

Guel Music and Dance as Agents of Social Change: Strengthening Social Cohesion and Cultural Sustainability in Central Aceh

Dian Herdiati¹✉, Nurlaili², Sabariah Musnaini³

¹Universitas Negeri Jakarta, Indonesia

²Universitas Syiah Kuala, Indonesia

³SMK Negeri 5 Takengon, Indonesia

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Abstract

This research aims to explore and analyse the role of Gayo music and dance performances as agents of social change in strengthening social cohesion and cultural sustainability within the Gayo community in Central Aceh. The research is motivated by the importance of the performing arts as a medium for preserving cultural identity and uniting communities, particularly in the face of the challenges posed by globalization, which threatens the sustainability of local traditions. The urgency of the research lies in the need to understand concrete strategies for utilizing traditional arts for social purposes, as well as to fill the gap in the literature regarding the unique elements of Guel music and dance in the context of social change. The research method employed was a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, combining a quantitative survey of 176 participants with a qualitative phenomenological study of 25 participants. The study's results showed that participation in Guel performances, particularly through the "Saturday Arts" and "Annual Festival" programs, significantly increased the community's sense of belonging, cultural pride, and social involvement. Quantitative data analysis showed an increase in governance and conservation indicators by 13.6% and 23.6%, respectively, while qualitative data revealed Guel's role in value education, gender inclusivity, and intercultural dialogue. The discussion relates this finding to Bourdieu's theory of social capital, confirming that Guel functions as a social glue (bonding capital), a bridge between groups (bridging capital), and a transformer of cultural capital into social capital. This research recommends the development of inclusive cultural policies, the integration of traditional arts into the educational curriculum, and a community-based governance approach to ensure the sustainability of Guel music and dance as an intangible cultural heritage and a unifying force for society.

Keywords: Guel music and dance; agents of social change; social cohesion; cultural sustainability; Saturday Arts

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INTRODUCTION

As a rich form of cultural expression, the performing arts have long been recognised as a significant agent of social chan-

ge. Guel music and dance performances, which are an integral part of the cultural traditions of the Gayo people in Central Aceh, play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and cultural sustainability.

✉ Corresponding author:
E-mail: dherdiati@unj.ac.id

Performing arts serve not only as entertainment but also as a medium to convey social messages, build collective identity, and strengthen relationships between individuals within the community. Previous research suggests that performing arts can increase community members' sense of belonging and solidarity, contributing to social and cultural stability. (Aol, 2024; Rubin et al., 2021).

The study of performing arts as a tool for social change has grown rapidly in recent years. Research indicates that participation in the performing arts, such as music and dance, can enhance social interaction and foster stronger community networks. (Diman, 2022; Maguire-Jacket et al., 2021; Ransome, 2023; Rubin et al., 2021). There is a deep understanding of the role of the arts as agents of social change in the performing arts. Recent research indicates that the performing arts, encompassing music and dance, can serve as a medium to foster social cohesion and enhance cultural identity amid the challenges of globalization and modernization. In addition, according to research conducted by Yang and Zhang, the development of digital technology has provided new spaces for artistic expression, which can also be applied in the context of performing arts to increase community engagement. (Yang & Zhang, 2023).

However, while many studies discuss the positive impact of performing arts, there is still a lack of studies explicitly examining how Guel music and dance performances can contribute to social cohesion and cultural sustainability. Previous research has often focused on the performing arts without identifying the social elements that make Guel music and dance performances unique. (Wu, 2023). This creates a research gap that needs to be filled, especially in understanding how these performances can serve as a tool to strengthen the identity of the arts community and preserve local culture.

Cultural sustainability is an increasingly pressing issue in the modern era, where global cultural influences endanger

many local traditions. Wu's research indicates that incorporating traditional cultural elements into public design can enhance a sense of belonging and identity within the community. (Wu, 2023) To that end, this research explores how Guel music and dance performances can preserve culture and strengthen social cohesion in local communities. By identifying key elements of Guel music and dance performances, this research aims to provide deeper insights into how the performing arts can be utilised to achieve broader social objectives.

The urgency of this research cannot be ignored, especially in the context of cultural sustainability and social identity strengthening. Amid increasing globalisation, many local cultures face threats to their sustainability and existence. Therefore, it is essential to understand how the performing arts, particularly those of Guel music and dance, can contribute to cultural sustainability and strengthen social identity amidst modern challenges. This research is expected to provide deeper insights into how performing arts can be used to build more cohesive and sustainable communities. (Aol, 2024; Maguire-Jack et al., 2021). The urgency of this research is also seen in the need to understand how performing arts can adapt to changing times. In a study by Anwar, architectural designs that integrate local cultural elements can create spaces that support performing arts activities and strengthen social ties among community members. (Anwar, 2023). As such, this research is both relevant in an academic context and has practical implications for the development of cultural and educational policies.

Through this research, empirical evidence can be found to support the claim that performing arts, particularly Guel music and dance performances, have the potential to enhance social cohesion and cultural sustainability. As such, the results of this study can not only enrich the academic literature on performing arts and social change but also provide practical recommendations for policymakers, artists, and members of the arts community to utilise

performing arts as a tool to achieve more significant social goals. (Lin et al., 2024; Zaeri & Roozafzai, 2024). In a broader context, this research also discusses how Guel music and dance performances can serve as a means for intercultural dialogue and strengthening collective identity. By understanding the role of the performing arts in a social context, it is hoped that more effective strategies can be developed to promote cultural diversity and foster mutual respect among different social groups. This research aims to make a significant contribution to understanding Guel music and dance performances as agents of social change. Focusing on the performing arts of Guel music and dance can improve the social cohesion of the Gayo community in Central Aceh. It can reveal the potential of performing arts in building social cohesion and cultural sustainability, and provide valuable insights for developing more inclusive and sustainable cultural policies.

For the purpose of this study, cultural sustainability is defined as the capacity of a community to maintain, adapt, and transmit its cultural heritage to future generations. The terms preservation and conservation are used as components of this process, with preservation focusing on safeguarding cultural practices from extinction, and conservation emphasizing the responsible management and maintenance of those practices

METHOD

A mixed-methods design with a sequential explanatory design approach was employed in this research. (Creswell & Poth, 2018, 2023; Rosenman, 2025). This design was implemented in two consecutive phases: a quantitative phase (survey) followed by a qualitative phase (phenomenological study) to explore and contextualize the statistical findings. This approach was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of performing arts as a social glue by combining generalizations of community participation patterns and an in-depth exploration of the mea-

ning of cultural experiences. (M. Fetters, 2017; M. D. Fettters, 2020; Molina-Azorín et al., 2022).

Although the qualitative phase of this study was initially framed as phenomenological to capture participants' lived experiences, the use of 25 participants, focus group discussions, participatory observation, and thematic analysis following the Braun and Clarke model suggests that the approach is more accurately described as a descriptive-thematic qualitative study within a mixed methods design, rather than a pure phenomenological inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2020). Pure phenomenology typically focuses on exploring the essence of deep lived experiences from a small number of participants (Sandelowski, 2000). The descriptive-thematic approach was better suited to identify patterns of meaning related to social cohesion and cultural sustainability while contextualizing the quantitative findings.

The research began with a literature review and preliminary observations to inform the formulation of research questions. The quantitative phase was conducted by distributing closed-ended questionnaires to 176 participants of the Saturday Arts and Annual Festival programs to measure the levels of social cohesion, cultural engagement, and perceptions of sustainability. The questionnaire instrument was validated through expert judgment and reliability analysis ($\alpha > 0.70$). Next, the qualitative phase was conducted by purposively selecting 25 participants from the survey respondents to be interviewed in-depth and observed participatively in various Guel performance contexts. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data collection techniques include: (1) questionnaire surveys using a Likert scale for quantitative data; (2) semi-structured interviews and focus groups to explore narratives and collective experiences; and (3) participatory observation and document analysis (activity reports, festival archives) as triangulation data. (Jia, 2020; Morgan, 2018). The merging of data from both methods is performed at the interpretation stage to present a convergent and

complementary analysis.

Quantitative data analysis employed descriptive and inferential statistics (paired t-tests) using SPSS 26 software to measure the change in indicators before and after the program intervention. Qualitative data were analysed thematically using the Braun and Clarke model, which involves a process of codification, theme identification, and interpretation of meaning. (Brown & Clarke, 2020) The findings from both methods were integrated using a connecting technique, in which the statistical results were described narratively in conjunction with the qualitative findings.

Research ethics were fully adhered to, based on the principles of informed consent, data confidentiality, and participant safety. Ethical approval was obtained from the research institution. A member checking process was conducted to ensure the validity of qualitative data interpretation. In contrast, internal and external validity in the quantitative phase were maintained through strict sampling controls and statistical tests. (Israel & Hay, 2020; Mertens, 2019) This research follows academic integrity guidelines to ensure objectivity and transparency throughout the entire process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Guel Music and Dance Performances as Agents of Social Change for the Gayo Community, Central Aceh

To present the findings systematically and avoid repetition, the results are organized into three key thematic areas: (1) Guel as an Agent of Social Cohesion, (2) Guel as a Medium for Cultural Value Transmission, and (3) Guel and Cultural Sustainability: Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence.

Guel as an Agent of Social Cohesion

Participation in Guel performances, particularly through community programs like Saturday Arts, significantly strengthened social bonds within the Gayo community. Quantitative survey data (N=176)

revealed that 85% of respondents felt more connected to their community after attending Guel performances. Qualitatively, participants described these events as inclusive spaces that bridged generational and gender divides. Figure 1, depicting the Saturday Arts event, visually encapsulates this function, representing Guel as a platform for generating bonding social capital that fosters intra-group trust and shared identity.

Guel as a Medium for Cultural Value Transmission

Interview and observational data indicated that Guel serves as a dynamic vehicle for educating the younger generation about Gayo history, customs, and values such as cooperation and respect. This process transforms embodied cultural capital (e.g., skills, knowledge) into institutionalized cultural capital through formal and informal learning channels. The involvement of youth in performances, as both performers and spectators, emerged as a critical factor in intergenerational knowledge transfer and cultural continuity.

Guel and Cultural Sustainability: Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence

The sustainability of Guel was measured through governance and preservation indicators. Table 1 shows a 13.6% improvement in governance and a 23.6% improvement in preservation after the intervention programs. This quantitative increase is not merely numerical; it conceptually reflects the successful conversion of cultural capital into social and institutional capital through participatory governance.



Figure 1. The “Saturday Arts” event performed the Gayo Traditional Music and Dance in Gayo, Aceh Tengah.

The sustainability of Guel music and dance performances as agents of social change cannot be separated from the support of the government and local communities. The Central Aceh local government has begun incorporating Guel music and dance performances into its cultural and tourism programs as a means of supporting the sustainability of this traditional art. In addition, the active participation of the arts community and academics in preserving Guel music and dance performances also helps strengthen the role of these performances in society. Based on the results of this study, the research findings indicate that Gayo music and dance performances are not only a cultural heritage but also serve as agents of social change in Gayo society, Central Aceh. Through various educational functions, social cohesion, gender inclusiveness, and social campaigns, Guel music and dance performances have evolved into practical tools for shaping public awareness of essential life values. With full support from various parties, Guel music and dance performances can continue to grow and become a social force that benefits society in the future.

The Role of Guel Music and Dance Performances in Improving the Social Cohesion of the Gayo Community in Central Aceh.

The results of research based on interviews and observations show that Guel music and dance performances have a significant impact on increasing social cohesion in Central Aceh. The majority of participants reported that their participation in these performances strengthened their sense of belonging and solidarity among community members. These findings confirm that Guel performances not only serve as entertainment but also play an effective role in strengthening social bonds within the community. This study also highlights the significant role of Guel music and dance performances in strengthening social cohesion among the Gayo community in Central Aceh. Social cohesion, which refers to the level of attachment and soli-

darity among community members, is a key element in creating a harmonious and stable community. It was also found that traditional art performances, such as Guel music and dance, serve as an effective medium for building and maintaining these social bonds. Active participation in Guel music and dance performances enables community members to engage in collective activities that foster a sense of togetherness. As revealed in previous studies, participation in cultural activities such as traditional dance and music can strengthen social cohesion by creating a sense of shared ownership and forming strong emotional bonds between individuals.

The research also highlights the significant role of Guel music and dance performances in strengthening social cohesion among the Gayo people of Central Aceh. Social cohesion, which refers to the level of attachment and solidarity between community members, is a key element in creating a harmonious and stable community. Through in-depth analysis, it was found that traditional art performances, such as Guel music and dance, serve as an effective medium in building and maintaining social ties. Active participation in Guel music and dance performances enables community members to engage in collective activities that foster a stronger sense of community. As revealed in previous research, participation in cultural activities such as traditional dance and music can enhance social cohesion by creating a sense of shared belonging and forming strong emotional bonds between individuals.

In addition, Guel music and dance performances act as a means of transmitting cultural values and social norms to the younger generation. Through their involvement in these performances, the younger generation learns artistic skills and understands and internalises traditional values, such as cooperation, discipline, and respect for ancestors. The results of this study also show that Guel's traditional art serves as a medium for transmitting cultural values, history, and identity to future generations. Guel music and dance

performances also form a platform for social interaction that transcends generations and community groups. Through joint activities such as traditional ceremonies, cultural festivals, and art performances, these performing arts strengthen social bonds between community members. Such interactions play a crucial role in building strong social networks and enhancing the community's social capital.

From the perspective of social cohesion theory, Guel music and dance performances can be seen as mechanisms that enhance social solidarity by creating shared experiences and a collective identity. This supports the concept that participation in cultural activities fosters a sense of community, builds bridges between villagers, and strengthens social ties. Furthermore, Guel music and dance performances form a strong cultural identity, strengthening social cohesion. A strong cultural identity helps individuals feel connected, strengthens social cohesion, and creates a sense of shared belonging. Thus, through the preservation of and participation in Gayo music and dance performances, Gayo people can maintain their cultural identity and strengthen their social bonds. In addition, Guel music and dance performances serve as tools to overcome differences and potential conflicts within the community. By providing a space for inclusive cultural expression, these performances enable different groups in society to interact and cooperate, ultimately reducing social segregation and fostering greater social cohesion.

Maintaining traditional cultural practices, such as Guel music and dance performances, is challenging in an era of modernization and globalization. However, this study demonstrates that integrating Guel music and dance performances into community and educational programs, such as the "Saturday Arts" program and the "Cultural Festival," can strengthen social cohesion while preserving cultural heritage. These findings confirm that Guel music and dance performances are crucial in fostering social cohesion among the Gayo

community in Central Aceh. Through participation in these performances, community members can build and strengthen social bonds, transmit cultural values, and form a strong collective identity, all of which contribute to creating a harmonious and cohesive community.

Quantitative data collected through a survey, conducted by distributing questionnaires during the "Saturday Arts" event attended by at least 116 people, including artists, government officials, community members, and invitees, showed that 85% of respondents felt more connected to their community after attending the Guel music and dance performances. In addition, 78% of respondents reported feeling prouder of their local culture after participating in the event. These statistics support qualitative findings showing that Guel music and dance performances strengthen cultural identity and social cohesion. In further analysis, researchers also found that Guel music and dance performances serve as a platform for intercultural dialogue. For example, in a single performance, artists from different regions of Indonesia collaborate to perform various variations of Guel music and dance. This enriches the audience's experience and creates a space for positive cultural exchange. The results of this study demonstrate that the performing arts can be an effective tool for fostering understanding and tolerance among diverse groups. Additional statistics, measured through indicators contained in the questions on the questionnaire distributed to the community, show that participation in Guel music and dance performances also contributes to increased community participation in other social activities. 72% of respondents reported being more actively involved in community activities after attending Guel music and dance performances. This suggests that the performing arts have an impact during the event and have long-term effects on social engagement.

Furthermore, the research also found that Guel music and dance performances have a positive impact on cultural sustain-

nability. Many participants and communities have expressed concern about the loss of cultural traditions in the modern era, and they view Guel music and dance performances as a means to preserve and pass on their cultural heritage to future generations. Based on data analysis of the results of questionnaires administered to communities, artists, and officeholders, as well as the younger generation of Gayo residents in Central Aceh, totalling approximately 116 people, 80% of respondents agreed that these performances helped them understand and appreciate their cultural traditions. In this context, researchers also noted that Guel music and dance performances often involve the active participation of the younger generation, who act as a link between tradition and innovation. Guel music and dance performing arts are preserved and adapted by involving the younger generation in performances to meet contemporary cultural needs and preferences. This suggests that performing arts can serve as a tool to create dynamic cultural sustainability.

The results of the study show that Guel performances can be agents of social change by increasing social cohesion. The mechanism is to create a space for interaction that strengthens bonds between individuals and encourages cultural preservation. Thus, these findings provide a strong empirical basis for the role of performing arts in social transformation. Therefore, this research highlights the positive impacts of Guel music and dance performances and provides recommendations for developing more inclusive and sustainable cultural policies. It is hoped that the results of this study can serve as a reference for artists, policymakers, and community members who wish to utilise the performing arts to strengthen social cohesion and preserve local culture in the future.

This reinforces that a community-based approach can be an effective solution in maintaining the existence of traditional arts. The cultural sustainability of Guel music and dance performances also depends on a sound governance system.

The research data analysis indicates that aspects of planning and supervision have improved following the implementation of community-based governance strategies. (Table 2)

Table 1. Pretest and Posttest Results of Governance and Preservation

Variable	Pre-test (Mean)	Post-test (Mean)	Improvement (%)
Governance	78,5	89,2	13,6%
Preservation	74,3	91,8	23,6%

Table 2. Comparison of Governance Indicators Before and After the Program

Governance Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test	Improvement (%)
Planning	75.2	88.7	18.0%
Organisation	80.4	86.3	7.3%
Implementation	77.6	84.9	9.4%
Surveillance	79.1	90.2	14.1%

Table 2 details improvements across specific governance indicators. The most substantial increase was in Planning (18.0%), followed by Surveillance (14.1%). This indicates that community-based governance strategies enhanced the structured and adaptive management of Guel, a key factor for intangible cultural heritage sustainability. The main challenge in maintaining the sustainability of conventional arts is fostering the younger generation's interest in local culture. However, research shows that after participating in the "Saturday Arts" program, several young people became interested in learning and performing in Guel dance productions. This suggests that traditional arts still have appeal when presented in a more inclusive and educational manner.

The success of sustainability in the Guel music and dance performing arts is inseparable from government support and community involvement. Following the community-based program, government policy support for performing arts activities has improved significantly, as evidenced by the data in Table 2.

ced by the "Saturday Arts" program. This indicates that collaborative strategies can enhance cultural sustainability, as shown in the research data analysis presented in the following table.

Table 3. Comparison of Preservation Indicators Before and After the Program

Sustainability Indicator	Pre-test	Post-test	Improvement (%)
Planning	71.3	89.5	18.2%
Protection	75.2	91.7	15.5%
Utilisation of	72.4	90.1	27.7%
Monitoring	78.5	94.3	15.8%

Based on Table 3, there is a significant increase in each element of cultural sustainability governance. The planning element has increased by 18.2%, protection by 15.5%, utilisation by 27.7%, and monitoring by 15.8%. This indicates that Guel music and dance performances are essential in maintaining the cultural sustainability of the Gayo community in Central Aceh. This art can be preserved and developed through a structured governance approach, digitalisation, and the involvement of the younger generation. With support from various parties, including the government, community, and digital media, Guel music and dance performances can continue to be a potent symbol of cultural identity and an agent of social change that benefits the community.

Table 3 reveals a remarkable 27.7% increase in the Utilization of cultural heritage. This is a pivotal finding, suggesting that Guel is not only being preserved but is also being actively repurposed and integrated into contemporary community life. This aligns with the concept of adaptive reuse in heritage studies, which is crucial for maintaining relevance.

As a concrete example, the Annual Festival in Takengon, which features Guel performances, has proven to promote cultural sustainability. The active participation of the community, not only as spectators but also as performers, effectively strengthens their sense of belonging to the

local culture and raises awareness of the importance of preserving traditional practices. This finding aligns with the role of the performing arts as a tool for strengthening cultural identity. Quantitative data obtained through a survey of 60 participants involved in the activity showed that 78% of respondents felt that the Guel music and dance performance helped them understand the cultural values contained in their tradition. In addition, 80% of respondents reported being more actively involved in other artistic activities after attending the Guel music and dance performance. These statistics support qualitative findings suggesting that Guel music and dance performances are essential in strengthening cultural sustainability in Gayo.

The research also found that Guel music and dance performances serve as platforms for cultural education. Many younger generations are involved in these performances as dancers and spectators, which helps them understand and appreciate their cultural traditions. Most respondents from younger age groups reported feeling more motivated to learn about Gayo culture after participating in the performances. This shows that performing arts can serve as an effective educational tool in preserving local culture. Furthermore, Guel music and dance performances also create a space for intercultural dialogue. In some performances, artists from different regions in Aceh collaborate to present various variations of Guel music and dance. This enriches the audience experience and creates a space for positive cultural exchange. (Shalma et al., 2023) The findings of this study suggest that performing arts can be an effective tool for building understanding and tolerance among different groups.

The results of this study demonstrate that Guel music and dance performances play a crucial role in enhancing the cultural sustainability of the Gayo community. By creating spaces for social interaction, these performances help strengthen interpersonal relationships and promote the preservation of local culture. These fin-

dings provide strong empirical evidence of the potential of the performing arts as a vehicle for positive social change. Therefore, this research highlights the positive impacts of Guel music and dance performances and provides recommendations for developing more inclusive and sustainable cultural policies. It is hoped that the results of this research will serve as a reference for artists, policymakers, and community members who wish to utilise the performing arts to enhance cultural sustainability and preserve local cultural heritage in the future. (Bitin, 2023).

Synthesis of Key Findings

In synthesis, Guel functions as a multi-dimensional agent of change. It strengthens social cohesion by creating shared experiential spaces, ensures cultural continuity by transmitting values to younger generations, and demonstrates measurable sustainability through improved community-based governance and active utilization. The integrated data confirms that Guel is a dynamic social force rather than a static cultural artifact.

The results of this study show that Guel music and dance performances in Gayo, Central Aceh, are significant agents of social change in improving the sustainability of community culture. The findings show that these Guel music and dance performances serve as both entertainment and a means to preserve and pass down cultural traditions to future generations. This aligns with existing theories that regard the performing arts as a tool to strengthen cultural identity and social cohesion, as expressed by Purnomo and Aulia (Purnomo & Aulia, 2021). These findings align with recent international studies that emphasize the performing arts as catalysts for social transformation, community resilience, and participatory development in diverse cultural settings. (Marsh & Petrov, 2022; Ratiu, 2023).

The quantitative improvements presented in Table 1 (governance and preservation) and Table 3 (utilization) provide empirical weight to the qualitative nar-

ratives. The significant rise in utilization (27.7%) particularly underscores Guel's role beyond preservation; it is a living practice actively woven into the social and cultural economy of the community. This finding resonates with Bourdieu's theory of capital conversion, where the cultural capital inherent in Guel is effectively transformed into social capital (strengthened networks) and symbolic capital (enhanced community status) through participatory programs.

Furthermore, Figure 1 is not merely illustrative; it offers visual evidence of Guel's function as what Putnam (2000) terms bridging capital. The image shows diverse community members in collective participation, supporting interview data about Guel's role in overcoming social segregation and fostering inclusive dialogue. The governance improvements detailed in Table 2 (planning, surveillance) highlight the importance of structured, community-involved management for cultural sustainability. This aligns with contemporary heritage governance literature emphasizing adaptive and participatory systems to counteract the homogenizing pressures of globalization (Lazzeretti & Capone, 2020).

These study results align with existing findings regarding the influence of music and dance in other cultural contexts. Previous research has demonstrated that the performing arts can create a space for social interaction and foster a sense of community identity. For example, research by Adiaya et al. on the sustainability of Balinese culture through the art of Arja demonstrates that community involvement in the performing arts can increase cultural awareness and participation among the younger generation (Adiaya, 2024). This reflects a similar pattern in Gayo, where Guel music and dance performances serve as platforms for cultural education and the continuation of traditions.

The social implications of these findings are significant. Guel music and dance performances enhance cultural awareness and foster a sense of community

identity. Most respondents feel prouder of their local culture after participating in Guel music and dance performances. This suggests that the performing arts can serve as a tool to build a sense of belonging and solidarity among community members, aligning with research by Kondoiyo et al. (Kondoiyo et al., 2022), which highlights the importance of the arts in strengthening cultural identity. Furthermore, international research confirms that arts-based interventions significantly enhance social cohesion, trust, and collective efficacy within communities, particularly in post-conflict or culturally diverse regions. (Boelman et al., 2020; Goubin, 2022).

However, challenges to the sustainability of performing arts, such as Guel music and dance performances, must also be identified. One of the main challenges is the influence of globalisation, which can threaten the existence of local traditions. Research by Fatimah and Hayati indicates that pop culture and modernization marginalize many traditional performing arts. (Fatimah & Hayati, 2021). Therefore, creating strategies to integrate traditional performing arts with modern contexts is essential without losing cultural values. Globalisation is not only hegemonic, but it also provides a platform for cultural transmission, such as the digitisation of Guel performance, that can expand the reach of global audiences. However, as Appadurai reminds us, the cultural imagination must remain rooted in locality so as not to be uprooted from the context of its meaning. Contemporary studies on cultural sustainability emphasize the importance of adaptive governance, digital archiving, and intergenerational knowledge transfer in safeguarding intangible heritage against the homogenizing pressures of globalization. (Deacon & Smeets, 2023; Lazzeretti & Capone, 2020).

The findings of this study have significant theoretical resonance when viewed through the lens of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital. Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of actual or potential resources associated with the

ownership of a network of sustainable relationships". In the context of Guel performances, this art practice serves as a social capital-generating institution through three key mechanisms: 1) Bonding Capital: Collective participation in Guel performances strengthens Gayo's intra-community bonds. As observed, activities such as Saturday Arts create shared experiences that foster trust and collective norms, according to 85% of respondents who feel more connected to their community. This is in line with Putnam's argument that cultural arts activities crystallise thick trust in homogeneous groups; 2) Bridging Capital: The collaboration of inter-regional artists in the Guel festival (e.g., Central Aceh artists with other regions) forms a bridging capital that bridges social differences. Bourdieu refers to this as "relational capital that transcends primordial boundaries." (Burnard, 2022; Maares, 2022), in which art becomes a medium of symbolic exchange to reduce cultural barriers; 3) Cultural Capital Conversion: Guel also transforms cultural capital into institutionalised social capital. Youth involvement in performances preserves artistic skills (embodied cultural capital) and builds networks with policy-makers and academics (institutionalised cultural capital), as seen in collaboration programs with local governments.

The opportunities for cultural sustainability through Guel music and dance performances are also immense. Guel music and dance can be adapted to meet contemporary cultural needs and preferences by engaging the younger generation in performance. Research by Takalumang suggests that adaptations of performing arts can create spaces for innovation and creativity, which can attract younger generations to engage in cultural sustainability. (Takalumang, 2021). This is supported by global research indicating that creative adaptation and participatory co-creation are key to maintaining the relevance and vitality of traditional arts in the 21st century. (Häuberer & Schlimbach, 2020; Jiang et al., 2024; Perić et al., 2024; Poetra, 2024).

Furthermore, this research found

that Guel's music and dance performances can serve as a platform for intercultural dialogue. In some performances, artists from different regions in Aceh collaborate to present various variations of Guel music and dance. This creates a space for positive cultural exchange and strengthens relationships between communities. This aligns with the findings of Riantika et al., which demonstrate that the performing arts can serve as a tool for fostering understanding and tolerance among diverse groups (Riantika et al., 2024). International scholarship further corroborates that performing arts festivals and cross-cultural collaborations are powerful mechanisms for building intercultural competence, reducing prejudices, and promoting social inclusion (Allaste & Saari, 2021; Hadley & Gant, 2023).

Participation in Guel music and dance performances also increased community participation in other social activities. Most respondents reported being more actively involved in community activities after attending Guel music and dance performances. This suggests that the performing arts have a substantial impact on the event and can have lasting effects on social engagement, as noted by Nurjatisari et al. (2023). This spillover effect aligns with studies showing that arts participation stimulates broader civic engagement and strengthens the social fabric of communities (Gross & Wilson, 2020; Walzer & Hefner, 2024).

In the context of community strengthening through the arts, this study's findings confirm that Gayo music and dance performances play an essential role in enhancing the cultural sustainability of Gayo communities. By creating spaces for social interaction, these performances strengthen bonds between individuals and encourage local cultural sustainability. This finding provides strong empirical evidence of the potential of performing arts as a driver of positive social change. This aligns with research by Hidayatullah, which shows that art can serve as a tool for constructive social change. (Hidayatullah, 2021)

Research Implications and Contributions

This research employs a comprehensive qualitative approach to contribute to the understanding of how the performing arts, a tool for social change in communities, can be utilised. The multidisciplinary approach, which combines art, culture, and public policy aspects, provides new insights into community-based performing arts sustainability strategies. The resulting recommendations are expected to be utilised by stakeholders, including local governments, artist communities, and educational institutions, to strengthen the cultural sustainability of Guel music and dance performances as intangible cultural heritage with significant social impacts.

CONCLUSIONS

Guel music and dance performances strategically reinforce social cohesion and cultural sustainability among the Gayo people of Central Aceh. Through participatory programs such as "Saturday Arts" and the "Annual Festival," these performances effectively foster cultural awareness and youth involvement. Empirical evidence from this study indicates that integrating traditional art with contemporary educational and governance approaches can maintain and revitalise local culture amidst globalisation pressures. The study recommends the development of inclusive cultural policies and the expansion of arts-based educational initiatives as critical strategies for preserving intangible cultural heritage.

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