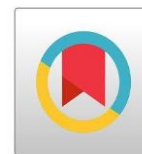


**Paradiplomacy of Malang City in Its Efforts to Join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network**



**Paradiplomasi Kota Malang dalam Upayanya untuk Bergabung dengan Jaringan Kota Kreatif UNESCO**

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

<p><b>Keywords</b>  <i>Creative Economy;</i>  <i>Creative City;</i>  <i>Media art;</i>  <i>Paradiplomacy;</i>  <i>UNESCO;</i></p>	<p><b>ABSTRACT</b>  <i>This research aims to examine the strategies of Malang City in preparing to become a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network 2025. Research on Malang City's paradiplomacy remains limited, offering an opportunity to analyze the local government's role in international cooperation. Using a descriptive qualitative method, the study applies the paradiplomacy concept as an analytical framework encompassing global paradiplomacy and multipurpose paradiplomacy indicators. The findings reveal that participation in the UCCN strengthens the creative economy, promotes cultural and knowledge exchange, and enhances the city's international image. Key strategies include infrastructure development, creative human resource capacity building, and the creation of a sustainable collaborative ecosystem. The implementation of these strategies has positioned Malang City as one of the UCCN 2025 members in the Media Arts category. Further studies are recommended to examine the sustainability of Malang City's paradiplomacy through the UCCN by analyzing the extent to which creative programs and policies during the membership period impact the development of the regional creative ecosystem.</i></p>
<p><b>Kata Kunci</b>  <i>Ekonomi Kreatif;</i>  <i>Kota Kreatif;</i>  <i>Media Art;</i>  <i>Paradiplomasi;</i>  <i>UNESCO</i></p>	<p><b>ABSTRAK</b>                  Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji strategi Kota Malang dalam mempersiapkan diri menjadi anggota UNESCO Creative Cities Network 2025. Topik ini menarik karena penelitian mengenai paradiplomasi Kota Malang masih terbatas, sehingga membuka peluang untuk menganalisis peran pemerintah daerah dalam menjalin hubungan internasional. Metode penelitian menggunakan analisis deskriptif kualitatif dengan konsep paradiplomasi sebagai kerangka analisis yang mencakup indikator global paradiplomacy dan multipurpose paradiplomacy. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa partisipasi Kota Malang dalam UCCN berpotensi memperkuat ekonomi kreatif, mendorong pertukaran budaya dan pengetahuan, serta meningkatkan citra internasional kota. Strategi yang dilakukan meliputi peningkatan infrastruktur, pengembangan sumber daya manusia kreatif, dan pembentukan ekosistem kolaboratif yang berkelanjutan. Implementasi strategi tersebut menempatkan Kota Malang sebagai salah satu anggota UCCN 2025 dalam kategori Media Arts. Studi lanjutan disarankan untuk mengkaji keberlanjutan paradiplomasi Kota Malang melalui UCCN, dengan menelaah sejauh mana program dan kebijakan kreatif selama masa keanggotaan berdampak terhadap pengembangan ekosistem kreatif daerah.</p>
<p><b>Article History</b>                  Send 23<sup>th</sup> October 2025                  Review 20<sup>th</sup> November 2025                  Accepted 3<sup>th</sup> Maret 2026</p>	<p>Copyright ©2027 <i>Jurnal Aristo (Social, Politic, Humaniora)</i>                  This is an open access article under the <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/">CC-BY-NC-SA</a> license.                  Akses artikel terbuka dengan model <a href="https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/">CC-BY-NC-SA</a> sebagai lisensinya.</p>



## Introduction

Over the years, developed countries face the challenge of finding more sustainable economic resources (Hariram et al., 2023). Relying solely on the industrial sector as the primary source of income is no longer sufficient. Instead, they have begun to focus on developing creative human resources. A new era which was more known as the creative economy emerged in the 1990s, with its driving sector being the creative industry (Zhao et al., 2024). The creative economy thrives best when supported by a supportive ecosystem, namely creative cities, which foster innovation and creativity (Maulana et al., 2024). A creative city is a strategy in urban planning which encourages communities to act creatively. Cities no longer rely solely on economic incentives from the central government, but they should be able to create independent sources of income through the utilization of local creativity (Purdiono et al., 2025). Creative cities are supported by five main components: creative industries, creative communities, creative environments, policies, and local culture, which together form a complementary system (Herawati et al., 2020). Dynamic global developments are considered as driving cities worldwide to transform in order to optimize their potential. The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) serves as a strategic platform connecting cities worldwide to share experiences, ideas, and solutions for developing the creative economy sector as a driver of sustainable development. The UCCN was first initiated in 2004, with its primary goal being in order to enhance cooperation between cities recognizing that creativity is a strategic tool for sustainable development (Arcos-pumarola et al., 2023). Furthermore, the UCCN invites member cities to develop creative solutions for their regional development by engaging with government, the private sector, and civil society. Currently, the UCCN has a total membership of over 350 cities in over 100 countries which includes seven key creative fields: Crafts and Folk Arts, Design, Film, Gastronomy, Literature, Media Arts, and Music. Indonesia has been an active participant in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), with a steadily growing number of designated cities. Pekalongan became Indonesia's first UCCN member in 2014 (Crafts and Folk Art), followed by Bandung in 2015 (Design), Ambon in 2019 (Music), Jakarta in 2021 (Literature), and Surakarta in 2023 (Crafts and Folk Art). Most recently, in 2025, Malang was officially designated as a UNESCO Creative City in the Media Arts category, accompanied by the recognition of Ponorogo Regency in the Crafts and Folk Art category, marking Indonesia's continued expansion and diversification within the UCCN framework.

Malang, one of the largest cities in East Java, is eager to join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. Malang City has the capacity supported by the presence of universities, creative communities, and a continuously growing creative ecosystem. The Malang City Government is committed to involving various stakeholders in order to make this city a Creative City (Sopanah et al., 2018). According to Wonderful Indonesia There are 17 creative economy subsectors which have been developed, namely applications, culinary, crafts, photography, architecture, fashion, visual communication design, film, television and radio, performing arts, games, interior design, publishing, product design, advertising, music, and fine arts. This creative ecosystem is designed to open new opportunities for the community and business actors in order to compete locally and globally. By 2025, Malang City aspires to become a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in the field of media art, a creative industry driven by digital technology. Preparation for UNESCO creative city status requires comprehensive planning related to infrastructure readiness, creative ecosystems, and supporting policies which in line with UNESCO standards.

Paradiplomacy has become a crucial strategy in modern international relations, particularly for local governments seeking to strengthen their identity, competitiveness, and global role. The term paradiplomacy was first introduced in academic discussions by Panayotis Soldatos, a Basque scholar in the 1980s. This term is a combination of "parallel" and "diplomacy" which refers to foreign policy conducted by non-central governments that is local governments (Mukti, 2015). Furthermore, paradiplomacy refers to efforts made by local governments in order to build international cooperation with foreign partners, where international relations are no longer dominated by the central government, but regions also actively participate in realizing their goals and interests in the local realm (Haqqi, 2024). Paradiplomacy is known as low diplomacy in which usually include various forms of cooperation related to urban and urban community issues. In addition, according to Ivo D. Duchacek in (Naronskaya, 2023), paradiplomacy can be categorized into three types. First, Transborder Paradiplomacy, which refers to formal and informal institutional relationships between sub-national governments in different countries which are directly adjacent geographically. This relationship is often influenced by emotional, cultural, and historical closeness. Second, Transregional Paradiplomacy which involves diplomacy between sub-national governments in different countries which are not directly adjacent geographically, but they are in the same region. Third, Global Paradiplomacy, which involves diplomacy between sub-national governments in different countries which are not directly adjacent geographically, but they are in the same region. Paradiplomacy encompasses diplomatic

relations conducted by subnational governments of countries which are not only geographically distinct but also from different regions and parts of the world. Based on their objectives and orientation, according to Lecours, paradiplomacy practices can be divided into three main groups. First, paradiplomacy focuses on economic objectives; such as, reciprocal investment, market expansion, and the development of overseas investment. Its orientation lacks complex motives; such as, politics, culture, or identity. Second, paradiplomacy encompasses cross-sectoral or multipurpose cooperation, encompassing economics, culture, education, health, and technology transfer. This concept refers to decentralized foreign cooperation, where subnational entities have the autonomy to make decisions and act independently. Third, complex paradiplomacy encompasses political objectives and the specific identity of a region. Its primary objective is to demonstrate autonomy, strengthen distinctive identities, and emphasize characteristics which distinguish one region from other regions within a country (Lecours, 2008; Oddone, 2023). Therefore, the indicators in this study refer to two main concepts: global paradiplomacy by Duchacek and multipurpose paradiplomacy by Lecours. In the context of global paradiplomacy, the UNESCO Creative Cities Network reflects a form of cross-border cooperation between city governments from various regions in the world, where Malang City can build non-central international relations, strengthen its global image, and expand its diplomatic network with other cities. Meanwhile, in the context of multipurpose paradiplomacy, UCCN represents cross-sector cooperation which encompasses the economy, culture, education, and city image through the decentralization of regional authority. In addition, membership in this network provides space for local governments in order to develop creative potential, strengthen local identity, and encourage sustainable development in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

Several studies have examined paradiplomacy from various perspectives with varying analytical focuses. For instance, a study conducted by Fauzia (2015) on the implementation of paradiplomacy through the sister city cooperation strategy between Surabaya and Kitakyushu, identifying three main strategies implemented in this partnership: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding, coordination in forest conservation and ecotourism development programs, and community involvement in environmental awareness activities. Further research, Allhadad (2025) analyzes the challenges and obstacles faced by the Surabaya City Government in implementing paradiplomacy practices, including bureaucratic complexity, rigid regulations, and dependence on local revenue as the main source of funding. From the perspective of UCCN, research which had been conducted

by Yuniar (2022) discussed how Pekalongan City strives to make culture the core of sustainable development, in accordance with the UCCN vision, through organizing various cultural festivals, community training, and collaborating with national and international parties, which have positively impacted the annual increase in batik exports. Furthermore, Syahidah (2022) emphasized the importance of collaboration between creative actors in maintaining the relevance of the creative city title. The creative city title has not been fully implemented by the community since the government's role is still too dominant, while coordination and communication between actors are not optimal due to limited collaborative facilities. Moreover, Andjanie (2023) emphasize the link between creativity and the tourism sector through case studies of four creative cities, highlighting that collaboration between the government and local communities is a key factor in successfully integrating creative programs into sustainable tourism development strategies. Several previous studies have discussed the practice of paradiplomacy in various Indonesian cities. However, specific research on Malang City's paradiplomacy strategy within the UCCN framework remains relatively limited. This lack of studies highlights the urgency of examining how the city employs paradiplomacy to strengthen its creative economy and international image. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to expanding the understanding of international relations practices at the local level and providing strategic direction for local governments in developing globally competitive creative city policies. The novelty of this study lies in integrating paradiplomacy theory with the concept of creative cities within the UCCN framework, particularly through the perspectives of global paradiplomacy and multipurpose paradiplomacy. Therefore, this study aims to examine Malang City's strategy in preparing to become a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network 2025.

## **Method**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method to analyze Malang City's strategy in preparing for membership in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) 2025. According to Cresswell, there are four main approaches in qualitative research for data collection, such as interviews, observation, literature studies, and audio-visual analysis (Levitt et al., 2018). A qualitative approach was selected because it enables an in-depth examination of policies, strategies, and institutional practices related to paradiplomacy and creative city development. Data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from official documents issued by the Malang City Government, including the Creative Economy Development Roadmap, Creative Economy

Action Plan (2023-2027), investment and training reports from the Department of Manpower and Investment Services (Disnaker PMPTSP), and official documents related to Malang City's UCCN application process. These documents were accessed through government publications, official websites, and institutional reports.

Secondary data were collected through a literature study, consisting of academic journal articles, books, UNESCO Creative Cities Network reports, policy documents from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, and credible national and local news portals. These sources were used to contextualize Malang City's policies within broader theoretical discussions on paradiplomacy, creative cities, and sustainable development.

Data collection was conducted using a document analysis technique, where relevant texts were systematically selected based on their relevance to the research objectives. The collected data were then analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis, involving data reduction, data categorization, and interpretation. The analysis focused on identifying patterns, strategies, and policy orientations that reflect the practices of global paradiplomacy and multipurpose paradiplomacy. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study applied source triangulation by comparing information obtained from multiple sources, including government documents, UNESCO publications, academic literature, and media reports. This technique was carried out by comparing and confirming information obtained from various types of secondary sources to ensure data consistency and reliability (Nurfajriani et al., 2024).

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Potential Benefits for Malang City from the UNESCO Creative Cities Network**

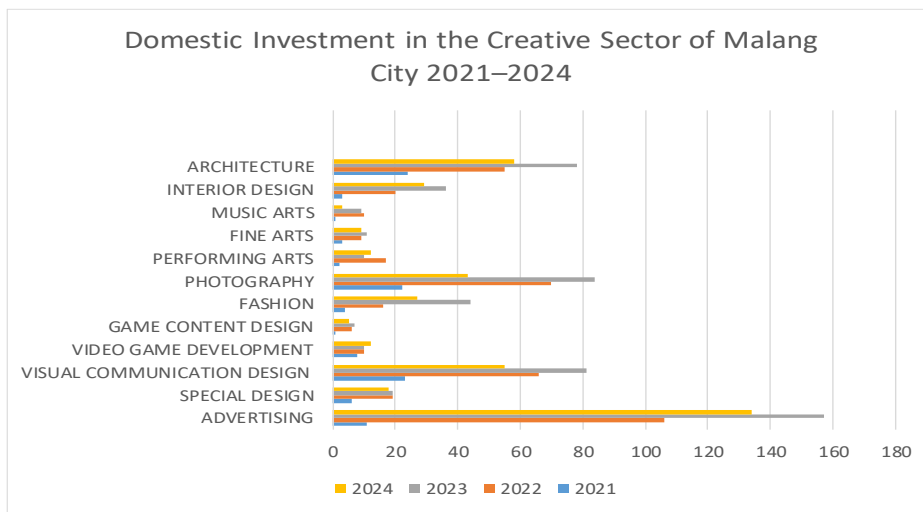
Sustainable development is a development process which aims to meet the needs of today's society without compromising the ability of future generations in order to meet their own needs (Elsawy & Youssef, 2023). This idea arose from the growing global awareness of various global issues; such as, environmental damage, social inequality, and economic uncertainty (Nasution et al., 2024). In response, the international community encourages cross-country collaboration to address these issues. International organizations act as facilitators which bridge the implementation of sustainable development principles into national and local policies in order to create harmony in efforts to achieve global goals. UNESCO, as one of the institutions under the auspices of the United Nations, launched a global initiative known as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) in order to reach various cities in the world. UCCN is a platform which connects cities around the world to

share experiences, ideas, and solutions in developing the creative economy sector as a driver of sustainable development. UCCN was first initiated in 2004, the main objective of UCCN is to strengthen international cooperation between cities which place creativity as a strategic pillar in sustainable development (Arcos-Pumarola et al., 2023). The UCCN has a total membership of over 350 cities in over 100 countries and covers seven creative city sectors: crafts and folk arts, literature, film, gastronomy, design, media arts, and music. The objective of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network is to encourage member cities to place creativity at the core of urban development. Through this network, cities are supported in developing initiatives that involve the public, private, and civil society sectors. UCCN also aims to expand the production, distribution, and utilization of cultural and creative works, while creating broader opportunities for artists, innovators, and cultural professionals. Moreover, the network promotes the establishment of local centers of creativity and innovation to increase community participation in cultural life and ensure equitable access, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable groups. A central priority of UCCN is the integration of culture and creativity into urban development strategies to generate meaningful social, economic, and environmental impacts (UNESCO, 2025).

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network's scope of activities encompasses various initiatives at the city and international levels. The network encourages the exchange of experiences, knowledge, and best practices between cities in order to strengthen mutual learning. In addition, the UCCN facilitates pilot projects and partnerships involving government, the private sector, and civil society to expand collaboration. Through professional and artist exchange programs, the network also supports the development of creativity across borders. Various studies and evaluations of the experiences of creative cities serve as a basis for formulating policies and strategies for sustainable urban development. By making creativity central to development, cities have the opportunity in order to optimize their cultural potential and transform it into a competitive creative industry sector (UNESCO, 2025).

One of the primary reasons cities join the UCCN is that to gain economic benefits and national and international reputation through global creative city status. This membership increases a city's national and global visibility, which in turn attracts tourists, investors, and businesses in the creative sector (Gathen et al., 2021). Malang City's mission is to become a productive and competitive city based on the principles of a creative economy, sustainability, and integration (Sopanah et al., 2018). This mission is in line with the opportunities which can be gained through participation in the UNESCO creative cities

network. Becoming a member of the UCCN opens up significant opportunities in the development of creative industries; especially, in the fields of media arts such as applications, games, radio and TV, advertising, film, video, animation, and photography. Malang City's membership in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) as a City of Media Arts is not merely symbolic recognition, but rather a paradiplomacy instrument which offers strategic advantages in various sectors including economics, culture, education and city branding. By utilizing the UCCN platform, the Malang City Government has the potential to increase regional governance capacity and strengthen international relations for sustainable development which is in line with the principles of low diplomacy that prioritize community and urban issues.



Source: Disnaker PMPTSP

Malang's creative sector has previously attracted investor interest which is proved by the influx of Domestic Direct Investment (PMDN) into various creative subsectors; such as, advertising, specialized film design, video, television programs, and comics. Investment has also flowed into visual communication design, video game development, game design, fashion, photography, fine art, interior design, and architecture.

To further substantiate the growing attractiveness of Malang City's creative economy, this study presents foreign investment data as empirical evidence complementing the previously observed trend of increasing domestic investment (PMDN) in the creative sector. While domestic investment reflects internal confidence and policy effectiveness at the local level, foreign investment serves as an indicator of Malang City's international competitiveness and global connectivity within the creative economy. As shown in Table 1, foreign direct investment in Malang's creative subsectors has increased since 2021,

particularly in media-related fields such as film and television distribution, visual communication design, and software development. The coexistence of rising domestic and foreign investment suggests a mutually reinforcing relationship, where strong local creative ecosystems supported by domestic capital create favorable conditions for attracting international investors. In this context, foreign investment functions not only as a financial contribution but also as a signal of Malang City’s readiness to engage in global creative networks, a condition that aligns closely with the objectives of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

**Table 1. Foreign Investment In The Creative Economy Sector**

Year	Origin Country	Company	Investment Sector	Investment Value (Rp)
2021	Japan	Catch Good Fortune	Distribution of films, videos, and television programs	10.170.000.000
2022	Yemen	Yamani Group	Visual communication design	10.500.000.000
2023	Singapore	Magicsoft Technology	Computer programming and software	14.000.000.000
2023	Denmark	24slides Design	Visual communication design	10.060.000.000
2024	Denmark	24slides Design	Visual communication design	10.060.000.000

*Source: Disnaker PMPTSP*

The data presented in Table 1 illustrate the pattern of foreign investment in Malang City’s creative economy sector between 2021 and 2024. Foreign capital inflows originated from diverse regions, including East Asia (Japan), the Middle East (Yemen), Southeast Asia (Singapore), and Europe (Denmark), indicating broad international interest in Malang’s creative industries. Investment was concentrated primarily in media-related subsectors, such as film and television distribution, visual communication design, and computer programming and software development. The value of foreign investment shows a generally positive trend, beginning with Rp10.17 billion in 2021 and reaching a peak of Rp14 billion in 2023, before stabilizing in 2024. Notably, repeated investment by the same foreign firm, particularly from Denmark in 2023 and 2024, suggests investor confidence and continuity in Malang City’s creative business environment. From an analytical perspective, this investment pattern reflects Malang City’s structural readiness to support media arts and digital creative industries, which aligns with its strategic positioning within the UNESCO Creative Cities Network framework. The dominance of investments in digital and media-oriented sectors reinforces Malang’s comparative advantage in the Media Arts category. Moreover, the diversity of investor origin countries indicates that Malang’s creative ecosystem has achieved a level of global visibility and credibility, supported by local policies, infrastructure, and human capital.

Furthermore, foreign investment from various countries has begun to flow in since 2021 through Catch Good Fortune from Japan, which operates in film and television distribution. In 2022, investment continued with the entry of Yamani Group from Yemen in the field of visual communication design. In 2023, further investment came from Magicsoft Technology of Singapore in computer programming, along with 24slides Design from Denmark in visual communication design, which subsequently continued its investment in the same sector in 2024. The presence of this foreign and local investment demonstrates the potential of Malang's creative sector to further develop on a global scale. Furthermore, membership in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network offers greater investment opportunities, both domestically and internationally, attracting new capital to support creative projects in Malang. In addition, membership in this network can expand global economic connections, giving Malang's creative products and services greater access to international markets. (UNICEF, 2021)

Beyond its economic focus, membership in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network enables cities to mobilize cultural heritage and creative capacities as strategic instruments of urban development, rather than treating culture as a symbolic or decorative asset. As emphasized by Kongmee & Kortana (2023), UCCN recognition encourages cities to embed creativity within broader sustainable development agendas, ensuring that cultural policies contribute to long-term social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and economic resilience. In this sense, UCCN functions as a governance framework that redefines culture as an active driver of development, not merely as an object of preservation. The UCCN further institutionalizes inter-city collaboration through mechanisms such as the Annual Conference, which operates as a transnational policy arena where member cities exchange best practices, evaluate policy outcomes, and negotiate shared development priorities. This forum enables cities to learn from diverse governance experiences and adapt global policy ideas to local contexts, strengthening policy innovation at the municipal level (Luerdi, 2023). Importantly, the conference also facilitates direct dialogue between UNESCO and local governments, allowing cities to align their creative strategies with global cultural and sustainability agendas.

At the same time, the Annual Conference plays a crucial role in enhancing international visibility and soft power for member cities. By hosting conferences, exhibitions, and creative showcases, cities are able to project their cultural identity to a global audience while fostering cross-border partnerships. For example, the 17th UCCN Annual Conference held in Enghien-les-Bains, France, in 2025 under the theme “Culture and

Artificial Intelligence” illustrates how UCCN encourages cities to engage with emerging global issues. Through thematic sessions, mayors’ forums, and creative exhibitions, cities not only exchange technical knowledge on innovation and inclusivity but also position themselves as active contributors to future-oriented urban governance (Para et al., 2017).

Within this context, Malang City’s participation in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in 2025 reflects a concrete practice of global paradiplomacy, as conceptualized by Duchacek. Through UCCN, Malang engages directly with cities across Europe, Asia, and other regions, building international relationships that operate beyond the traditional dominance of national governments. This decentralized mode of international engagement allows Malang to pursue its development interests autonomously while contributing to global cultural cooperation. Moreover, Malang City’s UCCN membership exemplifies multipurpose paradiplomacy, as outlined by Lecours, by generating benefits across multiple domains simultaneously. Economically, UCCN membership strengthens Malang’s attractiveness to foreign investors and supports the expansion of creative industries and employment. Culturally and educationally, it facilitates continuous knowledge exchange through international conferences, workshops, and collaborative projects, enhancing local creative capacity. Politically, UCCN recognition enhances Malang City’s international image, positioning it as a progressive urban actor committed to sustainable development and innovation. Taken together, these dimensions demonstrate that UCCN membership functions not merely as a cultural label, but as a strategic platform that integrates local development objectives with global networks of cooperation.

### **Malang City's Strategy Towards Malang Media Art 2025**

Article 363 of Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government states that, in order to improve public welfare, regions may enter into cooperation based on considerations of efficiency and effectiveness of public services, as well as the principle of mutual benefit with other regions, third parties, and institutions and regions abroad. This provision serves as the legal basis for the implementation of paradiplomacy in Indonesia, where regional governments have the authority to establish cross-regional cooperation, including with foreign parties, in order to strengthen regional potential. One form of implementation of this cooperation is reflected in the Malang City government's efforts to become part of international networks such as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). In order to join this network, each city must meet a number of criteria set by UNESCO, which cover five main aspects: creative policies, creative programs, creative

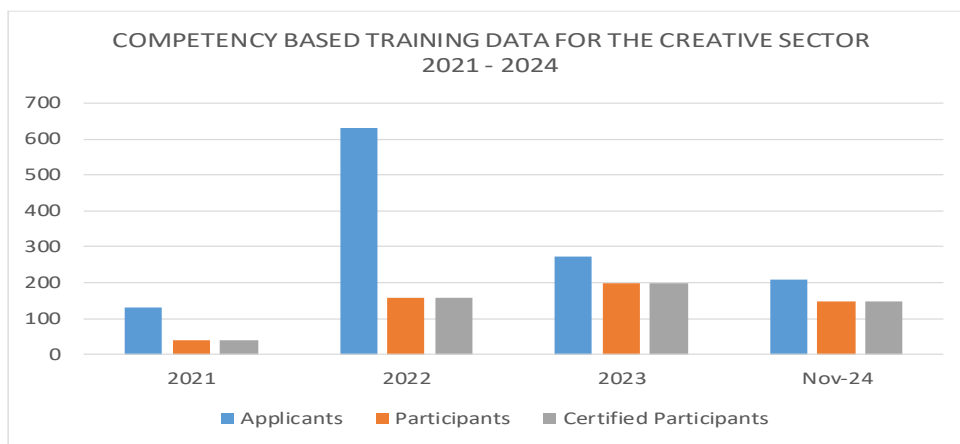
spaces, creative education, and creative communities. By meeting these five criteria, a city can apply to become part of the UCCN in order to expand the reach of international cooperation.

In preparation for becoming a global creative city, Malang City has formulated a creative economy development roadmap, first outlined in Malang Mayoral Regulation Number 12 of 2018, focusing on infrastructure provision, ecosystem development, and marketing enhancement (P. K. Malang, 2018). One concrete outcome of this roadmap is the establishment of the Malang Creative Center in 2022, which functions as a creative hub and research and development center for creative industry players. The MCC is equipped with various facilities; such as, a cinema, coworking space, creative design store, workshop space, multifunctional space, meeting rooms, an MSME superstore, an auditorium, and a photo studio, serving as a platform for collaboration and innovation. A follow-up roadmap, outlined in the Malang Creative Economy Development Action Plan 2023–2027, expands the scope of the roadmap by adjusting its strategic direction toward its vision as a global Creative City (P. kota Malang, 2023). This new roadmap comprises three main strategies, interconnected and reinforcing each other.

The first strategy is to facilitate access to relevant infrastructure and services for the creative economy. Although Malang City already has various supporting infrastructure; such as, the Malang Creative Center and Co-Working space, its use has not been optimal (Krisbiantoro & Fitriyanto, 2025). Therefore, special programs and events are needed in order to introduce these services to creative economy actors so that creative economy actors can utilize the available infrastructure and services. One effort to introduce this facility is through several events held at the MCC to introduce the facilities which have been provided. Starting from its opening until November 2024, there have been 10,396 events held at the MCC with 3,092 creative economy actors and 500,000 beneficiaries of the Malang Creative Center. The MCC also plays a role as a center for organizing creative activities, one of which is the Mbois Festival, an annual festival which has been held since 2016 with the aim of developing the talents and interests of creative industry actors and promoting the creative economy and tourism of Malang City. In its 7th to 9th editions, the festival was centered at the MCC as part of the government's strategy in order to optimize the utilization of the facility. In addition to the MCC, the Malang City Government, through the Youth, Sports, and Tourism Office, continues to develop various co-working space facilities, including the Gajayana Co-working, the Ken Arok Sports Hall Co-working, the Bakalankrajan Co-working, and the Kebun Bibit Co-working. These facilities are equipped with various

supporting facilities; such as, free Wi-Fi access, air conditioning, and television to support user comfort and productivity. This effort is a form of government responsibility in providing support to creative workers, startups, and students who need collaborative spaces to develop ideas and expand networks in Malang City's creative economy ecosystem. Malang City is also developing event spaces at Kayutangan Heritage and Ijen Boulevard as centers for creative activities and cultural tourism. The development of these two areas aims to increase the attractiveness of cultural and creative tourism through the integration of colonial heritage with modern public spaces at Kayutangan and Ijen Boulevard. Several activities held; such as, the Kajoetangan Festival and Malang Tempoe Doeloe are expected to encourage economic growth based on arts, crafts, and entertainment while strengthening Malang's identity as a creative city.

The second strategy focuses on creating competitive creative economy actors. It is achieved by enhancing the human resources capabilities of MSMEs and creative economy actors, as well as strengthening the creative value chain so that creative economy products can compete nationally and internationally (Haryati, 2024; Wikansari et al., 2024). Training programs, mentoring, and ongoing events are fundamental needs which should be continuously improved (Shan & Wang, 2024).



*Source: Disnaker PMPTSP*

The graph illustrates competency-based training data for the creative sector in Malang City from 2021 to 2024, based on data from the Manpower and Transmigration Office (Disnaker PMPTSP). It presents three indicators: number of applicants, number of participants, and number of certified participants. Overall, the data show a significant increase in training demand and participation between 2021 and 2022, followed by a period of stabilization in 2023 and 2024. In 2021, the number of applicants was relatively low, with

only a portion proceeding to participation and certification. A sharp rise occurred in 2022, when applications peaked at more than 600 individuals, accompanied by a substantial increase in participants and certified trainees. This surge indicates heightened public interest and awareness of competency-based training programs in the creative sector. In 2023, although the number of applicants declined compared to 2022, participation and certification levels remained relatively high, suggesting improved selection efficiency and training effectiveness. By November 2024, the data show a more balanced distribution between applicants, participants, and certified participants, indicating greater program maturity and alignment between training capacity and workforce needs.

From an analytical perspective, this trend demonstrates the institutional strengthening of human resource development in Malang City's creative economy. The increasing proportion of certified participants relative to applicants over time suggests improvements in training quality, curriculum relevance, and certification outcomes. This reflects the local government's growing capacity to translate policy initiatives into measurable skill development. Furthermore, the emphasis on competency-based certification aligns with the requirements of the Media Arts sector, which prioritizes technical skills, digital literacy, and professional standards. Since 2021, the Malang City Government, through the Manpower and Transmigration Office (Disnaker PMPTSP) has held various competency-based training programs in various fields; such as, content creation, multimedia design, graphic design, beauty, and fashion. These programs are complemented by competency certification from the National Professional Certification Agency (BNSP), which enjoys national and international recognition. In addition to government programs, there are strategic collaborations with the private sector, such as the partnership between Beon Intermedia and the Malang Creative Center under the DigitaLoka program. This program aims to support network expansion and business development, accelerate digitalization for MSMEs, and raise awareness of the importance of trademark registration and protection.

Strengthening the creative economy ecosystem within the formal education sector in Malang City has also shown significant progress through the implementation of various strategic initiatives. The implementation of the Application and Game-Based Guidelines, published in 2019, has reached 21 higher education institutions and 10 vocational high schools in the region. This book is the result of a collaboration between stakeholders in the city's digital ecosystem and the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, aiming to bridge the competency gap between university graduates and industry needs, particularly in the

Applications and Games subsector (Komite ekonomi kreatif kota malang, 2019). Furthermore, in early 2024, the Malang City Government initiated a program to integrate creative industry materials into the primary and secondary education curriculum. This program covers a comprehensive educational spectrum, from Early Childhood Education, Elementary School, to Junior High School. This initiative represents a systematic approach in building a foundation for creative economy literacy from an early age, which is projected to increase the capacity and competitiveness of the younger generation in facing the increasingly complex dynamics of the creative industry (Roring et al., 2024).

The third strategy focuses on building a synergistic and collaborative creative economy ecosystem through the Hexa Helix approach. This approach involves six key stakeholders: academics, business actors, communities, government, media, and financial institutions as the foundation for creative industry development in Malang City (Barbarossa et al., 2023). This model is an extension of the Triple Helix concept, incorporating society, media, and financial institutions to foster more inclusive and participatory collaboration (Shyiramunda & van den Bersselaar, 2024). Each stakeholder has a specific role, with the primary goal of creating synergy among actors, promoting innovation and creativity, and supporting sustainable and inclusive development (Tuthaes et al., 2024). Aligned goals and collaboration between parties are expected to strengthen competitiveness and encourage sustainable creative economy growth at the local and global levels (Manioudis & Angelakis, 2023).



**Figure 1.** Hexahelix Model of Creative Economy Stakeholders

To operationalize the Hexahelix model illustrated in Figure 1, Malang City translates multi-stakeholder collaboration into concrete institutional roles and policy actions. While the Hexahelix framework conceptually emphasizes the interaction between government,

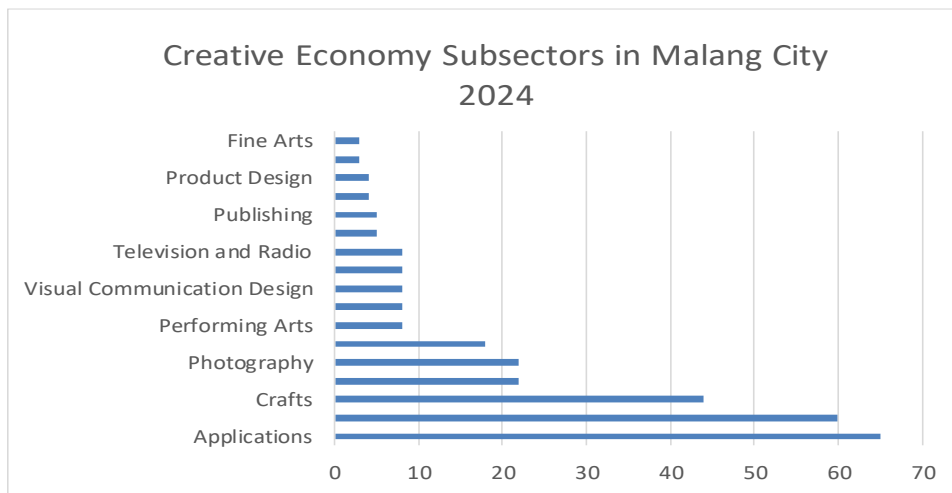
academia, business, community, media, and financial institutions, its practical implementation requires clear coordination mechanisms within the local government structure (Espuny et al., 2025; Sabaruddin et al., 2025). In this context, the municipal government acts as the central orchestrator that aligns the roles of various regional departments with the broader objective of creative economy development. Table 2 therefore presents the specific duties and activity focus of key government departments involved in strengthening Malang City’s creative economy ecosystem, demonstrating how the abstract Hexahelix model is implemented through formal administrative responsibilities and sectoral programs.

**Table 2. Duties of various Department in developing the creative economy in Malang City**

Department	Main Activities	Activity Focus
Department of Cooperatives, Industry, and Trade (Diskopindag)	Promotion and Facilitation	a. Management of Malang Creative Center (MCC): SME stimulus assistance at MCC. b. Creative events: Malang Creative Youth, Mbois Festival.
Department of Manpower (Disnaker)	Capacity Development	Competency-based training for creative economy actors.
Department of Communication and Informatics (Diskominfo)	Research and Database	Technology guidance for information technology services for the creative economy.
Department of Social Affairs (Dinsos)	Research and Capacity Development	a. Community empowerment programs. b. Economic empowerment for people with disabilities.
Department of Education (Disdik)	Research and Capacity Development	Integration of creative industry materials into the curriculum.
Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda)	Planning and Connectivity	Creative Economy Consultation for roadmap development.
Department of Public Works and Spatial Planning (DPUPR)	Infrastructure and Facility Development	a. Malang Creative Center development. b. Kayutangan Heritage area development.
One-Stop Integrated Service and Investment Services (DPMPTSP)	Facility Development	a. Facilitating investment opportunities. b. Mentoring potential investors.

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of roles and responsibilities among key government departments in developing Malang City’s creative economy ecosystem. Each department contributes through a specific functional focus that collectively supports a coordinated and integrated governance structure. The Department of Cooperatives, Industry, and Trade (Diskopindag) plays a central role in promotion and facilitation through the management of the Malang Creative Center and the organization of major creative events, while the Department of Manpower (Disnaker) strengthens human capital through

competency-based training programs for creative economy actors. Research, data management, and technological support are addressed by the Department of Communication and Informatics (Diskominfo), complemented by the Department of Social Affairs (Dinsos) and the Department of Education (Disdik), which emphasize inclusive capacity development through community empowerment, disability-focused economic programs, and curriculum integration. Strategic planning and policy alignment are coordinated by the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda), while physical infrastructure and creative spaces are developed by the Department of Public Works and Spatial Planning (DPUPR). Meanwhile, the One-Stop Integrated Service and Investment Services (DPMPTSP) facilitates investment inflows and investor mentoring. Taken together, this division of labor reflects an institutionalized application of the Hexahelix model, demonstrating how Malang City operationalizes multi-stakeholder collaboration through inter-departmental coordination to support sustainable creative economy development and international engagement.



*Source: Osiker*

The graph presents the distribution of creative economy subsectors in Malang City in 2024, showing variation in the number of actors across different creative fields. The applications subsector dominates with the highest number of creative actors, followed by crafts, indicating strong development in technology-driven and production-based creative industries. Photography and performing arts form a middle tier, reflecting moderate but stable participation within visual and cultural expression sectors. In contrast, subsectors such as visual communication design, television and radio, publishing, product design, and fine arts show relatively smaller representation.

Beyond the role of government departments outlined in Table 2, the effectiveness of Malang City's creative economy ecosystem is reinforced by the active involvement of non-government stakeholders within the Hexahelix framework. Business actors, operating across 17 creative economy subsectors and comprising 295 registered entities, function as the primary drivers of innovation, production, and market expansion, benefiting directly from facilitation, infrastructure, and investment services coordinated by Diskopindag, DPUPR, and DPMPTSP. Academic institutions support this ecosystem by supplying skilled human resources and research outputs, which align with the capacity development and planning functions of Disnaker, Disdik, and Bappeda, particularly through initiatives such as the Academic Association for Creative Economy (AACE). Media actors amplify creative outputs and policy initiatives through promotion and public engagement, complementing government-led creative events and festivals, including those managed through the Malang Creative Center. Meanwhile, financial institutions provide capital access and business support that strengthen start-ups and MSMEs, reinforcing investment facilitation roles under DPMPTSP. Collectively, these interactions demonstrate how the institutional responsibilities detailed in Table 2 are operationalized through cross-sector collaboration, translating governance structures into a functioning and sustainable creative economy ecosystem.

After a sustained period of policy formulation and institutional strengthening as reflected in Table 2 and the distribution of creative economy subsectors in Malang City, the local government formally positioned itself to participate in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network under the Media Arts category. The choice of Media Arts was not incidental but emerged from the structural composition of Malang's creative economy, where digital and technology-based subsectors such as applications, games, photography, and audiovisual production demonstrate higher levels of participation compared to other creative fields. This distribution indicates that creative activities in Malang are increasingly oriented toward technology-driven production, which aligns with the core definition of Media Arts as a creative field that integrates artistic expression with digital systems and modern communication technologies.

The institutional arrangements shown in Table 2 help explain how this sectoral concentration has been supported and sustained. Government departments responsible for infrastructure development, capacity building, education, and investment facilitation collectively create an enabling environment for media arts-related activities to grow. For instance, the development of creative infrastructure and public spaces supports production

and exhibition, while competency-based training programs strengthen technical skills required in application development, digital design, and audiovisual production. At the same time, the integration of creative industry materials into the education system ensures a continuous supply of human resources capable of responding to the evolving demands of the digital creative sector (Malaikosa et al., 2022). These coordinated institutional efforts contribute to the dominance of media-related subsectors observed in the creative economy distribution data.

Malang City's national recognition as a leading ecosystem for application and game development in 2017 and 2019 further reinforces this alignment between policy direction and sectoral strength. Such recognition reflects the effectiveness of local governance in translating creative economy strategies into measurable outcomes, particularly in subsectors closely associated with Media Arts. This track record provided a strong foundation for Malang City's participation in the national selection process for the 2025 UNESCO Creative Cities Network, where evaluators assessed not only cultural assets but also policy consistency, institutional capacity, and community participation.

The multi-stage national selection process in 2024 functioned as a validation mechanism for the governance model illustrated in Table 2 and the sectoral distribution shown in the graph. Through document evaluation, presentations, and on-site verification, the National Selection Committee assessed whether local creative ecosystems were supported by coherent policies, functional infrastructure, and active stakeholder engagement. In Malang City, visits to creative spaces, heritage areas, educational institutions, and the Malang Creative Center demonstrated how institutional coordination and sectoral strengths materialize in practice. The visibility of media arts activities during these visits confirmed that the city's creative economy structure was not merely planned on paper but actively embedded in urban life.

The final designation of Malang City as a UNESCO Creative City of Media Arts in 2025 thus represents the convergence of institutional governance, sectoral composition, and strategic international engagement. The creative economy distribution data illustrate why Media Arts was a logical thematic focus, while Table 2 explains how this focus was supported through coordinated departmental roles. Together, these elements show that Malang City's membership in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network is the outcome of a sustained and structured development process rather than a symbolic achievement. Through this integration of governance capacity and creative sector dynamics, Malang City

strengthens its position within global creative networks and advances its role in international cultural cooperation based on media arts.

## **Conclusion**

In the current global context, many countries are seeking sustainable economic sources through the development of the creative economy and promoting transformation toward becoming creative cities, one of which is facilitated by the international platform of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. The findings of this study indicate that Malang City's participation in UCCN not only optimizes its local potential but also strengthens its global position across economic, cultural, and political dimensions. Membership in the UCCN has the potential to increase investment, create employment opportunities, boost tourism, and preserve Malang's cultural identity. The Malang City government formulated a Roadmap for creative economy development in an effort to become part of the world's creative cities through various strategic steps; such as, facilitating access to relevant infrastructure and services related to the creative economy, creating competitive creative economy actors, and building a synergistic and collaborative creative ecosystem between stakeholders. These efforts successfully led to Malang becoming a part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in 2025. However, this study has several limitations, as it relies on data from official government documents and reports. Therefore, the results of the analysis depend on the completeness and availability of the existing data, without involving direct interviews with stakeholders engaged in the UCCN process. In addition, this study focused only on the preparatory stage for UCCN membership, so it was not yet able to assess the impact of program implementation after the membership was obtained. Future research is recommended to focus on the sustainability of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network in Malang City, examining how creative programs and policies influence the city's creative ecosystem, as well as the economic, cultural, and international collaboration impacts of its membership on both Malang and Indonesia. To support this, primary data should be collected directly from key stakeholders to gain deeper insights and produce more comprehensive research findings.

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