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Preservation of Traditional Art in the Modern Era: A Case Study of Seudati Dance in the Disruption Era in Pidie Jaya Regency

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Article Information

Received : June 10, 2024

Revised : July 5, 2024

Accepted : August 18, 2024

Published: September 19, 2024

Keywords

Preservation of traditional arts;
Seudati dance, disruption era;
Pidie Jaya regency.

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Abstract

The focus of this research is on the strategies for preserving Seudati dance by the Pidie Jaya government in the era of disruption. Pidie Jaya is one of the regencies known for the Seudati dance, and many prominent Seudati leaders, known as "syeh," hail from this region. This research was conducted in Pidie Jaya Regency, with the location chosen due to the observed phenomenon that the youth are no longer interested in learning and performing Seudati. Data collection techniques in this research included participant observation, where the researcher directly observed the subjects to gather data. In addition to participant observation, in-depth interviews were also employed as a technique for collecting data. The results of the research indicate that the youth are abandoning Seudati because the digital world is more appealing than Seudati. Furthermore, learning Seudati is not as easy as learning other dances. In response to these challenges, the Pidie Jaya government has made efforts to preserve Seudati through several approaches. First, they utilize digital media itself as a platform for Seudati campaigns. They also give recognition to Seudati maestros, creating a positive impression for all parties involved. The government promotes Seudati in extracurricular activities through the Gerakan Seniman Masuk Sekolah. Additionally, they are reactivating village dance studios and providing spaces for expression, such as the Pekan Kebudayaan Pidie Jaya.

INTRODUCTION

Seudati is a traditional art form from Aceh. This art takes the form of a dance performed by eight male dancers, accompanied by one or two "syeh" (leaders) and "syahi" (singers) (Hermaliza et al., 2014, p. 2). Pidie Jaya is one of the regencies renowned for its Seudati dance, and many prominent "syeh" (dance leaders) come from this region. Notable syeh from Pidie Jaya include Syeh Lah Baguna and Syeh Rih, both of whom are renowned maestros. This signifies that Pidie Jaya, or Pidie before its division into two regencies in 2007 Pidie and Pidie Jaya was a prominent area for Seudati dance. For instance, Syeh Lah Baguna gained fame as a Seudati maestro when he performed at the main stage of the Aceh Cultural Week (Pekan Kebudayaan Aceh/PKA) in August 1972. It is no surprise that Seudati has become the flagship dance of Pidie Jaya for various events and has even been used as a tagline in branding Pidie Jaya's tourism.

Seudati dance can be considered an identity of the Acehnese people. Historically, Seudati dance was performed at specific events, primarily during Islamic propagation activities

to teach the community about beliefs, worship of Allah, ethics, morality, and good social values based on Islamic teachings. Generally, dance is used for sacred activities as well as for entertainment purposes. It is associated with religious, cultural, and traditional events, and can also serve as a form of recreation or amusement (Yanti, [2017](#), p. 198). As part of tradition, art is an integral component of a community's culture that cannot stand alone. However, in the era of disruption, Seudati dance is increasingly being "abandoned" by the younger generation.

In the era of disruption, where innovation and change occur on a massive scale, these changes are fundamental and can transform existing systems and structures into new ones. Disruption is often seen as a disturbance to long-established practices. One impact of this disruption is that the younger generation, who are the future, is increasingly losing interest in regional arts. This shift has implications for cultural values, which may gradually fade away (Junaidi et al., [2023](#)). One noticeable phenomenon in Pidie Jaya is that the younger generation is no longer interested in inheriting Seudati as part of their artistic and cultural heritage. The process of passing down Seudati dance, traditionally done through education in village studios, has become rare and is almost non-existent.

Given this phenomenon, there is concern that the intangible cultural heritage of Seudati dance may become extinct. Yet, art is a crucial factor in shaping the personality of children, specifically the younger generation (Yuli & Ismawan, [2019](#), p. 14). However, the younger generation has become captivated by online games and, even more alarmingly, some have fallen into drug abuse and online gambling. They are no longer interested in learning about and inheriting the cultural heritage that is the legacy of their ancestors. As we know, culture encompasses the entire system of ideas, actions, and human creations in society, which individuals come to own through learning (Koentjaraningrat, [2009](#)). This means that learning is key to inheriting culture itself. However, the current social phenomenon in Pidie Jaya shows that the younger generation is reluctant to learn about and engage with Seudati. Seudati is now seen as outdated compared to online games.

Digital disruption indeed has a complex impact on traditional culture, including Seudati dance. The younger generation is more interested in online games, social media, and other digital content that offers instant and interactive entertainment (Burri, [2010](#)). This shift reduces their interest in traditional cultural activities like Seudati dance, which requires dedication and repeated practice. With the abundance of digital entertainment options, the time and attention that the younger generation could spend learning and practicing Seudati are now largely consumed by online activities.

Digital content has been dominated by global popular culture, such as Western music, films, and trends, which are more appealing to the younger generation than local culture. Digital technology tends to promote a more individualistic lifestyle, where social interactions and community are less emphasized. Seudati dance, which requires togetherness and group cooperation, may be sidelined. Additionally, in the disruption era, some young people have become involved in online gambling. Online gambling is a highly dangerous social issue that can, in turn, reduce participation in cultural activities due to financial and social problems.

METHOD

This research was conducted in Pidie Jaya, Aceh Province. Pidie Jaya is a region renowned for Seudati and is focused on tourism development. This study focuses on the strategies for preserving Seudati in the disruption era implemented by the Pidie Jaya government. The research employs a qualitative approach with descriptive-analytical techniques. The data collected includes both primary and secondary data. The collection of primary and secondary data was carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document

studies. Once the data was gathered, the relevant field facts related to the research theme were filtered and then analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques to produce the final conclusion. The data analysis process was carried out simultaneously with the data collection process, using an interactive analysis model as explained by Miles and Huberman (Habsy, [2017](#)), which involves three stages: First, the data reduction stage, which aims to select empirical facts obtained in the field to become data. This stage also aims to refine and organize the data into a specific pattern or theme. Second, the data display stage, which is intended to present and narrate the data, and third, the conclusion drawing stage, which is an effort to obtain a significant final meaning from the analysis by explaining the pattern of relationships among the dimensions of important variables.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Opportunities and challenges in the disruption era for the preservation of traditional arts

Opportunities from digital technology

In addition to its negative aspects, digital technology also provides positive impacts. Digital technology offers many opportunities for the preservation and promotion of traditional arts (Carrier, [1985](#)). It allows for the documentation of Seudati dance in video, audio, and text formats, helping to permanently preserve movements, music, and lyrics, and making them accessible to future generations. This technology can also aid in creating detailed simulations of the dance, enabling audiences to experience a more immersive and authentic engagement with the art form.

Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok enable the dissemination of Seudati dance videos to a broader audience, both domestically and internationally (Putri, [2021](#)). This increases awareness and appreciation for Acehese traditional arts. Creating dedicated websites or blogs containing information, history, and tutorials about Seudati can serve as valuable resources for those interested in learning about it.

E-learning platforms can also be utilized to teach Seudati dance movements online. Tutorial videos, online courses, and webinars can be created to teach this dance to learners around the world. By leveraging these opportunities, digital technology can play a significant role in preserving and promoting Seudati traditional art, ensuring that this cultural heritage remains vibrant and relevant in the modern era.

According to Syeh Husni, who is an expert staff member of the Aceh Customary Council (Majelis Adat Aceh/MAA) Pidie Jaya, Chairman of the Aceh Arts Council (Dewan Kesenian Aceh/DKA) Pidie Jaya, and a practitioner and promoter of Pidie Jaya's culture, digital technology can indeed help in promoting our culture. Although there are occasional inaccuracies, at least it helps spread awareness about our cultural heritage. However, Seudati is a different case. Seudati has complex movements, making it difficult for people to learn, replicate, or promote through digital content. Syeh Husni also notes that Seudati is being abandoned because it is perceived as difficult and unappealing to the younger generation. Without an understanding of Seudati, people cannot fully appreciate it. Marzuan, S.Pd., M.Pd, the Head of the Culture Division at Education and Culture Office of the Pidie Jaya, acknowledges that Seudati is indeed challenging to learn. Schools often request replacements for Seudati in events due to its difficulty and the short time frame for learning it. Additionally, students have lost interest in Seudati and no longer understand the meaning of its lyrics and movements.

Challenges and obstacles

The younger generation is more attracted to digital entertainment such as online games and social media compared to traditional arts like Seudati dance. The fast-paced and dynamic nature of modern lifestyles makes traditional arts, which require dedication and intensive practice, less appealing. Additionally, digital media has also contributed to negative addictions, causing the younger generation to become detrimental to the preservation of Seudati as a cultural heritage. Addiction to online games and gambling has led the youth to spend excessive time in front of screens, reducing the time available for cultural and artistic activities. Consequently, values and priorities shift. The instant gratification sought in games and gambling alters their values and priorities, distancing them from activities that require long-term effort, such as learning traditional dance (Wismawati et al., [2023](#)). With the development of technology and digital media, there has emerged a perception among the younger generation that traditional arts are outdated and irrelevant to modern life. Furthermore, a social environment that supports digital activities more than traditional arts can hinder the interest of young people.

Young people who are constantly exposed to content from various foreign cultures through platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Netflix, and other social media tend to adopt values, lifestyles, and trends from those cultures. This can shift their appreciation away from local culture. The strong influence of Western popular culture, especially from the US and Europe, often dominates the entertainment preferences and lifestyles of the youth, reducing their interest in local traditional culture. Dependence on digital communication (chat, social media) decreases direct social interaction, which is an important method for transmitting cultural values and traditions from one generation to the next. The more individualistic lifestyle resulting from digital technology often reduces participation in traditional cultural and community activities. Young people may experience an identity crisis when they identify more with global culture than with their local culture, which can lead to alienation from their own cultural roots.

According to the Chairman of DKA Pidie Jaya, digital factors have indeed made the younger generation more interested in online games and similar activities. This is a negative aspect of digital technology, with some becoming addicted to games and online gambling. This situation is quite concerning for everyone, including parents, teachers, and it seems to be a common issue across various regions. Marzuan, S.Pd., M.Pd, also notes that the advancements in digital technology have a clear impact and have become a concern for both parents and teachers. Specifically, the influence on young people has led them to favor online games over their inherited cultural heritage. However, the government is also striving to ensure that our arts and culture continue to thrive in this era of disruption, one of which is through the Gerakan Seniman Masuk Sekolah (GSMS) or Artist Goes to School Movement program (*Gerakan Seniman Masuk Sekolah (GSMS)*, [n.d.](#)).

Strategies for the preservation of Seudati dance and preservation programs

Community-based approach

a) Appreciation for maestros and passing down knowledge

The process of learning and acquiring skills, knowledge, and values passed down by experts involves direct instruction or practice, where students learn directly from the maestro through observation, imitation, and repeated practice. In addition to technical skills, maestros also teach values, work ethics, and the philosophy underlying the art form. They provide instruction on the history, meaning, and cultural context of the dance (Dalidowicz, [2015](#)). On the other hand, the government also gives appreciation to practitioners and maestros of Seudati.

Marzuan mentioned that this has already been implemented as a form of government recognition for the maestros. This award serves as an acknowledgment of their contributions to culture and the arts.

One of the Seudati maestros in Pidie Jaya is Azhari Sulaiman. Born in Meunasah Balek on July 1, 1950, Azhari is actively involved in extracurricular activities and the Gerakan Seniman Masuk Sekolah (GSMS) program organized by the Directorate General of Culture and the Pidie Jaya District Government. In addition to Azhari, Syeh Husni, who is also the Chairman of DKA Pidie Jaya, is active in the GSMS movement. In recognition of their various contributions to the advancement of art and culture, the Pidie Jaya District Government has proposed Azhari and Syeh Husni for the Indonesian Cultural Award 2024 to the Director General of Culture at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, with letter No. 430/378/2024. Azhari is nominated in the category of Artist/Seudati, while Husni is nominated in the category of Artist/Traditional Rapa'i Bube Dance.

- b) Reinvigorating local communities to organize cultural events involving Seudati dance (village studios)

Reactivating village studios offers many significant benefits for local communities and cultural heritage. Village studios play a crucial role in preserving local arts and traditions, such as Seudati dance, which is an important part of a region's cultural identity. Reactivating these studios facilitates the transfer of knowledge and skills from older generations to younger ones, ensuring that these traditions do not become extinct. The Pidie Jaya District Government is giving special attention to village studios, which are the epicenter for preserving Seudati. However, finding new talent for Seudati is not easy. Syeh Husni, the Chairman of DKA, mentioned that village studios have been encouraged to become active. In fact, village studio members have been given the opportunity to participate in the GSMS program. This serves as a source of motivation to reinvigorate activities at the village studios due to the encouragement and enthusiasm provided. The GSMS program involves experts in the field of arts and culture, including Seudati.

- c) Encouraging school and institutional involvement through extracurricular activities as a form of preservation

One of the preservation programs for Seudati implemented by the government through educational institutions is the Gerakan Seniman Masuk Sekolah (GSMS). This program, managed by the Directorate of Development and Utilization of Culture under the Directorate General of Culture at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, involves artists providing arts education in extracurricular activities at schools. The program is directly overseen by the directorate and is executed by the local government through the education and culture office.

Through the Gerakan Seniman Masuk Sekolah (GSMS), Seudati training for the younger generation is being actively promoted once again. They are trained in a structured and measurable manner (Susiati, [2021](#)). Marzuan stated that the GSMS program is expected to preserve (protect, develop, and utilize) cultural values and cultural advancement objects for students through artists teaching at schools. Additionally, the Gerakan Seniman Masuk Sekolah program serves as a means to identify talented students in the field of arts (Murcahyanto et al., [2021](#)). It also aims to achieve cultural transformation for the younger generation, in efforts to preserve (protect, develop, and utilize) regional arts and culture as part of Indonesia's national cultural heritage, addressing global challenges.



Figure 1. Students are practicing the Ranup Lampuan dance in the school entry seminar program



Figure 2. The students are practicing Seudati dance as part of the artist-in-residence program at the school

Digital cultural platforms and cultural campaigns and education

Digital cultural platforms and cultural campaigns and education aim to promote, preserve, and educate the public about cultural wealth through digital technology. These initiatives are crucial for maintaining cultural heritage, raising awareness, and ensuring that knowledge about culture remains vibrant in the digital age (Waluyo & Wahyuni, [2023](#)). One of the key functions of digital platforms is to document and preserve cultural artifacts, stories, and traditions for future generations. Social media platforms enable outreach to a broader audience with engaging and informative campaigns about culture, allowing more people to access and learn about cultural heritage, even those in remote locations. Digital documentation helps preserve cultures and traditions that might otherwise be lost.

Pidie Jaya has various digital platforms accommodating all forms of culture, including Seudati. These include the Pidie Jaya Culture Instagram, the Pidie Jaya Museum, and the Pidie Jaya Culture TikTok account. Digitalizing culture is an effort to campaign for and educate about culture. These digital platforms are accessible to all, regardless of gender, as both men and women engage in the arts and culture activities (Mujiburrahman et al., [2024](#)).

Organizing cultural events

Pekan Kebudayaan Pidie Jaya (PKPJ) or Pidie Jaya Cultural Week is an annual event organized by the local government to provide a space for young individuals who have studied and practiced the arts to express themselves. PKPJ serves as a platform where they can compete and showcase their talents as performers and cultural enthusiasts, including in areas such as Seudati dance. PKPJ is a highly valuable initiative for providing an expression space for the younger generation who have engaged in cultural arts, including Seudati. Through this annual event, they can display their skills, creativity, and dedication in the field of culture.

PKPJ plays a crucial role in the preservation of culture in Pidie Jaya by having a broad and profound positive impact on the local community and regional cultural heritage. The event offers a platform for artists and cultural practitioners to present traditional arts such as Seudati, traditional music, and crafts, helping to maintain and promote local cultural heritage. PKPJ also serves as an effective educational tool, raising awareness and understanding of the importance of cultural preservation. Additionally, the event can attract both local and international tourists, contributing to the local economy through cultural tourism. This annual cultural festival can also act as a tool for cultural diplomacy, introducing Pidie Jaya's culture to the outside world and building better relationships with other cultural communities. It helps build and strengthen Pidie Jaya's positive image as a region rich in culture and tradition.

The reality of Seudati in Pidie Jaya

Seudati studios in Pidie Jaya

Dance studios serve as spaces for teaching and learning both basic and advanced techniques of Seudati dance to the younger generation. These studios function as centers for knowledge and activities related to Seudati dance. They frequently organize public performances, allowing the community to enjoy and appreciate the dance. Essentially, dance studios act as gathering places for dancers, enthusiasts, and supporters of Seudati, fostering a strong and supportive community. Therefore, they play a central role in preserving Seudati as a cultural heritage. Dance studios not only maintain the continuity of Seudati but also work to develop and promote this dance form to a wider audience. Here are some of the dance studios in Pidie Jaya that continue to focus on Seudati, despite the overall decline in interest due to the dance's complexity and challenging learning process:

- 1) Cicem Pala Kuneng managed by Syeh Azhari
- 2) Bungong Seuke managed by Syeh Anam Muda
- 3) Genaseh Poma managed by Syeh Syamaun

Achievements in a challenging era

Achieving success in the field of culture, especially in Seudati dance, in the era of digital disruption is indeed challenging and not easy (Rustiyanti et al., [2021](#)). However, Seudati practitioners in Pidie Jaya are continuously striving to ensure that the dance remains vibrant and successful, even in the digital age. They are committed to keeping Seudati alive and evolving while preserving its authenticity and cultural values. Their efforts aim to ensure that Seudati remains a crucial part of Pidie Jaya's cultural identity and is passed on to future generations. The existence of Seudati carried out by cultural actors as a form of achievement in digital real, such as the appearance of the famous Seudati artist Syech Azhari from Meureudue Pidie Jaya, performed on the 2023 Maestro Stage at the Jakarta Arts Building,

July 5-6, 2023 (Eda, [n.d.](#)). Syech Azhari currently leads the Cimpala Kuneng Studio, a studio that educates Seudati artists in Pidie Jaya and he has learned Seudati from Syceh Lah Banguna. He has performed at Taman Ismail Marzuki, Senayan, and Taman Semanggi (Eda, [n.d.](#)).

The existence of Seudati dance in the disruption era remains robust, as evidenced by various achievements attained by cultural practitioners. One example is the performance by the renowned Seudati artist, Syech Azhari, from Meureudu, Pidie Jaya, at the Panggung Maestro 2023 event held at the Jakarta Arts Building on July 5-6, 2023. Syech Azhari, who currently leads Sanggar Cimpala Kuneng, a studio focused on the education and training of Seudati artists in Pidie Jaya, has gained widespread recognition for his dedication to preserving this art form. He acquired his skills in Seudati from his teacher, Syech Lah Banguna, and has showcased his dance at prestigious venues such as Taman Ismail Marzuki, Senayan, and Taman Semanggi. Syech Azhari's achievements and public performances demonstrate that, even in a challenging disruption era, traditional arts like Seudati can continue to thrive and receive broad appreciation. This highlights the crucial role of studios and communities in preserving cultural heritage, with government support being a key aspect in ensuring the continued existence of studios as cultural pillars.

CONCLUSION

The preservation of Seudati in Pidie Jaya faces significant challenges in the digital disruption era. The younger generation is increasingly attracted to entertainment available on digital platforms, such as online games, social media, and, in some cases, online gambling. The dominance of digital culture has begun to erode the traditional culture inherited from previous generations. However, Pidie Jaya is renowned for its Seudati and aims to boost tourism as a key source of regional revenue. Seudati remains a crucial cultural attraction for Pidie Jaya. In response to the phenomenon of the younger generation's reluctance to learn Seudati, the Pidie Jaya government is addressing this issue through several approaches. The first approach involves leveraging digital technology itself. Digital platforms are utilized to campaign for the culture, specifically Seudati, to raise awareness among the younger generation. The Pidie Jaya government acknowledges and awards Seudati maestros to recognize their contributions to culture and arts. Such recognition is expected to create a positive impression on the youth, emphasizing that Seudati is a valuable cultural heritage that needs to be preserved. Additionally, the revival of village art centers serves as a creative space for the youth. Encouraging schools and institutions to incorporate cultural activities, including Seudati, into extracurricular programs is another strategy. This initiative is realized through the Gerakan Seniman Masuk Sekolah program, which promotes Seudati training for the younger generation. Furthermore, providing a larger platform for cultural expression, such as the Pekan Kebudayaan Pidie Jaya, offers a valuable opportunity for youth who have studied and practiced cultural arts, including Seudati. The Pekan Kebudayaan Pidie Jaya is an excellent initiative that allows the younger generation to showcase their skills and dedication to cultural arts.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article was funded by PNPB Universitas Malikussaleh. We extend our thanks to LPPM Universitas Malikussaleh and all parties involved in this research.

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