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Baladewa Studio in the Virtual Era: The Dynamics of Traditional Art Preservation in Digital Space

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Abstract: This study aims to examine in depth the dynamics of the activities of Sanggar Baladewa, a traditional art studio located in the city of Surabaya and focuses on the training and preservation of puppet and karawitan arts. This studio is a representation of efforts to preserve Javanese culture in the midst of a growing urban society. The COVID-19 pandemic situation that has hit since early 2020 has forced significant changes in the pattern of artistic activities, including activities carried out by Sanggar Baladewa. The transition to virtual space is a challenge as well as an opportunity that must be faced by a traditional art community like this.

This research uses a library research method with a descriptive qualitative approach, which allows the exploration of data from various sources such as scientific journals, books, online articles, and documentation of studio activities. The focus of the analysis is directed at the adaptation strategies carried out by the studio in maintaining the existence of traditional art in the digital era. The results of the study show that although art activities can be transferred to an online format, this process is inseparable from a number of obstacles, including limited technological devices, uneven internet network access, and a decrease in the quality of artistic interaction between performers and audiences.

However, Sanggar Baladewa continues to show high initiative and resilience in maintaining cultural practices through virtual performances. The use of social media and online video platforms such as YouTube is an alternative solution in delivering performances to the public. This adaptation is not only an effort to survive, but also opens up new possibilities in the spread of traditional arts to a wider society, including the younger generation who are more attached to digital technology.

Thus, this study highlights the importance of strengthening the digital capacity of the traditional arts community and the need for synergy between art actors, educational institutions, and policy makers to support the sustainability of cultural heritage in the era of digital transformation.

Keywords: Studio, Virtual, Pandemic, Traditional Arts, Karawitan, Cultural Adaptation

1. INTRODUCTION

The art studio is a strategic forum in efforts to preserve culture as well as a means of shaping the character of the younger generation. Through structured and sustainable art activities, the studio becomes a space for effective social interaction and cultural education in the midst of modernization. In the city of Surabaya, one of the art studios that has a significant role in the preservation of traditional Javanese art is Sanggar Baladewa. Baladewa Studio was established in 2010, this studio was born from the spirit of community to



preserve the heritage of ancestors, especially the art of puppetry and karawitan, which began to be marginalized by the dominance of popular culture.

Since its inception, Sanggar Baladewa has carried out various community-based art education activities, such as routine training in gamelan, pedaling techniques, introduction to Javanese philosophy, to spiritual mental development through joint prayer and other cultural activities. These activities not only involve students as connoisseurs, but also place them as active actors in the creative process and cultural regeneration. The studio's participation in various competitions and art performances at the city, provincial, and even national levels strengthens its existence as an alternative space for non-formal education based on local culture.

However, entering 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a major challenge for all sectors of life, including the art world. Social restrictions and the prohibition of gatherings have a direct impact on the continuity of studio activities which have relied on physical interaction and togetherness in the process of rehearsals and performances. Activities that were previously carried out offline, such as gamelan practice, puppet performances, and traveling performances had to be stopped abruptly. The reliance on space and time in traditional art practices raises the dilemma between cultural preservation and adherence to health protocols.

This condition encouraged Sanggar Baladewa to adapt to the new reality, namely transforming its artistic activities into a virtual form. This adaptation is not easy, considering that traditional arts such as karawitan and puppetry have strong performative characteristics and rely heavily on direct experience and interaction between puppeteers, puppeteers, and audiences. However, through the use of digital media such as the YouTube platform and other streaming services, Sanggar Baladewa tries to maintain its existence in the midst of limitations. Online staging, performance documentation, and virtual training are strategic choices to ensure the sustainability of cultural heritage.

This research aims to describe in depth how the strategies, challenges, and innovations carried out by Sanggar Baladewa in maintaining their function as agents of cultural preservation in the digital era. On the one hand, this article highlights the potential of virtual spaces in opening up new access to traditional arts education. But on the other hand, it also discusses limitations. structural limitations that are still an obstacle in adapting traditional art into the digital ecosystem as a whole.

2. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the library *research method* as the main foundation. The literature study was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives that focus on collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data sourced from various relevant literature and documents, without conducting direct field observations. This method allows researchers to examine social and cultural phenomena in depth through the information that has been available, as well as develop a theoretical understanding of the dynamics of art studios in the digital era.

Secondary data was obtained from various types of sources, including scientific articles, academic books, national journals, and

trusted online sites that discuss topics related to art studios, virtualization of art activities, and the impact of the pandemic on cultural practices. The selection of sources was carried out selectively by considering the validity, actuality, and relevance to the focus of the study. The data collected is then not only used as supporting information, but also as a basis for building a critical thinking framework in analyzing the context of Sanggar Baladewa's activities.

Through this method, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of how Sanggar Baladewa navigates challenges in the virtual era, while relating it to the broader contemporary cultural discourse.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

In general, a studio is defined as a place or space used to carry out various artistic activities, both traditional and contemporary, such as dance, music, painting, drama, karawitan, and other folk performances. However, in a broader and dynamic context, the studio is not only understood as a physical place used for practice or art performances, but as a collective container that functions as a space for learning, expression, and social interaction. Sanggar plays an important role in supporting the process of developing individual potential, not only in terms of artistic technical skills, but also in character formation, strengthening cultural identity, and instilling moral and ethical values through art activities that are carried out in a sustainable manner.

Sanggar becomes a complex socio-cultural ecosystem rich in meaning. It is a space for intergenerational dialogue, where informal but profound knowledge transfer takes place from the older generation to the younger generation. In the studio, the process of organic cultural inheritance takes place not only by memorizing techniques or repertoire, but also by experiencing firsthand the atmosphere, values, and social norms that are part of the art practice itself. Therefore, the studio plays a strategic role as an agent of local cultural preservation that is able to strengthen community identity, build social solidarity, and become a fortress of defense of local wisdom values in the midst of strong globalization.

Meanwhile, *the term virtual* refers to all forms of communication, interaction, and activities that are carried out indirectly or virtually, utilizing digital devices and internet networks as the medium. In the ever-evolving digital era, the presence of virtual spaces is a necessity in various aspects of life, including in the fields of art and culture. The virtualization of art activities allows for the flexibility of space and time that was previously very limited in the context of performing arts that usually relies on physical presence and immediate momentum.

However, the transition to a virtual space also brings its own challenges. On the one hand, it opens up wider access for the public and artists from different locations; But on the other hand, he demanded a profound adjustment in the way of production, delivery, and acceptance of artworks by the audience. The performative aspect, which is at the heart of many traditional art forms, has the potential to be eroded if not carefully transformed. Maintaining the integrity of traditional cultural and aesthetic values in the digital space is a big homework for art actors and studio managers.

Sanggar Baladewa is one of the examples of traditional art studios that not only survive, but also thrive in the midst of modern urban

societies such as the city of Surabaya. Since its inception, the studio has instilled a deep philosophy that is reflected in the naming of "Baladewa," an acronym for *learning and playing gamelan*. This philosophy shows a dualistic yet harmonious approach that the studio firmly holds: on the one hand it serves as a serious educational institution, and on the other hand as a fun recreational space. This approach makes Sanggar Baladewa an inclusive and friendly place for anyone who wants to learn karawitan and the art of puppetry, both children, teenagers, and adults.

More than just a place to learn to play gamelan or understand the philosophy of puppetry, Sanggar Baladewa also acts as a meeting space between cultures and between generations. Participants who come from various social backgrounds and ages gather in one community built on the basis of common interests and passion to preserve culture. Activities that are routinely carried out, such as weekly gamelan practice, performances, cultural discussions, and joint recreation, form a strong atmosphere of togetherness. This studio not only teaches art as a skill, but also as part of the formation of identity and life values.

However, major changes occurred when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Its impact on various lines of life, including the art world, is significant. Physical activity that is usually the main pulse of studio life must be stopped or drastically limited in order to maintain safety and health together. Core activities such as routine exercises, live performances, discussions, and even social-spiritual activities of the studio were forced to be eliminated in a short period of time. This situation not only affects the rhythm of the studio's activities, but also has a psychological impact on its members, especially the younger generation who are in an important phase of self-development.

The continuous decline in the intensity of interactions and activities raises its own concerns. The motivation of the members began to decline, and the sense of emotional attachment to the studio slowly faded. The interest in traditional art, which has been fostered through face-to-face meetings, direct communication, and togetherness in collective practice, is beginning to be displaced by other digital distractions. However, in the midst of this limited situation, there is a collective awareness to innovate. Sanggar Baladewa did not give up on the situation, but responded in a creative and adaptive way.

As a strategic step, this studio began to explore digital platforms to maintain the sustainability of their art activities. YouTube, Instagram, and various other social media began to be used as a new medium to broadcast art performances. The studio organizes virtual performances, both live (*live streaming*) and through pre-recorded and edited videos. This step became an important breakthrough, not only as a technical solution, but also as an ideological statement that traditional art remains relevant and capable of speaking in the language of the times.

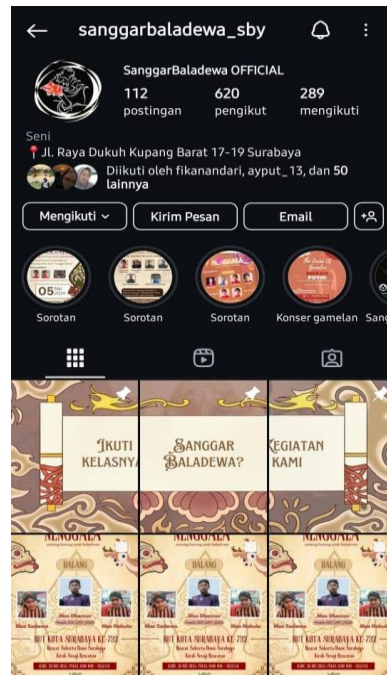


Figure 2. Sanggar Baladewa
Instagram Account

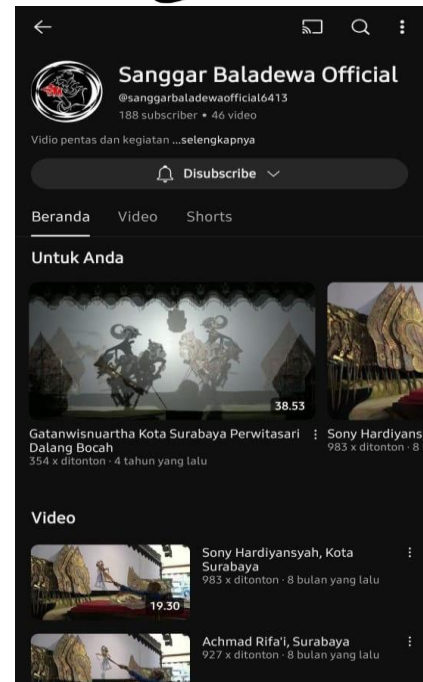


Figure 3. Sanggar Baladewa
Youtube Account

This digitalization effort not only maintains the existence of the studio, but also opens up new opportunities to reach a wider audience. Audiences who previously only came from the surrounding environment can now come from various cities and even other countries. Traditional arts that were once local are now globally accessible, strengthening cultural diplomacy and introducing East Java's rich culture to the international level.

More importantly, this step shows that Sanggar Baladewa has a high adaptive capacity. The younger generation who are more familiar with digital technology is the main target in this transformation process. Through a media approach that is close to their daily lives, traditional art is no longer considered old-fashioned or boring, but is transformed into creative content that has educational and aesthetic value, as well as being relevant to the needs of the times.

3.2 Discussion

The transition from offline to online performances is one of the biggest challenges that art actors must face during the pandemic, especially for traditional art communities such as Sanggar Baladewa. Traditional art, which essentially relies heavily on direct interaction, the feel of physical space, and collective presence, has suddenly had to adapt to a digital format that is completely different from its cultural roots. This sudden change requires mental, technical, and institutional readiness that is not light.

Performing virtually presents a variety of technical and non-technical obstacles that are quite complex, which, if not properly anticipated, can have a serious impact on the quality of performances, participant engagement, and the effectiveness of cultural communication.

1. Technology Limitations One of the main challenges in virtual performances is the limitations of technology owned by studio members and audiences. Not all attendees have adequate devices to record, edit, or even watch the show online. The quality of cameras, microphones, laptops, and software are important variables in digital art production, but the digital divide is still quite high causing limitations in viable production. In addition, the technical skills of studio members in using the device are also an obstacle. A traditional studio generally focuses on art training, not information technology. So, when it comes to moving to the digital world, many of them have to learn from the beginning how to operate a recording device, video editing application, to live streaming platforms such as YouTube or Zoom.

2. Internet Connection Problems Another obstacle that is no less important is access to the internet network. In many areas, including where most of the members of Sanggar Baladeva live, slow or unstable internet networks are often the main obstacles. When rehearsals or performances are conducted online, network interruptions can result in poor video and audio quality, delayed communication between members, and decreased viewing experience for the audience. The quality of the network is very influential in maintaining the professionalism and aesthetics of the show. In traditional arts such as karawitan and puppetry, the details of sound and rhythm are very important. The slightest interruption can obscure the meaning of the performance, and can even lower the credibility of the studio in the eyes of online audiences.

3. Reduction of Interactivity One of the main strengths of traditional art performances is the direct interaction between the performers and the audience. In puppet performances, for example, the audience's response to the play delivered by the puppeteer, spontaneous cheers, and nonverbal communication are part of a lively aesthetic. In a virtual context, this interactivity becomes very limited or even disappears altogether. The loss of this interactive element not only changes the aesthetic experience, but also affects the emotions and enthusiasm of the performers. The absence of applause, laughter, or direct expressions of admiration often makes artists feel "playing for a blank screen", which can gradually diminish their enthusiasm and passion for art.

4. Technical Aspects of Production and Limited Funds The production of virtual performances requires not only creativity, but also adequate technical skills. From lighting, shooting from different angles, to editing videos to keep them interesting and informative, they all require special skills. In traditional art that is thick with meaning and symbolism, the production process should not be arbitrary. A camera that doesn't capture the angle of the show, or editing that is too modern and ignores the sacredness of the tradition, can detract from the authenticity of the show. In addition, production costs are a challenge in itself. Technology devices, software, and professionals to record and edit videos require a lot of additional funds. In the midst of the limited operating budget of the studio, this need is often quite a burden.

Despite being faced with various obstacles, the virtualization of traditional art activities also opens up great opportunities that may not have been thought of before. One of the key opportunities is to expand the reach of the audience. If previously art performances could only be enjoyed by the surrounding community who were physically present, now performances can be accessed by a wider audience through the internet. Audiences from outside the city, even abroad, can get to know and appreciate East Java's karawitan and puppetry through one digital link.

This phenomenon opens up a new space in cultural diplomacy. Performances uploaded on YouTube, Instagram, or other digital platforms, not only serve as entertainment, but also as a means of cultural promotion and education to the global community. Traditional arts that were once considered exclusive and local, can now be part of an inclusive global cultural discourse.

In addition, the digital documentation of each performance makes an important contribution to cultural archives and the preservation of knowledge. If previously the performance was temporal where only one show and now every work can be immortalized, reviewed, and even used as teaching material for the next generation. This is crucial in building a continuum of cultural knowledge that not only relies on oral traditions or hands-on experience, but also strengthens the digital base.

A. Strategy for Strengthening Studios in the Future

Facing the post-pandemic era and increasing global challenges to the preservation of local culture, Sanggar Baladewa needs to formulate a planned and sustainable strengthening strategy. These strategies can include increasing human resource capacity, developing digital infrastructure, and expanding cross-agency cooperation networks.

First, in terms of human resources, it is necessary to conduct regular technical training for studio members, especially the younger generation, in terms of technology management, video documentation, and digital content management. Thus, technical skills will be part of cultural regeneration, not just complementary. Second, the studio can develop a more systematic-based traditional art training module. This module can be in the form of video tutorials, interactive e-books, or community-based learning platforms that facilitate self-paced exercises while still being socially connected.

In terms of institutional cooperation, the studio can expand collaboration with art colleges, cultural offices, formal schools, and even the Indonesian diaspora community abroad who want to introduce Javanese culture to the overseas young generation. By expanding the network, Sanggar Baladewa not only increases its reach, but also strengthens its legitimacy as a community-based cultural preservation center.

These strategies are also in line with the framework of "Cultural Sustainability" as discussed by Soini & Birkeland (2014), that cultural sustainability requires institutional innovation, inter-stakeholder interconnection, and openness to technological transformation without losing traditional identity.

B. The Role of Sanggar in Building an Inclusive Community

Apart from being an art training space, Sanggar Baladewa also plays a social role as a vehicle for strengthening inclusive and dialogical communities. This inclusivity is reflected in the involvement of

participants of various ages, genders, economic backgrounds, and educational levels. Elementary school-age children practice side by side with teenagers and adults. These cross-age interactions and experiences enrich the learning process and strengthen social solidarity within the studio.

Non-formal activities, such as joint recreation, mutual cooperation before the performance, and joint prayer before the performance, form a close family feel. This atmosphere makes the studio not only a place to practice, but also a second home for its members. In the context of big cities like Surabaya which tend to be individualistic, the existence of a warm social space like this is important as a counterbalance to urban life.

The role of the studio as a cross-social meeting space also creates a learning space about tolerance, the value of mutual cooperation, and respect for differences. Sanggar indirectly becomes a contextual character education medium rooted in local culture (Setiawan, 2021). In this sense, the studio is not only an agent of art, but also an agent of social cohesion that bridges the various elements of society within a cultural framework.

C. Theoretical Review: Culture, Education, and Community

The study of the studio as a cultural space can be strengthened by referring to the concept of "third space" proposed by Homi K. Bhabha (1994). According to Bhabha, the third space is a meeting space between identities that negotiate with each other and form new meanings. In the context of Sanggar Baladewa, this space occurs when the young generation living in digital culture interacts with traditional art values. The result is a unique, hybrid, and contextual new form of expression.

In terms of education, the progressive education theory developed by John Dewey emphasizes the importance of direct experience in the learning process. Sanggar as a learning space based on real practice is very suitable for this approach. Children and adolescents not only passively receive information, but experience, feel, and create for themselves the artwork they learn.

Meanwhile, Paulo Freire in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" emphasizes the need for education that is liberating and based on dialogue. The studio provides an egalitarian space for dialogue between teachers and students, between old and young, as well as between experts and beginners. This makes the studio not only a place for knowledge transfer, but also a place for the production of shared knowledge (Freire, 1970).

By linking the activities of the studio to these theoretical frameworks, it can be understood that the Baladewa Studio has a strategic position not only in the context of cultural preservation, but also in the renewal of the way of thinking about education, community, and art itself.

4. CONCLUSION

Sanggar Baladewa showed strong cultural resilience in the midst of the great challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite facing limitations in terms of physical meetings, this studio was able to transform adaptively by shifting traditional art activities to digital platforms. The transition from offline to virtual performances is not only a form of technical response to emergency conditions, but also a strategic step in maintaining the continuity of cultural practices in the

midst of changing times. This shows that traditional art is not something static, but dynamic and able to develop according to the social context that surrounds it.

The activities carried out by Sanggar Baladewa continue to have a positive impact on the non-academic development of participants, especially in terms of art skills, discipline, and understanding of local cultural values. In addition, the presence of the studio as a learning and working space also strengthens the cultural identity among the younger generation who are often exposed to popular culture and globalization. This digitization effort also expands access to traditional arts education to the wider community, reaching those who previously did not have the opportunity to watch performances in person.

While the virtual form of concert or staging cannot completely replace the valuable experience of live performance, it still provides a great opportunity for cultural preservation through digital documentation, online promotion, and cross-geographical interaction. Challenges such as network quality, technological devices, and interactivity are still obstacles, but they can be overcome gradually through technical capacity building and collaboration between art communities.

Thus, Sanggar Baladewa can be used as an inspirational model in maintaining the existence and value of traditional art in the digital era. The efforts made by this studio prove that cultural preservation does not have to be trapped in conventional forms, but can use technology as a tool to bridge the past, present, and future of the nation's culture. Other art studios across Indonesia can learn from this creative and adaptive approach as part of a sustainable cultural strategy.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Anugrah Putra Mahardika Irawan acted as researcher and author of the article, while Arif Hidajad acted as companion, reviewer, and article revisions

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