

From Tradition to Transformation: Community-Based Cultural Practices in Urban Indonesia

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Abstract:

This study examines how cultural practices function as drivers of social transformation in a multicultural urban context. Focusing on Rumah Cinwa, a community-based cultural initiative in Depok, Indonesia, the research explores how traditional art particularly Wayang Potehi is reinterpreted and mobilized to foster inclusive social relations. Using a qualitative field research approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The findings indicate that Rumah Cinwa serves not only as a space for cultural preservation but also as an active platform for social interaction and transformation. Through collaborative performances and community-based activities, the group transforms an ethnic-specific art form into a shared cultural medium that encourages participation across diverse groups. This process reflects cultural hybridity and contributes to social cohesion. Religious moderation emerges as an outcome of sustained intercultural interaction rather than as a primary agenda. This study argues that community-driven cultural practices play a crucial role in shaping inclusive societies in contemporary Indonesia.

Keywords: social transformation; cultural practices; cultural hybridity; community engagement; Indonesia

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana praktik budaya berfungsi sebagai pendorong transformasi sosial dalam masyarakat urban multikultural. Dengan berfokus pada Rumah Cinwa sebagai inisiatif budaya berbasis komunitas di Kota Depok, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana seni tradisional khususnya wayang potehi direinterpretasi untuk membangun relasi sosial yang inklusif. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi lapangan, dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Rumah Cinwa tidak hanya berperan sebagai ruang pelestarian budaya, tetapi juga sebagai medium interaksi sosial yang mendorong partisipasi lintas etnis dan agama. Melalui pertunjukan kolaboratif dan kegiatan komunitas, seni yang semula bersifat etnis-spesifik mengalami transformasi menjadi praktik budaya bersama. Proses ini mencerminkan hibriditas budaya, di mana makna dan identitas terus dinegosiasikan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Lebih lanjut, praktik budaya ini berkontribusi dalam memperkuat kohesi sosial dan identitas

kolektif. Nilai-nilai moderasi beragama muncul secara organik sebagai hasil interaksi sosial. Dengan demikian, praktik budaya berbasis komunitas berperan penting dalam membentuk masyarakat yang inklusif dan adaptif di Indonesia kontemporer.

Kata kunci: transformasi sosial; praktik budaya; hibriditas budaya; komunitas budaya; kohesi sosial; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Urban societies in the contemporary era are increasingly shaped by globalization, mobility, and cultural diversity, which intensify interactions among individuals and groups from different backgrounds. While such diversity creates opportunities for cultural exchange and innovation, it also generates challenges related to identity negotiation, social fragmentation, and the potential for conflict. In multicultural contexts, the ability of societies to manage diversity depends not only on formal institutions but also on everyday social practices that mediate differences. Indonesia, as a plural society with complex cultural and religious compositions, reflects these dynamics, particularly in urban areas such as Depok. In such settings, cultural practices function as important mechanisms for sustaining social cohesion by enabling interaction, dialogue, and shared meaning-making. Previous studies indicate that language and cultural systems have historically played a central role in shaping social integration and intellectual development within Islamic civilization (Elpaz Elsheakh et al., 2025; Sholihin et al., 2025).

However, despite the increasing recognition of cultural practices as mediating forces in diverse societies, there remains a significant gap in understanding how grassroots cultural initiatives operate as agents of social transformation in contemporary urban contexts. Existing studies often emphasize macro-level structures such as state policies, institutional frameworks, or ideological discourses of multiculturalism, while paying less attention to micro-level interactions where social meanings are actively constructed. In particular, there is limited empirical research examining how traditional cultural forms are reinterpreted within community-based settings to respond to present-day social challenges. This gap is especially important in contexts where cultural diversity intersects with religious plurality, requiring more grounded approaches that capture lived experiences rather than abstract formulations (Jawaad Haseeb & Mahmood Riaz Muhammad, 2021; Solihah Haji Yahya Zikri et al., 2024).

To address this gap, this study draws upon several interrelated theoretical perspectives, particularly cultural hybridity, structuration theory, and cultural practices. The concept of cultural hybridity, as proposed by Homi Bhabha, emphasizes the emergence of new cultural forms through the interaction and negotiation of differences, rather than through rigid preservation of fixed identities. Hybridity highlights the “third space” where meanings are continuously redefined, allowing for the coexistence of multiple cultural influences within a shared social context. Complementing this, structuration theory by Anthony Giddens explains how social structures and human agency are mutually constituted through everyday practices. Social transformation, in this view, occurs not only through top-down institutional change but also through repeated social interactions that reshape norms and meanings over time (Giddens, 1984). These perspectives are further supported by historical evidence from Islamic civilization, where cultural exchange and knowledge integration facilitated intellectual and social development across diverse regions (Arwani Agus, 2017; Furoidah, 2020).

Based on this conceptual foundation, this study aims to examine how community-based cultural practices contribute to processes of social transformation in a multicultural urban setting. The research focuses on Rumah Cinwa, a cultural community in Depok that engages in the preservation and reinterpretation of Wayang Potehi. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How are cultural practices within Rumah Cinwa reinterpreted and transformed in contemporary contexts? (2) How do these practices facilitate inclusive interaction across diverse ethnic and religious groups? and (3) How do these interactions contribute to broader processes of social transformation? By addressing these questions, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how cultural practices function as sites of negotiation, interaction, and transformation within everyday social life.

This article contributes to the field of cultural studies and social transformation in several ways. First, it offers an empirical case study that highlights the role of grassroots cultural initiatives as agents of social change in urban multicultural contexts. Second, it advances theoretical discussions on cultural hybridity by demonstrating how traditional art forms can be recontextualized into inclusive cultural practices that transcend ethnic and religious boundaries. Third, by integrating the perspective of structuration theory, this study

shows how social transformation emerges from the interplay between agency and structure within community practices. Finally, the study contributes to broader discussions on social cohesion by illustrating how inclusive values often associated with broader social and religious ethics can emerge organically from sustained cultural interaction. In doing so, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how community-driven cultural engagement can shape adaptive and inclusive societies in contemporary Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural practices are widely recognized as dynamic processes through which societies construct meaning, identity, and social relations. Rather than being static, culture evolves through interaction, negotiation, and adaptation to changing social contexts. In this regard, community-based cultural initiatives play a significant role in facilitating social transformation by creating shared spaces where diverse groups can interact and collaborate.

One important concept in understanding these processes is cultural hybridity, which refers to the blending and negotiation of cultural elements across boundaries. Cultural hybridity emphasizes that identities are not fixed but are continuously reshaped through interaction. Historical developments within Islamic civilization illustrate this process, where intellectual and literary traditions emerged from interactions between Arabic, Persian, and Turkish cultures (Hosoglu Dogan, 2023). Such interactions demonstrate how cultural exchange can lead to new forms of knowledge and expression.

In addition, cultural practices function as mechanisms for transmitting ethical values and fostering social cohesion. Islamic ethical literature, for example, has historically promoted cooperation, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence within diverse societies (Zartman, 2018). These values are often embedded within cultural activities rather than explicitly articulated as formal doctrines. Furthermore, the role of language and cultural exchange in Islamic civilization has facilitated the integration of knowledge across different regions, strengthening intellectual and social networks (Putra et al., 2025).

Building on these perspectives, this study positions cultural practices as active sites of social transformation, where cultural hybridity and community engagement intersect to produce inclusive social relations. By focusing on a local cultural community, this research seeks to extend existing literature by examining how these theoretical concepts operate within everyday social contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how cultural practices contribute to processes of social transformation within a community-based setting. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study as it allows for an in-depth understanding of social meanings, interactions, and lived experiences within their natural context. Qualitative inquiry is widely used in cultural and social research to capture complex phenomena that cannot be reduced to numerical analysis (Erdy, 2025).

The research is based on fieldwork conducted at Rumah Cinwa in Depok, Indonesia, which serves as the primary case study. Data were collected through three main techniques: (1) in-depth interviews with key informants, including community leaders, cultural practitioners, and local stakeholders; (2) participant observation of cultural performances, educational activities, and community events; and (3) document analysis of institutional records and cultural materials. The use of multiple data sources enables triangulation, which is essential in qualitative research to enhance credibility and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Wargadinata & Maimunah, 2021).

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement and relevance to the research objectives. This sampling technique allows researchers to focus on participants who possess rich and relevant knowledge, ensuring depth and contextual accuracy in the data collected (Tajik et al., 2025). Data analysis was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach, involving three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This analytical process allows for the systematic organization and interpretation of qualitative data to identify key themes and patterns related to cultural practices and social transformation. Such an approach is widely applied in qualitative social research to ensure clarity and analytical rigor (Furoidah, 2020).

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation techniques were applied by comparing data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. In qualitative research, credibility is strengthened through the consistency and convergence of multiple data sources (Elpaz Elsheakh et al., 2025).

In addition to primary data, this study is supported by a narrative literature review to contextualize the findings within broader theoretical discussions on cultural practices and social transformation. Previous studies demonstrate that cultural interaction and knowledge

exchange play a significant role in shaping social cohesion and intellectual development across societies (Yusuf Abdullahi et al., 2023). By integrating empirical findings with existing scholarship, this study adopts an integrative approach that strengthens both theoretical grounding and analytical depth.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Rumah Cinwa operates as a dynamic cultural space where social interaction and cultural negotiation take place simultaneously. Initially established as a platform for preserving Wayang Potehi, the community has evolved into a broader cultural hub that accommodates diverse forms of artistic and social engagement. This transformation reflects the shift from a preservation-oriented approach toward a more participatory and inclusive cultural model.

Rumah Cinwa facilitates regular activities such as performances, workshops, and community gatherings, which attract participants from different ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds. These activities create opportunities for interaction that go beyond formal social boundaries, allowing individuals to engage with one another in a shared cultural environment. Such interactions are crucial in fostering mutual understanding in multicultural urban settings.

From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with the idea that cultural spaces function as social arenas where meanings are constructed through interaction. Cultural spaces are not passive containers but active sites where identities are negotiated and reshaped. In this sense, Rumah Cinwa can be understood as a "third space," where cultural differences are not eliminated but rearticulated into new forms of coexistence. Furthermore, the openness of Rumah Cinwa allows it to bridge gaps between different communities. The inclusion of various cultural expressions such as Betawi, Javanese, and Islamic artistic traditions demonstrates its role as a mediator of cultural diversity. This inclusivity contributes to reducing social distance and strengthening social bonds among participants.

Recent studies also highlight that community-based cultural spaces play a significant role in strengthening social cohesion by providing platforms for dialogue and interaction across differences (Aol, 2024). In this regard, Rumah Cinwa exemplifies how cultural initiatives can function as effective mechanisms for fostering inclusive social environments.

Cultural Hybridity in Wayang Potehi Practices

One of the key findings of this study is the transformation of Wayang Potehi into a hybrid cultural practice that transcends its original ethnic boundaries. Traditionally associated with Chinese-Indonesian communities, Wayang Potehi has undergone significant reinterpretation within Rumah Cinwa. This transformation reflects a broader process of cultural adaptation in response to changing social contexts.

The performances at Rumah Cinwa demonstrate how cultural elements are selectively integrated and recontextualized. For example, the use of the Indonesian language instead of Hokkien makes the performances more accessible to a wider audience. Additionally, the incorporation of local narratives alongside traditional stories reflects an effort to connect the performance with local cultural contexts. Another important aspect of hybridity is the diversity of performers involved in Wayang Potehi. Participants include individuals from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, including Muslim youth. This diversity challenges the assumption that certain cultural practices are exclusive to specific groups, highlighting the fluidity of cultural boundaries.

The concept of cultural hybridity suggests that culture is continuously shaped through interaction and negotiation rather than preserved in a fixed form. Historical evidence shows that cultural exchange has long been a driver of intellectual and artistic development, particularly within Islamic civilization, where knowledge integration played a central role (Furoidah, 2020). Moreover, hybridity in this context does not imply the loss of cultural identity but rather its transformation into a more inclusive form. Wayang Potehi remains rooted in its historical origins while simultaneously adapting to contemporary social realities. This demonstrates the capacity of cultural practices to evolve while maintaining continuity.

Cultural Practices as Mechanisms of Social Transformation

The study finds that cultural practices within Rumah Cinwa function as effective mechanisms of social transformation by facilitating sustained interaction among diverse groups. Through repeated engagement in shared activities, participants gradually develop new patterns of social behavior that emphasize cooperation and inclusivity. These cultural

practices create opportunities for individuals to interact in informal settings, where social hierarchies and boundaries are less rigid. Such environments enable participants to build relationships based on shared experiences rather than predefined identities. Over time, these interactions contribute to changes in attitudes and perceptions toward others.

From the perspective of social theory, this process reflects the idea that transformation occurs through everyday practices rather than through top-down interventions. Social structures are continuously reproduced and reshaped through human actions, and cultural activities provide a medium through which these processes unfold. The findings also indicate that participation in cultural activities encourages a sense of belonging and collective identity. Participants begin to identify themselves not only as members of specific ethnic or religious groups but also as part of a broader cultural community. This shift in identity is crucial for fostering long-term social cohesion.

Previous research shows that cultural engagement can significantly influence social behavior and contribute to the development of inclusive communities (Yusuf Abdullahi et al., 2023). In this sense, Rumah Cinwa demonstrates how cultural practices can serve as catalysts for social transformation.

Emergence of Inclusive Values and Social Cohesion

Another important finding is that inclusive values such as tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation emerge organically through participation in cultural activities. These values are not explicitly imposed but are embedded in the collaborative nature of the practices carried out within Rumah Cinwa. Participants engage in shared activities that require cooperation and communication, which in turn fosters understanding and empathy. Through these interactions, individuals learn to appreciate differences and develop a more inclusive perspective toward others.

In this context, cultural practices function as informal mechanisms for value transmission. Rather than relying on formal instruction, values are learned through experience and interaction. This experiential learning process is particularly effective in shaping attitudes and behaviors. The findings also suggest that these inclusive values contribute to the formation of social cohesion within the community. As participants develop stronger relationships and shared identities, the sense of belonging increases, leading to greater social stability.

Research on Islamic ethical traditions highlights that values such as cooperation and peaceful coexistence have long been embedded in cultural practices and social interactions (Erdy, 2025). This indicates that cultural engagement can serve as a bridge between social interaction and ethical value formation.

Community-Based Initiatives as Agents of Change

The findings underscore the significant role of community-based initiatives in driving social transformation. Rumah Cinwa operates independently of formal institutional structures, yet it has a meaningful impact on the social dynamics of the surrounding community. By providing an inclusive space for cultural interaction, Rumah Cinwa enables individuals to engage with diversity in constructive ways. This demonstrates that social transformation can emerge from grassroots initiatives that are rooted in community participation.

The sustainability of Rumah Cinwa is supported by strong community involvement and a shared commitment among its members. This collective engagement ensures that the initiative continues to evolve and adapt to changing social conditions. Furthermore, the success of Rumah Cinwa suggests that similar community-based cultural initiatives can be replicated in other contexts. By leveraging local cultural resources, communities can develop strategies to address social challenges and promote inclusivity.

Studies on cultural transformation also emphasize the importance of local agency in shaping social change, highlighting that communities play a central role in negotiating cultural and social dynamics (Wargadinata & Maimunah, 2021). In this regard, Rumah Cinwa serves as a model for how grassroots cultural initiatives can contribute to building inclusive and adaptive societies.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that community-based cultural practices play a significant role in driving social transformation within multicultural urban contexts. Through the case of Rumah Cinwa, the findings show that cultural activities are not merely forms of artistic preservation but function as dynamic social processes that facilitate interaction, negotiation, and the construction of shared meanings among diverse groups. In this sense, cultural practices become active mechanisms through which social relations are reshaped and

inclusivity is fostered in everyday life.

The analysis confirms the relevance of cultural hybridity as a conceptual framework in understanding how traditional cultural forms evolve in contemporary settings. The transformation of Wayang Potehi into an inclusive cultural medium illustrates how cultural identities are continuously negotiated within what Bhabha describes as a "third space." Rather than maintaining rigid cultural boundaries, hybridity enables the coexistence and integration of multiple cultural influences, allowing traditions to remain relevant while adapting to new social contexts.

Furthermore, the findings support the perspective of structuration theory, which emphasizes the interplay between agency and structure in processes of social change. The repeated interactions within Rumah Cinwa demonstrate how everyday practices contribute to the gradual transformation of social norms and relationships. Participants act as agents who actively reinterpret cultural practices, thereby reshaping the social structures in which they are embedded. This highlights that social transformation is not solely driven by formal institutions but also emerges from sustained community engagement.

Another important conclusion is that inclusive social values such as tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation can emerge organically through cultural interaction. These values are not imposed through formal discourse but are embedded in shared practices and experiences. This finding reinforces the argument that cultural practices function as informal mechanisms for value transmission and social cohesion, particularly in contexts characterized by diversity and pluralism.

This study contributes to the field of cultural studies and social transformation by providing empirical evidence that bridges theoretical concepts with lived social practices. It highlights the importance of grassroots cultural initiatives as agents of change and offers a nuanced understanding of how inclusivity can be fostered through everyday cultural engagement. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that policymakers and cultural practitioners should recognize and support community-based cultural initiatives as strategic resources for strengthening social cohesion. Encouraging participatory cultural spaces can provide sustainable approaches to managing diversity and promoting inclusive social relations in urban settings.

However, this study is limited to a single case study, which may not fully represent

the diversity of cultural practices in other contexts. Future research is recommended to explore similar initiatives in different regions and to examine how varying socio-cultural conditions influence the dynamics of cultural transformation. Comparative studies may further enrich the understanding of how cultural practices contribute to social change across different settings.

In conclusion, this research affirms that cultural practices, when driven by community participation, have the potential to become powerful instruments of social transformation. By fostering interaction, negotiation, and shared identity, such practices contribute to the development of inclusive, adaptive, and resilient societies in contemporary Indonesia.

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