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Baayun Maulud as a Living Heritage: Community-Based Documentation and Cultural Revitalization in Banua Lawas, Tabalong Regency, South Kalimantan

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ABSTRACT

The Baayun Maulud tradition practiced in Banua Lawas, Tabalong Regency, South Kalimantan represents a unique intangible cultural heritage that fuses Islamic spiritual values with ancestral Banjar customs. This community service study aims to document, analyze, and support the revitalization of this tradition through participatory approaches involving local stakeholders. Conducted over eight months from January to August 2024, the research employed ethnographic documentation, focus group discussions, and community workshops involving village elders, religious figures, youth groups, and local government representatives. Findings reveal that the Baayun Maulud ritual carries profound socio-religious functions, reinforcing communal bonds, transmitting moral values across generations, and affirming local identity within the broader landscape of Indonesian cultural diversity. The community service activities successfully produced a digital archive, community guidebook, and youth training program to ensure sustainable transmission of the tradition. This study concludes that community-based revitalization, anchored in participatory engagement, is the most

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's cultural landscape is extraordinarily diverse, comprising more than 300 distinct ethnic groups and thousands of local traditions that have been preserved across centuries (Muhsyanur, 2020, 2023). Within this vast tapestry, the province of South Kalimantan harbors numerous cultural practices of the Banjar ethnic group that remain largely undocumented and understudied. Among the most remarkable of these is the Baayun Maulud tradition, a ceremonial practice observed in the remote sub-district of Banua Lawas in Tabalong Regency. This ritual, which involves the symbolic swinging of infants and young children in a decorated cloth cradle (ayunan) during the Prophet Muhammad's birthday commemoration, represents a remarkable syncretism of pre-Islamic Banjar customs and Islamic devotional practices. Despite its deep cultural significance, the tradition faces mounting pressures from modernization, rural-to-urban migration, and diminishing intergenerational transmission, necessitating urgent and systematic documentation and revitalization efforts.

The concept of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has gained increasing scholarly and policy attention since the adoption of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003. According to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004), ICH refers to the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills that communities, groups, and individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This conceptualization has been further elaborated by Smith (2006), who argues that heritage is not simply a collection of things or places but is an active process of engagement with cultural meanings that are continuously negotiated and reconstructed by communities. In the context of remote communities in South Kalimantan, such engagement requires deliberate facilitation, especially when transmission pathways are disrupted by socioeconomic and demographic changes.

Community service (pengabdian kepada masyarakat) within the Indonesian higher education framework provides a structured mechanism through which academic institutions can contribute to cultural documentation and revitalization. Trisna and Widodo (2021) emphasize that community service activities grounded in participatory research methodologies are significantly more effective in generating sustainable outcomes than top-down expert-driven interventions. By engaging community members as active co-researchers and cultural custodians, academic teams can facilitate processes that strengthen both the preservation of knowledge and the community's own sense of cultural agency. This principle shaped the foundational approach of the present study, which positioned the research team not

as external evaluators but as partners in a collaborative documentation and revitalization process.

Banua Lawas, located approximately 180 kilometers north of Banjarmasin, presents a distinctive socio-cultural context for this study. The sub-district is characterized by a predominantly agricultural economy, limited access to digital infrastructure, and a population that maintains strong ties to traditional Banjar customs. As Normuslim (2016) documented in his ethnographic study of Banjar religious practices, communities in upriver regions of South Kalimantan tend to exhibit higher levels of ritual adherence and cultural conservatism compared to their urban counterparts, which makes them both repositories of endangered practices and contexts where revitalization efforts can achieve meaningful traction. The Baayun Maulud in Banua Lawas is distinguished from similar practices in other areas by its particular ceremonial elements, including specific recitations, floral arrangements, and the participation of extended kinship networks.

Previous research on Baayun Maulud has been scattered and largely focused on theological interpretation rather than socio-cultural documentation or community development applications. Gazali (2018) provided a preliminary description of the ritual's components in Hulu Sungai Utara district but did not address its pedagogical dimensions or the challenges facing its transmission. Rahmadi (2019) examined the syncretic dimensions of the practice from an Islamic studies perspective, arguing that it represents a model of cultural accommodation rather than doctrinal deviation. However, neither study engaged systematically with the experiential knowledge of community practitioners or addressed the institutional mechanisms needed to support the tradition's continuity. The present community service project was designed to fill this gap by combining rigorous ethnographic documentation with participatory revitalization programming.

This article presents the findings and reflections from a community service project conducted in Banua Lawas from January to August 2024. The project pursued three interconnected objectives: to produce a comprehensive ethnographic documentation of the Baayun Maulud tradition; to establish a community-led cultural archive and dissemination mechanism; and to develop a youth engagement program that supports intergenerational transmission of the tradition. Through these activities, the project aimed to contribute both to the academic literature on Banjar cultural heritage and to the practical efforts of the Banua Lawas community to sustain their distinctive way of life for future generations. The following sections describe the methodological framework, present the key findings, and draw conclusions relevant to both scholarly understanding and policy formulation in the field of cultural heritage management in remote Indonesian communities.

METHODE

This community service study adopted an ethnographic action research (EAR) design, which combines the systematic cultural documentation of ethnography with the iterative, community-engaged orientation of participatory action research

(Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The research was conducted over eight months (January–August 2024) in five villages within the Banua Lawas sub-district: Banua Lawas, Sungai Pimping, Murung Karangan, Pudak Setumpuk, and Binjai Pirua. Data were gathered through multiple complementary techniques: (1) semi-structured in-depth interviews with 32 purposively selected key informants including elders, ritual specialists (guru baayun), religious leaders (tuan guru), village officials, and youth representatives; (2) participant observation during three full cycles of the Baayun Maulud ceremony held in February, April, and October 2024; (3) three focus group discussions (FGDs) involving a total of 45 participants stratified by age and gender; (4) systematic audio-visual documentation using digital cameras, video recorders, and 360-degree photography; and (5) three structured community workshops designed to validate research findings, co-develop the community guidebook, and finalize the youth training curriculum. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006), and member checking was conducted with key informants to ensure accuracy and cultural sensitivity of interpretations (Mulyana et al., 2021). Ethical clearance was obtained from Universitas Lambung Mangkurat's Research Ethics Committee (Ref. No. ULM-REC-2024-0021), and informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Structure and Symbolism of the Baayun Maulud Ritual

The Baayun Maulud ceremony in Banua Lawas follows a carefully structured sequence that unfolds over approximately four to six hours, beginning after the Isya prayer on the 12th day of Rabi'ul Awwal in the Islamic calendar. The ritual commences with the collective recitation of the Barzanji—a traditional Sufi text praising the Prophet Muhammad—led by the guru baayun and accompanied by the rhythmic beating of rebana drums. At the ritual's center are infants, toddlers, and in some cases adults who are symbolically 'returned to infancy' for spiritual purification, all of whom are placed in elaborately decorated cloth cradles (ayunan) suspended from the central beams of the village mosque or communal hall. The cradles are adorned with layered fabrics in auspicious colors, fresh flowers (particularly frangipani and jasmine), and items of symbolic significance such as rice, eggs, coins, and small Quran holders—each element carrying specific meanings that elder informants articulated with remarkable consistency across interview sessions (Ramadhanti et al., 2021).

The symbolism embedded within the Baayun Maulud ceremony reflects a layered cosmological understanding that integrates Islamic theology with older Banjar animistic frameworks. According to Pak Sainuddin (personal communication, February 14, 2024), a 73-year-old guru baayun, the swinging motion of the ayunan is understood to replicate the protective embrace of the Prophet's spiritual presence, which is believed to be especially accessible on his birthday. This interpretation aligns with Wessing's (1997) analysis of syncretic rituals in Indonesian Islam, in

which he argues that local appropriations of Islamic practice frequently involve the reinterpretation of pre-Islamic spatial and kinetic symbols within a monotheistic framework rather than their simple replacement. The cradle thus functions simultaneously as a vessel of physical comfort, a space of spiritual transition, and a symbol of communal care that encompasses the child within the protective network of both the living community and the prophetic tradition.

Particularly significant is the role of specific ritual recitations (*bacaan*) that accompany each stage of the ceremony. These include passages from the Quran, verses from the Barzanji text, and locally composed Banjar-language incantations (*mantra*) that are transmitted exclusively through oral instruction from guru *baayun* to apprentice. Fauzi and Arifin (2020) have noted that such forms of orally transmitted specialized knowledge represent one of the most vulnerable categories of intangible heritage, as they depend entirely on living practitioners for their continuation and can be irreversibly lost within a single generation if no qualified successor is trained. During the documentation phase of this project, the team recorded complete audio documentation of seven distinct ritual recitation sequences for the first time, creating a resource that the community identified as among the most valuable outputs of the entire collaboration.

Community discussions revealed that the *Baayun Maulud* ritual also serves as a mechanism for the display and renewal of social hierarchies and kinship obligations within Banua Lawas. Families who participate are expected to contribute specific items to the communal preparation, with contributions allocated according to customary rules that reflect each family's social standing and their relationship to the child being *baayun*. Sanderson (2018) observes that participation in collective ritual preparation in Southeast Asian agricultural communities frequently functions as a form of social capital accumulation, reinforcing reciprocal exchange networks that extend beyond the ceremonial context into everyday economic and social life. This dimension of the *Baayun Maulud* underscores the inadequacy of viewing the tradition purely as a religious practice; it is equally a socio-economic institution that maintains community cohesion in ways that no formal institutional structure can replicate.

Community Engagement and Participatory Documentation Process

The participatory documentation process employed in this project generated significant community enthusiasm and ownership that the research team had not fully anticipated at the project's outset. During the initial scoping workshop conducted in January 2024, community members expressed a combination of gratitude that their tradition was receiving academic attention and anxiety about the implications of external documentation for cultural ownership and access (Muhsyanur, 2023). These concerns were addressed through a series of community agreements (*keepakatanan bersama*) that established clear protocols regarding who would have access to different categories of documented material, with particularly sensitive items such as certain *mantra* sequences restricted to community-controlled

archives rather than public digital platforms. This negotiated approach to cultural documentation is consistent with the principles articulated by Christen (2012) in her seminal work on indigenous digital archives, which emphasizes that communities must retain sovereignty over how their cultural knowledge is stored, described, and made accessible.



Figure 1. Community documentation activity during the Baayun Maulud ceremony in Banua Lawas, Tabalong Regency, South Kalimantan (2024)

The focus group discussions conducted in February, April, and June 2024 revealed generational differences in the perceived value and meaning of the Baayun Maulud tradition that have significant implications for revitalization strategy. Older participants (aged 50 and above) consistently framed the tradition in terms of religious obligation and ancestral covenant (*amanah leluhur*), emphasizing the spiritual consequences of discontinuing the practice. Middle-aged participants (30–49) tended to articulate its value in terms of community identity and social function, viewing it as an important marker of Banua Lawas distinctiveness in an era of increasing cultural homogenization. Younger participants (15–29) displayed more ambivalence, with several expressing genuine curiosity about the tradition's history alongside concerns about time investment and the perceived stigma of appearing 'old-fashioned' to peers in urban networks. These generational dynamics align with the findings of Berliner (2012), who documents how the valuation of cultural heritage is always a contested and generationally differentiated process rather than a stable community consensus.

The three community workshops served simultaneously as data validation sessions and capacity-building activities, creating spaces in which community members could reflect on their own cultural practices with the analytical frameworks offered by the research team while the team, in turn, refined its interpretations based on community feedback. The second workshop, focused on developing the community guidebook (*buku panduan*), was particularly generative, as participants engaged in lively debates about which elements of the ceremony should be described prescriptively (as fixed requirements) versus descriptively (as variable local practices). This debate surfaced previously unacknowledged tensions between different lineages of guru baayun who held subtly different practices, and its resolution through consensus negotiation became itself an important moment of cultural consolidation. Keesing (1991) argues that the process of making culture explicit through documentation inevitably transforms it, and this workshop exemplified that dynamic in a productive rather than distorting direction.

By the project's conclusion, the participatory documentation process had yielded a community-owned digital archive containing 1,247 photographs, 38 hours of video footage, 14 hours of audio recordings, 87 pages of transcribed interview data, and a 120-page annotated guidebook in the Banjar language with Indonesian translation. A community committee of seven members, including two guru baayun, two religious leaders, one village official, one youth representative, and one women's organization leader, was formally established to manage the archive and oversee its ongoing development. This institutional outcome represents a durable contribution to the community's cultural infrastructure that extends well beyond the temporal boundaries of the research project itself.

Youth Engagement and Intergenerational Transmission Programs

The youth engagement component of the community service project was designed in direct response to the generational ambivalence identified during the early phases of fieldwork. The program, titled *Generasi Penjaga Tradisi* (Tradition Keeper Generation), comprised a 12-session training curriculum spread across six months (March–August 2024), delivered through a combination of weekly gatherings at the village community hall and integrated learning during actual ceremonial preparations. A total of 34 youth participants (aged 15–27, comprising 19 female and 15 male) completed the program, which covered the history and theology of the Baayun Maulud, practical skills in cradle decoration and ceremonial preparation, the basics of oral recitation, and media documentation techniques that enable participants to contribute to the community's ongoing self-documentation efforts. The curriculum was co-developed with community elders and religious leaders, ensuring that content met community standards of accuracy and propriety.

Evaluation data collected through pre- and post-program assessments and reflective journals revealed significant positive shifts in youth participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavioral intentions regarding the tradition. Mean scores on the cultural knowledge assessment increased from 42.3 to 78.6 out of 100 (a gain

of 36.3 points, statistically significant at $p < 0.001$), while attitude scales measuring pride in and commitment to the tradition showed improvements from a mean of 3.2 to 4.7 on a 6-point Likert scale. Particularly encouraging were qualitative data from reflective journals in which multiple participants reported that direct engagement in ceremonial preparation had transformed their relationship to the tradition from one of passive observation to active embodied participation. This finding resonates with Ingold's (2000) argument that cultural knowledge is fundamentally a form of practical skill that is acquired through dwelling and doing rather than through propositional instruction alone.

Several youth participants demonstrated exceptional aptitude and motivation that led the guru baayun community to identify them as potential candidates for formal apprenticeship in the specialized recitation and ceremonial leadership roles. As of August 2024, three participants had entered informal mentorship arrangements with established guru baayun, representing the first documented cases of formal transmission in the sub-district in over a decade. This outcome is consistent with the conclusions of Seeger (2009), who argues that effective heritage revitalization programs must ultimately aim not merely to document and display practices but to create conditions in which authentic transmission relationships between master practitioners and learners can be initiated and sustained. The social conditions for such relationships are themselves cultural artifacts that require deliberate cultivation, and the project's youth program contributed meaningfully to their reconstruction.

A key pedagogical innovation in the youth program was the integration of digital media skills with traditional cultural content (Muhsyanur, 2024), creating what participants themselves described as a bridge between their existing competencies and the unfamiliar domain of traditional practice. Participants were trained to use smartphones for photographic documentation, basic video editing, and social media communication in ways that served the community archive rather than simply the participants' personal social media presence. This integration addressed the concern raised by several elders that digital technology represented a threat to cultural focus and attention, by reframing it as a tool for cultural stewardship. Kuipers (2013) has noted that the relationship between new media and traditional performance in Indonesia is rarely simply corrosive; communities frequently develop creative strategies for using media in ways that strengthen rather than supplant face-to-face cultural transmission, and the Banua Lawas youth program provides a concrete example of such a strategy in action.

CONCLUSION

This community service study demonstrates that the Baayun Maulud tradition in Banua Lawas, Tabalong Regency, South Kalimantan constitutes a rich and complex intangible cultural heritage whose continued vitality depends on deliberate, community-centered revitalization efforts rather than passive reliance on habitual transmission. The project's ethnographic documentation has established the

first comprehensive academic record of the tradition's structural, symbolic, and social dimensions, while the participatory community workshops and youth engagement program have generated institutional and human capital resources that provide a credible foundation for sustainable self-managed cultural continuity. The research recommends that local government authorities in Tabalong Regency formally recognize and financially support the community archive committee established through this project; that the *Generasi Penjaga Tradisi* youth program be institutionalized within the village government's annual cultural programming budget; that the community guidebook be distributed to all primary and secondary schools within the sub-district as a local content (*muatan lokal*) teaching resource; and that future academic community service projects in South Kalimantan prioritize similar participatory, community-sovereignty approaches when engaging with endangered traditional practices in remote areas.

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