
Social-Economic Transformation in Traditional Cultural Festivals: A Study on the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival

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ABSTRACT

Cultural festivals play a vital role in promoting tourism and preserving heritage, but their sustainability and broader socio-economic impacts are not always well understood. This research aims to investigate the perceptions of stakeholders and tourists regarding the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, to assess its demand and supply aspects and its potential for cultural and economic development. Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with five stakeholders involved in the tourism sector, and their responses were content-analyzed and organized into a SWOT matrix. The study revealed the importance of enhancing security measures, providing additional accommodation options, and investing in festival promotion to attract more tourists and boost socio-economic benefits. The Isen Mulang Cultural Festival has the potential to contribute significantly to cultural and economic development in Central Kalimantan. However, addressing identified shortcomings and increasing government involvement are crucial steps to ensure its sustainable growth and appeal to international tourists.

Keywords : traditional festivals; social-economic; cultural tourism

I. Introduction

Festivals are increasingly acknowledged as types of tourism development that prioritize sustainability (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002; Quinn, 2006; Song et al., 2015) and as instruments for sustainable behavioral change (Mair & Laing, 2013). Festivals can be designed to create changes in attitudes and behaviors both in the short and long term. Commercial sponsors of festivals may aim to alter participant behaviors so that their brand preferences and purchasing decisions change (McAlexander 2002). For non-profit sponsors, anticipated changes in behavior could involve different stakeholders, like food festivals seeking to alter food buying and consumption habits (Organ et al., 2015); eco-friendly festival campaigns to boost environmentally-friendly intentions (Mair & Laing, 2013); and sporting

events aiming to shift attitudes and behaviors towards sports and physical exercises (Cleland et al., 2019).

Getz (2009) asserts that "sustainable events are not only those that endure over time, but also those that play a significant role socially, culturally, economically, and environmentally valued by the community." The assessment of finances and the orchestration of festivals has evolved beyond a primary emphasis on economic gains resulting from increased tourism spending to encompass social and cultural ramifications. Sustainability, in this context, denotes the capacity of a phenomenon to persevere. The United Nations has embraced sustainability as guiding principles for development that satisfy current needs without compromising the capability of future generations to meet their own needs, as well as ensuring equitable distribution of environmental costs and benefits (Keeble, 1988). Within tourism, sustainability often entails a balancing act between ecological, social justice, and economic dimensions, where political influence can shape the adopted sustainability paradigms. Meanwhile, cultural sustainability is commonly perceived within the social sphere, although some scholars advocate for its recognition as an independent dimension (Hansmann et al., 2012).

The Isen Mulang Cultural Festival (FBIM) is a cultural sustainability effort designed in the form of an annual festival initiated by the Central Kalimantan provincial government. This festival involves participation from all thirteen districts and one city, Palangka Raya, in the province. Each district and city participate by showcasing various cultural artworks, including dances, music, and other applied arts. FBIM serves as a strategic moment to promote the cultural richness of Kalimantan communities, especially Central Kalimantan. Additionally, the festival serves as a means to preserve cultural wealth, traditions, arts, and to maintain cultural sustainability amidst globalization and technological advancements.

This research focuses on the social and cultural contributions left by the festival. To emphasize this point, the research investigates different dimensions of festival sustainability that extend beyond economic effects (Collins & Potoglou, 2019; Mair & Laing, 2013; O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2002). One of the primary objectives of the festival is to promote social cohesion by strengthening

community relationships (Rao, 2001). The festival serves as a "driver of cultural creativity" (Del Barrio et al., 2012) and provides cultural experiences (McKercher et al., 2006). While numerous research works have indicated the beneficial influence of festivals on societies by enhancing social capital (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007; Stevenson, 2016), cultural capital, and the safeguarding of indigenous culture (Black, 2016; Del Barrio et al., 2012), there is still a scarcity of empirical studies regarding the socio-cultural legacy of cultural festivals (Kruger & Saayman, 2017). Scant research in this domain suggests, for instance, that art festivals boost interest in art (Quinn, 2006) and music festivals "foster a deeper appreciation for particular music styles and promote ongoing engagement by attendees even after the event concludes" (Kruger & Saayman, 2017).

In this context, this research makes a significant contribution to understanding the relationship between visitor participation in a cultural festival, for instance, heightened admiration for the culture honored during the festival and a desire to actively engage in community events following the festival's conclusion. Although some studies have investigated the presence's impact on festival effects and heritage (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007), the mechanisms linking participation in festivals with post-festival heritage impacts are still rarely examined. Thus, this research makes an important contribution to understanding the relationship between the level of visitor participation during the festival and the post-festival benefits in the socio-economic context, considering the importance of festival cultural heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Three aspects in the transformation of the value of a cultural festival

Three aspects in the transformation of the value of a cultural festival: economic, social, and cultural (López et al., 2019). Festivals have wide-ranging impacts on the regions where they are held and their inhabitants from various perspectives. Economically, festivals can increase income and create job opportunities (Snowball, 2007; SACO, 2016). In social terms, festivals foster favorable cultural exchanges among people from varied ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, embodying principles like diversity and tolerance (Kim & Uysal,

2003; Matarasso, 1997). Culturally, festivals contribute to the conservation and advancement of artistic and cultural forms that mirror the intangible legacy of a community (Frey & Frey, 2000; Heredia-Carroza et al., 2021; Hutter & Throsby, 2008; McCarthy et al., 2001; Throsby, 2001).

From a temporal standpoint, organizing festivals encompasses elements from past, present, and future perspectives. The past is reflected in the contributions of intangible heritage accumulated from various periods of time. The present, as festivals provide the foundation for diversity and cross-cultural dialogue. The future, as festivals encourage skill development in cultural fields, innovation in styles, the emergence of new artists, and provide a platform for showcasing their works.

Festivals and Cultural Tourism

Richards and Palmer argue in "Eventful Cities" that modern cities are confronted with a choice: they can either evolve to confront the challenges posed by global transformations or opt for stagnation by resisting change (Richards & Palmer, 2012). Festivals and events offer constructive avenues for transformation as they are adaptable to both global and local exigencies. Fostering an environment of "eventfulness" serves as a means to enhance cities, involving residents and visitors alike in festivities that honor urban culture and foster a sense of place identity (Derrett, 2003).

Culture-interested visitors are a highly vital market segment for festivals and events, as they are considered to have significant growth potential, contributing to about 40% of total international tourism (Richards, 2018). Cultural events and festivals have the potential to enrich the cultural tourism experience in a destination by adding dimensions of diversity and depth (Csapo, 2012).

Dynamics of Cultural Festivals

Cultural festivals celebrate various cultural elements such as music, dance, crafts, literature, language, cuisine, social groups, and institutions, offering occasions for culture to be appreciated, perpetuated, and redefined (Del Barrio et al., 2012). Apart from reinforcing existing cultural identities, festivals can also hold a 'novelty value' (Dowell et al., 2019), meaning they can introduce newcomers to the culture. Festivals play a role in cultural preservation (de Araujo Aguiar, 2019;

Dowell et al., 2019; Song et al., 2015; Whitney-Squire, 2019) by providing distinctive or recurring platforms to showcase local culture in interactive and direct ways, encouraging active participation and engagement.

The notion of heritage within the tourism context encompasses various dimensions, often becoming subjects of political discourse, and emphasizing long-term effects over short-term outcomes. Cultural heritage showcased in festivals can be seen as an augmentation of cultural capital, which is defined as "the accumulation of cultural practices, preferences, educational capacities, and social backgrounds that influence one's ability to appreciate cultural offerings" (Taheri et al., 2014). Black (Black, 2016) and Del Barrio (Del Barrio et al., 2012) argue that cultural festivals serve as platforms to gather and showcase cultural heritage. For instance, Schlenker, Edwards, and Sheridan (Schlenker et al., 2005) suggest that cultural festivals yield positive outcomes such as enhancing local interest in regional culture and history, increasing awareness of available cultural activities, facilitating educational experiences through interactions between visitors and organizers, and fostering appreciation for regional cultural identities overall. However, festival heritage may also yield negative repercussions alongside its positive ones for certain stakeholders. Moufakkir and Kelly (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2013) illustrate how music festivals can trigger controversy and cultural discord when transitioning from local street events to international spectacles. While these festivals may prosper economically, the authors argue that their cultural sustainability is called into question as they become detached from their original community. Building on the literature cited and (Cleland et al., 2019) study on event heritage, scholars define the cultural heritage of a festival as a sustainable contribution to cultural capital (Duvignaud, 1976), promoting the preservation of culture through heightened interest and participation in cultural activities.

Apart from their cultural advantages, festivals also act as bridges, fostering shared experiences and chances for dialogue, interaction, and networking among entire communities, thus celebrating community solidarity, which can potentially enhance post-festival effects (Black, 2016; Dowell et al., 2019). The widespread engagement of festival attendees is frequently characterized by participation in communal activities, which could cultivate social capital by reinforcing social

cohesion (Falassi, 1987). Hence, festivals centered around celebratory themes offer a stage for engagement in occasions that evoke feelings of pleasure and companionship (Salamone, 2000).

The role of festivals in fostering social capital, defined as "processes among individuals that facilitate cooperation, agreements, mutual benefit, a sense of belonging, and solidarity" (Arcodia & Whitford, 2007), has the potential to shape community dynamics. Various studies have associated festivals with the accumulation of social capital, demonstrating their influence on community cohesion (Dwyer et al., 2000; Quinn, 2006; Stevenson, 2016). For instance, Dwyer (2000) presented a framework outlining the community benefits derived from such events, encompassing community development (through educational initiatives and participatory activities) and heightened community pride (by fostering positive attitudes toward the locality). Festivals can strengthen social bonds and nurture a sense of local identity, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of destinations (Stevenson, 2016).

METHODS

This research focuses on the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival held in Palangka Raya City, Indonesia. As one of the significant cultural festivals in the city, this festival became the subject of study to understand its impact on local culture and society. A qualitative approach was employed in this research to explore the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of festival participants and relevant stakeholders. Through this approach, the researcher sought to understand the festival's contribution to the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of tourism in Central Kalimantan.

The research design adopted a single case study approach, allowing the researcher to investigate the phenomenon of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival in depth. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with festival participants, organizing committee members, community leaders, and local government officials. Participatory observation was also conducted to comprehend the dynamics and interactions occurring during the festival.

Data analysis was conducted thematically, where patterns, themes, and meanings emerging from interviews and observations were identified. An inductive approach was used to explore various dimensions of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival without being constrained by any specific theoretical framework. The results of the data analysis will be presented in the form of a rich narrative, providing a deep understanding of the role and significance of the festival in the cultural and tourism context of Central Kalimantan.

Qualitative Approach: Interviews with Stakeholders

A structured interview guide was devised to assess the views of community stakeholders regarding the festival. This guide comprises 13 open-ended questions categorized into four segments: the introductory segment offers insights into the tourism aspect of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival, the subsequent segment delves into perceptions of the festival's tourism dimension, and the final segment explores opportunities for tourism advancement and the event itself. Five interviews were undertaken with community stakeholders engaged in the tourism industry and local policymakers. Interviewees included a local journalist, a member of the organizing team for the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival, a cultural performer at the festival, and other relevant stakeholders. Permission was sought from them to record audio interviews, facilitating a comprehensive content analysis of the qualitative data gathered. Subsequently, the data was condensed into a SWOT analysis matrix, as elaborated upon in the findings section.

II. Discussion

Isen Mulang Cultural Festival in Central Kalimantan

The Isen Mulang Cultural Festival (FBIM) has been held since 1993, serving as an important occasion to showcase various cultural attractions from the Central Kalimantan region. This festival has garnered attention from the public and serves as an effort to preserve regional culture. Participation in this festival involves representatives from the 14 District/City Governments in Central Kalimantan. The Isen Mulang Cultural Festival holds significant importance for the people of Central Kalimantan, symbolizing a "meeting" and serving as a platform for local artists to showcase their creativity (Saputra & Suparta, 2023). The festival is based on long-

standing cultural practices that continue to thrive in the daily lives of the Dayak community in Central Kalimantan. The event includes various competitions, including Cultural Carnival, Tourism Prince and Princess Selection, Traditional Arts, Traditional Games, Traditional Sports, and Dayak Central Kalimantan Cuisine (Kementerian Pariwisata dan Ekonomi Kreatif, 2024).

Isen Mulang is part of a series of celebrations for the anniversary of Central Kalimantan Province, which usually takes place in May. However, the Isen Mulang cultural festival was not held for two consecutive years due to restrictions on community activities imposed by the local government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. After being absent for several years, the Isen Mulang cultural festival returned in 2022, 2023, and 2024, showcasing various cultural arts such as Dayak ornaments, traditional attire, and dance performances. The theme for the 2024 Isen Mulang cultural festival was "The Power of Culture". The diversity of cultural arts showcased and competed in this festival captivated visitors with rich views of preserving local culture. The word "Isen Mulang" means "never give up", which is a distinctive motto of the Dayak people of Central Kalimantan. The concept of this motto reflects the values of high spirit and perseverance, which are the main characteristics of the Dayak people of Central Kalimantan (Azizah, 2024).

The Isen Mulang Cultural Festival is not just a competition, but also a manifestation of the commitment of the Central Kalimantan government and all elements of society to preserve valuable cultural values so they are not eroded by inevitable modernization. Through this festival, it is hoped that the preservation of cultural arts can serve as a bridge and adhesive for diversity and diversity in Central Kalimantan. The Isen Mulang cultural festival concludes by showcasing the collaborative efforts and works of all participants from various districts who participated in organizing this festival.

Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival

One objective of this study is to grasp the viewpoints of stakeholders and tourists to assess demand and supply factors. This segment unveils the outcomes of qualitative, in-depth interviews conducted with five stakeholders engaged in the tourism industry in Central Kalimantan. Subsequently, the gathered information underwent content analysis and was structured into a SWOT matrix, outlined in

Table 1. The interview analysis results indicate that the current tourism infrastructure in the region is insufficient, and more infrastructure development is needed to enhance facilities. Additionally, addressing issues such as traffic congestion on main roads, effective waste management, and environmental preservation are also primary concerns. Furthermore, there are efforts to enhance cultural tourism in Central Kalimantan by creating job opportunities and business prospects related to the cultural tourism sector, thereby increasing socio-economic benefits for the local community and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The majority of the respondents believe that the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival is a significant cultural attraction and has contributed to the development of the region and its people, for example, by improving infrastructure and providing better opportunities for the younger generation living there.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of Stakeholders' Perceptions

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Included in the Charisma of Nusantara Events 2024. • Increased profits for MSMEs and the local economy. • Increased profits for costume services, studio services, decorated cars, and decorated boats. • Increased profits for hotels and accommodations during the event. • Visitors from various places nationally and internationally. • Promoting the cultural image of Central Kalimantan. • Promoting the creative economy and typical culinary of Central Kalimantan. • Enhancing the cultural identity of Central Kalimantan.
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing cultural heritage every year. • Educating future generations about the types of culture we have in Central Kalimantan. • Emerging young talents to represent in future festival events. • Expanding accommodation routes. • Utilizing youth empowerment. • Increasing awareness of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor waste management and environmental damage. • Congestion on main roads. • Restricted movement of tourists to other parts of this region due to traffic congestion. • Some event locations are poorly maintained. • Inadequate security personnel training before the event.
Threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited public facilities such as restrooms, accommodations, and resting areas.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Environmental degradation and inadequate waste management.• Insufficient accommodation facilities.• Inadequate promotion.• Lack of awareness about the festival being promoted.
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Source: Researcher elaboration

The interviewees concur that enhancing the security measures of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival is imperative for its next iteration. Some also underscore the necessity for increased lodging options for tourists planning to attend future editions of the festival. Regarding the steps to be taken by local authorities, the majority of stakeholders stress the significance of training sessions for security personnel who will assist the police and other security personnel during each annual festival. A particularly crucial recommendation put forward is that this festival could serve as a solution to the employment challenges within the community if managed effectively, thereby involving the younger generation in the workforce and reducing unemployment rates in the region. Furthermore, aggressive promotion of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival is essential to attract more international tourists and enhance its reputation among cultural events. Government involvement in the festival is deemed crucial to realize all the aforementioned improvements. As per the respondents, increased investment is required to address the identified deficiencies and enhance the overall quality of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival.

Implications for the Organizers of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival

These findings have significant implications for cultural festival organizers, both locally and internationally recognized. The benefits perceived by individuals from the existence of the festival can be divided into two main aspects. First, the festival brings many positive impacts to its host region, such as increased revenue and business opportunities. Second, individuals experience personal benefits from the festival, such as cultural enrichment through pride in the preservation of cultural traditions and the artistic quality of the event, as well as the enjoyment of well-organized events, including venue comfort and logistical access.

These implications indicate that festival organizers need to pay attention to four important aspects in their management. Firstly, they should facilitate and promote initial community interaction with the festival to gain knowledge about

the culture being showcased. Secondly, effective communication plans are needed to convey information about the festival's impact on the region to the community. Thirdly, efforts to preserve intangible heritage should be a focus in maintaining authenticity in relationships with the region and local characteristics. Lastly, festival logistics management is crucial, as accessibility and venue comfort are important factors in evaluating the festival.

The significant role that cultural festivals play in attracting tourists to destinations has been widely acknowledged. Among the festival visitors who were not interviewed, a substantial 32% have participated in at least one cultural event during their stay, underscoring the considerable impact of the festival on the overall tourist experience at the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival. Our findings indicate that festival attendees tend to derive a more positive experience compared to other tourists, underscoring the importance of developing cultural event programs to support tourism marketing objectives. This aligns with the conclusions drawn by McKercher et al. (2006), who found that cultural events exert a significant influence on visitors' experiences at destinations, surpassing their initial motivations for visiting the destination. The experiences of festival attendees hold greater significance, particularly in terms of cognitive, affective, and novelty aspects. Moreover, festival tourists demonstrate a favorable response to branding messages propagated by local governments, albeit with some distinctions compared to other visitors.

Implications of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival for Central Kalimantan Province

Numerous countries renowned for their tourist attractions are currently endeavoring to bounce back from the repercussions of the pandemic crisis while also seeking to bolster visitor numbers, particularly from international tourists. Hence, it becomes imperative to comprehend and emphasize the potential of traditional cultural festivals as compelling attractions to entice individuals to specific locations. This study seeks to offer fresh insights into the significance of such events, utilizing the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival as a case study, for the advancement of cultural and creative tourism, the attraction of international

tourists, the enhancement of destination image, and the generation of socio-economic benefits for the local community.

Literature review highlights the close relationship between creativity and cultural tourism and the benefits they provide to host communities. In the context of efforts to recover from the pandemic's impact, many tourist destinations are seeking ways to increase visitor numbers, and in this regard, it is important to understand how cultural festivals can play a role in attracting tourists to specific destinations. Research indicates that cultural tourism emphasizes the importance of experiencing various cultural aspects of a place, including history and cultural identity. Cultural events, such as the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival, play a crucial role in preserving local traditions and preserving the identity of local communities. They not only strengthen cultural heritage but also influence destination image, tourist experiences, participant engagement, and potentially have positive impacts on socio-economic development in the region.

Furthermore, cultural tourism also plays a role in preserving cultural assets and history, as well as creating income that can be allocated for preservation purposes. The more tourists are interested in cultural heritage and cultural events, the more resources they can contribute. Therefore, traditional cultural festivals are not only celebrations of local culture but also means to promote destinations, preserve cultural heritage, and strengthen the local economy.

III. Closing

The development of cultural tourism and creative tourism has become an integral part of the recent evolution in the tourism industry. This has made many destinations highly appealing, with an increasing emphasis on cultural heritage and the experiences of those living there (Richards, 2018). In this context, the socio-economic aspects of these places are becoming increasingly important, as tourists and local residents contribute to the local economy by purchasing various products and services, including food, clothing, artifacts, souvenirs, transportation, and accommodation. As per the United Nations World Tourism Organization (Canton, 2021), cultural tourism contributes to over 39% of the overall

expenditure in international travel, underscoring the significant role this segment plays in today's tourism sector.

By examining the characteristics of tourists, this study illustrates the strong correlation between creativity and cultural tourism, as well as the advantages they offer, particularly concerning the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival. In the context of this festival, visitors typically allocate more spending, which contributes positively to the economic conditions of the local community, evident in the purchase of diverse goods and services such as accommodations, souvenirs, meals, and traditional attire, among others. Furthermore, the key findings of the study underscore the significance of the socio-economic dimensions of the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival and its influence on the destination, as acknowledged by stakeholders within the locality. Although the level of tourist satisfaction with Central Kalimantan, particularly the Isen Mulang Cultural Festival, is quite high, many improvements are still needed in the future to ensure that fundamental aspects such as security, infrastructure maintenance, accessibility, investment, and promotion can meet the necessary standards for the festival to continue to grow and attract the interest of international tourists, while continuing to provide significant socio-economic benefits to the local community.

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