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THE ROLE OF ISTANO BASA PAGARUYUANG AS A LIVING HERITAGE IN PRESERVING MINANGKABAU CULTURAL IDENTITY

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Abstract

This study aims to discuss how Istano Basa Pagaruyuang functions as a living heritage in preserving and strengthening Minangkabau cultural identity amid contemporary developments. Istano Basa Pagaruyuang is not merely a historical building but a living symbol of customary values, kinship systems, and the philosophies of Minangkabau society that are preserved to this day. This research uses a qualitative approach through direct observation and interviews with the management and surrounding community. The results of the study show that Istano Basa Pagaruyuang serves not only as a cultural tourism object but also as an educational center introducing Minangkabau customs and traditions to the broader public. Through its architecture, customary activities, and community involvement, the istano becomes a space for preserving cultural values that continue to be passed down across generations. The community plays an active role in tourism activities, serving as guides, artisans, and creative economy actors based on local culture. In addition, this study finds several challenges in maintaining the authenticity of cultural values amid tourism commercialization and declining interest among the younger generation in local traditions. Overall, this study affirms that Istano Basa Pagaruyuang is a concrete example of living heritage that not only preserves but revitalizes Minangkabau cultural identity through social, economic, and tourism interactions. Sustainable preservation requires collaboration between the management, customary community, and local government.

Keywords: Istano Basa Pagaruyuang, Living Heritage, Cultural Identity, Minangkabau, Cultural Preservation

INTRODUCTION

The Minangkabau are one of the largest ethnic groups in Indonesia, inhabiting West Sumatra and several other regions in the archipelago. The Minangkabau community adopts a kinship system that follows the maternal lineage, known as matrilineality. In this system, women become the main heirs of ancestral property, while men hold roles in social and customary structures (Navis, 1984). Additionally, their lives are governed by the principle "Adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah," meaning that adat is based on the teachings of Islam, and Islam is rooted in the Qur'an

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(Mansoer, 2005). This principle forms the moral and social foundation of various aspects of life from governance, education, to cultural expressions such as architecture, art, and oral traditions.

Minangkabau culture contains many philosophical values embedded in various aspects such as the rumah gadang, traditional clothing, ceremonies, arts, as well as proverbs passed down through generations. Culture is not merely seen as a product of past human creativity but as a living system of values that continues to evolve within society. According to Koentjaraningrat (2009), culture is the totality of ideas, activities, and human works in social life that are learned and become part of individual identity. Thus, Minangkabau culture is not static but dynamic and adaptive to changing times while maintaining the core values that characterize its people.

In cultural studies, the term living heritage refers to cultural heritage that is not only preserved as static objects or artifacts but is still practiced and understood by the community that sustains it. According to UNESCO (2003), living heritage includes practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills along with cultural spaces that are recognized by communities as part of their cultural legacy. It is called "living" because it continues to be practiced and has social functions for the community.

Applying the principles of living heritage is crucial amid globalization, which can threaten local values. Globalization brings rapid technological and informational development but can also erode local cultural identity if not addressed consciously. As stated by Smith (2006), heritage is a social process that constantly changes, where communities negotiate their history to understand and strengthen their present identity. Therefore, cultural preservation must consider not only physical elements but also social and spiritual values embedded within them.

One significant example of living heritage in Indonesia is Istano Basa Pagaruyuang, located in Batusangkar, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra. This palace symbolizes the glory and administrative center of the Pagaruyuang Kingdom, which forms the basis of Minangkabau customary governance. The majestic architectural design with its horn-shaped gonjong roof reflects Minangkabau philosophy emphasizing deliberation, kinship bonds, and balance between tradition and religion (Nasution & Wulandari, 2020). Besides its role as a cultural tourism site, Istano Basa Pagaruyuang is also used for customary ceremonies, cultural education, and represents the pride of Minangkabau identity.

The palace has undergone several reconstructions after fires, yet its authenticity and philosophical meanings are preserved. This shows the strong commitment of the Minangkabau people in maintaining their cultural heritage. Sari and Zulfikar (2021) note that the continuity of social functions and traditions at the palace makes it a living heritage still connected to contemporary society. The palace also serves as an intergenerational learning space for customs, history, and Minangkabau cultural values.

Cultural identity is the collective understanding of values, symbols, and traditions accepted as a heritage by a community. This identity develops through historical and social processes and becomes the foundation for unity and pride in an ethnic group. In the Minangkabau context, cultural identity is reflected not only in tradition and language but also in physical heritage such as the rumah gadang and Istano Basa Pagaruyuang, which embody the philosophical, social, and spiritual values of the Minangkabau people.

Furthermore, Istano Basa Pagaruyuang plays a significant role in sustaining local culture. Its preservation supports sustainable cultural tourism development. By involving local communities in its management, cultural heritage becomes a medium for education, identity promotion, and economic empowerment. According to UNESCO (2015), local community involvement is crucial to ensuring sustainability and authenticity of cultural heritage sites.

However, the transformation of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang into a tourism destination and cultural education center also brings challenges, including cultural commodification, changes to traditional spatial functions, unmanaged tourist pressure, and technical conservation needs that require community-based governance. This study examines the role of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang as living heritage in preserving and reproducing Minangkabau cultural values, as well as reviewing preservation practices, community involvement, and tourism implications for the sustainability of local culture.

Therefore, this research aims to analyze the role of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang as living heritage in maintaining Minangkabau cultural identity. It specifically focuses on how the palace performs its role in keeping Minangkabau identity relevant in the contemporary era. The study is expected to contribute to efforts in preserving and developing Minangkabau cultural heritage and to strengthen society's awareness of the importance of safeguarding the customs, traditions, and philosophies embedded in this heritage.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research applies an analytical qualitative method aimed at understanding the meaning, value, and function of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang as a living heritage in preserving Minangkabau cultural identity. This method was chosen to identify the palace's role in maintaining cultural identity. According to Sugiyono (2013), qualitative research examines natural conditions where the researcher is the key instrument, and the findings emphasize meaning rather than generalization. This means the study does not focus on statistics but on deeply understanding the social and cultural phenomena occurring in the field.

In this study, data were collected through direct observation and in-depth interviews with the palace management, customary leaders, and visitors to obtain diverse perspectives on preserved cultural values. Observations were conducted by examining cultural activities and interactions among the management, customary community, and visitors in the palace area. The researcher also collected data from archives, manuscripts, and relevant publications. Through this method, the study aims to provide a comprehensive picture of how Istano Basa Pagaruyuang functions as living heritage in maintaining Minangkabau cultural identity symbolically, socially, and functionally.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Primary Role of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang in Preserving Minangkabau Cultural Identity

Based on direct field observations and in-depth interviews with the management, Istano Basa Pagaruyuang plays a significant role in safeguarding, introducing, and revitalizing Minangkabau cultural identity within modern society. The palace is not merely a replica of the historical Pagaruyuang Kingdom; it serves as a symbol of cultural grandeur and a center for preserving Minangkabau values, which are rich in philosophical, social, and cultural meaning.

Physically, Istano Basa Pagaruyuang presents the beauty of traditional Minangkabau architecture filled with symbolic values. The pointed gonjong roof, resembling buffalo horns, symbolizes victory, resilience, and the ingenuity of the Minangkabau people. This philosophy is closely related to the proverb "Alam takambang jadi guru," which means that human beings must learn from nature as a source of wisdom.

Its educational role is reflected through cultural tourism activities that introduce local customs, life philosophies, traditional governance systems, and the long history of the Pagaruyung Kingdom. Guides provide detailed explanations about the meaning behind each part of the building, the traditional clothing, and cultural artifacts on display. Thus, visiting the palace becomes not only a visual experience but also a comprehensive cultural learning encounter.

Beyond education, the palace also functions as a social space and a generational connector. For the local community, it is a symbol of pride that strengthens their sense of belonging to ancestral heritage. For the younger generation, the palace acts as an important source of inspiration to learn, understand, and appreciate their culture.

Many students, university researchers, and cultural enthusiasts visit the palace to study Minangkabau culture firsthand. According to interviews, the management stated that Istano Basa Pagaruyuang attracts thousands of visitors annually, both domestic and international. Many come not only for sightseeing but also to gain a deeper understanding of Minangkabau culture. This demonstrates the palace's role as a cultural ambassador that introduces Minangkabau identity to the broader world.

In the context of preservation, Istano Basa Pagaruyuang is regarded as living heritage, meaning that cultural preservation is not limited to maintaining physical structures. Instead, culture is kept alive through practices, rituals, and active community participation. Cultural heritage is not treated as a static museum artifact but as a set of values to be lived and practiced in daily life. The palace shows that Minangkabau cultural traditions are capable of adapting to modern times without losing their essence.

Thus, the primary role of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang extends far beyond being a historical attraction or a symbol of pride. It serves as a living cultural space that preserves the core values of Minangkabau culture. Through various activities, educational programs, and cultural interactions, the palace continues to uphold noble values such as morality, adat, courtesy, consensus-based decision making, and reverence for ancestors ensuring that they are preserved within contemporary society.

2. Management Efforts in Preserving Traditional Values (FULL TRANSLATION)

The management of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang makes diligent efforts to ensure that tourism activities are not solely entertainment-driven but also educational and culturally preservative. They understand that the palace is not just an architecturally impressive attraction, but a sacred cultural symbol embedded with deep Minangkabau philosophies. Therefore, the management always prioritizes balance between tourism development and the preservation of traditional values.

One of the primary strategies is the regular organization of cultural and customary events, such as batagak panghulu, baralek gadang, traditional art performances like randai, and various Minangkabau dances. These events are not staged merely for tourist consumption; they function as a medium for passing down traditional knowledge to younger generations. Randai, for example, teaches values of togetherness, collective decision making, and heroic narratives.

The management also adopts an educational approach through culturally oriented guided tours. Local guides explain not only the building structure but also the philosophical meanings behind each ornament and room. The carvings on the walls symbolize human relationships with nature, while the spatial layout reflects values of equality and communal consensus in Minangkabau social life. Strong collaboration is established with local government, traditional leaders, niniak mamak, and educational institutions to ensure the authenticity of adat practices. Every major event involves traditional authorities as advisors to prevent deviations from legitimate Minangkabau customs.

In the field of education, the management partners with schools and universities to conduct cultural visits. Students and researchers are invited to explore history and adat directly, providing a deeper cultural experience than classroom learning alone. The management also enforces visitor etiquette, including dress codes, behavior guidelines, and photography restrictions in certain areas. These rules are not intended to limit visitor enjoyment but to cultivate respect toward cultural and spiritual values associated with the palace.

In addition, digital media is utilized for promotion and education through documentary videos about Minangkabau customs, Pagaruyuang history, and the philosophy of the gonjong roof. This strategy widens cultural outreach, especially to digital-native youth. However, several challenges remain. Cultural commodification is a major concern as tourism increases, raising fears that traditional meanings may be reduced to mere performances. Limited funding and human resources also hinder the sustainability of large-scale customary events, which require considerable investment. To address this, the management builds partnerships with government agencies, private sponsors, and cultural institutions to ensure the continuity of preservation efforts.

3. The Contribution of Local Communities to Management and Preservation

The local community plays an active role in the management, preservation, and protection of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang. The people of Tanjung Emas Subdistrict, where the palace is located, become an integral part of various activities organized at the site. Through their participation, the palace is not merely preserved physically but also socially and culturally. Community involvement is visible from traditional leaders, women of bundo kanduang, cultural activists, to youth groups who collectively uphold the essence of Minangkabau traditions.

In traditional ceremonies such as batagak pangulu or aleg nagari, the community acts as cultural bearers as well as implementers of customary processes. This demonstrates that the palace

is not only a historical monument but also a living space that reflects the life of the Minangkabau people. Ceremonies held in the palace area are not limited to tourist attractions; they are genuine cultural practices carried out by the community.

Aside from serving as cultural actors, the community also acts as guardians of values and norms. Their presence ensures that activities within the palace area do not contradict Minangkabau customs. Traditional figures and bundo kanduang guide the procedures for wearing traditional clothing, etiquette, and the use of sacred spaces. This helps prevent commercialization that could reduce the cultural value of the palace.

The community also plays an important role in regenerating cultural traditions. Many traditional leaders and artists mentor children and youth in dance studios, randai groups, silat martial arts, and talempong music. Cultural education is crucial to maintaining interest among the younger generation, especially amid the influence of global culture. By providing these learning spaces, cultural values are sustained from one generation to the next.

In the creative economy, the community contributes through the production of souvenirs and traditional foods. These economic activities not only generate income but also support cultural tourism sustainably. Traditional snacks, songket weaving, and handmade crafts add cultural value and attract tourist interest.

Community involvement is also evident from their adaptability to modern developments. Some members use digital platforms to promote cultural activities, crafts, and tours at the palace. This digital innovation brings cultural heritage closer to the younger generation and tourists. Although the community plays an important role, several challenges persist. Modern lifestyles and the younger generation's reduced interest in culture may hinder preservation. Moreover, tourism demands often require professionalism in cultural activities. Without careful planning, this might shift cultural values into mere commodities. Therefore, collaboration between the community, government, and managers is essential to ensure sustainable cultural preservation.

4. The Role of Traditional Ceremonies in Enhancing the Identity of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang

Traditional ceremonies at Istano Basa Pagaruyuang serve as a bridge reconnecting cultural values with society, especially the younger generation. Minangkabau customs hold spiritual, social, and moral values that enrich cultural identity. Ceremonies held at the palace are not solely for entertainment they carry deep meanings that teach humility, respect, and unity.

One major ceremony often carried out is batagak pangulu, the appointment of traditional leaders. This ceremony reinforces the structure of Minangkabau society, where niniak mamak bear responsibility for guiding their clans. The event symbolically represents unity, wisdom, and justice, core values of Minangkabau culture.

Other ceremonies include traditional weddings (baralek), thanksgiving events, and welcoming rituals. Each ceremony involves a series of traditional performances such as tari pasambahan, tari piring, and randai. These performances not only entertain but also preserve the artistry and creativity of the Minangkabau people. The presence of these ceremonies strengthens the palace's role as a cultural hub. Tourists, students, and researchers visiting during these ceremonies gain firsthand experience of Minangkabau practices. This experiential learning helps preserve cultural identity in a meaningful way.

In addition, these ceremonies function as educational tools. Through observation and participation, the younger generation learns about the values embedded in traditions. The bundo kanduang and niniak mamak often explain the significance of each ritual to ensure cultural continuity. Traditional ceremonies also strengthen community unity. Preparations often involve cooperation among community members, reflecting the Minangkabau principle of gotong royong. This communal work fosters empathy, trust, and shared responsibility. However, challenges arise due to modernization. Some youth consider traditional ceremonies outdated, decreasing participation levels. Despite this, continuous guidance, workshops, and the integration of culture in education can help ensure that these traditions remain relevant.

In summary, traditional ceremonies at Istano Basa Pagaruyuang play a central role in preserving and strengthening Minangkabau identity. They serve as cultural education, community bonding, and heritage preservation mechanisms that ensure the values of the past remain alive in the present and future.

5. Preservation Efforts and Future Management Strategies for Istano Basa Pagaruyuang

The preservation of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang as a living heritage does not solely focus on maintaining the physical structure of the building, but also on ensuring that Minangkabau cultural values remain alive, understood, and practiced by the community. Based on interviews with the management and traditional leaders, it is evident that preservation is carried out through educational, participatory, and sustainable approaches. This means that all stakeholders managers, government, traditional leaders, local communities, and visitors are encouraged to take an active role in safeguarding the cultural meaning and function embodied in the palace.

a. Educational Approach: The Palace as a Center for Cultural Learning
   One of the key strategies of the management is to position Istano Basa Pagaruyuang as a center for learning Minangkabau culture. Numerous educational activities are conducted within the palace area, such as workshops on customs and traditions, training in traditional dance and music, as well as “learning at the palace” programs for students and university groups. Through these programs, visitors do not merely observe cultural artifacts but also learn the values and philosophies behind them. For instance, schoolchildren are taught the importance of gotong royong (mutual cooperation) in Minangkabau culture or how the matrilineal system shapes the community’s social life. This educational approach ensures that cultural knowledge does not remain confined to a museum but continues to be passed down as a living tradition within society.
b. Participatory Approach: Involving the Community as Key Actors
   The successful management of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang depends heavily on the involvement of the local community. The residents are not merely spectators but serve as key actors in maintaining the authenticity of the culture. They play roles as tour guides, artisans, songket weavers, performers, and traditional culinary providers. This form of participation has both economic benefits and strengthens cultural pride and a sense of ownership. Meanwhile, traditional leaders and niniak mamak provide guidance and advice to ensure that cultural activities remain aligned with Minangkabau norms and values. The collaboration between management, local government, and the community exemplifies the principles of community-based tourism, where local people are at the heart of culturally sustainable tourism.

c. Sustainable Approach: Balancing Tourism and Preservation
   The management also recognizes the importance of maintaining a balance between tourism and preservation. The high interest of tourists does bring economic benefits, but it may also exert pressure on cultural values if not carefully managed. Therefore, the management implements various policies, such as limiting visitor numbers during traditional ceremonies, prohibiting the use of sacred areas for commercial activities, and enforcing dress codes and behavioral guidelines within the palace grounds. At the same time, routine maintenance is carried out on the building and cultural artifacts to prevent deterioration. The local government, together with the Department of Culture and Tourism, continues to allocate funds for restoration and the digitalization of cultural archives. This digitalization includes producing audiovisual documentation of traditional ceremonies, traditional music, and the philosophical aspects of the palace's architecture, which can later be accessed by younger generations through digital platforms. In this way, cultural preservation focuses not only on physical aspects but also on transmitting values and knowledge across generations.
d. Collaboration Among Government, Academics, and the Community
   Beyond the participation of local communities, the sustainability of palace management also requires support from other institutions. The local government plays a role in providing funding and regulations, while academic institutions contribute through research and scientific assistance. This collaboration has produced various strategic programs, such as the development of a heritage tourism roadmap, training for cultural tour guides, and the creation of educational modules based on local wisdom. Several universities in West Sumatra have even designated Istano Basa Pagaruyuang as a living cultural laboratory, where students conduct research, observations, and community service activities. These initiatives not only strengthen the connection between academia and the local community but also ensure that scientific knowledge and tradition work hand in hand in safeguarding cultural sustainability.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research findings and the discussions that have been carried out, it can be concluded that Istano Basa Pagaruyuang holds a very important role as a living heritage in preserving and strengthening Minangkabau cultural identity. Its existence is not only as a historical tourist attraction but also as a center of cultural life that continues to be practiced by the community and the management. Istano Basa Pagaruyuang functions as a bridge between the past, the present, and the future. Its distinctive architecture, the customary values practiced in tourism activities, and the various traditional ceremonies that continue to be held demonstrate that Minangkabau culture is not merely a memory of the past, but something that is still alive and developing. Through the philosophy of Alam takambang jadi guru, the istano has successfully become a symbol that teaches local wisdom and a way of life that is in harmony with nature, society, and customary values.

The active role of the local community is also one of the key factors in the successful preservation of the istano. Their involvement in various aspects from organizing traditional ceremonies, guiding tourists, to producing creative economic products shows that cultural preservation cannot be separated from the socio-economic life of the community itself. Thus, the

concept of living heritage is truly realized, because culture is not only preserved symbolically but also lived and passed down through real actions.

This study shows that the management of Istano Basa Pagaruyuang has succeeded in balancing cultural preservation and tourism development. Efforts to maintain the authenticity of customs, collaboration with the government and academics, as well as the application of community-based tourism principles have become strategic steps to ensure the sustainability of the istano's functions amid the challenges of modernization.

However, there are still various challenges that need to be addressed, such as limited funding, supporting facilities, and the declining interest of younger generations in local traditions. Therefore, more innovative and inclusive strategies are needed so that Istano Basa Pagaruyuang not only survives but is also able to adapt to the developments of the times without losing the cultural values that form the identity of the Minangkabau people. Overall, Istano Basa Pagaruyuang is a real example of how cultural heritage can continue to live, function, and remain meaningful amid the changes of time. It is not merely a historical symbol, but a system of values that continuously shapes the worldview, behavior, and pride of the Minangkabau community toward their ancestral heritage. As long as customary values continue to be practiced, as long as the community remains proud to be part of Minangkabau, Istano Basa Pagaruyuang will continue to live not only as a building but as the very soul of the culture itself.

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