

Barter Transactions at the Wulandoni Market: Preserving the Sustainability of Traditional Economy

Santhy Chamdra^{*)}, Jullyo Gideon Rohi

Agribusiness Study Program, Faculty of Agriculture, Universitas Nusa Cendana, Jl. Adisucipto, Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, 85001, Indonesia

^{*)}Correspondence e-mail: santhy.chamdra@staf.undana.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the traditional barter market system in Wulandoni, Lembata Regency, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, where inland farmers exchange agricultural products with coastal fishermen's marine goods. The research aims to examine the socio-economic and cultural mechanisms of this barter market, which continues to operate amidst modern market systems. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through field observations, structured interviews, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Findings reveal that the barter market functions not only as an economic exchange but also as a sacred cultural tradition reflecting mutual dependence between inland and coastal communities. Transactions are shaped by kinship ties, trust, and shared beliefs, with agreed values based on fairness and mutual respect. Although monetary exchange has gradually entered the system, especially after Wulandoni became a populated sub-district center, barter remains a core practice due to its cultural significance. The market reflects a subsistence economy, deeply rooted in local wisdom and traditional technologies. The study concludes that while the barter system signifies economic backwardness, it also represents a strong cultural identity. Transforming this traditional market into a cultural tourism site requires careful preservation of its local values and indigenous knowledge.

Keywords: barter market, cultural tradition, local wisdom, subsistence economy, Wulandoni

INTRODUCTION

Rural economic change is a phenomenon that has received increasing attention in studies of economic sociology and regional development. Economic modernization is often associated with the development of a money-based market system and the integration of rural communities into the broader market economy. However, various studies have shown that economic practices do not always fully follow modern market mechanisms but are still influenced by social relations, cultural norms, and community structures that develop within the community (Polanyi, 1944; Granovetter, 1985). This perspective emphasizes that economic activity does not stand alone as an autonomous system but is embedded within the social structure of society.

Traditional economic practices, such as the barter system, persist in Indonesian rural communities. Barter is a mechanism for exchanging goods without using money as a means of transaction, which generally occurs in societies with strong social networks and a high level of trust between economic actors (Humphrey & Hugh-Jones, 1992). This practice serves an economic function and plays a role in strengthening social relations and community solidarity. In agrarian societies, this kind of exchange is often related to moral economic values that emphasize the principle of mutual assistance and maintaining the survival of the community (Scott, 1976).

Several previous studies have examined the existence of barter markets in the Wulandoni area, Lembata Regency. Nyoko, Fanggidae, and Ose (2022) found that the barter system in the Wulandoni market continues to thrive because traders have strong social connections and agree on exchange rates that everyone understands. Another study by Marselina (2025) showed that barter practices in the region not only function as a mechanism for exchanging goods but also reflect local wisdom values passed down through generations in the community, such as the importance of trust, reciprocity, and community cohesion in sustaining these practices. Furthermore, Wutun (2023) highlighted the relationship between traders' financial literacy levels and the economic well-being of households around barter markets, indicating the increasingly complex economic dynamics inherent in barter practices, which may influence how effectively these traders can negotiate and engage in barter transactions.

Although various studies have provided an overview of the existence of barter markets in Wulandoni, most studies still focus on descriptive aspects of barter practices and the cultural values underlying them. Studies on how regional economic changes, infrastructure develops, and the integration of modern markets influence local economic dynamics within the barter system are still relatively limited. However, in the context of regional development, these changes can influence local economic structures and the adaptation strategies of rural communities in maintaining traditional economic practices. Therefore, it is important to conduct more in-depth research into the dynamics of local economic changes occurring within barter market activities and how communities adapt to these changes.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of local economic structures and social adaptation of the community in barter market practices in Wulandoni. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How do changes in local economic structures affect barter practices in the Wulandoni market? (2) How do rural communities adapt to these economic changes? and (3) What factors support the sustainability of barter practices in the context of a modern economy? Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of economic sociology studies, particularly regarding the concept of embeddedness in traditional economic practices. Practically, the results of this study are expected to be a consideration for local governments in formulating economic development policies that pay more attention to the social and cultural characteristics of local communities.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative paradigm that aims to gain a deeper understanding of barter practices in Wulandoni Traditional Market as part of the socio-cultural system of inland and coastal communities. The methods used include direct observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs), as well as literature and documentation studies. Data were collected directly from barter actors, community leaders, village officials, and other relevant parties, then analyzed through a process of reduction, tabulation, classification, and interpretation with reference to socio-cultural theories such as those proposed by Koentjaraningrat (1984) and Clifford Geertz (1989). In this study, the author firmly places the theoretical perspective within the framework of economic sociology by

using embeddedness theory as the main analytical tool. The concept of embeddedness introduced by Karl Polanyi and later developed in modern economic sociology by Mark Granovetter is positioned as a middle-range theory that explains that economic activity does not occur separately from social structures, but rather is embedded in the network of social relations, norms, and values that develop within society (Polanyi, 1944; Granovetter, 1985). Thus, this research's methodological approach is based on the epistemological assumption that local economic practices, such as barter systems in rural communities, cannot be understood solely as rational economic mechanisms but must be analyzed within the context of the social relations, beliefs, and institutions that shape these practices. Therefore, this study uses a qualitative approach with an economic sociological perspective to examine how barter exchange practices are formed, maintained, and adapted within the dynamics of local social structures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social Economic Perspective on Exchange Practices at the Wulandoni Market

The barter market in the Wulandoni and Nagawutung regions represents a form of traditional economic practice that persists despite the dominance of the modern monetary economic system. This exchange system brings together coastal communities carrying marine commodities with inland communities providing agricultural produce. In practice, the barter market serves not only as a mechanism for exchanging goods to meet household needs but also as a space for social interaction that strengthens inter-community ties. Economic activity in this context does not exist autonomously, as in modern market systems, but is instead embedded in social structures, cultural norms, and networks of trust established within the community.

In reality, the barter market at Wulandoni Barter Market is inseparable from the whaling tradition practiced by the Lamalera community. This tradition produces high-value marine commodities such as whale meat and dried fish, which are then distributed through a barter mechanism to inland communities. Research in the *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* shows that the barter system in Lamalera (panetan) is a form of complementary exchange between marine and agricultural products that directly meets the basic needs of both communities. Thus, the whaling tradition functions as a production base that strengthens the economic position of coastal communities while maintaining the continuity of commodity flow in the barter system. From a social economic perspective, this phenomenon aligns with Karl Polanyi's concept of the embedded economy, which asserts that in traditional societies, economic activity is embedded in social relations and community institutions. Furthermore, James C. Scott's concept of moral economy explains that the economic practices of traditional societies are often guided by norms of social justice and community solidarity, rather than solely by the rationality of profit. Meanwhile, Mark Granovetter's embeddedness approach emphasizes that individual economic decisions are influenced by the network of social relationships formed through repeated interactions within the community. In the context of barter markets, social relationships between market participants, close kinship ties, and established trust are crucial factors supporting the sustainability of these exchange practices.

Several previous studies have shown that barter markets in various regions of Indonesia function not only as a mechanism for economic exchange but also as a social institution that maintains inter-community ties and local cultural identity. A study by De Rozari et al. (2022), for example, showed that the sustainability of barter markets in the Wulandoni region is influenced by the region's geographic conditions, limited access to formal markets, and strong cultural values passed down through generations. Other research on traditional barter markets in several regions of Indonesia also confirms that this exchange system often emerges as a form of community adaptation to the limitations of modern market economic and distribution infrastructure. However, most of these studies focus on descriptive aspects of the existence of barter markets and have not examined institutional dynamics, gender relations, and the influence of government policies on the transformation of traditional exchange systems.

Social and Cultural Values as a Guide to the Life of Barter Actors at the Wulandoni Traditional Market

The Wulandoni barter market reflects a traditional economic system formed from a reciprocal relationship between two geographically separated communities: coastal and inland communities.

Coastal communities, whose livelihood is fishing, rely heavily on agricultural products from inland areas to meet their food needs, while inland communities, whose livelihood is farming, also require marine products such as fish, salt, and lime from coastal communities. This interdependence creates vital values that maintain the survival of both groups and foster social interactions that are internalized in their cultures. This relationship is not limited to the exchange of goods, but is also embedded in a strong social system, where mutual respect and maintaining harmony are key principles. Barter practices take two main forms: “peneteng”, where coastal communities visit homes inland to exchange goods, and “vuleng”, where exchanges are made periodically at specific locations (such as the Wulandoni Barter Market). This bartering activity is not only an economic practice but also a sacred social and cultural ritual, believed to impact the success of harvests or sea catches. Therefore, conflicts or denials of this relationship must be resolved through peace rituals.

One of the sacred ritual activities highly respected by the Lembata community is the seasonal and high-risk practice of whale hunting, which encourages the formation of a solidarity-based distribution system through barter as an economic adaptation strategy. Abundant catches during certain periods are distributed through social networks to be exchanged for agricultural products, thus creating a balance of consumption over time. Furqan's (2024) research on the peneta tradition shows that bartering activities carried out by Lamalera women function not only as an economic exchange but also as a symbol of peace and social relations between communities. This confirms that barter is a distribution mechanism as well as a social bond that supports the sustainability of the local economic system.

The link between the whaling tradition and the barter market also reflects an economic system based on structural interdependence between the coast and the interior. A study by Hamado et al. (2019) shows that the sustainability of the barter market in Wulandoni is influenced by customary factors, subscription networks (prevo), and geographic conditions that create interdependence between regions. In this context, marine products from whaling activities become strategic commodities that strengthen these exchange relationships. Therefore, the whaling tradition functions not only as a production activity but also as an adaptive strategy that strengthens the barter system, maintains local economic stability, and maintains the socio-cultural integration of the community on Lembata Island.

The bartering practices in Wulandoni, Solor Islands, Alor, and Pantar represent a form of traditional economic interaction between coastal and inland communities to meet subsistence needs. Exchanged goods, such as seafood and garden produce, are complementary, not competitive. Inland communities, as shifting cultivators, rely heavily on nature and ancestral customs, while coastal communities, such as those in Lamalera, rely on the sea for their livelihoods, utilizing inherited technology. These two groups socially and culturally seem to have unwritten boundaries: fishermen do not cultivate crops and farmers do not fish, creating a strong system of interdependence. Bartering is a form of traditional market rooted in cultural values and norms, where direct, cashless transactions reflect social ties and the continuity of local culture. As Polanyi explains, markets are social institutions that have existed since humans began exchanging to meet their needs. In this context, bartering markets serve not only as economic platforms but also as a manifestation of shared culture that serves as a guide and tool in community life.

Cora Du Bois recorded conversations with the residents of Atimelang, whom she was researching. An interesting story for this study on pages 301-302 is the Autobiography of Reverend Malelaka (Cora Du Bois.....301-302), whom she interviewed on May 4, 1939, which relates, among other things:

“We finished our corn that year before the rainy season even arrived. But I had a very good cassava field, and many people brought us corn so we could dig cassava in my field. I told them to take the tubers but replant a shoot in the hole you dug. That's the only way you take off the waste. That's how you dispose of the leftovers. Take the core and plant the shoot, so that real food will still be available.”

The story of Malelaka and the practice of barter in Wulandoni illustrates the socio-economic dynamics of a traditional society that relies heavily on agriculture and fishing, utilizing ancestral technologies. Malelaka, who chose to work independently due to his disillusionment with the mutual cooperation (tatul) system, became a crucial food provider during the lean season through his fields of cassava and sweet potatoes. The barter system involved not only the exchange of goods (corn for sweet potatoes) but also labor, such as digging and replanting the sweet potatoes. This demonstrates that barter in traditional societies is not merely an economic activity but also part of a complex and mutually beneficial social system. The Wulandoni barter market emerged as a means of balancing the livelihoods of coastal and inland communities who face high risks in farming and fishing. When disruptions in harvests or

catches occur, the cause is often attributed to disrupted social relations, and resolutions are often carried out through customary mechanisms, reinforcing the fact that barter in this region serves not only an economic function but also a social and cultural institution that binds the community holistically.

Several international studies have shown that barter practices persist in various communities as part of local economic systems with strong social and cultural dimensions. A study of the Purépecha barter market in Mexico showed that bartering not only serves as a mechanism for exchanging goods but also plays a role in strengthening community resilience, maintaining the sustainability of local production, and expanding women's roles in household economic activities. These barter markets also serve as social spaces, enabling the exchange of information, the formation of social networks, and the maintenance of local cultural identity amidst the pressures of economic globalization (García et al., 2023). These findings suggest that the sustainability of barter systems is often underpinned by values of solidarity, social trust, and reciprocity among community members.

Other research on the transformation of traditional exchange systems in various communities shows that the transition from barter to modern trade generally occurs gradually through a process of economic monetization and the integration of local markets into broader trade networks. Studies of exchange practices in indigenous communities indicate that the use of money in economic transactions does not completely replace barter but rather creates a form of coexistence between traditional exchange mechanisms and modern market systems (Pelipa et al., 2022). Furthermore, research in economic sociology also confirms that economic activity is often embedded in a network of social relations that influence people's economic behavior. Therefore, barter practices can persist because they are supported by strong relationships of trust and social networks (Mark Granovetter, 1985; Humphrey & Hugh-Jones, 1992).

Forms of Barter at Wulandoni Traditional Market

In early times, humans independently met their food needs by hunting and gathering fruit, without engaging in exchange or trade. However, as populations grew and needs diversified, humans were no longer able to meet all their needs alone. Therefore, they lived in groups and began to depend on each other, particularly between groups providing agricultural products and groups providing seafood. This gave rise to the barter system as a form of direct exchange.



Figure 1. Wulandoni Market Activities

In the southern region of Lembata Regency, bartering occurs between coastal residents who make a living as traditional fishermen and inland residents who practice shifting cultivation. Fishermen exchange seafood such as fish and sea cucumbers for agricultural products such as corn and sweet potatoes from farmers. This exchange is a practical form of barter, the exchange of goods for goods without the use of money, which meets the needs of both groups in their daily lives. The forms of bartering at the Wulandoni Traditional Market, based on research results, are as follows:

Seafood. Coastal residents visiting the Wulandoni barter market come from the villages of Lamalera, Labala, Wulandoni, Pantai Harapan, and Nuhalela. Lamalera is primarily a traditional fisherman, catching large fish such as whales, dolphins, rays, and sharks. Lamalera fishermen are known for

catching high-value fish using traditional techniques, while coastal residents of other villages, such as Wulandoni, Pantai Harapan, and Labala, primarily catch small and medium-sized fish using arrows, fishing rods, and scoop nets. The fish they catch, such as scad and octopus, are typically dried in the sun before being taken to markets or inland villages to be bartered for agricultural products.



Figure 2. Seafood Brought by Coastal Residents

Furthermore, the residents of Nuhalela are known as potters, producing traditional kitchenware such as pots, bowls, and utensils for the people of southern Lembata. Wulandoni Village has a more diverse community, encompassing farmers, fishermen, teachers, and civil servants, given its status as the sub-district capital, with a variety of educational facilities ranging from kindergarten to high school. The barter market here became an important center for the exchange of seafood and agricultural products, strengthening social and economic ties between coastal and inland communities.

Agricultural Product. The rural residents who come to the Wulandoni Barter Market come from Lewuka, Smuki, Ataili, Atawolo, Mulandoro, Waiwejak, and Watuwawer. The agricultural products brought by the rural residents include corn, rice, ground corn, bananas, papaya, coconuts, cassava leaves, papaya leaves, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, and several other types of tubers.



Figure 3. Agricultural Products Brought by Inland Residents

The sales volume for corn, bananas, and sweet potatoes is monga, where one monga is equal to six ears or six fruits. A bunch of bananas is called lili tou in the local language. However, in barter, it is more commonly known as monga. Meanwhile, rice and ground corn are measured out in a single container (the container size can be close to 1 kg). Various types of tubers are usually sold in a single pile or single tuber, or "hik" in the local language. Cassava leaves, papaya leaves, lemongrass, and basil are sold in a single pile, called mupul in the local language. This barter system uses a traditional rule called "monga" to determine the exchange rate of goods. This research aligns with research conducted by Marselina (2025), which states that the barter system in Wulandoni District uses traditional rules called "monga"

to determine the exchange value of goods. Factors influencing the existence of this barter market include customs and culture, tena and kotoklema factors, prefo factors, and geography. The barter market persists due to its alignment with local culture and customs, which uphold traditional values, despite the widespread circulation of paper money. In line with research (Nyoko et al., 2022), traders from remote villages typically bring agricultural products such as fruits, vegetables, corn, rice, bananas, tubers, betel, areca nut, tobacco, and coconut oil. Meanwhile, traders from coastal areas exchange various marine products, such as fresh fish, salted fish, dried fish, salt, and seaweed. In the exchange process, they do not use standard units of account, but rather local units called "monga". One monga is worth half a dozen ($1 = 6$), while two monga is equivalent to a whole ($2 = 12$). For example, one medium-sized fish can be exchanged for six stalks of corn or six ripe bananas, while one piece of whale worth two monga can be exchanged for twelve corn or twelve bananas. Based on observations, the use of this monga unit is not rigid, but depends on the agreement between the traders conducting the exchange.

The rapid development of modern markets has negatively impacted the sustainability of traditional markets, but in Wulandoni District, there are still markets that maintain the barter system. This study aims to analyze the history, implementation process, sustainability factors, and efforts to preserve the barter market in the area using descriptive qualitative methods through literature review, observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of the study indicate that the barter markets in Wulandoni have different origins, including the Labala Leworaja market which began with a meeting between coastal and mountain communities in the 18th century, the Wulandoni market which was born from the groi tena event in the early 19th century, and the Lamalera market which emerged as a temporary replacement in 2014. The implementation of the market begins with the blowing of a blowpipe by the market foreman and uses the monga ($=6$) value system. Factors that maintain its existence include customs and culture, tena and kotokelema, prewo (customer) relationships, geographical conditions, and regional development. Conservation efforts are carried out through the development of physical market facilities and strengthening socio-cultural values that apply in the community (Hamado et al., 2019; Lolon, 2020).

Wulandoni Barter Market and the Bonds of Brotherhood between Coastal and Inland Residents

This pattern of interdependent relationships, the bonds of brotherhood, are ingrained in the greeting "Prevo." "Prevo kame," an expression that fosters close relationships, mutual affection, and non-negotiation, much less betrayal. As told by elders, large gatherings or markets (Vuleng), such as those in Lebala and Wulandoni, began with agreements between individuals over the need for fish, salt, and lime, along with agricultural products. Mutual promises to wait at a certain place at a certain time, either morning or afternoon, are known as habeng. Habeng, which embodies the values of loyalty, friendship, love, and honesty, continues to develop; farming feeds both inland and coastal populations, and fishing, salt production, and limestone production from coral reefs feed and meet the needs of both coastal and inland populations. This relationship pattern subsequently developed into a fetishistic, sacred, and sacred relationship (Glareng) that must not be denied.

When in the 1990s, for several years, the Lamalera people did not catch whales, whales did not appear in Lamalera waters, or even when they appeared, it was difficult for the Lamalera people to catch whales. Community leaders from the interior said that this condition was due to the denial carried out by the Lamalera people; whales caught by the Lamalera people were not brought to the interior residents (farmers) but were sold directly to buyers from the city who came to the coast to get cash. As a result, the Lamalera people did not catch whales, and the interior residents also experienced harvest problems. Every year the harvest always failed, a crop failure that was difficult to explain. What can only be explained is that there was a slight problem in the relationship between the interior residents and the coastal residents, in this case the Lamalera people who directly sold their catch (whale meat and skin) to outsiders who came to buy directly on the coast. The inhabitants of Lamalera village found it easier because the fish caught were immediately sold at a high price, compared to first processing them and then taking them to the interior to be exchanged for agricultural products. With the large amount of cash they earn, Lamalera fishermen can easily buy or obtain various necessities of life, especially daily necessities.

This is the complaint and frustration expressed by the inland residents, who attributed the rift in the relationship between the inland and coastal residents to Lamalera fishermen selling their catch directly on the beach for cash. In this case, Lamalera fishermen violated the taboo (glareng) of selling their catch directly on the beach for cash. The consequence of this rift in the relationship was that both the sea and

the land provided no livelihood. For several years, the Lamalera people stopped catching whales, and the inland residents experienced annual crop failures. The Lamalera people acknowledged their negligence and stopped selling fish directly on the beach. The catch was first processed and then transported inland for agricultural purposes. Lembata Regent Yentji Sunur said that

"Between the Wulandoni barter market and traditional whale fishing, there is an inseparable economic chain. People from Lamalera catch whales and then exchange them for bananas, sweet potatoes, coconuts and corn with villagers living on the mountain slopes and the exchange process is carried out at the Wulandoni barter market." (Lembata Regency Government Website, 23-06-2019)

The sustainability of barter practices at the Wulandoni Barter Market is driven not only by taboos or cultural preservation, but also by rational and institutional factors, as confirmed by previous research findings. Marselina's (2025) study showed that barter practices persist due to local value systems, such as "monga," which serve as guidelines for determining exchange rates, thus creating a sense of fairness and certainty in transactions. This suggests that barter has a rational internal mechanism, not simply tradition. This finding aligns with research by Cipta and Nuka (2023), which states that barter practices remain efficient in the local context because they are based on real needs (use value), not simply market prices.

Furthermore, the presence of rituals and social interactions within market activities is also supported by previous research. Syaiful et al. (2022) found that in locally based communities, economic activities are often integrated with social practices such as community gatherings and forms of collective solidarity that strengthen economic resilience. In other words, barter market activities do not stand alone as economic transactions but also serve as social spaces that maintain intergroup cohesion. This strengthens the argument that the sustainability of barter is influenced by the strength of social networks and shared values that are continuously reproduced in community routines.

The role of customary authorities in maintaining the sustainability of barter markets is also supported by empirical research. Ose, Tameno, and Tiwu (2025) show that despite modernization due to infrastructure development, local institutions continue to function as regulators of community economic activity. Customary leaders play a role in maintaining norms, resolving conflicts, and ensuring fairness in exchanges. Meanwhile, research by Gunu Wutun et al. (2023) confirms that despite increased financial literacy and the penetration of the modern economy, communities have not completely abandoned traditional systems due to continued trust in local institutions. Furthermore, facilitative government support also strengthens the sustainability of barter markets as part of the local economic and cultural potential on Lembata Island. Thus, the sustainability of barter markets is the result of the interaction between cultural factors, customary institutions, economic rationality, and complementary external support.

The Form of Change in Local Economic Structure Influences Barter Practices in Wulandoni Market

Changes in the local economic structure around the Wulandoni Barter Market indicate a shift from a traditional economic system to a more modern, market-integrated one. This transformation is marked by increased regional accessibility, the development of transportation infrastructure, and the influx of goods from outside the region, which encourages the use of money as the primary medium of exchange. According to Michael P. Todaro and Stephen C. Smith (2015), the process of economic development generally shifts subsistence economic patterns toward a market economy, which implies a decline in non-monetary exchange practices such as barter. This is also reflected in Wulandoni, where the barter system is beginning to decline in intensity and is being replaced by a hybrid transaction system of barter and money. Research by Mariana Ose, et.,al (2025) shows that the development of sea toll ports has brought significant changes to the distribution patterns of goods and economic activities of the community, including increased access to goods from outside the region and the emergence of a cash-based trading system. This condition directly affects the previously dominant practice of bartering, as people begin to adapt to modern, more economically efficient market mechanisms. Thus, the transformation of the local economic structure contributes to the shift in the function of the barter market from a primary need to an alternative.

However, the practice of barter at the Wulandoni Barter Market has not completely disappeared, as it serves a strong social and cultural function. According to Karl Polanyi (1944), economic activity in

traditional societies is embedded in social relationships, so exchange is not solely based on market logic but also on values of trust, solidarity, and cultural norms. The practice of barter in Wulandoni reflects this, where the exchange process is still based on kinship and trust between market participants. Therefore, despite the penetration of the modern economy, barter remains a part of the cultural identity and social mechanisms of the local community. Furthermore, changes in people's economic behavior are also influenced by increased financial literacy and integration with the formal economic system. Research by (Wutun et al., 2023) found that aspects of financial literacy such as savings, investment, and access to loans significantly influence the welfare of traders in barter markets. This indicates that people are no longer entirely dependent on the barter system but are instead beginning to adopt cash-based economic practices. This change reinforces the shift from a traditional economy to a mixed economy, where

Furthermore, the conditions in Wulandoni also demonstrate an economic dualism, where traditional and modern economic systems coexist. According to Julius Herman Boeke (1953), societies in developing countries often experience economic dualism, namely the coexistence of a traditional sector based on social values and a modern, market-oriented sector. This phenomenon is clearly visible on Lembata Island, where barter practices persist amidst the increasing use of money in daily transactions. Thus, changes in the local economic structure have not completely eliminated barter practices, but rather transformed them into a hybrid economic system that adapts to the dynamics of the times. However, various recent studies also confirm that the practice of bartering at the Wulandoni Barter Market persists due to social, cultural, and local wisdom factors. A study by Apriana Marselina (2025) shows that the barter system persists because it is supported by traditional values, beliefs, and local rules such as "monga" which regulates the exchange rate of goods. Furthermore, research by Dyah Ayu Sulistyaning Cipta and Anastasia K. Nuka (2023) revealed that bartering still has a structured and rational value system in determining commodity exchange. Even in crisis conditions such as the pandemic, people continue to return to local economic mechanisms to meet their daily needs (Syaiful et al., 2022). This confirms that despite economic transformation, bartering persists as a form of economic resilience and cultural identity of local communities.

How do Rural Communities Adapt to These Economic Changes?

Rural communities around the Wulandoni Barter Market have demonstrated a dynamic ability to adapt to changes in the local economic structure. One key form of adaptation is the emergence of a mixed economic system, combining barter practices with cash-based transactions. Communities have not completely abandoned barter, but have begun using cash for certain commodities originating from outside the region or possessing a more certain market value. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of economic transformation by Michael P. Todaro and Stephen C. Smith, which states that communities will gradually adapt to a modern economic system without immediately abandoning traditional systems. This adaptation does not occur suddenly, but rather is a response to increased regional connectivity and the influx of goods from outside the region. Research by Ose, Tameno, and Tiwu (2025) shows that infrastructure development, such as the sea toll road, has expanded community economic access and encouraged a shift in transaction patterns from barter to a monetary system. However, communities have not completely abandoned traditional practices, but rather integrated them as a survival strategy. This demonstrates that local economic transformation encourages flexibility in rural economic practices.

Communities are adapting through diversification of income sources and commodities. Farmers and fishermen are no longer solely producing for their own consumption or barter, but are beginning to adapt their production to market demand. For example, some crops are sold for cash, while others are still used in the barter system. This adaptation reflects evolving economic rationality, yet remains framed within local social values. From Karl Polanyi's perspective, this condition indicates that economic activity remains embedded in social relations, so that economic change does not completely erase traditional values but rather integrates with them. Research by Gunu Wutun et al. (2023) found that increased financial literacy impacts the well-being of traders in barter markets, indicating a shift in economic behavior toward more modernity. Conversely, a study by Syaiful et al. (2022) confirmed that in crisis situations, communities tend to revert to local economic systems such as barter as a coping mechanism. Thus, community adaptation is contextual, using modern systems when possible but still relying on traditional systems when necessary.

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What Factors Support The Sustainability of Barter Practices in The Context of a Modern Economy?

The sustainability of barter practices in a modern economic context, such as that occurring at the Wulandoni Barter Market, is supported by a complex interaction between local economic rationality, social structures, and adaptive institutional dynamics. From an economic perspective, barter remains relevant because it can reduce transaction costs, especially in conditions of limited liquidity and market price uncertainty. This mechanism allows for direct, need-based exchange without reliance on the formal monetary system. Furthermore, the differentiation of production between coastal and mountainous communities on Lembata Island creates a structure of complementarity that strengthens the sustainability of exchange. The findings of Cipta and Nuka (2023) confirm that rationality in barter is not solely determined by price, but rather by the suitability of needs and utility, while Marselina (2025) points to the existence of a set of local values that serve as a stabilizing mechanism in determining the balance of exchange.

Furthermore, the social dimension plays a fundamental role in maintaining these practices. Market activities serve as a space for the reproduction of social relations that strengthen community cohesion through routine interactions, information exchange, and the maintenance of collective trust. In this context, transactions do not stand as individual activities, but rather as part of a sustainable relational system. Syaiful et al. (2022) showed that community-based economic systems have a higher level of resilience because they are supported by social solidarity and reciprocity mechanisms. Thus, the existence of barter reflects the integration of economic and social functions that are difficult to replace by modern, impersonal market systems.

This sustainability is also inseparable from the effectiveness of local institutions in regulating and maintaining the stability of exchange practices. Customary authorities act as informal regulators, establishing norms, monitoring compliance, and mediating potential conflicts between actors. This role ensures that economic interactions continue within a framework of justice and social balance. Research by Ose, Tameno, and Tiwu (2025) shows that despite the pressures of modernization through infrastructure development, local institutions retain the adaptive capacity to manage change without losing their social legitimacy. Meanwhile, Gunu Wutun et al. (2023) indicate that increasing financial literacy does not necessarily eliminate traditional practices but rather encourages the formation of new patterns of interaction between local systems and the formal economy.

Furthermore, the barter system's resilience is also determined by its evolutionary internal transformation process. Exchange practices are no longer exclusive, but have been reconfigured through limited integration with monetary mechanisms. This adaptation allows economic actors to respond to change without having to abandon established basic structures. Within this framework, barter is not positioned as a remnant of the traditional economy but as a system undergoing change to meet contemporary needs. This approach demonstrates that sustainability is not synonymous with stagnation, but rather with the ability to selectively transform. Finally, the sustainability of barter practices is also strengthened by the strategic distribution of roles within households and communities. The involvement of women as key actors in exchange activities demonstrates that this system is directly integrated with the family's economic reproduction strategy. This role relates not only to economic activities but also to the management of social networks that underpin the system's sustainability. In this context, the barter market functions as a node that simultaneously connects economic, social, and cultural dimensions, enabling it to survive the currents of modern economic change without losing its relevance.

CONCLUSION

The Wulandoni Barter Market is one of two surviving markets in Wulandoni District and has become increasingly popular due to its connection to the world-renowned whaling tradition of the Lamalera people. This market serves as a crucial medium for meeting subsistence needs between two communities: the inland farmers and the coastal fishermen. The commodities traded are diverse, ranging from agricultural products such as bananas, sweet potatoes, vegetables, and fruit, to seafood such as dried fish (rays, whales, sharks, dolphins, flying fish), salt, and lime. Bartering takes place in various sizes, such as piles, handfuls, bundles, and pieces. The exchange value depends on the fraternal relationships between market participants, particularly between inland and coastal women, who uphold the principles of mutual respect and non-harm.

This relationship between coastal and inland communities is known as the vuleng and peneteng relationship, a tradition passed down from generation to generation and held sacred value in their lives. Vuleng is a form of bartering held at a specific location and time (such as the Wulandoni market), while peneteng is a direct bartering activity conducted in residents' homes. These relationships are built on material, vital, and dominant values for survival, where seafood and agricultural products are complementary staples. This high level of interdependence creates harmonious and respectful social interactions, expressed through kinship terms such as ema, bapa, prevo, arik, and others. Disruptions to these relationships are believed to lead to disasters such as crop failures or fishing failures, which must be resolved through customary mechanisms to restore social and natural balance.

The conditions at the Wulandoni barter market illustrate that coastal and inland communities in southern Lembata still adhere to a traditional, subsistence economy and rely heavily on nature and ancestral technologies. The sustainability of barter practices at the Wulandoni Barter Market is not only supported by cultural values and economic interdependence between the coast and the interior, but also by the community's ability to adapt to modern economic changes, including its ties to local traditions, such as in Lamalera. However, there are still important issues that have not been widely studied, such as the influence of the younger generation, the digitalization of the economy, and the potential commodification of tourism on the sustainability of the barter system. Therefore, further research needs to emphasize the dynamics of internal community adaptation, the transformation of exchange values, and the synergy between development policies and traditional institutions so that barter practices remain relevant and sustainable on Lembata Island.

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