

KUJANG SALAKAGENI ASSOCIATION PRESERVES DEBUS TRADITION AMIDST MODERN TURMOIL IN BOGOR

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Abstract

This research explores the efforts of Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni in Bogor Regency, Indonesia, to preserve the traditional art of Debus amidst the challenges posed by modernity. As globalization and modernization threaten the resilience of local cultures, the Salakageni community, made up primarily of young individuals, remains committed to safeguarding and promoting this unique cultural heritage. This study uses a qualitative approach and includes data collection methods like observations, interviews, and documentation studies. The findings reveal that preserving the Debus tradition is a significant challenge. In contemporary society, Debus performances are often viewed by certain segments of the population as mere forms of entertainment. The younger generation, in particular, tends to perceive the tradition as outdated, which makes it less attractive compared to modern forms of music and dance. However, despite these challenges, Salakageni continues to perform at various community events, not only within Bogor but also in neighboring regions. In spite of struggling for support from both the private sector and government institutions, the group remains dedicated to organizing Debus performances in public spaces, funded out of their own pockets. Their efforts are driven by a deep passion and a sense of moral responsibility to preserve and pass on this traditional art form, ensuring the continuity of the nation's cultural heritage for future generations.

Keywords:

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INTRODUCTION

The traditional art of Debus, or Dabus, originally grew and took root in the Banten region, particularly among rural communities. In this art form, Debus serves to manifest an individual's invulnerability to various sharp weapons. The skill of bodily invulnerability is essentially a performance with religious and magical connotations, meaning this display is connected to the spiritual activities of a religion. The performers of Debus hold a belief in the power of God, which gives them a sense of safety while engaging in these dangerous acts. They are confident that they will be protected by God, leading to a lack of fear, doubt, or pain.

Essentially, they can harm themselves with sharp weapons without feeling hurt, as they believe in the protection and healing power of the Divine.

Debus is said to have originated in the 16th century during the reign of Maulana Hasanuddin of Banten (1532-1570). The people of Banten even regard Debus as one of the methods for spreading Islam, attributed to Nurrudin Ar-Raniry, a Muslim figure from the Tarikat al-Rifa'iyah. This figure demonstrated physical strength that could be attained by reciting prayers from the Al-Quran. Later, during the reign of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa (1651-1692), Debus was used to ignite the spirit of the Banten people in facing Dutch colonization.

After Banten, Debus spread throughout West Java and has since extended to various regions. However, this art form has experienced ups and downs, and at one point, it seemed to vanish following the decline of the Banten Sultanate under Sultan Rafiudin. It was not until the 1960s that Debus regained popularity, albeit mostly recognized as a performance art. In its early development, Debus was understood as a form of martial arts, often combined with silat from the movements of silat groups or studios. However, over time, Debus seemed to fade with the times. This decline was not only due to a lack of public interest in watching the performances but also because of the diminishing number of Debus practitioners themselves.

Hadiningrat (1981), in his book "*Kesenian Tradisional Debus*," expressed concerns about the state of Debus during his research in 1981-1982. According to him, many Debus performers in Banten at that

time were elderly. He emphasized the need for nurturing the next generation to continue this cultural tradition so that it does not become extinct. Hadiningrat's concerns for Debus have existed for 43 years. One can imagine the state of Debus in the present era, which is far more advanced in various aspects. Digital technology has penetrated the world, facilitating the influx of new cultures that many young Indonesians find modern and more appealing. Consequently, local cultural traditions are gradually forgotten and considered outdated, including Debus.

This alarming condition has also troubled a young man named Farhan Hamdani. At 22 years old, he was born and raised in Bogor Regency. His motivation to establish Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni was initially to make Bogor known as a region that still holds its traditional arts and culture close. Bogor is now a large and advanced area with a population comprising not only Indigenous people but also a mix of various races, ethnicities, religions, and, of course, cultures.

This group not only regularly strives to repopularize Debus but also showcases other artistic expressions, such as classical Sundanese dance and traditional Sundanese instruments like the Karinding. However, in their first year, Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni, consisting of 20 members, became more widely known for their Debus performances.

According to Farhan, the vision and mission of Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni are to introduce traditional arts and culture to the wider community, especially the youth in Bogor, encouraging them to participate in activities related to arts and culture. It includes opening educational programs, cultural activities, and training that can involve the general public, particularly in the realm of traditional Sundanese arts. These activities are held at cultural centers, open fields, or specially prepared venues on specific occasions. However, the process is not easy, and they face challenges in their efforts to preserve Sundanese arts and culture. The greatest challenge is undoubtedly financial support for all the programs they organize. Farhan and the members of Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni are all ordinary workers, yet they willingly share their resources to fund these cultural activities with sincerity and goodwill. The modest funds they have make their progress slow and difficult, but they continue to pursue their noble intentions, even though they have yet to receive support from the government or private sectors, whether in operational funding or facilities.

In their struggle to overcome various shortcomings and difficulties, Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni is currently working to recruit and train younger generations continuously. Farhan, the Founder and Chairman of the group, explains that the more youth who join their organization, the stronger their enthusiasm becomes. It indicates that they not only need material support but also moral encouragement. According to Farhan, local community participation in cultural arts activities, particularly in Bogor, remains low, perhaps because such activities are still seen as rare and have begun to be considered endangered in modern society. To attract interest, Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni has initiated innovations and creativity by blending traditional culture with modern elements.

Culture and Modernity. According to Edward Burnett Tylor, culture is a complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs, and other capabilities acquired by individuals as members of society (Karolina & Randy, 2021).

Meanwhile, Herskovits (1955) defines culture as something that is passed down from one generation to another, which he refers to as superorganic. Andreas Eppink adds that culture encompasses social values, social norms, scientific knowledge, all social and religious structures, and all intellectual and artistic expressions characteristic of a society.

Debus, as one of the activities promoted by Paguyuban Salakageni, is a traditional Indonesian performance art that combines martial arts, music, and spiritual elements. In the Bogor region, Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni plays a crucial role in keeping this tradition alive as an essential part of their cultural identity. However, in reality, Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni faces not only operational funding issues to support their activities but also the challenge of shifting local tastes due to the influence of modernity.

According to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), modern means the latest. Modern can be interpreted as behaviors, views, or actions that align with current conditions. The opposite of modern

is traditional, which refers to behaviors, views, and actions that are fanatically loyal to values and cultures inherited through generations.

Modernity refers to something modern. It is also understood as a historical phase of the modern age and a blend of certain cultural values that emerged in Europe during the Middle Ages and spread worldwide. Additionally, modernity can refer to subjective knowledge or existence in relation to existing conditions and impacts, including relationships with others concerning capitalism and shifts related to secularization and post-industrial life.

Modernity also pertains to the relationship with time, which is characterized by a disconnection from the past, an openness to new things in the future, and an increased awareness of unique aspects of the present (Kompridis: 2006, 32–59).

In social sciences, modernization refers to the process of change from an undeveloped or less advanced state toward a more satisfying condition, aiming for a more prosperous, advanced, and developed life. Modernization is not solely about material aspects but also encompasses immaterial points such as views, actions, and more (Riduan, 2021).

A primary factor in the emergence of modernization in developed countries is the effort to transfer their local cultures globally, promoting them as global values. The spread of cultures from developed nations poses a threat to local cultures that represent the unique heritage of various regions in Indonesia. Local cultures are increasingly eroded and forgotten, leading to a fading spirit of nationalism and the rise of popular culture. The impact of modernization on cultural dynamics is profoundly felt by Indonesian society. Indonesians, who participate in global developments, have experienced a revolution through the role of information and communication technology (Rumbewas et al., 2017). Modernity significantly influences national culture in several ways.

Table 1. Impact of Modernity on National Culture

No.	Aspect	Sub-category	Explanation
1.	Changes in Values and Norms	Globalization	Cultural values from various parts of the world enter and affect societal perspectives, potentially leading to shifts in traditional norms.
		Individualism	There is a greater emphasis on individual freedom over the collective values typically found in traditional cultures.
2.	Technology and Communication	Social Media	Technology enables rapid cultural exchange, leading to cultural homogenization.
		Access to Information	Easy access to information can enrich knowledge but may also obscure local values.
3.	Economy and Employment	Urbanization	The movement of people from rural areas to cities in search of work can alter social structures and lifestyles.
		Cultural Consumption	Influenced by industry and marketing, this can change how people interact with traditional cultures.
4.	Preservation and Innovation	Cultural Adaption	Cultural adaptation and creativity remain relevant in the context of modern innovation. However, this can obscure the authenticity of local cultures.
		Identity Crises and Conflicts	New elements of modernity can create challenges and tensions between modern and traditional values, leading to social friction.
		Balancing Modernity and Tradition	The development of modernity's influence on national culture is complex, involving both positive and negative changes. Society must balance adopting modernity with preserving cultural heritage.

Source:

Both the government and private sectors should be more responsive and proactive, ensuring that communities like Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni do not struggle alone in preserving the nation's assets. Efforts to preserve traditional culture are fundamentally a shared responsibility.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach as its primary method, aiming to provide an in-depth and clear description of the research findings documented in writing. According to Saryono (2010: 49), qualitative research is used to investigate, discover, describe, and explain the qualities or characteristics of a social influence that cannot be explained, measured, or depicted through a quantitative approach.

A literature review serves as the key framework for conceptual understanding, theory, and previous findings that can guide the direction of the scientific study. Data collection was carried out through participatory observation, interviews, and literature studies. The qualitative research method was chosen to obtain more detailed and comprehensive information from participants regarding their perspectives and experiences related to the research topic. The observation was used to directly observe the efforts made by the Salakageni cultural community to preserve the Debus cultural tradition in Bogor, which is indeed challenging but still pursued by them, despite the need for time and personal funding, as there has been no support from any party thus far.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Cultural preservation by cultural identity in society or individuals includes how cultural identity helps people understand themselves and interact with others or communities that can participate in social, political, and economic life.

Maintaining National Identity. Cultural preservation is an effort by the government and society to uphold national identity. It is crucial in facing globalization's influence, which can obscure local values.

Passing Down Knowledge and Traditions. Preservation programs ensure that knowledge, skills, and traditions that have existed for a long time can be inherited by future generations so they do not fade away.

Strengthening Community Bonds. Preserved culture can enhance the bonds of brotherhood and solidarity among community members, fostering a sense of togetherness and community.

Boosting Tourism. Rich and diverse cultural aspects can attract tourists, contributing to the local economy and regional development.

Encouraging Creativity and Innovation. Cultural preservation is not just about maintaining traditions but also about inspiring creativity in the arts, music, and other forms of expression, which can lead to new innovations.

Building Social Awareness. By understanding and appreciating their own culture, people can better understand and value other cultures, which is essential for building tolerance and peace.

Addressing Global Challenges. Cultural preservation can be an effective strategy in facing global challenges that threaten the existence of local and traditional values.

Cultural preservation is vital in maintaining the wealth of a nation's cultural heritage. The efforts to preserve the Debus tradition, as undertaken by Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni in Bogor, exemplify a community's commitment and conscientiousness to strive to safeguard and uphold the nation's culture independently.

However, Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni needs to manage its community more professionally and enhance human resource training, such as in English and public speaking, so that these skills can be passed on to the community, making their performances more appealing to various audiences. Additionally, they should increase their presence on various social media platforms and actively engage in entrepreneurial activities in the art sales sector to fund their activities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni has been making efforts to preserve the Debus cultural art in Bogor Regency. This struggle has been demonstrated through the free Debus performances organized by the Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni since 2023. Although there has been an incredible response from the community, unfortunately, this effort has not yet received support from the private sector or the government. All activities, held weekly in various locations, are funded by the personal finances of the chairman and its members.

The efforts to preserve this traditional cultural art show a strong desire within the community to continue safeguarding the nation's cultural heritage. The positive response from the community towards the activities of the Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni also indicates that there is still a great interest in loving traditional arts from within the country.

So far, the biggest challenge faced by the Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni is funding. They organize shows for the community free of charge, and although some audience members who enjoy the performances contribute small amounts of money, it is not substantial. For instance, when the Author attended their performance at GOR Pekansari Bogor, most audience members contributed only small change, as they are generally from lower-middle-income backgrounds. The form of appreciation they express for the traditional cultural performances is limited to what they can afford.

To ensure the smooth running of these positive activities while waiting for support from the government and private sectors, it is recommended that the Paguyuban Kujang Salakageni intensify their promotion of activities through social media content. It can help the general public become more familiar with and appreciate their activities, potentially generating funding opportunities for their future operations.

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