International Conference on Sustainable Tourism and Entrepreneurship

Vol. 01 No.01 August 2026, ISSN: 3163-2912

Keris Values in Sustainable Heritage Tourism: Cultural Communication and Legal Governance

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the ways in which cultural heritage is produced, represented, and interpreted in the public sphere. The keris, recognized as an intangible cultural heritage of Indonesia, embodies philosophical values that have historically been transmitted through community-based communication practices. However, within the contexts of tourism and digitalization, these meanings are increasingly transformed under the logic of mediatisation and cultural commodification. This study aims to analyze the dissemination of the philosophical values of the keris within sustainable heritage-based tourism, with a particular focus on cultural communication and legal governance. This research employs a qualitative approach using a communication ethnography design. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of both local practices and digital representations across multiple communication contexts. The findings indicate that within local communities, the philosophical meanings of the keris remain relatively stable due to the presence of symbolic authority and traditional communication structures. In contrast, within tourism and digital environments, these meanings become more fluid and tend to undergo simplification to meet market and media demands. Furthermore the study reveals that legal governance has not been fully effective in regulating the commodification of cultural heritage, particularly in digital and tourism contexts. This gap creates challenges in maintaining the authenticity and depth of cultural meanings. The study concludes that the integration of cultural communication and legal governance is essential to ensure the sustainability of the keris's philosophical values within heritage-based tourism development.

Keywords: *Keris, cultural communication, heritage-based tourism, sustainable tourism, legal governance, cultural mediatisation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has brought significant changes in the ways culture is produced, represented, and distributed in the public sphere. In empirical reality, cultural heritage is no longer confined to traditional spaces, but has expanded into digital spaces and the tourism industry. This shift has generated new dynamics in the process of cultural meaning-making, in which symbolic values are often simplified due to the logic of media visibility and market commodification [9]. As a result, culture is no longer understood solely as a system of deep meaning, but also as an object of consumption constructed to meet the demands of the tourism market.

This phenomenon is also evident in the keris as one of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritages. In practice, the keris is not only produced as a cultural artifact, but is also represented across various digital platforms and tourism activities as a symbol of identity and economic attraction. The keris functions as a medium of symbolic communication that conveys philosophical values through its form, ornaments, and the social practices associated with it [1]. However, in the modern context, these meanings tend to shift and become more superficial and fragmented as a result of mediatization and commodification processes [2], [7].

On the other hand, from a normative perspective, cultural heritage such as the keris should be preserved as a system of values reflecting the identity, ethics, and local wisdom of society. Cultural preservation is not only intended to safeguard its physical form, but also to maintain the depth of the philosophical meanings embedded within it. In the context of sustainable tourism,

the development of cultural heritage should ideally balance economic interests with the authentic preservation of cultural values. This normative framework is grounded in Law Number 5 of 2017 on Cultural Advancement and Law Number 10 of 2009 on Tourism, as most recently amended by Law Number 18 of 2025. These two regulations affirm that the utilization of culture within the tourism sector must remain oriented toward the protection, development, and sustainability of culture.

The local context is important for examining the tension between das sein and das sollen, particularly in Banyusumurup Village. As a center of keris craftsmanship, this village serves as a social space in which cultural values are produced and distributed through the practices of artisan communities [13]. In addition, the presence of local wisdom in the Imogiri area further strengthens cultural preservation efforts through the integration of tradition and tourism activities [8]. However, the entry of tourism industry logic and digitalization also has the potential to shift the orientation of cultural production from symbolic value toward economic value.

Although various studies have discussed the keris as a medium of symbolic communication [1], strategies of cultural preservation [2], cultural identity [5], and the role of heritage-based tourism [7], these studies still tend to be partial in nature. Existing research has not yet comprehensively integrated the dimensions of cultural communication, the dissemination of philosophical values, and legal governance into a single, coherent analytical framework. Furthermore, there remains limited research specifically examining how the philosophical values of the keris are negotiated within the context of digitized tourism and how regulation plays a role in maintaining the sustainability of these cultural meanings. This condition indicates the existence of a research gap in understanding the mechanisms through which cultural values are disseminated amid the interaction between local communities, digital media, and the structures of sustainable tourism [11].

Based on this gap, this study offers novelty through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates cultural communication and legal governance in analyzing the dissemination of the philosophical values of the keris. The novelty of this research lies in three main aspects. First, this study positions the keris as an active medium of communication in the process of meaning production and distribution, rather than merely as a cultural artifact. Second, this study places heritage-based tourism as a strategic arena for the dissemination of philosophical values, thereby enabling an analysis of the relationship between cultural preservation and commodification. Third, this study connects this process with the dimension of legal governance as a normative mechanism functioning to maintain a balance between economic interests and the sustainability of cultural values.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the dissemination of the philosophical values of the keris within the context of sustainable heritage-based tourism, with a focus on cultural communication practices and the role of legal governance. This research is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to the development of cultural communication studies, as well as a practical contribution to the formulation of sustainable cultural preservation strategies, particularly at the local level, such as in Banyusumurup Village.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Keris as a Cultural Symbol and a Medium of Communication

The keris, as one of Indonesia's intangible cultural heritage objects, is not only understood as a material artifact, but also as a symbolic system representing the philosophical, spiritual, and social values of society. From the perspective of cultural communication, the keris functions as a medium for conveying meaning transmitted from generation to generation through the social practices and rituals of the community. Such meaning lies not only in its physical form, but also in the narratives, myths, and social relations that surround it [1].

Research shows that the keris operates as a medium of symbolic communication in Javanese society, particularly within social structures characterized by complex hierarchies of values and cultural meanings [1]. In addition, cultural communication strategies play an important role in sustaining the existence of the keris amid the dynamics of modern social change [2]. This indicates that cultural communication serves as the principal mechanism for maintaining the sustainability of the keris's symbolic meaning.

A hermeneutic approach to the symbolism of the keris also reveals that ornaments such as Singa Barong contain profound philosophical meanings and remain open to cross-cultural interpretation [3]. Accordingly, the keris may be understood as a cultural text that continually undergoes reinterpretation in various social contexts.

2.2. Philosophical Values and Cultural Identity in the Keris

The philosophical values of the keris are closely related to the construction of Javanese cultural identity. The keris functions not only as a symbol of identity, but also as a means of building and maintaining that identity within dynamic social contexts. Ethnolinguistic studies demonstrate that the meaning of the keris is formed through the relationship between language, symbols, and cultural practices [10]. In a broader context, the keris becomes part of the discourse of Javanese identity, which continues to be negotiated amid the currents of globalization [5]. The philosophical values embodied in the keris, such as balance, courage, and wisdom, make it a symbol that is not merely aesthetic, but also normative.

Moreover, the ethical dimension of the keris constitutes an important part of its symbolic meaning. The representation of dragon figures in the keris, for example, contains moral values associated with leadership and wisdom [4]. Meanwhile, the transformation of the keris in the modern context demonstrates a shift from a collective symbol to a component of individual identity as well as an economic asset [6].

2.3. The Dissemination of Keris Values in Heritage-Based Tourism

Within the context of tourism, the keris undergoes a functional transformation from a cultural symbol into part of an economic commodity. Nevertheless, its philosophical value remains an important element in constructing the appeal of heritage-based tourism. The keris can be used as a destination-branding element that emphasizes local cultural identity [7].

In the Imogiri area, particularly in Banyusumurup Village, the keris forms an integral part of community life through production and craft activities. Artisan communities do not merely produce keris as commodities, but also as a medium for preserving cultural values [13]. This demonstrates that the dissemination of keris values in tourism occurs not only through the product itself, but also through social practices and cultural experiences.

In addition, local wisdom in the Imogiri area supports the preservation of cultural heritage through the integration of tradition and tourism activities [8]. Thus, heritage-based tourism becomes an important space for disseminating the philosophical values of the keris to wider society.

2.4. Sustainable Tourism and Cultural Governance

The development of heritage-based tourism requires an approach oriented toward sustainability. The concept of sustainable tourism emphasizes a balance between cultural preservation, economic benefit, and social sustainability. In this context, governance becomes a key factor in ensuring that tourism development does not damage existing cultural values.

Research indicates that sustainable tourism requires a governance framework that integrates cultural, environmental, and economic aspects in a balanced manner [11]. Furthermore, cultural heritage such as the keris can become a national competitive advantage if managed properly [12].

In the local context, the development of culture-based tourist destinations requires the involvement of various actors, including government, communities, and industry stakeholders [14]. This approach makes possible the creation of a tourism model oriented not only toward tourist visits, but also toward the preservation of cultural values.

2.5. Digitalization and the Transformation of Cultural Meaning

The development of digital technology has changed the way culture is produced, represented, and disseminated. In this context, the dissemination of keris values is no longer confined to physical space, but also takes place in a broader digital sphere.

Digital communication enables the wider spread of cultural values, but it also has the potential to simplify cultural meaning into merely visual content [9]. This causes cultural meaning to become more fluid and open to various interpretations.

Therefore, the main challenge in disseminating keris values in the digital era is maintaining a balance between visibility and depth of meaning. Cultural communication becomes an important instrument in ensuring that the philosophical values of the keris are preserved despite transformations in medium and context.

2.6. Legal Governance in the Dissemination of Cultural Heritage

Legal governance constitutes an important dimension in the management of cultural heritage, particularly in the context of sustainable tourism. From a normative perspective, the state has a strategic role in ensuring that the utilization of culture does not eliminate the philosophical values and identity inherent within it. In Indonesia, the legal framework concerning this matter is regulated under Law Number 5 of 2017 on Cultural Advancement, which affirms that culture must be protected, developed, utilized, and fostered in a sustainable manner, as well as Law Number 10 of 2009 on Tourism, which emphasizes the importance of sustainable and culture-based tourism.

In theoretical terms, legal governance is understood not merely as a set of formal regulations, but also as an institutional mechanism governing the relationship between the state, society, and the market in cultural management. This governance includes the aspects of regulation, control, and facilitation of cultural activities within economic and tourism spaces. Studies show that effective governance is capable of creating a balance between cultural preservation and economic utilization [11], [14].

However, the implementation of legal governance in practice often encounters challenges, particularly in the context of digitalization and cultural commodification. The process of cultural mediatization causes state control to become more limited, while market actors and digital platforms play an increasingly dominant role in shaping cultural representation [9], [16]. As a consequence, a gap emerges between legal norms and field practices, in which cultural values tend to be reduced to commodities.

In the context of cultural heritage such as the keris, the weak integration between legal policy and cultural communication practices may lead to the loss of philosophical depth in the dissemination process. Therefore, a legal governance approach is needed that is not only top-down in nature, but also based on the

participation of local communities as the main actors in cultural production and preservation.

Thus, legal governance becomes a key element in ensuring that the dissemination of the philosophical values of the keris in heritage-based tourism is oriented not only toward economic gain, but also toward preserving the sustainability of cultural meaning in an authentic manner.

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a communication ethnography design to understand how the philosophical values of the keris are disseminated within the context of heritage-based tourism. This approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to examine cultural communication practices in depth within their natural social context, including how meanings are constructed, negotiated, and transmitted within the community.

Epistemologically, communication ethnography is rooted in the interpretive paradigm, which views social reality as a construction of meaning generated through symbolic interaction. Therefore, this study does not focus solely on texts or cultural artifacts, but also on communication practices involving actors, contexts, and social structures. In this way, the approach is relevant for analyzing the keris as a medium of symbolic communication in society.

The research was conducted in Banyusumurup Village, which is known as one of the centers of keris craftsmanship in Indonesia. This site was selected on the grounds that Banyusumurup constitutes a social space in which the production, distribution, and preservation of the cultural values of the keris actively take place, while also being connected to local tourism activities.

The research informants were selected purposively. In the fieldwork process, this study positions Mas Momo as the key informant because he holds a dual role as both a cultural actor and a tourism practitioner in Banyusumurup Village. This position enables the informant to explain comprehensively the practices of keris production, the processes of cultural communication, the representation of philosophical values, and their connection to local tourism activities. Accordingly, this study focuses on a single key informant, whose data are deepened through observation, documentation, and tracing digital representations, so that the validity of the data relies more on methodological triangulation than on triangulation across informants.

Data collection was carried out through several methods. First, limited participant observation was used to observe keris production practices, social interactions within the artisan community, and tourism activities related to the keris. The researcher was present as a non-intrusive observer-participant who followed the flow of the informant's activities, asked contextual questions when explanations were given, and recorded the communication situations, communication events, and communication acts that emerged in the field. Second, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore the informant's subjective interpretation of the philosophical values of the keris and how those values are communicated to others. The interview process was dialogic and semi-structured, allowing the informant to explain experiences, narratives, and cultural practices in his own terms. Third, documentation was used to collect data in the form of photographs, field notes, and representations of the keris in digital media related to tourism promotion.

In interacting with the research subject, the researcher first established rapport by explaining the academic purpose of the study and requesting consent to observe and document relevant activities. Interaction took place during observation of keris craftsmanship, conversations about symbolic meanings, and discussions of tourism practices in Banyusumurup. The researcher did not treat the informant merely as a data source, but as a cultural interlocutor who actively clarified the meanings, terms, and practices observed in the field. This interaction allowed the researcher to compare spoken narratives with observed practices and digital representations.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic-interpretive approach. The analytical process began with data reduction, continued with thematic categorization, and ended with the interpretation of meaning based on the socio-cultural context. Within the framework of communication ethnography, the analysis also considered elements of communication such as communication situations, communication events, and communication acts in order to understand how the meaning of the keris is produced and disseminated in various contexts.

To ensure data validity, this study employed methodological triangulation by comparing the key informant's interview data with participant observation, field notes, documentation, and digital representation traces. In addition, the researcher conducted member checking to ensure that the interpretations produced were consistent with the informant's perspective.

Through this approach, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the process of disseminating the philosophical values of the keris in the context of sustainable tourism, while also revealing the dynamics of cultural communication occurring at the local level. This study applies the communication ethnography framework developed by Dell Hymes to analyze the components of communication within cultural practices.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The Keris as a Medium of Symbolic Communication in Local Communities

The findings of this study indicate that, within the community context of Banyusumurup Village, the keris

is not only produced as a craft object but also functions as a medium of symbolic communication that represents the philosophical values of Javanese society. The production process and social interactions among artisans reflect cultural communication practices that continuously transmit values [1]. From the perspective of communication ethnography, this practice forms part of a communication event that produces and reproduces cultural meaning. The meaning of the keris is determined not only by its physical form, but also by the narratives, symbols, and social relations that accompany it. This shows that the keris operates as a living system of meaning within the community.

4.2. The Transformation of the Meaning of the Keris in the Context of Tourism

In the context of tourism, the keris undergoes a transformation from a cultural symbol into an economic commodity. This process is marked by a shift in focus from philosophical value to aesthetic value and visual appeal. The keris is represented as a cultural product that can be easily consumed by tourists, resulting in the simplification of its symbolic meaning [7]. This transformation reflects a process of cultural commodification, in which cultural values are adjusted to market logic. In this context, cultural communication changes its function from a medium of value transmission into a tool of cultural promotion. This condition reinforces the finding that cultural dissemination in tourism is not neutral, but is influenced by economic interests.

4.3. The Dissemination of Values through Cultural Communication and Digital Media

The findings show that cultural communication remains the primary mechanism for disseminating the philosophical values of the keris. However, in the digital era, this process has undergone a significant transformation. Digital media enables the broad dissemination of culture, but it also causes the simplification of meaning due to the demands of visualization and the speed of information [9]. In this context, there is a shift from communication based on depth of meaning toward communication based on visibility. The meaning of the keris becomes more fluid and open to multiple interpretations. This is consistent with the concept of mediatization, in which media not only conveys messages but also shapes cultural reality [16].

4.4. The Gap between Cultural Practice and Legal Governance

One of the main findings of this study is the existence of a gap between the practice of cultural dissemination and the implementation of legal governance. Although there are regulatory frameworks such as Law Number 5 of 2017 on Cultural Advancement and Law Number 10 of 2009 on Tourism, their implementation at the local level remains limited. In Banyusumurup Village, the production and marketing activities of the keris in the context of tourism are not yet fully situated within an integrated regulatory framework. This indicates the presence of a regulatory gap, in which legal norms have not yet been able to effectively control the process of cultural commodification, especially in digital spaces and the creative economy. This condition causes culture to be governed more by market mechanisms than by legal regulation. As a result, the philosophical values of the keris are at risk of being reduced due to the absence of strong normative control.

4.5. The Strategic Role of Legal Governance in Sustainable Tourism

Although the implementation of legal governance remains limited, this study shows that law has strategic potential as an instrument for maintaining cultural sustainability. Legal governance can function as a mechanism to regulate the relationship between cultural preservation and economic interests in tourism.

In the context of sustainable tourism, law functions not only as a regulatory tool but also as an instrument for protecting cultural values from excessive exploitation. Studies show that effective governance must be able to integrate formal regulation with local cultural practices [11], [14].

Therefore, legal governance needs to be developed in an adaptive and participatory manner by involving local communities as the main actors. This approach makes it possible to create a balance between cultural preservation and tourism-based economic development.

4.6. The Integration of Cultural Communication and Legal Governance

Overall, the findings show that the dissemination of the philosophical values of the keris is a complex and multidimensional process. Cultural communication serves as the primary mechanism in the production and distribution of meaning, while legal governance functions as the normative framework that regulates and stabilizes this process.

However, in practice, these two aspects have not yet been fully integrated. Cultural communication develops dynamically within communities and digital media, while legal governance still lags behind in regulating these changes. Therefore, a stronger integration between cultural communication and legal governance is needed to ensure the sustainability of cultural values in the context of tourism and digitalization.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the keris functions not only as a cultural artifact, but also as a medium of symbolic communication that embodies the philosophical values of Javanese society. In the context of Banyusumurup Village, these values are disseminated through cultural communication practices that take place in the interactions among artisan communities, tourism actors, and the wider society.

The findings reveal that the dissemination of the philosophical values of the keris undergoes a transformation when it enters the spheres of tourism and digital media. In traditional settings, the meaning of the keris remains relatively stable and is maintained through community-based communication. By contrast, in modern settings, that meaning becomes more fluid and tends to be simplified as a result of commodification and mediatization processes. This condition reflects a tension between efforts to preserve cultural values and the economic demands of the tourism industry.

This study affirms that cultural communication plays a strategic role in maintaining the sustainability of the philosophical meaning of the keris, while legal governance functions as a normative mechanism for regulating the balance between cultural preservation and utilization. The integration of these two aspects becomes essential for the development of sustainable heritage-based tourism.

Theoretically, this study contributes by integrating the perspectives of cultural communication and legal governance in analyzing the dissemination of cultural values. Practically, this study recommends strengthening cultural communication strategies and adaptive regulations in order to preserve the authenticity and sustainability of the philosophical values of the keris in the context of tourism and digitalization.

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