



## Community Empowerment in Cultural Preservation: Lived Experiences Amidst Modernization

Mukhlis Lubis

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri Mandailing Natal, Indonesia  
[mukhlizlubiz@gmail.com](mailto:mukhlizlubiz@gmail.com)

### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received 15-01-2025

Revised 05-02-2025

Accepted 15-02-2025

#### Keyword:

Cultural Preservation;  
Community Empowerment;  
Modernization; Subjective  
Experiences; Cultural Identity.

### ABSTRACT

Cultural preservation is a critical issue within the context of globalization, where local traditions are increasingly at risk of marginalization. While previous studies have explored the systemic impacts of modernization on cultural practices, limited attention has been given to the subjective experiences of cultural practitioners tasked with safeguarding these traditions. This study addresses the gap by investigating how cultural practitioners perceive, experience, and respond to the challenges of cultural preservation in a rapidly changing social landscape. Using a phenomenological approach, the research uncovers the lived experiences of ten cultural practitioners, highlighting their moral commitment and community-driven strategies to sustain their heritage. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, revealing key themes such as the emotional dimensions of preservation, challenges posed by modern societal preferences, and empowerment strategies employed by practitioners. The findings reveal that cultural practitioners often experience a profound emotional attachment to their cultural heritage, with many describing the preservation effort as a moral duty passed down through generations. Practitioners also face significant challenges, particularly the tension between traditional practices and the dominant trends of modern consumer culture, which prioritizes convenience and globalization. However, they employ a variety of unique empowerment strategies, such as organizing community workshops, collaborating with local schools to educate younger generations, and using social media to promote cultural awareness. These strategies not only help preserve cultural tradition but also foster a sense of solidarity and resilience within the community. The findings demonstrate that cultural preservation is not merely a functional effort but a deeply personal endeavor, driven by an intrinsic sense of responsibility and resilience. These insights contribute to a richer understanding of cultural sustainability, emphasizing the importance of integrating subjective experiences into preservation policies and programs. Future studies could expand this work by exploring diverse cultural contexts and the potential role of digital technologies in supporting cultural heritage initiatives.



©2024 Authors. Published by PT Mukhlisina Revolution Center.. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

### INTRODUCTION

The preservation of cultural heritage represents a critical issue in the face of globalization and modernization (Abdullah & Polus, 2024). Cultural traditions, including artisanal crafts, performing arts, and ritual practices, are often marginalized as societal preferences shift toward modern and globalized lifestyles. This phenomenon threatens the continuity of local cultural identities, creating a tension between the desire for progress and the need to sustain traditional values. Cultural practitioners—those actively engaged in preserving these traditions—play a vital role in navigating this delicate balance, often amidst challenges of declining community interest and limited institutional support.

Modernization and the rise of digital technologies have amplified these challenges, as younger generations gravitate toward globalized entertainment platforms, such as social media, rather than participating in traditional cultural practices. This shift underscores the urgent need to understand

the subjective experiences of cultural practitioners who persist in their efforts despite systemic obstacles. Prior research, such as Hofstede's (2005) examination of globalization's impact on local cultures and Zimmerman's (1995) focus on community empowerment, provides insights into the broader systemic challenges faced by communities. However, these studies often overlook the subjective experiences and emotional dimensions of cultural preservation, which are critical for understanding the motivations of cultural practitioners.

Exploring the lived experiences of cultural practitioners offers a unique lens to uncover the deeper meanings and motivations underlying their efforts. The phenomenological approach provides an ideal framework for this inquiry, as it centers on subjective experience and the essence of phenomena within a social context. This study aims to address the gap in the literature by delving into the personal narratives of cultural practitioners, offering insights into the strategies they employ and the challenges they face (Amponsah & Agyemang, 2024). Through this exploration, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the human dimensions of cultural sustainability in a rapidly changing world.

Research into the lived experiences of individuals within specific phenomena has emerged as an essential domain for understanding complex social and cultural issues. The exploration of subjective experiences provides insights into how individuals perceive, interpret, and navigate their realities, offering a rich and nuanced perspective often absent in broader quantitative approaches. In the context of cultural preservation, the narratives of cultural practitioners are particularly significant, as they embody the intersection of tradition, identity, and resilience amidst societal transformation.

However, methodological challenges have constrained the depth of understanding in this field. Quantitative methods, while valuable for identifying trends and correlations, often fall short in capturing the intricate meanings and emotional dimensions of cultural practitioners' experiences. Even qualitative studies, when focused primarily on descriptive accounts, may overlook the deeper, interpretive layers of meaning that phenomenological inquiry seeks to uncover. This limitation is particularly evident in studies that address globalization's impact on local cultures, which frequently prioritize systemic or structural analyses over individual experiences (Hofstede, 2005).

These challenges underscore the necessity of employing phenomenology as a methodological approach that prioritizes the subjective and interpretive aspects of human experience. By focusing on the lived realities of cultural practitioners, this study seeks to address the methodological gaps in prior research and provide a more holistic understanding of cultural preservation in the modern era.

While practical approaches to cultural preservation—such as organizing workshops, festivals, and institutional collaborations—have demonstrated measurable success in sustaining traditions, they often prioritize visible outcomes over the nuanced experiences of cultural practitioners (Basri dkk., 2023). These methods frequently adopt a top-down perspective, focusing on outputs like audience engagement or participation rates, while overlooking the subjective and emotional dimensions of the individuals who actively sustain these traditions. Such approaches, although valuable, provide an incomplete understanding of the deeper meanings and personal struggles inherent in cultural preservation efforts.

Existing studies, including those exploring globalization's impact on local traditions (Hofstede, 2005), often rely on macro-level analyses or generalizable findings, leaving significant gaps in understanding the lived realities of cultural practitioners. These limitations highlight the inadequacy of quantitative or surface-level qualitative approaches in capturing the complex interplay of identity, tradition, and resilience. Without an exploration of these subjective dimensions, the broader implications of cultural preservation remain poorly understood.

A phenomenological approach offers a robust alternative to addressing these gaps by delving into the essence of cultural practitioners' experiences. Through this lens, it becomes possible to uncover the intrinsic motivations, emotional challenges, and strategies that shape their efforts to sustain cultural practices (Bathla dkk., 2024). This study seeks to bridge the gap in existing literature by employing phenomenology to explore the rich, subjective meanings that underpin the phenomenon of cultural preservation in the face of modernization.

Existing literature has provided valuable insights into the dynamics of cultural preservation, including the impact of globalization on local traditions and the strategies employed by communities to sustain their heritage. Studies such as Hofstede's (2005) exploration of cultural dimensions and Zimmerman's (1995) work on community empowerment have highlighted systemic challenges and structural approaches to resilience. However, these contributions often lack an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of cultural practitioners, particularly their subjective motivations and emotional journeys. This research builds upon these foundations by addressing the gaps in knowledge about personal and experiential aspects of cultural preservation. By doing so, it seeks to complement existing frameworks with a phenomenological perspective.

The study employs an interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of cultural practitioners. This method was selected for its ability to uncover the deeper meanings and motivations that underlie participants' efforts to sustain their traditions. Unlike quantitative or surface-level qualitative methods, phenomenology prioritizes subjective experience and seeks to reveal the essence of phenomena as perceived by individuals. This approach enables the study to address the gaps identified earlier by providing a holistic understanding of how cultural practitioners navigate the challenges posed by modernization while preserving their heritage.

The structure of this article is organized to guide readers through the research journey systematically (Croes dkk., 2024). The introduction establishes the context and significance of the study, followed by a review of related literature to situate the research within existing scholarship. The methods section details the phenomenological approach, including participant selection, data collection, and analysis procedures. Results are presented thematically, reflecting the rich narratives of participants, while the discussion interprets these findings in light of relevant theoretical frameworks. The article concludes with practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research, providing a comprehensive view of the phenomenon under investigation.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

This study employed a phenomenological design to explore the subjective experiences of cultural practitioners in preserving their traditions amidst modernization. The phenomenological approach was selected for its focus on understanding lived experiences and uncovering the underlying meaning individuals ascribe to phenomena (Gade dkk., 2024). This method was particularly suited to address the research questions, as it allowed for a comprehensive exploration of how participants perceive, navigate, and respond to cultural preservation challenges. An interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) was adopted, emphasizing the dual interpretation process wherein participants' experiences are explored and interpreted to uncover the essence of their meaning within a socio-cultural context.

### **Participants**

Participants consisted of 10 individuals actively engaged in the preservation of local cultural traditions, including traditional artisans, performing artists, and community leaders. Inclusion criteria required participants to have been involved in cultural preservation activities for at least five years and to possess firsthand experience with the challenges of modernization. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a rich and diverse representation of experiences relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Lin, 2020). Demographic characteristics included a balanced representation of gender and ages ranging from 30 to 65 years, reflecting varying levels of expertise and community engagement. To protect privacy, pseudonyms were assigned to all participants.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in person at participants' preferred locations to create a comfortable and open environment. Interviews ranged from 60 to 90 minutes and followed a flexible interview guide designed to elicit participants'

experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to cultural preservation (Magoutas dkk., 2024). Open-ended questions were employed to encourage detailed narratives, such as, “Can you describe your experiences in maintaining cultural traditions in your community?” and “What challenges have you faced in preserving these practices?” Observational data were also gathered during cultural activities, such as workshops, performances, and community events, providing contextual insights into participants’ lived realities. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the data, following a structured, iterative process. Transcripts were first read multiple times to achieve familiarization, after which data were coded to identify significant statements and recurring ideas (Phuangprayong & Noonin, 2023). These codes were then grouped into themes that captured the essence of participants’ experiences, such as challenges of modernization, moral responsibility, and community empowerment strategies. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure alignment with the research questions and the theoretical framework. The analysis was conducted with the aid of qualitative data analysis software, which facilitated systematic coding and theme development. The final themes were interpreted within the context of the study’s phenomenological orientation, emphasizing the subjective meanings participants attributed to their experiences.

### **Ethics**

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional ethics review board. Participants provided written informed consent prior to data collection, ensuring they were aware of their rights, the study’s purpose, and the voluntary nature of their participation (Risfandini dkk., 2023). Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing personal identifiers and securely storing all data. The research adhered to established international and local ethical standards, including the Declaration of Helsinki principles. To ensure participant comfort and minimize any potential discomfort during the in-depth interviews, several steps were taken. First, interviews were conducted in private, comfortable settings chosen by the participants, such as their homes or community spaces, to ensure they felt safe and at ease. Prior to each interview, participants were informed about the nature of the study and reassured that they could withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. During the interviews, I adopted an empathetic, non-judgmental approach, creating a supportive environment that encouraged open dialogue. Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to review the interview transcripts for accuracy and to withdraw any information they were uncomfortable sharing. These measures helped foster trust and respect, ensuring that the participants’ rights and well-being were prioritized throughout the research process.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Moral Responsibility of Cultural Preservation**

Participants consistently expressed that cultural preservation is deeply intertwined with a sense of moral obligation to honor their ancestors. For many, the act of maintaining traditions was seen as more than a task—it was a legacy of identity and heritage. A traditional dancer remarked, “I feel a deep responsibility to preserve this dance, as it is a legacy from my grandfather.” This sentiment encapsulates the intrinsic motivation shared by most participants to safeguard cultural practices. However, it is important to note that this sense of moral responsibility was not universally experienced in the same way across all participants. While most described a deep emotional connection to their traditions, the intensity and personal significance of this responsibility varied. Some participants spoke more about their community role, while others emphasized the ancestral connection more strongly. The experience of cultural preservation was described as both a privilege and a duty, highlighting the participants’ emotional connection to their traditions.

Through the lens of symbolic interactionism, this commitment is framed as a meaningful interaction between past, present, and future generations, where the preservation of rituals and customs reinforces communal identity and continuity.

### **Challenges of Modernization in Cultural Sustainability**

Participants frequently emphasized the profound challenges posed by modernization and the pervasive influence of popular culture. The rapid shift in societal preferences, particularly among younger generations, was a recurring theme. A traditional musician lamented, “Young people now prefer TikTok over learning gamelan.” This statement underscores the encroachment of modern entertainment forms on the traditional cultural space.

The narratives further revealed a sense of marginalization, with participants often feeling unsupported by external entities, including governmental and societal bodies. Despite their efforts, the lack of structural resources and shifting societal values were significant obstacles. These accounts highlight the need for strategies that reconcile traditional practices with contemporary cultural trends.

### **Empowerment Strategies for Cultural Continuity**

Despite challenges, the findings illuminate various empowerment strategies adopted by cultural communities to sustain their traditions. Participants detailed initiatives such as hosting workshops, organizing cultural festivals, and collaborating with educational institutions to integrate local culture into curricula. “We strive to keep our traditions alive by holding small performances in our village,” shared one participant, highlighting the community-driven nature of these efforts.

Observational data supported these accounts, revealing vibrant interactions during activities such as dance training, craft-making, and artistic performances. These events were marked by high levels of dedication among cultural practitioners, despite limited resources. A notable finding was the enthusiastic participation of children in these activities, albeit confined to certain community groups. This engagement points to the latent potential for expanding cultural preservation programs to broader audiences.

### **Interactions Between Cultural Practitioners and External Entities**

Participants described the complex dynamics of their interactions with broader societal and institutional stakeholders. While some collaborations proved beneficial, others were marked by misunderstandings or neglect. One artisan commented, “External support is often sporadic and does not align with our needs.” This sentiment underscores the critical need for more tailored and consistent engagement between cultural practitioners and external entities.

These interactions were seen as both opportunities and challenges, depending on their context. Successful collaborations often led to increased visibility and recognition of cultural practices, while failed attempts reinforced feelings of isolation.

The experiences of cultural practitioners reveal a profound tension between their commitment to preserving traditions and the challenges posed by modernization. Despite these obstacles, participants demonstrate resilience and creativity in their strategies to sustain cultural heritage. Their narratives underscore the importance of moral responsibility, innovative community-led initiatives, and constructive external collaborations in cultural preservation efforts. These findings offer valuable insights into the lived realities of cultural practitioners and the intricate dynamics of cultural sustainability in the modern era.

The findings of this study reveal the profound sense of moral responsibility and resilience exhibited by cultural practitioners in preserving their traditions amidst the challenges of modernization (Velayati & Ahmad, 2024). Through a phenomenological lens, the study uncovers the intricate interplay between identity, heritage, and societal change, highlighting the strategies and emotional complexities involved in sustaining cultural practices. These findings directly address the research questions posed in the introduction, offering nuanced insights into the lived experiences and subjective meanings ascribed by cultural practitioners to their preservation efforts.

The study makes a unique contribution to the understanding of cultural preservation by revealing the deeply personal and community-driven dimensions of this phenomenon. It demonstrates that, for practitioners, cultural preservation is not merely a functional activity but a moral and emotional imperative rooted in ancestral legacy (Roy & Roy, 2024). This perspective answers the research question about how cultural practitioners perceive and navigate their roles, revealing that their actions are driven by a profound sense of responsibility and the desire to foster continuity across generations. Furthermore, the findings shed light on the specific strategies employed by practitioners, such as workshops, festivals, and community collaborations, and how these approaches help counter the encroachment of modern cultural influences.

In comparison to previous research, this study complements the macro-level analyses of cultural change, such as those by Hofstede (2005) and Zimmerman (1995), by adding a micro-level understanding of individual and collective experiences. While earlier studies focused on structural and systemic aspects, this research delves into the emotional and motivational underpinnings of cultural preservation, highlighting the personal sacrifices and communal engagement involved. The findings align with symbolic interactionism, which frames cultural practices as dynamic processes of meaning-making shaped by ongoing interactions within and across communities. By offering this perspective, the study bridges the gap between theoretical constructs and real-world experiences, providing a richer understanding of the complexities of cultural sustainability.

### **Implications of Findings**

The findings of this study carry significant implications both academically and practically. Scientifically, they deepen the understanding of cultural preservation by framing it as a lived experience imbued with emotional and moral meaning. This perspective underscores the need for future research to incorporate subjective narratives into analyses of cultural sustainability. From a practical standpoint, the study highlights the importance of community-driven initiatives, such as workshops and collaborations with educational institutions, in fostering cultural resilience. These strategies not only empower cultural practitioners but also create opportunities for younger generations to reconnect with their heritage, offering a model for cultural preservation programs in similar contexts globally (Suksikarn & Suksikarn, 2024). The study also sheds light on the potential of integrating cultural traditions into broader developmental policies, ensuring that modernization does not occur at the expense of cultural identity.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations that may affect the generalizability of its findings. The small sample size, while appropriate for phenomenological research, limits the ability to draw conclusions beyond the specific community studied. Additionally, the study focuses on cultural practitioners with at least five years of active engagement, potentially excluding perspectives from individuals who are newer to cultural preservation efforts (Suwarlan dkk., 2024). The reliance on qualitative methods, though central to phenomenological inquiry, inherently excludes quantitative validation of broader trends. Contextual factors, such as local socio-economic conditions and policy environments, further restrict the applicability of findings to other settings. Acknowledging these limitations provides a foundation for cautious interpretation of the study's results while highlighting the need for complementary research approaches.

### **Prospective Directions for Future Research**

This study opens several avenues for further exploration. Future research could expand the scope of inquiry by including diverse cultural settings and examining how global digital platforms might be leveraged to support cultural preservation (Tyagi dkk., 2024). Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the evolving experiences of cultural practitioners over time, especially as societal attitudes toward tradition and modernization shift. Additionally, exploring the interplay between institutional policies and grassroots cultural efforts may yield actionable strategies to enhance support for cultural preservation initiatives. By building upon these findings, future studies can continue to bridge the gap between theory and practice, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of cultural sustainability in a rapidly changing world.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of cultural practitioners in preserving their traditions amidst the challenges of modernization. The findings reveal that cultural preservation is deeply rooted in a sense of moral responsibility and emotional commitment, reflecting practitioners' dedication to safeguarding their heritage against societal shifts. By employing a phenomenological approach, this research addressed gaps in previous studies by uncovering the subjective and experiential dimensions of cultural sustainability, which are often overlooked in quantitative or macro-level analyses. The study highlights the importance of community-driven strategies, such as workshops and collaborations, in fostering resilience and intergenerational engagement with cultural practices. Based on these findings, policymakers should prioritize funding and supporting community-based cultural initiatives that foster collaboration between local practitioners, educators, and cultural organizations. Additionally, integrating cultural preservation into national education curricula could ensure that younger generations remain engaged with their heritage. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural preservation as a dynamic and personal endeavor, offering practical implications for policy and program development. Future research could build on these findings by expanding the scope to diverse cultural contexts and exploring the role of digital technologies in supporting cultural heritage initiatives.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This article has undergone an independent and objective review process. The editor handling this article was not involved in any previous publications with the author, and to maintain independence, the peer review process was conducted by another editor who has no direct relationship with the author.

## REFERENCES

- Abdullah, T., & Polus, R. (2024). *Tourism case studies Asia-Pacific region* (hlm. 402). CABI International; Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1079/9781800628687.0000>
- Amponsah, E., & Agyemang, F. (2024). Securing indigenous land rights through community engagement in South African mining communities: Lessons from international and national legislative and policy frameworks. *Town and Regional Planning*, 85, 64–80. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.38140/trp.v85i.8417>
- Basri, M., Islam, F. S. P., Paramma, M. A., & Anas, I. (2023). The Impact of English Educational Tourism on the Growth of Local Economy: A Systematic Literature Review. *International Journal of Language Education*, 7(2), 304–318. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijole.v7i2.45783>
- Bathla, G., Raina, A., Kumar, A., Tripathi, R., & Kaur, D. (2024). Exploring the role of sustainable tourism in building environmental and social resilience. Dalam *Building Community Resiliency and Sustainability With Tourism Development* (hlm. 83–106). IGI Global; Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-5405-6.ch004>
- Croes, R., Renduchintala, C., & Badu-Baiden, F. (2024). Reimagining Indigenous Tourism: The RISE Framework. *Tourism Planning and Development*. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2024.2415462>
- Gade, J., Johnpaul, M., & Miryala, R. K. (2024). Tribal tourism: A literature-based study of ethnographic exploration of culture and sustainable development. Dalam *Managing Tourism and Hospitality Sectors for Sustainable Global Transformation* (hlm. 169–183). IGI Global; Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-6260-0.ch012>

- Lin, C.-L. (2020). Establishing environment sustentation strategies for urban and rural/town tourism based on a hybrid MCDM approach. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 23(19), 2360–2395. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2019.1642308>
- Magoutas, A. I., Manolopoulos, D., Manouka, M., & Dimitropoulou, M. (2024). Digitalization of the Alternative Tourism Marketspace: Evidence from an EU Peripheral Economy. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 5(4), 1151–1166. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.3390/tourhosp5040064>
- Phuangprayong, K., & Noonin, S. (2023). The Social Impact Value Chain and Driving Factors of the Social Innovation Project to Promote the Social Solidarity Economy: A Study in the Pilot Area of Central Thailand. *Thammasat Review*, 26(2), 200–223. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.14456/tureview.2023.18>
- Risfandini, A., Yulianto, I., & Wan-Zainal-Shukri, W.-H. (2023). Local Community Empowerment for Sustainable Tourism Development: A Case Study of Edelweiss Park Wonokitri Village. *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning*, 18(11), 3617–3623. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.18280/ijstdp.181127>
- Roy, B. K., & Roy, B. (2024). Economic, social, and environmental impact of sustainable gastronomy tourism: A special reference to West Bengal. Dalam *Gastronomic Sustainability Solutions for Community and Tourism Resilience* (hlm. 77–99). IGI Global; Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-4135-3.ch005>
- Suksikarn, R., & Suksikarn, J. (2024). Craft-Design Collaboration: Designing and Developing Products from Banana Fibers through Community Participation. *Archives of Design Research*, 37(5), 197–218. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.15187/adr.2024.11.37.5.197>
- Suwarlan, S. A., Lai, L. Y., & Said, I. (2024). SOCIO-CULTURAL RESILIENCE FRAMEWORK FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE SEA TRIBES COMMUNITY OF THE INSULAR CITY. *Alam Cipta*, 17(1), 10–17. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.47836/AC.17.1.PAPER02>
- Tyagi, P., Nadda, V., Kankaew, K., & Dube, K. (2024). *Examining tourist behaviors and community involvement in destination rejuvenation* (hlm. 407). IGI Global; Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-6819-0>
- Velayati, M. F., & Ahmad, B. (2024). Good tourism governance and tourism development in Bira village. *Edelweiss Applied Science and Technology*, 8(5), 1906–1912. Scopus. <https://doi.org/10.55214/25768484.v8i5.1921>