

ECOSPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CHARITY RITUAL OF MOUNT NGASA GANDOANG IN SALEM, CENTRAL JAVA

(Ekospiritualitas dan Keberlanjutan Budaya dalam Ritual Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang di Salem, Jawa Tengah)

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Abstract: *This research begins with the question of how the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang ritual functions as a collective mechanism in maintaining ecological balance while strengthening the cultural identity of the community amidst the currents of modernization and ecological crisis. The main objectives of the research are (1) to analyze the ecological and spiritual values contained in the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang ritual, (2) to examine its social function in strengthening collective identity, and (3) to analyze the sustainability mechanism of the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang ritual amidst socio-cultural changes. The approach used is qualitative ethnography through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with traditional leaders, religious figures, and the younger generation, accompanied by visual documentation. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques to find patterns of meaning, social functions, and mechanisms of traditional inheritance. The research findings show that the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang ritual plays a multifunctional role: as a sacred ritual, a means of natural resource conservation, and a medium for transmitting values between generations. However, challenges remain, particularly the weakening of the inheritance of values and the reduced involvement of the younger generation. This research recommends that further studies highlight the role of digital media, cultural policies, and cross-generational collaboration as an effort to revitalize traditions so that they remain adaptive and relevant.*

Keywords: *Community Identity; Cultural Sustainability; Ecospirituality; Local Ecological Wisdom; Mountain Alms Ritual*

A. INTRODUCTION

Local traditions in Indonesia often serve as crucial spaces for maintaining spiritual, ecological, and cultural identity amidst modernization. The Gandoang community in Salem, Central Java, continues to practice the mountain alms ritual despite shifting beliefs and an ecological crisis. This ritual is not only a cultural symbol but also embodies eco-spiritual wisdom, such as prohibiting the felling of trees believed to be inhabited by ancestral spirits. This serves as both a taboo and a local conservation strategy. In line with (Naililhaq, 2022), sacred narratives about mountains form the basis of the community's religious-ecological values. The main problem is how this tradition can survive amidst social and ecological changes, while also functioning as an adaptive mechanism to preserve culture and maintain the balance of the ecosystem.

So far the study on Local rituals in the context of ecology and cultural sustainability demonstrate three main trends. First, (Hadi, 2019) examined the Ngayu-Ayu ritual in East Lombok, which is understood as an expression of gratitude and a means of conserving soil fertility. Second, research by (Haq, Syamsul., Lubis, Sopian., Raqieb, Achmad., & Agustin, 2024) on the Kajang community in South Sulawesi emphasized ecospirituality that unites humans, God, the environment, and a simple lifestyle in collectively preserving the forest. Third, a study by (Setiawan, Fredy. Nugroho., Nurmansyah, M. Andhy., Nufiarni, Rizki., & Vidyayani, 2024) revealed ecological symbolism in the Kasada ritual of the Tengger Karo people. At an international level, (Bock, 2024) introduced *decospiritual praxis* as a collective strategy to address the climate and ecological crises. Meanwhile, the theoretical framework

of cultural sustainability developed by (Soini, Katriina, 2016) remains relevant for understanding the role of culture in maintaining ecological and social balance. Unlike previous research, this study positions the Sedekah Gunung *Ngasa Gandoang* ritual as an adaptive mechanism that integrates ecological conservation, spirituality, and social responses to global pressures, while expanding current discourse on the relationship between ecospirituality and cultural sustainability.

The purpose of this paper is to address the shortcomings of previous studies that have neglected the ecological, spiritual, and social dimensions of the Sedekah Gunung (mountain alms) tradition. The research focuses on the Sedekah Gunung *Ngasa Gandoang* ritual as a traditional institution that maintains ecological balance and strengthens the cultural identity of the community. Three main questions are highlighted: (1) how are ecological and spiritual values interpreted and realized in ritual practices, (2) what is the social function of ritual in strengthening collective cohesion and identity, and (3) through what mechanisms does this tradition maintain itself amidst modernization and the penetration of external cultures. The main problem lies in the lack of attention of previous studies to the spiritual-ecological dimension and how this tradition continues to function as a collective mechanism in facing ecological crises and social change. To answer this, this study uses Ecospirituality Theory (Berry, 2009), Cultural Sustainability Theory (Soini, Katriina, 2016), Social Cohesion Theory (Fonseca, Xavier, Stephan Lukosch, 2019) and Oral Tradition Theory (Ong, 1982; (Finnegan, 2012) which emphasize that this ritual is an adaptive strategy that unites spirituality, ecology, and cultural identity, while ensuring the inheritance of values through oral traditions across generations.

This research is based on the assumption of the role of traditional communities in maintaining cultural and ecological sustainability through spiritual values and a harmonious relationship with nature. The Sedekah Gunung *Ngasa Gandoang* ritual in the Gandoang community, Salem, is not only inherited as a cultural tradition, but also functions as a mechanism for ecosystem conservation, strengthening social solidarity, and a means of transmitting ancestral values between generations. In this ritual practice, humans and nature are understood as one entity, so that resource utilization is carried out proportionally to maintain balance. Expressions of gratitude in the ritual reflect the community's awareness of maintaining relationships with nature, while emphasizing the importance of sustainable ecospirituality. This tradition demonstrates the integration of spirituality (Ecospirituality) with local wisdom in conservation. Thus, this research confirms that rituals are not merely cultural heritage, but also adaptive strategies for dealing with social change and ecological crises, and make a significant contribution to the development of local and global literature on ecospirituality and cultural sustainability.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Local Ecological Wisdom

Local ecological wisdom reflects the traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous communities in maintaining balance with nature through values passed down across generations. Nature is understood not merely as a resource, but as a living entity with spiritual and social ties to humans in local communities. (Hasriyanti Hasriyanti(1), Fitri Handayani(2), Anugerah Aulia Magfirah Ikhdar (3), 2023) emphasized that *sasi* is a local wisdom-based management model proven effective in balancing community economic needs with the sustainability of marine ecosystems. Similarly, (Haq, Syamsul., Lubis, Sopian., Raqieb, Achmad., & Agustin, 2024) found that *Pasang Rikajang* in the

Kajang community in South Sulawesi contains eco-spiritual values embedded in a strict and sustainable social conservation system. Meanwhile, (Setiawan, Fredy. Nugroho., Nurmansyah, M. Andhy., Nufiarni, Rizki., & Vidyayani, 2024) highlighted the Kasada and Taneh Karo rituals in the Tengger community as cosmological devices directly integrated with the ecological governance of mountains and natural systems.

More than just a conservation practice, local ecological wisdom also serves as a strategic instrument in education, disaster mitigation, and community-based governance. (Febryani, R., Puspitawati, D., & Malau, 2021) demonstrated that developing teaching materials by integrating local mitigation traditions in North Sumatra, such as the tolak bala ritual, mangrove conservation, and sarilala, can strengthen ecological awareness while enhancing mitigation education in the academic realm. Meanwhile, (Lestari, P. A., Lestari, F. D., Abidin, R. Z., Zuliensyah, R. D., Zulfayani, Z., & Suryani, 2025) emphasized that the implementation of the sasi custom in South Papua is not only a conservation mechanism but also an effective ritual tool for fostering community participation in environmental protection. Thus, local ecological wisdom can be understood not merely as a cultural symbol, but as an active value system relevant to contemporary ecological knowledge. This has been shown to play a crucial role in conservation, environmental education, disaster mitigation, and community governance deeply rooted in tradition.

2. Cultural Sustainability

Cultural sustainability is a community's collective effort to maintain and pass on cultural practices, spiritual values, and collective identity amidst the dynamics of changing times. One manifestation of this is seen in the Mount Merapi Alms ritual, which is not only spiritual but also contains ecological and symbolic messages. (Kurniawan, H. C., & Setyawan, 2021) note that ritual elements such as the burnt jadah and tumpeng convey messages prohibiting land burning and tree felling, which also function as disaster mitigation and conservation strategies based on local wisdom. Furthermore, (Gumilang, J. S., Haryono, A., & Budiati, 2016) emphasize the central role of traditional leaders as guardians of the continuity of traditions. They not only organize processions and lead prayers but also ensure the continuity of spiritual and ecological values for communities on the slopes of Mount Merapi.

The Mount Merapi Alms Ritual serves as a means of transmitting cultural values through symbols and language. (Makrifah, S., & Fateah, 2019) ethnolinguistic study found that terms, such as teh kidungan (tea kidungan) in offerings, serve as a medium for preserving cultural identity, both verbally and symbolically. Meanwhile, (Fuaddah, 2022) emphasized that ritual communication, which includes verbal (mantras, kidung) and nonverbal (procession and arrangement of offerings) elements, strengthens social solidarity among the people on the slopes of Mount Merapi while establishing a strong collective identity. These findings align with (Nurrianti, 2023) assertion that cultural sustainability depends not only on monumental artifacts but also on real cross-generational involvement in the ritual space and community social life. Thus, cultural sustainability in this ritual rests on active participation, intergenerational communication, and the integration of spiritual, social, and ecological values.

3. Mountain Alms Ritual

The mountain alms ritual plays a complex role, not only as a spiritual practice but also as a socio-ecological system rooted in the local wisdom of mountain communities. (Oktavia, M. A., Nabila, N.,

Novelly, C., Zahra, H. A., Sofyan, M. R., & Khumairoh, 2023) showed that mountain alms in Lencoh Village, Merapi, serves a dual function: as an expression of gratitude to God and as a tradition-based disaster mitigation strategy. The community strengthens food security through the cultivation of local crops, such as ganyong and cassava, and utilizes the principle of *memayu hayuning bawana* as an ecological ethic that emphasizes harmony between humans and nature. Furthermore, (Wuryandari, W., & Rahardi, 2020) emphasized that the chants in the mountain alms procession are not merely ritual songs, but rather a medium that strengthens social and spiritual functions. Through symbolic language and collective rituals, the chants convey religious messages, values of mutual cooperation, and ecological awareness that are passed down across generations. Thus, mountain alms form an ecosystem of values that transcends rituals, becoming both an ecological conservation practice and a community-based cultural defense system.

Mountain almsgiving also serves as an important space for strengthening social cohesion and community cultural identity. Research by (Saputra et al., 2021) in Pelangas Village, West Bangka, shows that women play a central role in this ritual, from preparing offerings, participating in traditional dances and songs, and preserving the community's collective memory. Women's active involvement confirms that mountain almsgiving is not only spiritually valuable but also serves as a medium for dividing social roles across genders. Furthermore, (Wuryandari, W., & Rahardi, 2020) emphasize that the values in the ritual chants convey messages of environmental sustainability through communicative artistic expression. Thus, mountain almsgiving can be understood as a dynamic cultural practice, uniting spiritual, ecological, and social dimensions in a space of negotiation between tradition and modernity.

C. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative ethnographic approach as the primary methodological framework to explore the meaning and practices of the *Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang* ritual in Salem, Central Java. This approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of the community's lived experiences, particularly in spiritual and ecological relationships that cannot be measured solely with quantitative data. Through direct engagement with the community, ethnography provides a space for researchers to understand the symbolism and cultural practices that reflect the community's ecospiritual values. The analysis of this study is supported by Ecospirituality Theory (Berry, 2009), Cultural Sustainability Theory (Soini, Katriina, 2016), Social Cohesion Theory (Fonseca, Xavier, Stephan Lukosch, 2019), and Oral Tradition Theory (Ong, 1982; (Finnegan, 2012), which are collectively used to interpret the meaning, function, oral transmission process, and sustainability of the ritual.

This research was conducted in Gandoang Village, Salem District, Central Java, located on the slopes of Mount Sagara. Geographically and culturally, this area represents a cultural landscape that combines ancient Javanese Hindu heritage with Islamic traditions resulting from centuries of acculturation. The local community still maintains the mountain alms ritual as a form of respect for ancestors, the earth, and the natural cycle, which is interpreted as a spiritual bond between humans and cosmic forces. The presence of megalithic remains, such as statues and standing stones, demonstrates the continuity of traditions from prehistoric times to the present. With these characteristics, Gandoang Village is a strategic location for researching the reproduction of ecological harmony, social cohesion, and the sustainability of cultural identity through ritual, in accordance with the theoretical framework used.

The research data was obtained through preliminary and primary observations during the mountain alms ceremony on January 29, 2025. The researchers used participatory observation techniques by directly participating in the entire ritual, from the recitation of interfaith prayers to the communal meal. Observations were conducted at several key points, such as the Mount Sagara hiking trail, Pancuran Lima, Gedong Jimat, Saung, and the Batara Guru burial site. The documentation process included photographs, videos, and field notes to capture the performative, emotional, and symbolic dimensions of the ritual. The analysis was then guided by the framework of Ecospirituality Theory, which views this practice as an expression of the ecological spiritual relationship between humans, nature, and the cosmos. Meanwhile, the theory of oral tradition was used to examine the role of prayers, mantras, and oral narratives as a means of transmitting values and collective memory within the ritual context.

Research informants were divided into two categories: key informants and supporting informants. Key informants included traditional leaders, caretakers, religious figures (ustaz or local kyai), and village elders who possessed a deep understanding of the spiritual values and history of rituals. Supporting informants included village youth, mothers' groups, school teachers, and village government officials involved in the implementation and preservation of local traditions. Informants were selected purposively, using criteria of a minimum age of 35 years for key informants and at least five years of experience. Furthermore, a snowball technique was applied to reach informants with tacit knowledge. The participation of these diverse categories of informants is crucial to understanding how rituals function as a means of social cohesion,

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, allowing researchers flexibility to explore key themes, such as the spiritual meaning of nature, changing values in rituals, community perceptions of the environment, and the influence of globalization. To maintain data validity, source and method triangulation was used through village archives, religious manuscripts, and observations of cultural artifacts, such as statues, offerings, and ritual symbols. Prayers during the procession were audiovisually recorded to enrich symbolic analysis and support the digital preservation of oral traditions. Within the framework of Cultural Sustainability Theory, this data is used to explore the mechanisms of cultural value inheritance, the transformation of practices, and strategies for ritual sustainability. Meanwhile, Oral Tradition Theory provides a unique perspective for analyzing the dynamics of oral transmission, text variation, and the process of collective memory formation.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic method through three stages: restatement, description, and interpretation. The first stage reorganized the results of interviews and observations into a chronological narrative to establish context. The second stage detailed the structure of the event, actors, symbols, and spiritual meanings within the ritual. The third stage interpreted the relationship of the ritual to community strategies in maintaining ecological wisdom, social solidarity, and cultural identity. This process was analyzed by combining several theories: Ecospirituality Theory highlights the sacred relationship between humans and nature; Cultural Sustainability Theory emphasizes the continuity of values and culture; Social Cohesion Theory examines the role of ritual in strengthening solidarity; and Oral Tradition Theory emphasizes the importance of oral transmission, textual variation, and collective memory for the continuity of the ritual. These four frameworks complement each other to understand the complexity of Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang as a whole.



D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION







To understand the complexity of meaning in the Ngasa Gandoang Mountain Alms Tradition, a thematic analysis of the cultural practices surrounding it is necessary. The following table was compiled through a participatory ethnographic approach that documents the forms of practice, symbolism, and ecological, spiritual, social, and preservation strategy dimensions as implemented by the Gandoang community in Salem. Each aspect not only displays the ritual form but also reflects the depth of meaning and patterns of intergenerational inheritance. Direct quotations from traditional practitioners, community leaders, women, and the younger generation also provide an authentic nuance to the dynamics of cultural inheritance. Thus, this table serves not only as documentation but also as a thematic map that emphasizes mountain alms as a local value system integrated with the environment, spirituality, and cultural identity.






1. Ecospiritual Values in the Ngasa Gandoang Mountain Alms Ritual



The eco-spiritual value of this ritual is evident in the sacred relationship between humans, nature, and ancestral spirits, which is maintained at every stage of the procession. Mountains and forests are understood not only as sources of livelihood but also as sacred spaces where ancestors reside, honored through communal offerings and prayers. The selection of offerings from local natural resources, such as corn, tubers, and leaves, is carried out with full ecological awareness and gratitude, reflecting respect for the sustainability of natural resources. Furthermore, the mutual cooperation in ritual preparation strengthens social solidarity while emphasizing a collective spiritual ethic in maintaining ecological balance. Thus, mountain almsgiving is understood not only as a traditional form of worship but also as a value system that integrates spirituality with local environmental sustainability.

Table 1. Ecospiritual Values in the Ngasa Gandoang Mountain Alms Ritual

Number	Informant Code	Interview Questions	Practice Description	The Meaning of Spirituality	
1	Republic of Indonesia	What is the meaning of the mountain for the people in this ritual?	Mountains are believed to be the abode of ancestral spirits and the source of life.	Awareness of a higher existence and respect for ancestors.	 <p>Photo 1: on the slopes of Mount Sagara</p>
2	R2	Why should we bring agricultural products during the ritual?	Bringing produce from the land as an expression of gratitude for nature's blessings.	An ecological expression of gratitude that reflects the harmonious relationship between humans,	 <p>Photo 2: Corn rice, vegetables, sticky rice, and fruit</p>

				nature, and the Creator.	
3	R3	How is the relationship between humans and nature in this tradition?	Nature is seen as an older sibling, not just an object of exploitation.	A holistic view of nature as an integral part of humankind.	 <p>Photo 3: Forest on Mount Sagara</p>
4	R4	Why must rituals be performed at certain times?	The ritual is carried out at the beginning of the planting season to ask for blessings.	The relationship between cosmic time and the spiritual dimension in the continuity of life.	 <p>Photo 4: Micen ritual or prayer for safety on Mount Sagara</p>
5	R5	What is the role of prayer in this ritual?	Prayer is a means of communication with God and ancestors.	Spirituality is reflected as a connection between humans and divine power.	 <p>Photo 5: Keys praying for salvation</p>
6	R6	What is the role of water in rituals?	Water is considered sacred and is always included in offerings.	A symbol of purity and a spiritually guarded life.	 <p>Photo 6: Five waterfalls on Mount Sagara</p>
7	R7	Why are children invited to participate in rituals?	So that they learn to appreciate nature from an early age.	Cross-generational spiritual and ecological education.	 <p>Photo 7: The young generation at Pincuran Lima</p>
8	R8	What is the attitude towards animals around the ritual site?	Animals are not disturbed and are considered part of the sacred ecosystem.	Respect for all God's creatures.	 <p>Photo 8: A notice board explains that cutting down trees and killing animals is prohibited.</p>

9	R9	What are the consequences if the ritual is not performed?	Local beliefs say that crop failure or disaster could occur.	Collective spirituality acts as an ecological moral binder.	 <p>Photo 9: One of the caretakers leads the prayer</p>
10	R10	How do I choose the main location for the offering?	The location is determined based on ancestral guidance and the flow of natural energy.	Belief in the harmony of space and spiritual energy.	 <p>Photo 10: Gedong Jimat where the mountain almsgiving ceremony is held</p>
11	R11	How do you feel when you participate in the ritual?	Feel calm, close to nature, and connected to ancestors.	An inner experience that reflects transcendent spirituality.	 <p>Photo 11: The pride of the young generation in following the ritual</p>
12	R12	Has this ritual ever changed form?	Some aspects have been modernized, but the essence remains intact.	Cultural adaptation without losing spiritual meaning.	 <p>Photo 12: How to count participants using torn banana leaves</p>
13	R13	What is the relationship between rituals and forest conservation?	Forests must not be cut down carelessly because they are considered the home of guardian spirits.	Environmental conservation based on spiritual beliefs.	 <p>Photo 13: The caretakers after the Micen ritual or prayer for safety</p>

14	R14	What is the role of elders in maintaining this tradition?	Elders act as guardians of values and conveyors of spiritual meaning to the younger generation.	The spiritual role of elders maintains cultural and ecological continuity.	 <p>Photo 14: Photo of the caretakers performing the ritual</p>
15	R15	How is prayer taught?	Prayers are taught verbally by parents or traditional leaders.	Oral tradition is a means of passing on ecospiritual values.	 <p>Fptp 15: One of the younger generation is praying</p>

Source: Data Processed from In-Depth Interviews, Observations, and Documentation, 2025

Table 1 summarizes the results of interviews with fifteen informants regarding the ecospiritual values of the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang ritual. For the Gandoang people, nature is not viewed simply as a resource, but as a living and sacred spiritual entity. This is reflected in the practice of respecting the mountain as the abode of ancestors, the prohibition on disturbing animals during the ritual, and the prohibition on littering or cutting down trees, which are considered symbols of life and purity. The timing and location of the ritual also follow ancestral guidance and the harmony of natural energies, signifying the close connection between spiritual values and local ecological knowledge. Thus, this tradition functions not only as a cultural heritage but also as a value system that instills ecological awareness through a spiritual dimension.

The spiritual values within this ritual play a crucial role in maintaining cultural continuity and the regeneration of knowledge between generations. The spirituality inherent in this ritual is collective and passed down orally, evident in the involvement of children in the ritual as early education and the role of elders and traditional leaders as guardians of noble values. Belief in the ecological consequences of neglecting the ritual, such as crop failure or disaster, serves as a collective moral reminder of the importance of harmony with nature. Thus, ecospirituality in this tradition is not merely a religious dimension, but also a philosophical foundation for sustainably regulating human relationships with nature, communities, and ancestral heritage.

2. Social Function of the Ngasa Gandoang Mountain Alms Tradition

The Ngasa Gandoang Mountain Almsgiving tradition plays a crucial role in strengthening social cohesion and building a collective identity within the community. The active participation of all community members, from children to elders, serves as a means of transmitting values, norms, and cultural knowledge between generations. The social function of this tradition is also reflected in the practice of mutual cooperation, customary deliberation, and egalitarian role allocation during the preparation and execution of rituals, thereby strengthening solidarity and local social structures. Furthermore, this tradition affirms local wisdom by reinforcing the role of traditional and religious figures as community guides. Thus, the mountain almsgiving is not merely a spiritual ritual, but a

social institution that maintains the continuity of cultural values while strengthening a sense of ownership of ancestral heritage.

Table 2. Social Function of the Ngasa Gandoang Mountain Alms Tradition

Number	Informant Code	Interview Questions	Informant's Answer	Social Function
1	R16	What is the meaning of the mountain alms tradition for the Gandoang people?	Mountain almsgiving is seen as a way to bind people together; without this tradition, communities tend to become more isolated and less interactive.	Strengthening solidarity and a sense of togetherness in the community.
2	R17	What is the role of the younger generation in this mountain charity activity?	The younger generation is involved from preparation to implementation, including cooking and bringing offerings, so that they understand the importance of this tradition for the village.	Passing on cultural values and identity between generations.
3	R18	Is there a special value or symbol in the mountain alms that represents the village identity?	Residents wear white clothes and carry local produce as a symbol of preserving ancestral heritage.	Symbolic representation of local cultural identity.
4	R19	Why do people still preserve this tradition even though we live in modern times?	This tradition is not merely a custom, but also maintains the relationship between residents and nature. Losing tradition means losing the community's identity.	The mechanism for maintaining the identity and character of the community against changing times.
5	R20	How do you feel when you participate in the annual mountain charity?	Participating in rituals creates a sense of pride and awareness as part of the village's history.	Internalization of collective identity and community pride.
6	R21	Does this activity bring together people of all ages and social statuses?	All residents are involved, from children to the elderly, rich and poor, sitting and eating together.	Removing social barriers and strengthening equality within the community.

7	R22	How is this tradition related to people's beliefs today?	Even though the majority are Muslim, the ritual is still carried out because it is considered part of the tradition that does not conflict with religion.	Negotiation between religious identity and ancestral culture.
8	R23	Does this tradition help strengthen relationships between residents who have migrated?	Many migrants return to their hometowns to participate in rituals to stay connected with their communities and hometowns.	Strengthening the emotional and geographical ties of migrant communities with their villages of origin.
9	R24	Do you feel different from other villages because of this tradition?	Villages have characteristics that distinguish them from other villages, giving them a strong sense of identity.	Differentiation of collective identity between local communities.
10	R25	In your opinion, if this tradition disappears, what will be lost in society?	Losing tradition means losing the spirit of mutual cooperation and concern among citizens.	Tradition as a social bond and maintainer of mutual cooperation values in the community.
11	R26	How are women involved in this tradition?	Women play an active role, from preparing food to welcoming guests, demonstrating their important role in tradition.	Empowerment of women in the local cultural sphere.
12	R27	Do you feel this tradition strengthens family bonds?	All family members gather, working together from morning to night, an activity that rarely happens on normal days.	Strengthening family ties through collective participation.
13	R28	What is the relationship between this tradition and the surrounding environment?	Residents clean the path to the mountain and water sources before the event, following ancestral teachings to protect nature.	Environmental conservation based on local traditions.

14	R29	Does this tradition bring pride to be introduced outside the village?	Residents are proud to tell their friends in town about this tradition, who even come to witness it firsthand.	Building a positive image of the community at the external level.
15	R30	Is this tradition just a ritual or are there life values to be learned?	Tradition is not only a ceremony, but teaches cooperation, respect for nature, ancestors, and helping each other.	Instilling life values within a local cultural framework.

Source: Data Processed from In-Depth Interviews, Observations, and Documentation, 2025

Table 2 reveals that the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang tradition has a crucial social function for the community. This tradition strengthens community solidarity through community togetherness, both across ages and by involving the younger generation in every stage of the ritual, so that the inheritance of cultural values and identity can continue sustainably. Symbolic aspects are also evident, for example through the use of white clothing and offerings of local produce, which emphasize the community's commitment to preserving ancestral heritage while distinguishing their village identity from other communities. Furthermore, this tradition serves as a mechanism for maintaining community identity amidst changing times, strengthening pride, internalizing collective identity, and maintaining emotional and geographical ties between migrants and their hometown.

Furthermore, mountain almsgiving serves to build social equality and strengthen family ties through collective participation that transcends barriers of age and social status. Women's involvement, from preparing food to welcoming guests, demonstrates their role in empowering local culture. The connection between tradition and the environment is also evident in practices of preserving nature, such as cleaning roads and water sources before events, which integrate ecological preservation into the ritual. Furthermore, this tradition instills life values, including cooperation, respect for nature and ancestors, and mutual assistance, while simultaneously building a positive image of the community externally. Thus, mountain almsgiving is not merely a ritual, but also a social institution that maintains cultural sustainability, identity, and harmony among residents.

3. The Mechanism for the Sustainability of the Ngasa Gandoang Mountain Alms Tradition

The sustainability of the Ngasa Gandoang Mountain Alms tradition is maintained through the intergenerational transmission of cultural values, collective community participation, and selective adaptation to social change. This tradition remains alive thanks to the active role of traditional elders and religious figures who connect spiritual values with community social norms. The involvement of the younger generation in every stage of the ritual, from the preparation of offerings to the main procession, creates an effective informal learning space for understanding the philosophy, ecological values, and spirituality contained within. Furthermore, the community makes adjustments to the contemporary context, such as simplifying the offerings, without diminishing their symbolic meaning, so that the tradition remains relevant to current socio-economic conditions. Thus, the sustainability of the mountain alms is not simply following custom, but is driven by a collective awareness of the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans, ancestors, and nature, which is at the core of the Gandoang community's cultural identity.

Table 3. Mechanism for the Sustainability of the Ngasa Gandoang Mountain Alms Tradition

Number	Informant (Code)	Key Questions	Answer Summary	Sustainability Mechanism	Challenge
1	R31 Traditional Leader (65)	How does the tradition maintain the sustainability of mountain alms?	Annual meetings are held to prepare for the ritual, as well as to involve children and grandchildren from an early age so that they become accustomed to it.	Inheritance through customary deliberation and cross-generational participation.	Lack of written documentation.
2	R32 Religious Leaders (54)	What is the position of religion in this tradition?	As an ustaz, I allow rituals as long as the intention is gratitude; Islamic prayers are usually recited before the event.	Integration of Islamic spiritual values into rituals.	Rejection from groups who consider the ritual to be heretical.
3	R33 Village Elder (78)	Are there still young people actively involved?	Previously there were many, now only a few truly understand the meaning of rituals.	The involvement of the older generation as a reminder of values.	Weakening of the regeneration of cultural values.
4	R34 Hamlet Head (51)	What steps is the village taking to preserve this tradition?	The village helps allocate funds for activities and invites young people through youth organizations.	Village structure support and youth involvement.	Competition with modern activities in the village.
5	R35 Local Elementary School Teachers (38)	Are ritual values taught in schools?	Ritual values are embedded in local content, folk tales, and social ethics.	Integration of cultural values into formal education.	Lack of attention from the Department of Education.
6	R36 Chairman of the Youth Organization (27)	Are young people interested in joining?	By creating YouTube content and documentation, young people become more interested.	Adapting digital media to attract the younger generation.	Lack of training and facilities.

7	R37 Mother Making Offerings (62)	How do you teach me how to make corn rice?	Invite your grandchildren to help pick leaves, peel coconuts, while explaining their meaning.	Transmission of skills through household practices.	Dependence on the older generation.
8	R38 Environmental Activist (30)	Is there any connection between this ritual and nature conservation?	Following the ritual, residents are invited to plant trees; this program has been running since 2020.	Integration of ecological conservation into traditions.	Lack of funding and volunteers.
9	R39 Local Artists (45)	How do you express tradition in art?	Creating murals and paintings from symbols of offerings and mountains.	Visualization of cultural values in contemporary art.	Criticized as less 'sacred' by conservative citizens.
10	R40 Students from Village (23)	How do you document rituals?	Making short films and vlogs; I used to be indifferent, now I care more.	Youth-based audio-visual documentation.	Limited access to promotion and distribution.
11	R41 Village Officials (49)	Does the village government support this tradition?	Currently applying for recognition as cultural heritage at the district level.	Formal advocacy to the cultural service.	Slow response from local government.
12	R42 Female Figures (58)	What is the role of women in this tradition?	Women prepare ingredients, cook, keep the location clean, and tell traditions to their children and grandchildren, although this is rarely mentioned.	The role of women in community logistics and morals.	Lack of formal recognition.
13	R43 Key Keeper (66)	What is the spiritual meaning of this ritual?	This ritual is no ordinary event; the mountains are ancestors, and the ancestral spirits are present and waiting.	Local spirituality as the foundation of ecospirituality.	Oppressed by the rationality of formal religion.
14	R44 Teenagers (18)	What do you think about this ritual?	I used to be bored, but after participating in creating content and talking with	Increasing the interest of the younger generation through social	Lack of in-depth knowledge.

			elders, I became more interested.	media and vlogs.	
15	R45 Youth Leaders from Outlying Regions (35)	What is the role of migrant workers?	The diaspora community arranges holidays so they can return home to participate in rituals.	Mobilization of the diaspora for regular participation.	Time and economic constraints.

Source: Data Processed from In-Depth Interviews, Observations, and Documentation, 2025

Table 3 shows that the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang tradition is imbued with ecospiritual meaning at every stage of the ritual. Spiritual values are reflected in the community's belief in ancestral spirits and the power of nature, which must be honored through offerings of agricultural produce. For example, informants from among the traditional elders emphasized that the selection of the offering location on the slopes of Mount Sagara was not simply a geographical consideration, but a symbol of closeness to the supernatural world and respect for nature as a medium of spiritual communication. This emphasizes that local ecospirituality cannot be separated from traditional procedures and attitudes toward the environment. Thus, Sedekah Gunung is not simply an annual ritual, but rather a collective mechanism for maintaining a sacred relationship between humans and nature.

Furthermore, ecospiritual meanings are passed down through oral narratives and the younger generation's involvement in rituals. Several young informants stated that despite being exposed to modern values, they still follow and respect traditions because they understand the ecological philosophy behind them. This is evident in their involvement in preparing meals based on local produce, which is seen as both a form of gratitude and ecological responsibility. This demonstrates that ecospirituality not only reflects traditional beliefs but also serves as a practice of ecological education across generations. Thus, this tradition serves as a regenerative space for the formation of cultural identity and environmental awareness among the Gandoang community.

Research findings show that the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang ritual in Salem, Central Java, is an ancestral heritage that functions as an eco-spiritual mechanism and strengthens cultural identity. This tradition maintains the balance of relationships between humans, nature, and ancestors, and strengthens solidarity through mutual cooperation across generations. Its sustainability is supported by customary deliberation, the integration of Islamic values, the role of education, and the support of digital media. In line with (Hervansyah, G. H., Purwanto, E., Pratama, R. P., Saputra, N. B., & Rifai, 2022), digitalization not only functions as a means of documentation but also opens up space for creative collaboration between local communities and global audiences. Similarly, (Zahrani, I. P., Purwanto, E., Ardiyanti, N., Lusiyanti, S., & Riani, 2025) emphasized that digital-based visual campaigns can strengthen local culture amidst the currents of globalization. Within the framework of Cultural Sustainability Theory (Soini, Katriina, 2016), digitalization in Gandoang village is understood as a cultural sustainability strategy that keeps local values alive and relevant in a global context.

Digitalization is currently a crucial cultural strategy for maintaining the sustainability of traditions. Digital media not only serves as a means of preservation but also opens up space for creative collaboration between local communities and global audiences (Hervansyah, G. H., Purwanto, E.,

Pratama, R. P., Saputra, N. B., & Rifai, 2022). Through visual campaigns and creative communication, digital platforms strengthen the position of local culture amidst the currents of globalization (Zahrani, I. P., Purwanto, E., Ardiyanti, N., Lusiyanti, S., & Riani, 2025), as reflected in the village of Gandoang, which utilizes social media to enrich cultural narratives. Within the framework of Cultural Sustainability Theory (Soini, Katriina, 2016), the continuity of tradition depends on the community's ability to adapt creatively so that local values remain alive and relevant globally. However, digitalization only acts as a new medium, while spirituality, solidarity, and collective identity remain the primary foundations that ensure the sustainability of traditions.

4. Comparison

The Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang ritual demonstrates significant differences compared to previous studies, which tended to view mountain alms solely as a ceremonial symbol, without emphasizing the regeneration of values or the use of technology. Many previous studies also failed to capture the dynamics of intergenerational inheritance and did not view tradition as an adaptive social system (Kurniawan, H. C., & Setyawan, 2021). From the perspective of Social Cohesion Theory (Fonseca, Xavier, Stephan Lukosch, 2019), this tradition serves to strengthen solidarity, clarify social roles across generations, and create a space for togetherness. This social cohesion is what enables the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang ritual to survive amidst modernization and globalization, while simultaneously maintaining the community's ecological, spiritual, and social identity. Thus, the sustainability of tradition is supported not only by ritual practice but also by the community's adaptive capacity to respond to changing times.

Contemporary research has highlighted the role of digitalization in cultural preservation efforts. (Dwihantoro, P., Susanti, D., Sukmasetya, P., & Faizah, 2023) discuss the digitalization of Njanen art through social media, while (Hervansyah, G. H., Purwanto, E., Pratama, R. P., Saputra, N. B., & Rifai, 2022) emphasize both the creative opportunities and the risks of commodification that arise from this practice. In contrast to these studies, the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang ritual is understood as a socio-ecological system that adapts to the digital era. This ritual not only strengthens social cohesion but also ensures the transmission of values across generations. Within the framework of Oral Tradition Theory (Ong, 1982; Finnegan, 2012), the strength of tradition lies in the transmission of values through oral communication, while digitalization serves to expand its reach without erasing its orality. Thus, the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang oral tradition remains alive and relevant despite the transformation of its medium.

5. Reflection

The shrinking space for communal interaction in the modern era reaffirms the importance of local spirituality as the basis for ecological and social ethics. Traditions rooted in communities have proven more resilient in the face of cultural homogenization and environmental crises. (Holilah, 2016) study of the Cigugur indigenous community shows that the Tri Tangtu concept in Buana serves as a guideline for maintaining a balanced living space. In Gandoang, similar values are reflected in the prohibition on the exploitation of natural resources and the interpretation of mountains as sacred elements. This demonstrates that local spirituality is not only inherited as tradition but also serves as a source of community-based ecological ethics. Within the framework of Ecospirituality Theory (Berry, 2009), the Ngasa Gandoang ritual can be understood as an ecospiritual expression that fosters a sacred awareness of nature. This awareness plays a crucial role in maintaining harmony between

humans and the cosmos while strengthening community resilience in the face of environmental crises.

Digital transformation demonstrates the ability of traditions to adapt without losing their core essence. Social media has now become a space for the younger generation to actively participate in the process of cultural inheritance. (Amalia, R., Shifa, L. N., & Fadilah, 2025) emphasized that digital creativity can strengthen the younger generation's attachment to traditional values. In Gandoang village, youth participation in producing content for the mountain alms ritual via YouTube and Instagram serves as a strategy for value regeneration as well as a means of cultural promotion. This aligns with Cultural Sustainability Theory (Soini, Katriina, 2016), which views digitalization not only as a means of documentation but also as a space for value negotiation to maintain the continuity of oral traditions and rituals. Thus, Gandoang village serves as a concrete example of how traditions can survive through the synergy between local spiritual roots and digital media innovation.

6. Interpretation

The sustainability of the Ngasa Gandoang Mountain Charity is supported by collaboration between traditional institutions and the younger generation. Traditional institutions provide legitimacy and direction, while youth bring innovation and regeneration. (Muzakkir Walad, M., Zulfikar, A., Sari, R., & Rahmawati, 2025) show that integrating local wisdom into education can build collective awareness and strengthen cultural identity. This collaborative community strategy ensures the survival of traditions through harmony between ancestral values and the younger generation's adaptation to changing times. In line with Social Cohesion Theory (Fonseca, Xavier, Stephan Lukosch, 2019), social cohesion is the foundation of traditional sustainability. The mountain charity ritual plays a role in strengthening solidarity, clarifying social roles, and maintaining intergenerational connections. With solid social cohesion, traditions are not only maintained but also continue to develop within the collective space of society.

The failure to preserve traditions often occurs when there is no room for negotiation regarding their form and meaning, leaving the younger generation feeling alienated. (Soselisa, P., Laitupa, F., & Pical, 2024) emphasizes that customary governance, such as sasi law, has proven effective in maintaining sustainability. Meanwhile, (Judge, Z., & Nurizka, 2024) highlight the importance of integrating traditional values into daily practices. Thus, the sustainability of traditions depends heavily on the community's adaptive strategies in adapting cultural heritage to the modern context while simultaneously engaging the younger generation. From the perspective of Oral Tradition Theory (Ong, 1982; Finnegan, 2012), the vitality of tradition lies in its oral transmission through prayer, symbols, and ritual narratives. Digital media acts as an extension of orality, expanding the audience reach without diminishing the authority of tradition. In this way, orality remains central, even as the medium of delivery continues to transform.

7. Action Plan

This study recommends integrating local wisdom into education not merely as a complement, but as a foundation for character building that strengthens cultural identity and fosters spiritual ecological awareness. The findings of (Miskiyyah, S. Z., Puspita, P. I., Dewi, T. B. T., Mu'izzah, R., Febriyanti, A. A., 2025) and (Chotimah, U., Alfiandra, A., El Faisal, E., Sulkipani, S., Camelia, C., & Arpanudin, 2023) demonstrate that local wisdom can strengthen social cohesion, encourage tolerance, and increase the relevance of teaching materials. From the perspective of Ecospirituality

Theory (Berry, 2009), local wisdom is understood as a strategic pathway for instilling ecological ethics as well as collective responsibility for nature. Therefore, the integration of local wisdom into the curriculum should be directed towards a reflective approach that unites education, spirituality, and ecological sustainability. Implementation can be done through the development of teaching materials based on local traditions, the involvement of traditional leaders in school activities, and the use of digital media to strengthen the inheritance of cultural values. With this approach, local wisdom-based education functions as spiritual ecological character education that not only maintains cultural sustainability but also fosters collective awareness of environmental responsibility.

Furthermore, (Trisfayani et al., 2024) demonstrated that traditional Batak geometry can be utilized as an effective medium for mathematics learning, while (Andriani, Y., & Effendy, 2024) emphasized the importance of local wisdom in creating inclusive learning spaces. This thinking aligns with Cultural Sustainability Theory (Soini, Katriina, 2016), Social Cohesion Theory (Fonseca, Xavier, Stephan Lukosch, 2019), and Oral Tradition Theory (Ong, 1982; Finnegan, 2012), which emphasize the need for the regeneration of cultural values, strengthening social cohesion, and preserving oral traditions through direct practice and the use of digital media. Therefore, the integration of local wisdom in education needs to be directed towards inclusive and sustainable thematic learning. Its implementation can be realized through cross-subject projects, culture-based extracurricular programs, and collaboration between schools and local communities. With this approach, education no longer functions merely as a transfer of knowledge, but rather becomes a means of preserving cultural identity across generations. The end result is education that is more contextual, adaptive, and in tune with the socio-cultural dynamics of society.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on research findings, the Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang ritual in Salem, Central Java, is an ancestral heritage that serves as an eco-spiritual mechanism and strengthens cultural identity. This tradition maintains a balance between humans, nature, and ancestors, and strengthens social solidarity through intergenerational mutual cooperation. The ritual's sustainability is supported by customary deliberations, the integration of Islamic values, education, and the use of digital media, although it still faces challenges related to regeneration, limited resources, and minimal institutional support. Therefore, collaboration between the village government, the cultural office, and the local community is crucial to strengthening the tradition's continuity.

The continuation of this tradition offers dual benefits. In addition to embodying the community's cultural identity, this ritual serves as an eco-spiritual instrument for preserving the environment. As a means of transmitting values, Sedekah Gunung Ngasa Gandoang also has the potential to be developed into a local wisdom-based tourism destination that can boost the village economy and expand cultural recognition at the regional and national levels.

This research confirms that this tradition has strategic potential. On the one hand, the ritual strengthens social cohesion as a cultural identity; on the other, it serves as an eco-spiritual practice that supports environmental conservation. Its development is directed not only at cultural preservation but also at the development of sustainable tourism based on local wisdom. Inclusive revitalization—involving the younger generation, women, the diaspora, and local creative actors—is key to maintaining the tradition's relevance amidst the dynamics of changing times.

However, this research has limitations because it focused on only one local community. Future studies are recommended to use a comparative approach to similar traditions in other regions and involve more diverse data sources. This approach is expected to enrich academic perspectives on tradition preservation and cultural identity negotiation, while also encouraging village governments and cultural agencies to provide more concrete support for the sustainability of traditions.

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