

OSING YOUTH'S INVOLVEMENT IN PRESERVING LOCAL WISDOM THROUGH THE GANDRUNG SEWU FESTIVAL

Oleh

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Abstract: *This study examines the strategic involvement of Osing youth in preserving local culture through their participation in the Gandrung Sewu Festival in Banyuwangi. This annual festival functions not only as an artistic performance but also as a medium for transmitting Osing cultural values and promoting culture-based tourism. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach framed by theories of social participation, cultural transmission, cultural tourism, and cultural festivals as preservation and promotion tools. The research explores various forms of youth involvement, ranging from dancers, organizing committees, and art facilitators to digital promoters. The findings reveal that youth participation is predominantly symbolic, although creative initiatives have emerged, such as the Gandrung Anak Muda community, which utilizes social media and digital content innovation. Key driving factors include cultural identity and community support, while challenges consist of limited training, inadequate cultural facilities, and the influence of popular culture. The study underscores the importance of engaging young generations in all stages of sustainable cultural preservation. The Gandrung Sewu Festival holds significant potential as an educational platform and as a driver of culture-based creative economy. Recommendations are directed toward strengthening digital strategies, fostering early cultural education, and implementing participatory cross-generational policies*

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on the strategic involvement of Osing youth in the preservation and transmission of local culture through their participation in the Gandrung Sewu Festival in

Banyuwangi. The festival, held annually on the eastern tip of Java, is not only a large-scale artistic performance but also an important cultural platform for strengthening identity and promoting culture-based tourism.

The Osing community, as the indigenous population of Banyuwangi, has a long historical trajectory rooted in the legacy of the Blambangan Kingdom and a rich repertoire of intangible heritage such as the Gandrung dance, the Kebo-Keboan ritual, and the Barong Ider Bumi procession. Among these, the Gandrung Sewu Festival has become the hallmark cultural event, gathering thousands of young dancers—mostly students—while attracting national and international tourists. The event has been recognized as one of Indonesia's most prominent cultural festivals, including being awarded as the Best Cultural Festival by the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy in 2021.

Despite its success in promoting Banyuwangi as a cultural tourism destination, youth involvement often remains ceremonial. Many young participants are engaged primarily as performers or supporting staff, while more strategic roles—such as cultural content development, event management, and digital promotion—are still limited. This condition raises concerns about the sustainability of cultural preservation if younger generations are not fully engaged in more substantive aspects. The Gandrung Anak Muda (GAM) community, for instance, demonstrates how youth can actively participate by organizing dance training, producing digital cultural content, and managing cultural programs, thereby broadening the scope of preservation efforts.

Empirical data reinforce this concern. The 2023 statistics of Banyuwangi Regency indicate that only 28% of local youth actively participated in cultural activities at least once a year, despite the fact that the productive-age population (15–34 years) accounts for 33.9% of the total population. This imbalance reflects untapped potential, considering the growing importance of cultural heritage for education, identity, and the creative economy. At the same time, cultural tourism in Banyuwangi has shown remarkable growth, with tourist arrivals increasing from 1.2 million in 2012 to 3.6 million in 2023, contributing up to 40% of the regional GDP.

In line with theories of social participation and cultural transmission, as well as the concept of cultural tourism, this research seeks to identify the forms of Osing youth participation in the Gandrung Sewu Festival, both in direct roles as dancers, committee members, and facilitators, and in indirect roles as digital promoters, cultural entrepreneurs, or logistics supporters. The study also analyzes the driving and inhibiting factors of youth involvement, ranging from cultural pride and community support to challenges such as limited training opportunities, insufficient cultural facilities, and the influence of popular culture.

Based on these issues, the research becomes significant in addressing how the younger Osing generations can play an active role in preserving, developing, and transmitting their cultural heritage through contemporary platforms such as the Gandrung Sewu Festival.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is built upon four core theoretical and conceptual domains: social participation, cultural transmission, cultural tourism, and festivals as instruments of preservation and promotion.

Social Participation Theory

Tosun (2000) categorizes community involvement in tourism development into spontaneous, induced, and coercive participation, highlighting varying degrees of community initiative. Arnstein (1969), through the Ladder of Citizen Participation, delineates symbolic versus active engagement. Cohen and Uphoff (1980) further emphasize that meaningful participation involves decision-making, implementation, benefit-sharing, and evaluation processes. More recent empirical evidence supports this view: grassroots festivals in Indonesia have been shown to enhance youth capacity and networks (Emerald Insight, 2020), reinforcing the importance of genuine engagement.

Cultural Transmission Theory

It focuses on how cultural values, norms, and traditions are transmitted across generations. Durkheim (1912) posited that collective rituals bolster social cohesion, while Bandura (1977) explained that cultural learning occurs through observation and imitation. Empirical research shows that youth engagement in cultural tourism initiatives fosters stewardship and local identity—for example, youth-led cultural tourism in Tipang Village, Indonesia, leverages digital promotion effectively (Sormin & Sihombing, 2022), confirming the multifaceted nature of cultural transmission in contemporary contexts.

Cultural Tourism Theory

Smith (2023) stated that tourism activities aimed at cultural heritage appreciation can drive community development while risking cultural commodification (Smith, 2003). A newer case from Denpasar's Kasanga Festival demonstrates how cultural tourism can stimulate local empowerment, heritage preservation, and economic growth when managed inclusively (Yulianingsih et al., 2023).

Cultural Festivals as Preservation and Promotion Tools

Cultural festivals serve as platforms for cultural awareness and identity reinforcement. MacCannell (1973) warns against commodification through staged authenticity. However, they inclusive festival practices can counter this risk. For example, UNESCO-backed initiatives that engage youth in heritage site enterprises (2020–2021) illustrate how cultural festivals can support sustainable livelihoods while preserving intangible heritage through digital capacity-building, mentoring, and market linkages.

Existing literature reveals that youth involvement in cultural events largely remains symbolic. Dewi (2019) notes that while festivals like Gandrung Sewu play a cultural role, youth participation often lacks depth. Quinn (2006) and Getz (2007) caution that commercialization can dilute cultural authenticity. Pretty (1995) and Arnstein (1969) argue for the transformation of tokenistic participation into empowerment.

However, these studies do not adequately examine the internal motivations and external constraints influencing youth engagement. Recent work on civic engagement among students in preserving local culture (Indriyani et al., 2023) highlights the persistent gap between attitudes and real actions. Furthermore, strategies for youth empowerment in cultural tourism and heritage—such as those in Tipang Village—suggest economic and digital drivers that remain underexplored in Osing youth contexts.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these research gaps by exploring the underlying factors—motivations, constraints, and enabling conditions—that shape how Osing youth participate in cultural preservation through the Gandrung Sewu Festival.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research focus. The research subjects consisted of young Osing generations who were actively involved in preserving and promoting local culture through the Gandrung Sewu Festival. The population in this study included community members and stakeholders associated with the implementation of the festival, while the selected samples were determined purposively to ensure relevance to the research objectives.

The study was conducted in Banyuwangi Regency, East Java, particularly focusing on the area where the Gandrung Sewu Festival was held. The research took place between March and May 2025. The main instrument used in this study was the researcher herself, supported by observation sheets, interview guidelines, and documentation techniques. Data collection procedures involved three steps: (1) observation of the festival activities and participants' involvement; (2) in-depth interviews with selected informants, including cultural figures, festival organizers, and young community members; and (3) collection of documents and archival records related to the festival.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive model, consisting of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The credibility of the data was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques, prolonged engagement in the field, and member checks with informants.

RESULTS

Profile of Kemiren Village and Osing Youth

Kemiren Village, located in Glagah District, Banyuwangi Regency, is recognized as the cultural center of the Osing community, a Javanese sub-ethnic group considered the indigenous population of the region. The village has been designated as a culture-based tourism destination by the local government and serves as a strategic site for various cultural events, including the Gandrung Sewu Festival. According to the 2023 statistics of Banyuwangi Regency, 33.9% of the local population belongs to the productive-age group (15–34 years), representing a significant segment of potential youth involvement in cultural preservation.

Osing youth are currently positioned at the intersection of modernity and tradition. While many are actively engaged in social media and global popular culture, they also demonstrate an interest in maintaining their cultural identity. The presence of youth-led communities such as *Gandrung Anak Muda* and the *Kemiren Art Movement* reflects emerging cultural movements among younger generations, manifested through both artistic performances and digital content production. As noted by Maharani (2017), youth serve as mediators between tradition and modernity, not merely inheriting cultural practices passively but also adapting and contextualizing them to contemporary realities.

Cultural Attractions and Traditional Values

The Gandrung Sewu Festival is a colossal annual performance held at Boom Marina Beach, featuring thousands of Gandrung dancers. Historically, the Gandrung dance originated as a ritual offering to Dewi Sri, the goddess of fertility, before evolving into a cultural symbol of the Osing identity. Following Durkheim's (1912) concept of collective rituals, the festival strengthens social solidarity and nurtures a *collective conscience* within the community.

The symbolic values embedded in the festival include discipline, spirituality, communal cooperation, and reverence for ancestors. Every element—from costumes and choreography to accompanying music—carries deep cultural meanings that are transmitted to younger generations. In this way, the festival not only serves as entertainment but also as a mechanism for cultural transmission.

Forms of Youth Participation

Youth involvement in the Gandrung Sewu Festival takes multiple forms such as primary performers (dancers and musicians); technical committees and documentation teams, digital promoters on social media; cultural tour guides; facilitators of traditional dance training for children

This aligns with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, where cultural inheritance is shaped through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. In line with Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation, the engagement of Osing youth spans from symbolic participation—mainly performing roles—to more participatory forms such as cultural facilitation and festival management. Field observations indicate that most youth remain at the *tokenism* level, though emerging initiatives have begun to move toward deeper participation, particularly through youth-led community efforts.

Digital platforms play a critical role in this transformation. As noted by Putra and Wulandari (2021), youth employ social media to construct new cultural narratives that are adaptive to contemporary communication styles. Their motivations include cultural pride, social recognition, economic benefits from performances and digital content, family support, and the desire to establish cultural presence on digital platforms.

Driving and Inhibiting Factors

Addressing the second research problem, this study identifies both driving and inhibiting factors of Osing youth participation in cultural preservation through the Gandrung Sewu Festival.

Hastuti (2019) stated that the inhibiting factors include: a) limited access to traditional arts training; b) scarcity of active cultural studios in rural areas; c) generational gaps between youth and cultural elders; d) dominance of global popular culture; e) economic pressures that make traditional arts less appealing pragmatically. On the other hand, key driving factors are: a) pride in cultural identity; b) social prestige and recognition, c) economic opportunities from performances, content creation, and cultural tourism, d) strong family and community support; e) digital media as an accessible platform for cultural expression.

Yuliana (2023) emphasizes that early cultural education is an effective strategy to build awareness and pride among youth, while Mahendra (2022) highlights that creative youth initiatives represent a form of “cultural transformation” essential for sustainability. Innovative practices observed include: a) utilizing TikTok and Instagram for festival promotion; b) integrating modern elements such as mapping light shows, c) introducing Gandrung-themed merchandise; and d) organizing monthly mini-festivals in villages for regular training and cultural engagement.

Policy Interventions

Government initiatives have also played an active role in enhancing youth participation. In collaboration with schools and local communities, these policies include:

- a) Integrating local cultural curricula into primary and secondary education;

- b) Providing scholarships for traditional arts;
- c) Supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) based on Osing cultural heritage;
- d) Encouraging collaborations between the Department of Tourism and youth cultural communities.

Through these multi-layered efforts, youth involvement in the Gandrung Sewu Festival not only contributes to sustaining cultural heritage but also fosters innovation in cultural tourism and strengthens the creative economy of Banyuwangi.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Osing youth play an active role in the Gandrung Sewu Festival through multiple forms of involvement, including performers, organizers, digital promoters, and cultural facilitators. Although their participation is still largely symbolic, motivations such as cultural pride, social recognition, and the use of digital media drive more adaptive engagement. Despite challenges such as limited training access, lack of art studios, intergenerational gaps, and pressure from popular culture and economic constraints, the creative ideas of Osing youth demonstrate strong potential to act as cultural transformation agents. Government and educational institutions, through policies on local culture, scholarships, and small business programs, serve as essential foundations for ensuring the sustainability of Osing culture in the modern era.

Implication

The findings of this research have several implications. Academically, it contributes to the study of cultural preservation by highlighting the adaptive role of youth in safeguarding intangible heritage through both traditional and digital means. For society and local communities, the active participation of Osing youth in the Gandrung Sewu Festival reflects the potential of intergenerational collaboration in strengthening cultural identity and resilience. At the national level, this study reinforces the importance of cultural-based education and policy support to empower young people as strategic partners in heritage preservation. Internationally, the case of Osing youth provides valuable insight into how local communities in developing countries can integrate cultural traditions with digital innovation to maintain cultural sustainability in the global era.

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