



## **Community Perception of Kuda Lumping Art in The Simpang Kiri Sub-District Subulussalam City**

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### **Abstract**

This research is about "public perception of kuda lumping art in Simpang Kiri District, Subulussalam city". The researcher tries to describe: (1) the implementation of kuda lumping art in Simpang Kiri District, Subulussalam city. (2) the public's perception of the presence of kuda lumping art in the city of Subulussalam. The purpose of this study was to find out the implementation and public perception of kuda lumping art. This research belongs to the type of descriptive research with a qualitative approach. While collecting data using interview techniques. Informants in this study amounted to 8 (eight) people. The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of kuda lumping was performed by 8 or more young people who rode horses made of woven bamboo and then dressed in typical Javanese traditional dress and accompanied by musical instruments that were played on the spot. At the end of the event some players will experience a kind of possession. The community accepts the existence of kuda lumping art and is quite enthusiastic about watching this art. Of course, this art reaps good and bad responses from the community. But the community still accepts and expects the preservation of kuda lumping art. The conclusions of this study are: (1) The art of kuda lumping in its implementation is dancing using a piggyback made of woven bamboo directly accompanied by traditional Javanese musical instruments. (2) the art of Kuda Lumpung is well received by the people of Subulussalam City without neglecting the existing arts.

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## INTRODUCTION

Each ethnic group has its own culture and traditions, which are distinctive characteristics of their society. Culture within a community holds a unique significance for its members and is passed down through generations within the family and the community. One element of culture that has been traditionally handed down in the Javanese community is the horse dance performance known as "kuda lumping."

Kuda lumping is a well-known art form in Indonesia due to its unique costumes and props used in the performance. It is a traditional Javanese performing art that combines elements of art and religion. This horse dance is known by various names, such as jathilan, jaran kepang, or kuda kepang. One distinctive feature is the use of horse figures made from woven bamboo as part of the performance, accompanied by trance-like episodes. Before the spread of Islam in the 15th century, kuda lumping performances were conducted as part of worship rituals. In its later development, kuda lumping became part of village purification ceremonies aimed at warding off evil spirits responsible for illnesses and other misfortunes (Turmiadi, 2017:4).

Budianingsih (2015, p. 3) states that in a kuda lumping performance, participants wear traditional Javanese attire and ride horse-like figures made from woven materials. Typically, this kuda lumping game is played by men, while children may participate during the opening phase. However, in modern times, it is mostly performed by men. The performance is accompanied by musical instruments such as gamelan, gong, kenong, kendang, and others, each serving a distinct purpose. Riding the bamboo-woven horse figures, the riders have small bells attached to their ankles that produce sounds when they move, jump, and roll on the ground. The loud cracking sound produced by a large whip at the beginning of the performance marks the initiation of the mystical power that can alter the participants' consciousness. The kuda

lumping performers appear to possess supernatural abilities.

This traditional art form has become immensely popular among both rural and urban communities. The term "kerakyatan" refers to its simplicity and lack of complexity, making it a light, entertaining, and easily recognizable art performance for the general public. Kuda kepang, or the horse dance, is not only popular on the island of Java but has also spread to various regions throughout Indonesia, thanks in part to government-led population relocation programs. Subulussalam City is one of the transmigration areas, and many of its villages have numerous kuda lumping art groups, including those found in the Simpang Kiri subdistrict.

Living in a transmigration area presented significant challenges for the local population, especially in the early stages of their arrival. These challenges encompassed not only transportation difficulties, given the dense forests and limited pathways through marshy terrain but also the struggle to find entertainment. Consequently, the transmigrant communities collectively held discussions and established the kuda lumping art form. This was not only meant for entertainment but also as a means to preserve their cultural heritage and the existence of Javanese communities in the region. Kuda lumping was chosen as the art form of choice because, at that time, the majority of transmigrants from Java were already familiar with it.

Developing the kuda lumping art form in a new area was not an easy task, and it faced various challenges throughout its development, experiencing both ups and downs. Despite the passage of time and the difficulties encountered, kuda lumping did not fade away in this region. In fact, the local community collectively made efforts to preserve this art form by involving the younger generation in its performances. Kuda lumping is also showcased on the occasion of major holidays and religious celebrations. Additionally, individuals holding special events or ceremonies often include kuda

lumping as a form of entertainment, which serves both as a means of preservation and can generate economic benefits. However, not all enthusiasts of kuda lumping are exclusively from the Javanese immigrant community; the native population also participates. This has led to both support and opposition from the long-standing local residents, as they have their own regional arts and traditions.

The presence of kuda lumping art is an intriguing subject of study, given its existence not in its original place of origin but its ability to continue evolving from the past to the present while coexisting with the local community's way of life.

Perception is the process of information processing from the environment in the form of stimuli, which are received through sensory organs and relayed to the brain for selection, organization, resulting in interpretation or assessment based on sensory input or prior experiences. According to Walgito (2010, p. 102), perception has indicators, which include: absorbing stimuli or objects from outside the individual, understanding or comprehending the object, and individual evaluation of the object.

The theory that supports this research is the structural-functional theory. In the structural-functional paradigm, all elements that constitute a society are interconnected and form a system. Therefore, if one element does not function properly, it can disrupt the entire society. The interdependence and cooperation among these elements demonstrate that a society is integrated, stable, and enduring.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The issue to be examined in this research will employ a qualitative approach, with the aim of seeking, analyzing, and managing information directly from the field by understanding social interactions through interviews. This research falls under the category of descriptive research. As per Sugiyono (2013, p. 11), descriptive research is conducted to understand independent variables, whether a single variable or

more (independent), without making comparisons or establishing relationships between one variable and another.

The research is conducted in the Simpang Kiri Subdistrict of Subulussalam City. Subulussalam City consists of 5 subdistricts, one of which is the Simpang Kiri Subdistrict, administratively comprising 14 villages. The selection of the Simpang Kiri Subdistrict is due to its rapid development rate. Out of the 14 villages, the researcher has chosen 4 villages as the research locations: Subulussalam Village, Sikalondang Village, Pasar Panjang Village, and Danau Tras Village.

The sampling technique employed in this research is area sampling, specifically cluster sampling (area sampling). Cluster Sampling is a method of sampling an area used when the subject of study or data sources are extensive. Out of the 14 villages, the researcher has selected 4 villages as the sample, and the selection of these sample villages is done to represent different stages of development, including advanced, moderately advanced, less advanced, and developing villages. Consequently, the study includes 8 individuals from each of these selected villages as research subjects.

The data collection technique employed in this research is interviews. According to Arikunto (2016:199), unstructured interviews are conducted by asking questions freely but still following the interview guidelines that have been established. The questions may evolve during the interview process.

According to Sugiyono (2018), there are three data analysis methods used in qualitative research, as outlined by Miles and Huberman. These methods encompass data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the interviews with 8 informants, the researcher has gathered various pieces of information related to the research problem. The information presented by the researcher is up-to-date and directly obtained from relevant

parties, including community members and community leaders in the 4 selected representative villages in the Simpang Kiri Subdistrict. Here is the discussion of the information obtained during the research:

**The Kuda Lumping art performance in the Simpang Kiri Subdistrict of Subulussalam City.**

Kuda Lumping is quite popular in Subulussalam City, and the local community is familiar with this traditional art form. The popularity of this art form is a result of the efforts made by the performers from their studios, which has piqued the interest of many people in inviting these performances to both formal and informal events. Kuda Lumping performances in Subulussalam City typically include 1 to 4 dances in a single show. The dancers are adorned, and they perform while riding horse-like figures made from woven bamboo. The dance is accompanied by live music played during the performance. The musical instruments used are not randomly acquired; in fact, all the instruments and costumes, such as gamelan and others, are directly imported from Java. Apart from the dance involving the woven bamboo horses, there is also a dance where the performers wear masks during their performance. In the execution of this traditional art form, there seems to be a trance-like process, causing the dancers to move uncontrollably and make unusual requests such as flowers, raw chickens, coconuts, and more. Kuda Lumping is invited to specific occasions, both formal and informal, with the purpose of entertaining the community.

Kuda Lumping is one of the cultural treasures possessed by the diverse Indonesian community, with its various customs, traditions, and cultural backgrounds. It has a distinct and characteristic art form with the potential to attract attention. One intriguing aspect of Kuda Lumping is the presence of elements of magic in its performances. This explanation of the art is further supported by Sari (2018, p. 22), who describes Kuda Lumping as a traditional Javanese art form that carries a heroic or martial

message. Kuda Lumping depicts a group of horseback riders. The horses in this dance are not real but rather bamboo-made figures woven and decorated to resemble horses. This dance is highly popular in the Javanese community, especially in Central Java and its surrounding areas. This aligns with the Kuda Lumping art form, which is preserved by the transmigrant community in Subulussalam City, where it is currently used primarily for entertainment.

Based on the findings above, it aligns with the perception process described by Walgito (2004, p. 90), which states that perception doesn't occur spontaneously but goes through a process. It starts with an object that triggers stimulation, and this stimulation is sensed by sensory organs or receptors (a physical or sensory process). Then, the stimulation received by the senses is relayed to the brain through sensory processing, allowing individuals to become aware of what they have received from those receptors as the stimuli they perceived.

The traditional art of Kuda Lumping is executed in harmony between the musical accompaniment and the listeners. When people listen to the music of Kuda Lumping, they are captivated by its power. It is particularly attention-grabbing for children and teenagers, who are often drawn to join in the dance. Moreover, this traditional art is performed with uniform costumes, enhancing the cohesion and synchronicity of the dance performances. There are no striking or contrasting elements. The attire worn by the performers is modest and conforms to the norms and Islamic guidelines. The attire has been adapted to suit the conditions of the Aceh region, which is no longer identical to its original Javanese roots. It has been modified to better fit the times while still retaining its traditional elements.

Towards the end of the performance, the performers go into a trance. This is a highly anticipated moment for the audience, as the trance process is captivating to watch. The possessed performers often behave in

amusing and seemingly directed ways, imitating animals like monkeys, pigs, or tigers. They may even consume flowers, coconuts, raw taro, fire embers, and more. They may also request to be whipped on their arms and bodies. The possessed dancers are deeply influenced by the music and seem to be controlled by external forces as they dance. This is considered a normal part of the performance because each traditional art form has its unique characteristics, often originating from ancestral practices. It's not only the dancers who may become possessed, but sometimes members of the audience also enter into a trance and join the dancers in their performances.

The concept of possession, as described by Wallace (2001, p. 14), is a phenomenon involving supernatural beings taking control of a person's mind, emotions, and intellect (the ability to make decisions) by merging with their consciousness. As a result, these supernatural beings can influence a person's actions. Possession occurs when an individual's body is inhabited by a supernatural being that controls their soul. Therefore, the behavior of a possessed person is dictated by the supernatural being. In nearly every case of possession, the person who is possessed is unaware or has no recollection of being in a possessed state.



Figure 1: Trance Movement  
(Source: Personal Documentation)

The process of possession that occurs in the traditional art in the Simpang Kiri Subdistrict has undergone changes regarding the acts involving eating glass and fire embers. These practices are now rarely carried out due to a lack of requests from the possessed performers. This

change is also influenced by the fact that Subulussalam City is located in the province of Aceh, a region known for upholding strict Islamic values. Consequently, the elders have imposed some limitations on such practices. It's also worth considering that the dancers could get injured due to the things they demand during these rituals.

### **Perception of the Community Toward Kuda Lumpung Art in the Simpang Kiri Subdistrict of Subulussalam City.**

The Kuda Lumpung art in Subulussalam City is seen as having a positive impact. Despite its Javanese origins, the art form is still preserved by the transmigrant community in this modern age. Nowadays, traditional culture is gradually losing its appeal, and there is concern that its presence may vanish. The younger generations are the inheritors of all the existing cultural elements, ensuring that our identity as Indonesians is maintained. The presence of Kuda Lumpung in Subulussalam City not only broadens our understanding of the diverse arts in Indonesia but also saves the community from traveling far to Java to witness this art form in person.

The community views this art form as entertainment, and it doesn't become a major issue that would lead to debates about which art form is superior. Despite the presence of various other art forms in Subulussalam City, Kuda Lumpung continues to thrive and evolve. In reality, the community shows more effort in enjoying this form of entertainment compared to the original arts of Subulussalam City.

As time passes, Indonesia experiences rapid population growth. Being a country with diverse cultures and distinct traditions, Indonesia is comprised of different ethnic groups in each region. Due to these differences, it's common for them to engage in acculturation. As Putra (2018, p. 70) explains, acculturation is the peaceful and harmonious blending of different cultures. Acculturation or Culture

Context is a social process that occurs when a specific cultural group is confronted with elements of a foreign culture in such a way that, over time, the foreign culture is accepted and integrated without causing the loss of the original culture's authenticity. In simpler terms, acculturation is a process carried out by migrant communities to adapt by adopting the local culture.

So far, there is no opposition from the community, and in fact, they are supportive. Despite their different customs and cultures, they continue to uphold the principle of "Bhineka Tunggal Ika," which means "unity in diversity." The presence of this art form serves no other purpose than pure entertainment. The community is highly enthusiastic whenever there is a Kuda Lumping performance, especially the children. Some even faithfully watch from the beginning to the end of the performance. While it's generally well-received, there may be some individuals who have difficulty accepting this art form. Some view Kuda Lumping as associated with superstition because it involves invoking spirits. However, this doesn't lead the community to want to disband or expel the performers when they appear. The community understands that all forms of art must be preserved.

Based on the findings above, it aligns with the structural-functional paradigm as described by Ritzer (2000, p. 121). In the structural-functional paradigm, all elements that make up a society are interconnected and form a system. If one element doesn't function properly, the whole society may be disrupted. Through interdependence and cooperation, it demonstrates that the community is integrated, coherent, and enduring. The term "function" is used in various aspects of human life, indicating the activities and dynamics of individuals in achieving their life goals.

The research findings discussed align very well with Ritzer's opinion (2001:121), where the community of Subulussalam City forms a systematic order within the society that mutually

depends on each other. The performance of Kuda Lumping is an art form that is invited by the community of Subulussalam City as entertainment for both formal and informal events. The community's support to enliven this art form is excellent and it strengthens the existence of Kuda Lumping. The preservation of Kuda Lumping is directly tied to the acceptance and support from the Subulussalam City community. Without the community's acceptance and support, there wouldn't be an audience to attend and enliven this art form.

The Kuda Lumping art in Subulussalam City is considered entertaining and doesn't deviate from existing social norms. However, there are some individuals who view this art form as having elements of superstition due to the invocation of spirits. As far as the implementation goes, the performers adapt to the region they reside in. Their dances and costumes are modified to be more appropriate and modest, in line with the local norms and values. This traditional art of Kuda Lumping is still in accordance with customs and traditions, and the community recognizes the importance of preserving these cultural elements. However, there is a minor concern related to the dressing rooms and makeup areas that are shared between men and women.

The positive impact of this art form is primarily in its ability to entertain the community. At the end of the performance, it leaves the host who invited the art form for a significant event in their life with a sense of happiness. Additionally, for the children who watch, they imitate the movements they see, indirectly nurturing their interest in art. Kuda Lumping art also strengthens social bonds, both among the performers and the audience. People who rarely meet come together, fostering family ties and maintaining a sense of community.

Another positive impact is that, in the era of Industry 4.0, the community still recognizes and preserves the art passed down from their ancestors. Moreover, in terms of the economy, this

art form has a positive impact on micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (UMKM) that participate in selling during the performances. They reported increased income because many people attending the performances purchased their goods. On the other hand, the main negative impact of Kuda Lumping art is related to the timing of the performances, which can sometimes extend late into the night. This affects the children's study hours and sleep patterns, making them sleepy. A minor concern is that many young people are enthusiastic about this art form, and it is possible that conflicts might arise among the youth due to various reasons, which, of course, would be detrimental to the community. This not only happens during Kuda Lumping performances but also at other entertainment events.

Kuda Lumping art is expected to be continuously preserved, further developed, and expanded as long as it remains a positive element and doesn't violate norms. If it's not the Indonesian community itself that preserves this art, it could disappear from circulation, potentially erasing a part of Indonesia's identity. Even though this art isn't originally from Subulussalam City, it should still thrive in any part of Indonesia. This aligns with Article 32, Paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which mandates that "The state advances Indonesian national culture amidst the world civilization by ensuring the freedom of the people to preserve and develop their cultural values."

The hope and suggestion from the community of Subulussalam City are to continue preserving and introducing Kuda Lumping art to the children in this era. It is essential to find and nurture new generations so that when the older performers retire, there are young individuals ready to continue and enhance this art form, both in terms of dance and costumes. Expanding the reach of the performances is also important so that people beyond Subulussalam get to know this art form.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this research is as follows: (1) Traditional Kuda Lumping art in the Subulussalam City's Simpang Kiri sub-district is quite well-known among the local community. In its performance, the artists wear traditional Javanese attire while riding bamboo horse structures, involving a minimum of 8 participants, both male and female. They perform various types of dances, ranging from 1 to 4 dances, all accompanied by traditional music such as gamelan, kendang, bonang, and others. The dancers' movements are highly synchronized and harmonious. Towards the end of the performance, the dancers undergo a trance and perform extreme acts like asking to be whipped, eating flowers, playing with fire, and more. This art is typically invited to various events, including weddings, circumcision ceremonies, and national holidays like Independence Day. (2) Kuda Lumping art is an art form originating from Java and has found its place in the Subulussalam City without causing any disturbance to the local community. The people warmly welcome this art, and they view it as pure entertainment rather than a subject of dispute. It doesn't lead to arguments about which form of the art is superior. The traditional Kuda Lumping art enriches the younger generation's understanding of the diverse arts in Indonesia. In this modern age, cultural heritage from the ancestors must be preserved. Kuda Lumping has a positive impact on both the audience and the performers, strengthening the bonds of community. Children watching the performance eagerly mimic the dances they see, instilling a love for the art and a determination to preserve it. However, Kuda Lumping also has its share of negative impacts, such as late performance times that interfere with children's study and sleep schedules. It can also lead to conflicts among the youth. The community hopes that this art form continues to be preserved and passed down through future generations.

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