & Videography Training (2022)	Creative media communities, freelancers
6	Digital Creative Content Training (2023)	Local influencers, content creator communities
7	Event Organizer Training (2023)	EO communities, university students, event practitioners
8	Creative Economy Marketing Training (2024)	MSMEs in fashion, culinary, and craft subsectors
9	Product Branding & Storytelling Training (2024)	Creative MSMEs and startups
10	Creative Photography Training (2024)	Local photography communities

Source: Disbudpar Surakarta (reprocessed), 2025.

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the city government has consistently attempted to strengthen human resource capacity within the creative economy sector through destination management training, digital marketing workshops, creative content development, branding programs, and event organizer training. The involvement of diverse participants, ranging from tourism awareness groups and MSMEs to digital creator communities and event organizers, reflects an effort to encourage broader ecosystem participation. These initiatives also indicate that the local government recognizes the importance of creative economy development as part of Solo's broader MICE competitiveness strategy.

Rather than simply improving technical skills, these training programs function as collaborative governance instruments by creating repeated interactions among creative actors, government agencies, and event organizers. Such interactions strengthen institutional trust and facilitate knowledge exchange, thereby laying the foundation for value chain upgrading.

Interviews with local stakeholders indicate that training programs related to digital marketing, branding, photography, videography, and event organization have encouraged greater participation from young entrepreneurs, creative communities, and local MSMEs. As explained by the Head of the Human Resources and Creative Economy Division of the Surakarta Department of Culture and Tourism:

"Through various capacity-building programs, we have encouraged young entrepreneurs and creative communities to participate more actively in tourism events. They are no longer merely participants, but have increasingly become partners in developing creative products, digital promotion, and cultural experiences that support Solo's MICE ecosystem." (Interview, 2025).

Cultural festivals and MICE-related events organized by the city government have also provided important spaces for interaction among artists, culinary entrepreneurs,

tourism actors, and event organizers. It supports previous studies arguing that collaboration among public institutions, creative communities, and local industries is essential for strengthening creative economy ecosystems and urban competitiveness (Bianchi et al., 2021; Warintarawej et al., 2025).

Interviews also reveal that several collaborations originate from creative communities and event organizers rather than government initiatives alone. Local performing arts groups independently organize cultural festivals, while culinary communities frequently collaborate with private event organizers to create thematic cultural experiences. Universities also contribute through student involvement, research support, and creative incubation programs, although their participation remains relatively limited. These findings indicate that collaborative governance in Solo increasingly reflects shared agency among multiple stakeholders rather than purely government-led coordination.

However, despite these efforts, it indicates that collaboration within Solo's creative economy ecosystem remains fragmented and insufficiently institutionalized. Interviews with academics and cultural practitioners reveal that coordination among actors is still largely temporary and event-based, as stated by performing arts scholar: "Collaboration already exists, but it is still far from optimal. Most initiatives remain formalistic and project-based rather than being sustained over the long term." (interview, 2025). This strengthen by others scholars, stated: "Cross-sector coordination needs to be more systematic. Collaboration should not remain sectoral but become more integrated across creative economy subsectors." (interview, 2025).

Collaboration tends to intensify during festivals or government-sponsored events but weakens once activities are completed. Consequently, long-term mechanisms capable of sustaining innovation, knowledge exchange, and cross-sector collaboration remain underdeveloped.

One of the major institutional challenges identified in this study concerns the lack of coordination among local government agencies. Interviews with officials from the Department of Culture and Tourism reveal that different agencies often operate with varying definitions and priorities regarding the creative economy. This condition has resulted in overlapping training programs and duplicated activities involving the same creative actors. For example, entrepreneurship or creative economy training may be conducted separately by tourism, trade, industry, and cooperative agencies without integrated planning or shared evaluation mechanisms. Such fragmentation creates inefficiency, weakens policy coherence, and limits the effectiveness of creative economy development programs.

These demonstrate that institutional coordination and shared commitment among stakeholders have not yet been fully established. Ansell & Gash (2008) emphasize that effective collaborative governance requires sustained dialogue, shared objectives, institutional trust, and clear coordination mechanisms among participating actors. In Solo's case, although government-led facilitation programs have successfully encouraged participation, the absence of integrated institutional structures has limited the sustainability of collaboration. This also reflects broader challenges identified in collaborative governance studies, particularly regarding sectoral fragmentation and the persistence of institutional ego within public administration systems (Aditya & Kusumastuti, 2023; Ariesmansyah et al., 2023).

That institutional fragmentation has constrained the formation of a unified creative economy ecosystem. Although numerous programs have been implemented, there is still

no permanent collaborative platform capable of integrating government institutions, creative communities, academics, private actors, and event organizers within a shared long-term framework. As a result, interactions among stakeholders remain sectoral rather than ecosystem-based. This condition also limits opportunities for stronger integration among performing arts, culinary industries, digital promotion actors, and creative entrepreneurs that could potentially strengthen Solo's competitiveness as a culture-based MICE destination.

Interviews with cultural scholars additionally highlight the limited involvement of higher education institutions within the broader creative economy ecosystem. According to one performing arts scholar: "Our role is not limited to education. We are also responsible for research, human resource development, and serving as a government partner in strengthening Solo's cultural ecosystem." (interview, 2025).

While universities occasionally participate in cultural festivals and MICE events, their role in research collaboration, innovation development, and policy support remains relatively limited. This is significant because stronger collaboration between academia, government institutions, and creative communities could contribute substantially to human resource development, digital innovation, and sustainable ecosystem strengthening. One cultural practitioner explained: "Through collaboration with funding and management partners, I was able to bring traditional dance together with Solo's culinary culture to international performances." (interview, 2025).

Several structural constraints also continue to hinder ecosystem integration, including limited digital infrastructure, uneven creative human resource capacity, weak international networking, and the absence of sustainable funding mechanisms for cross-sector collaboration. These conditions reduce the ability of local creative actors to expand their participation beyond local events and enter broader international MICE networks. Similar institutional rigidity and structural limitations have also been identified as common obstacles in creative economy development within emerging countries (De Beukelaer, 2014).

The interviews consistently indicate that collaboration among stakeholders is largely concentrated during government-sponsored festivals, training programs, and tourism events. Outside these activities, participants reported limited opportunities for sustained interaction, knowledge exchange, and joint strategic planning. Creative communities, universities, government agencies, and private actors therefore continue to operate within relatively separate institutional spaces. This empirical pattern demonstrates that the principal governance challenge lies not in the absence of stakeholders, but in the absence of a permanent institutional mechanism capable of maintaining collaboration beyond individual events.

Based on these empirical findings, the establishment of a cross-subsector creative hub or an integrated collaborative forum becomes a logical institutional response rather than a purely normative recommendation. Such a platform could strengthen communication, coordination, and co-creation among stakeholders by providing continuous opportunities for interaction that are currently absent from Solo's creative economy ecosystem. In this context, collaboration should move beyond temporary event coordination toward more sustainable ecosystem governance capable of supporting innovation and value chain upgrading (Putri & Hardjono, 2023).

Strengthening the city's competitiveness within the global MICE industry requires a transition from fragmented and event-based collaboration toward more structured,

sustainable, and cross-sector governance mechanisms. These collaborative mechanisms gradually enhance the professional capacity of creative economy actors, improve event quality, and expand opportunities for digital promotion and destination branding. Within the Global Value Chain framework, such institutional improvements represent the initial conditions for process upgrading and functional upgrading, allowing local actors to move beyond cultural production toward higher-value activities in international MICE networks.

Strengthening Value Chain Upgrading for MICE Internationalization

Solo's creative economy subsectors possess considerable potential to support the internationalization of the city's MICE industry. Performing arts, culinary heritage, crafts, fashion, and digital promotion not only function as cultural attractions but also represent strategic economic assets that can generate higher value within broader tourism and creative industry networks. However, maximizing these potentials requires stronger integration among subsectors, institutional coordination, and upgrading strategies that enable local actors to move beyond cultural production toward higher value-added activities within the global MICE ecosystem.

Field findings indicate that Solo's creative economy actors in the global area, continue to face several structural constraints, including limited international market access, weak digital capacity, fragmented collaboration, inconsistent branding strategies, and limited sustainability of cross-sector partnerships. Interviews with creative practitioners and government officials reveal that many collaborations remain temporary and highly dependent on government-sponsored events. As a result, the integration of creative economy subsectors into broader international MICE networks remains relatively limited. Similar challenges have been identified in studies on creative economy development in emerging countries, particularly regarding institutional fragmentation, limited innovation systems, and unequal access to global markets (De Beukelaer, 2014).

Despite these limitations, the findings also reveal significant opportunities for value chain upgrading. From the perspective of the Global Value Chain (GVC), upgrading refers to the ability of local actors to improve their position within production and service networks through increased efficiency, innovation, and higher-value functions (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2011; Zhao et al., 2024). In Solo's case, upgrading opportunities can be identified through improvements in event management professionalism, digital promotion capacity, integrated destination branding, and cross-subsector collaboration. These strategies are particularly important because competitiveness within the contemporary MICE industry increasingly depends on experience-based tourism, digital visibility, and the integration of local cultural identity into international tourism markets.

Table 2. Mapping of Disbudpar Surakarta's Creative Economy Training Programs and Their Links to GVC and MICE Opportunities (2020–2024)

Main program/ training	Focus / subsectors	Potential contribution to MICE & GVC	Gaps / Weaknesses	Strategic recommendations
Tourism Destination Management	Museums, tourism awareness groups, batik villages, tourism parks	More professional human resources; readiness to host MICE events	Still local and sectoral, limited global connectivity	Develop MICE- friendly destination networks; integrate with EO and travel agencies

Main program/ training	Focus / subsectors	Potential contribution to MICE & GVC	Gaps / Weaknesses	Strategic recommendations
Event Management & Brand Activation	Creative communities, local EO	Supports event creativity and local product branding for MICE side events	Limited promotion, weak global connections	Encourage cross- actor co-creation; access global event platforms
Creativepreneur ship, Digital Content, Culinary Creative Economy	Young entrepreneurs, content creators, culinary actors	Embeds culinary and digital elements in global value chains; cross-sector collaboration potential	Limited mentorship and financing access	Integrate business incubation programs; connect with venture or grant funding
Fashion, Music, and Crafts	Designers, musicians, artisans	Enriches MICE side events (fashion shows, concerts, craft exhibitions)	Weak cross- subsector synergy	Establish inter- subsector communication forums
Digital Marketing & Content Creation	MSMEs, young creative talents	Promotes Solo globally; strengthens the city's digital cultural showcase	Limited digital talent pool, immature global strategy	Develop sustainable digital talent programs; foster collaboration with art and technology universities

Source: Disbudpar Surakarta (reprocessed), 2025

The mapping presented in Table 2 reveals that the proposed governance interventions directly correspond to specific institutional and operational gaps identified during fieldwork. Rather than representing generic policy recommendations, each intervention addresses empirical constraints reported by stakeholders, including fragmented collaboration, weak digital capacity, limited international networking, and insufficient cross-sector coordination.

Each creative economy subsector possesses distinctive strengths and collaborative opportunities that can support Solo's MICE internationalization strategy. Performing arts provide strong cultural differentiation through traditional performances and cultural showcases, while culinary industries contribute to experience-based tourism and destination branding. Fashion and crafts enrich cultural exhibitions and souvenir industries, whereas digital media communities strengthen online promotion and destination visibility. At the same time, the table also highlights persistent constraints, including weak cross-subsector integration, limited global connectivity, inadequate digital infrastructure, and insufficient coordination mechanisms among stakeholders. Another scholar said: "Cross-subsector collaboration is essential. Without collaboration, performing arts will stand alone, whereas integration with culinary, crafts, and other creative sectors creates much greater value." (interview, 2025).

The research further suggests that strengthening cross-subsector collaboration is essential for enhancing Solo's competitiveness within the global MICE industry. Currently, many creative actors still operate independently within their respective subsectors. Performing arts communities, culinary entrepreneurs, digital creators, and event organizers rarely collaborate within integrated long-term projects. Consequently, opportunities for co-creation and integrated cultural branding remain underutilized. Previous studies have emphasized that collaborative ecosystems and value co-creation

are important mechanisms for strengthening competitiveness within the creative economy sector (Putri & Hardjono, 2023).

One important upgrading pathway identified in this study concerns the strengthening of digitalization strategies. Interviews with stakeholders indicate that digital promotion has become increasingly important for expanding market access and improving destination visibility. Several initiatives, such as social media campaigns, online event publications, and digital tourism promotion platforms, have already been implemented by local communities and government institutions. As one performing arts scholar explained: "Technology has become an integral part of contemporary performances. It allows traditional arts to be presented in more modern formats without losing their authenticity." (interview, 2025).

Nevertheless, these initiatives remain fragmented and have not yet developed into a comprehensive international branding strategy. In the context of the contemporary MICE industry, digital innovation is increasingly essential because international events now rely heavily on online visibility, hybrid event systems, and digital audience engagement.

In addition to digitalization, stronger institutional integration is necessary to support sustainable upgrading. Solo still lacks a permanent collaborative platform capable of connecting government institutions, creative communities, academia, private actors, and international partners within a shared ecosystem framework. Establishing a cross-sector creative hub could therefore become a strategic mechanism for facilitating collaboration, integrating training outcomes, supporting business incubation, strengthening digital innovation, and expanding international networking opportunities. Such a platform could also reduce institutional fragmentation and encourage more sustainable collaboration beyond temporary event-based activities.

The role of higher education institutions should also be strengthened within the upgrading process. Universities and vocational institutions possess important potential to contribute through research collaboration, digital innovation, creative talent development, and policy support. Stronger engagement between academia and creative communities could improve the sustainability of human resource regeneration and support the development of more adaptive creative economy strategies aligned with global market trends.

From a broader perspective, Solo's pathway toward MICE internationalization depends not only on cultural richness but also on the city's capacity to institutionalize collaboration and strengthen strategic upgrading. The transformation of local cultural assets into globally competitive economic value requires integrated governance mechanisms, digital innovation, and stronger connectivity with international networks. In this regard, collaborative governance and value chain upgrading function as complementary approaches: collaborative governance strengthens institutional coordination among stakeholders, while GVC upgrading enables local actors to move toward higher-value economic functions within international MICE networks.

Overall, the study demonstrates that Solo possesses substantial potential to strengthen its position as a culture-based international MICE destination. However, achieving sustainable global competitiveness requires long-term collaboration, integrated policy coordination, stronger digital transformation, and more strategic upgrading efforts capable of connecting local creative assets with broader global tourism and creative economy networks.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Solo City possesses considerable potential to strengthen its position as a culture-based international MICE destination through the development of its creative economy ecosystem. The findings demonstrate that creative economy subsectors contribute not only to enhancing the city's cultural identity and visitor experience but also to strengthening its competitiveness within the MICE industry. However, despite active government facilitation through training programs, promotional activities, and event organization, collaboration among stakeholders remains largely temporary and event-based. The absence of a sustainable collaborative platform continues to limit long-term coordination among government institutions, creative communities, universities, and private actors, preventing the creative economy ecosystem from becoming fully integrated.

From a Global Value Chain perspective, Solo currently functions primarily as a provider of cultural content and local experiences rather than a creator of higher value-added activities such as international branding, digital innovation, cultural intellectual property commercialization, and integrated event management. Strengthening Solo's position within the global MICE value chain therefore requires continuous value chain upgrading supported by stronger institutional coordination, digital transformation, and cross-sector collaboration.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that Collaborative Governance and Global Value Chain perspectives are complementary rather than separate analytical frameworks. Collaborative Governance explains how institutional coordination, trust, and stakeholder collaboration are established, while the Global Value Chain perspective explains how these collaborative mechanisms facilitate process and functional upgrading toward higher-value activities within the MICE ecosystem. Integrating these perspectives offers a more comprehensive framework for understanding how medium-sized cultural cities can transform local creative assets into sources of international competitiveness through collaborative governance and value chain upgrading.

This study has several limitations. First, it employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a limited number of informants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the research does not quantitatively assess the economic impact of creative economy collaboration on MICE development. Future studies are therefore encouraged to evaluate the economic outcomes of value chain upgrading, examine the long-term effectiveness of collaborative governance mechanisms, and conduct comparative analyses across creative MICE destinations in different regional contexts.

Based on these findings, this study recommends strengthening institutional coordination among government agencies, establishing sustainable collaborative platforms for creative economy stakeholders, expanding digital innovation, and increasing international networking to support value chain upgrading within the MICE ecosystem. Beyond the Solo case, the integrated Collaborative Governance–Global Value Chain framework proposed in this study may also serve as a useful analytical approach for examining the internationalization of other medium-sized cultural cities seeking to enhance their competitiveness through creative economy-based MICE development.

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