

Engaging Vernacularity and Identity Politics of Public Spaces to Promote Cultural Tourism: Art Festivals in Bandung, Indonesia

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Abstract

Public space has a vital role in defining the politics of identity. Art festivals in public spaces can increase the function of public spaces to negotiate cultural identity, characterized by vernacularity, and simultaneously use various local symbols and tourist attractions. This research discusses how art festivals in public spaces become a means for reconstructing cultural identity and promoting cultural tourism in Bandung City, Indonesia.

This research employs qualitative research methods. Data collection is carried out through a literature study and field research using various approaches, including observations, interviews, and Focus Group Discussions with relevant stakeholders during July-August 2023.

Findings show that art festivals become a space where the politics of culture and cultural tourism meet different interests. At the same time, government policies appear to promote the preservation of vernacular culture and local traditions in order to improve tourism attractions. The paper concludes that the festivals serve as a significant place for cultural commodification, even if their primary goals are to celebrate cultural identity.

Keywords: Art festivals, Vernacularity, Public spaces, Cultural tourism, Bandung city

Introduction

According to the Indonesian traditions, a festival is essential in many different settings such as those related to religions, agriculture, harvesting, or life cycle events. It is a long tradition and part of the vernacular culture. As part of the vital aspect of tradition, it contains symbols that signify meanings and interpretations of the Indonesian social system. Following social, political, cultural, and societal changes in the last decades, festivals are usually considered cultural events rather than religious ones. Of course, in some communities, different festivals are still connected to religious activities. However, tension and dichotomies between religion and culture have sharpened following the increase of the politics of identity in Indonesia, where a religious identity is used widely. One example of this tension was at a sea

festival in Bantul, Yogyakarta 2018. This incident shows that the symbolic violence towards the crowds in the public sphere has shifted. In the past, state apparatuses mostly dominated and controlled the public sphere.

Art festivals in public spaces are cultural events that involve interactions with various communities and groups. Public spaces such as squares, parks, and even roads are often used as venues for art festivals. In fact, both are initiated by the communities and facilitated by the government. The festivals can be used as a platform to promote cultural diversity with its vernacularity and to educate the public about art and culture. Moreover, art festivals are also part of tourist attractions and are a place where identity politics are negotiated.

Compared to the population, the number of public spaces in West Java still needs to be increased. This situation makes every event in public places full of the people. Besides, some social problems that include the issues of violence and intolerant practices also have arisen in public spaces. In this connection, Daga (2021) suggests that intolerant narratives in public spaces often interrupt the harmony of social life. In addition, the need for more spaces for expression for diverse communities is also an issue regarding the importance of public spaces that all parties can access. In this case, art festivals become a meeting space for various cultures, communities and artists, and they are a means to build awareness and understanding of diversity in the city where exclusive and intolerant attitudes can be easily found.

Unlike in the New Order era of Indonesia (1967-1998), which has strict rules for expressing self in the public sphere, in the reform era (1998- now), people have more freedom to voice their opinions. This situation has opened opportunities for reproducing locality and vernacularity, especially when a decentralization policy has been established. Regional autonomy urges every region to have its distinctive local marker to establish its locality, i.e., local identity (Lahpan, 2015).

Thus, festivals in Indonesia are currently expressions of local celebrations and vernacularity through diverse arts and traditions. Different social groups and communities have been involved in these festivities. In fact, this involvement has made festivals more festive than before. After the reform era, new festivals have emerged extensively and have been created by different groups and communities, carried out independently and sponsored by the government. These new festivals are mostly part of cultural commodification as cultural tourism on the one hand and motivated by the high spirit of locality on the other.

In this situation, festivals become complex phenomena by which different interests meet each other. In this article, we give attention to the political meaning of the place in the festivals, especially those that define culture and identity. What is displayed in the carnivals represents the community as the expression of their identity. However, the control of the public sphere during the festival is not only in the government's hands but also includes industries, communities, and individual artists.

Festivals are used to control the economy, culture, and cultural politics. Thus, festival or carnival culture can be seen as the politic of the public sphere. It provides a culture to be contested. In the New Order era, the festivals should follow government regulations on the public sphere and aesthetic measurements. These aesthetic measurements are also used widely in every aesthetic expression, as Weintraub (2001) discussed in the Sundanese puppet competition in West Java.

Nowadays, in Indonesia's post-reform era, cultural carnivals have increased significantly in numbers and provide different meanings and perspectives; people who participated in the events came from various backgrounds, reflecting differences in negotiating cultural identity. Not only are the festivals defined by the government but they are also involved in multiple communities and groups celebrating cultural identity. The Ministry of Tourism and Creative Industry of Indonesia established 100 festivals in its national Calendar of Events in 2019; it does not include local festivals scattered across the regions of Indonesia¹. During

¹ See for example <https://travel.kompas.com/read/2019/07/01/155449627/ada-banyak-festival-sepanjang-juli-2019-berikut-daftarnya?page=all>

pandemics, the festivals were stopped, and then, after three years of hiatus, the number of music festivals doubled in 2023.²

In this context, this paper aims to examine how vernacularity and art festivals in public spaces are intertwined and contribute to forming cultural identity and promoting cultural tourism in Bandung city, Indonesia. Its objectives are:

1. To reveal the complex nature of the art festivals in Indonesia
2. To ascertain how the art festivals contribute to engage vernacularity and identity politics of public spaces to promote cultural tourism.

Theoretical Framework

Vernacular

The term “vernacular” is used in different fields of studies. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “the language or dialect spoken by ordinary people in a particular country or region” or “architecture concerned with domestic and functional rather than monumental buildings.” The term “vernacular” has also been used more broadly to refer to vernacular modernism, music, crafts, sports, literature and art, among other things. As a result, different academic fields have joined in, including linguistics, cultural studies, architecture, anthropology, and other fields of study (Suartika and Nichols, 2020). Thus, vernacular has a vast array of settings and meanings. Its use may be most widespread in the field of vernacular architecture such as discussed in Saha et al. (2021), Suartika and Nichols (2020), Yongli and Zhongwei (2017), Bromberg (2008) and Lawrence (1983).

The term “vernacular” also denotes a state of being original, native, and situated inside a particular geography or location. It embraces entire ecosystems, their art, culture, and the simple fact that indigenous societies exist in many places. It is irrelevant how the word is understood; what matters is how postmodernity understands and makes room for a vernacular existence. This is a monumental task that involves arguments at an array of levels. Thus, “vernacularity” is a component of the overall picture (Suartika and Nichols, 2020).

Nowadays, the global tourism strategy of commercialising people and places profoundly affects vernacular life, including practices, traditions, aspirations, and sensibilities. In this case, local people incorporate their traditions and practices through art festivals to present them as something unique to show.

Public Space

Public space is one of the essential elements of city life. A good public space should fulfil the community needs, including accessibility, safety, and comfort. Madanipour (2003) explains that public space is a place where people can gather and interact, build social relationships, and celebrate culture. In addition, public spaces must have a clear identity and be recognisable by the people who use them. Therefore, the design and management of public spaces must consider the needs and interests of the community at large (Lynch, 1960). Besides, public spaces also play an essential role in strengthening a sense of community and tolerance between people of different backgrounds. For example, a well-constructed park can attract people of various ages and backgrounds to gather and do activities together (Sari & Wijaya, 2019). These public spaces can be parks, streets, squares, or other places that allow people to gather and interact with others and enable and develop open, reflective, inclusive, and responsive communication and participation (Dewey, 1927).

The Charter of Public Space and UN Habitat define public space as any place that is publicly owned or usable, easily accessible and enjoyed by all free of charge and without a profit motive. This definition supports public ownership as such ‘ownership’ ensures more stable access and enjoyment over time. Furthermore, The Charter of Public Space and UN Habitat distinguish four typologies of public spaces: streets, public open spaces, public facilities, and markets (UN-Habitat, 2018). Roads and open public spaces are two of the four typologies of spaces often used in public activities. Streets are public spaces owned and

² Ibid

maintained by the public, accessible and enjoyed by everyone, primarily free of charge and around the clock. Streets have a wide range of activities that can be undertaken, from social and economic to cultural and political uses (UN-Habitat, 2018). As multi-functional spaces and their roles are understood from different perspectives, streets can act as physical spaces, channels of movement and public realms. Streets also showcase communities, connect people, and act as efficient channels of movement and visual elements (Sulaiman et al., 2017). In this article, public space becomes a significant element where the art festival takes place and gives particular meaning to forming the so-called 'cultural identity'.

Art Festival

Art festivals, according to Waterman, are cultural commodities in which culture is contested (1998:55). As a country with cultural diversity, art festivals in Indonesia are about celebrating cultural identity expressed in ritual practices and traditions, including religious celebrations, harvest festivals, sea festivals, carnivals or street festivals. They are cultural commodities on the one hand and cultural identity formations on the other. Diverse art festivals hold events across the archipelago yearly, both old practices and newly created forms. Festivals are ubiquitous. According to Lahpan (2015), some emerged during the post-reform of Indonesia era following the revival of traditions due to political changes in the country in which decentralisation policy demands uniqueness of locality in each region of Indonesia. Thus, festivals as a cultural attraction are essential to the locality, significantly expressing cultural identity.

In the Indonesian context, according to Lahpan (2020), art festivals are related to the revival of traditional arts in the post-New Order. In this situation, the role of the communities in art preservation through festivals is significant. Art festivals at university are also used to develop art entrepreneurship (Lahpan, 2018; 2020). Furthermore, Ayuni (2020) underline the management of art festivals, and Ramdhon (2020) discuss festivals concerning government policies.

According to Healy (2016), art festivals held in public spaces have the potential to unite people, create shared experiences and build networks between artists, visitors, and the community. In addition, art festivals can improve environmental quality and increase community involvement in public spaces (Kwon, 2019). In this connection, Wijetunge (2018) argues that art festivals in public spaces can increase the sense of community ownership and participation in public spaces, improve the image of the city, and provide added values to the tourism sector.

As mentioned earlier, art festivals in the Indonesian context contain vernacularity, which at some points become tourist attractions.

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is a complex concept to describe. It is because human identity is formed by interrelated, non-static, and distinct aspects of existence (Hill, 2012). It also portrays the feeling of being a part of a community united by a standard set of rituals, traditions, languages, symbols, and other cultural elements. A set of morals, customs, symbols, beliefs, and lifestyles serve as a unifying factor within a social group and provide a foundation upon which the group members can build their sense of identity.

To define and differentiate a particular cultural or ethnic group, shared values, traditions, customs, language, beliefs, and behavioural standards are all part of an individual's cultural identity, which is their sense of belonging and connection to that group or community (Chen, 2014). This concept is valuable for analysing the interconnection between public space and art festivals in forming people's sense of belonging to particular practices.

Cultural Tourism

According to Picard (1997), the term 'cultural tourism' was first coined in the seminar in 1971 to name Bali as a tourism destination. In this regard, festivals are considered tourist attractions where people visit the places where festivals are held. This intersection allows

festivals to meet the intertwined interests of economy, industry, tourism, politics, aesthetic expressions, and local identity negotiation. In other words, the festival becomes cultural commodification, which has not only worked at the industry level but also

“...stimulated preservation, community consciousness and an appreciation of local tradition. Identity affirmation and pride are examined as integral aspects of cultural commodification process”

Cole in Smith and Robinson, 2006: 90

This asserts that a festival cannot be seen from a single view as different interests meet each other in one place. It is even more complicated in Bali as the three crucial elements of Balinese, religion (*agama*), custom (*adat*), and art (*seni*), unified and formed Balinese identity or what they called “Balineseness” (*kebalian*) (Picard, 1997:184). These three aspects are also linked to festivals as significant cultural practices.

All these conceptual frameworks are linked to interpreting and understanding how vernacularity engaged with identity politics and public space are expressed through art festivals in Indonesia, in order to promote cultural tourism.

Review of Literature

Studies on festivals have been done using different approaches and in various contexts. A festival has had political meanings for a long time; Brophy (1997) traced the meaning of a carnival culture back in the early 19th century, which has been seen as a form of middle-class political activity and a political public sphere. He defines it as Borjouis’ political culture (1997: 874). This is different from what we can see now, especially in the Indonesian context, where the festivals involve different social groups and activities, not only from a particular social class. Meanwhile, Waterman (1998) argues that festivals are a place for controlling culture where it is contested and used by elites to establish social distance between them and others. Thus, festivals become a place where culture is defined. Here, festivals change landscapes and settings from everyday life to a temporary environment created by and for a particular group. Art festivals become cultural commodities where various interests, including industries, meet each other (Waterman, 1998).

Niekrenz (2014) examines a festival as a collective enthusiasm of the community to experience contrasting realities of social life. It is a temporary place that could allow people to share their identities. In a similar view, Schwarz and Tait (2007) put arts, festivals, and other events that contribute to sharing the sense of community in a rural area that creates shared emotions in communities. On the other hand, in a different approach, Kapferer (2010) argues that a festival in the cultural industry perspective by which the complex interests of arts and the state meet each other. Here, the festival is seen as a culture-consuming society by which economic aspects are dominant. This situation has declined the values of culture as the “cornerstone of an enlightened social formation” (2014: 9).

Festivals are also used as expressions of sound criticism and social problems, as discussed by Fernandez (2006), McKinney (2007), and Clarke & Knifton (2009). Fernandez (2006) discusses an art festival called Desh Pardesh based in Toronto, Canada, to voice marginalized communities such as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender by which the arts are used to sound their voices, i.e., to stand their political choices. Arts are not only defined as an expression of the community, but they also use the arts to sound their criticisms, resistance, and other disparagement. Here, the festival as activism is more dominant than other aesthetic expressions. Moreover, McKinney (2007) and Albaik (2023) examine art festivals and street art as activism to deliver messages. It is also discussed by Clarke & Knifton (2009), seeing art festivals for social changes.

Apart from that, in Indonesia, the festivals are part of cultural commodification, by which they become a new destination of cultural tourism, and the government gives them more attention as tourism is set as a new national income to support economic growth. In this matter, Butcher (2006: 21) propose that cultural policy cannot be separated from the politics of culture and cultural attractions, specifically related to cultural tourism, which means it influences how festivals are defined.

Research on festivals and public space is found in several writings with different aspects and focuses, such as architectural approaches in Groń (2020) and festivals as community development in Grodach (2009). Meanwhile, Brownnett and Evans (2020) discuss the concept of space with community-based art festivals. Quinn (2005; 2006) links art festivals with public spaces and tourism in urban areas, and Quinn et al. (2021) discuss the links between festivals and public spaces from a public policy perspective.

These various studies have discussed research on art festivals and public spaces with different theories and methods. However, the use of public space for negotiating cultural identity and the development of cultural tourism simultaneously through art festivals still need to be improved. This research contributes to examining how the negotiation of a place where local identity politics are intertwined with cultural tourism.

Research Methodology

This research employs qualitative research methods, by which data collection is analysed with an emphasis on cultural meaning. Qualitative research methods aim to explore and describe phenomena or research objects through social activities, attitudes and perceptions of people individually or in groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

This research is conducted in Bandung, the capital city of West Java, Indonesia, known for its vibrant festivals and public spaces. The data sources in this study include primary data and secondary data. Preliminary data were obtained directly in the field, including the forms of festivals, the characteristics of public spaces, the types of arts and their art groups, and the characteristics of the communities involved in the festival. In contrast, secondary or supporting data are obtained through literature studies, photos, and video documentation. Data was collected during July-August 2023. Meanwhile, data collection techniques are carried out through:

1. A literature study gathering data regarding social and cultural situations, characteristics of public spaces, and other relevant concepts.
2. Observations to understand activities in public spaces, potential art forms, and how people interact in public spaces at art festivals. Some festivals during July-August 2023, including the Asia Africa Festival were observed.
3. Interviews conducted with artists, community groups, and government and other stakeholders regarding the regulation of public space, preservation of traditional arts, and a cultural tourism ecosystem. Informants were assigned to several categories, including prominent artist figures in West Java, art communities actively involved in the festival, and government officials from the Culture and Tourism Division of Bandung City. The interviews were done in several places in Bandung.
4. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with stakeholders related to art festivals and the use of public space. The FGD invited government officials from different divisions to understand relevant regulations, artist figures, and festival organisers about their experience using public space for festivals.

Findings

Art Festivals, Public Space and Cultural Commodification

Bandung has a significant position as the capital city of West Java and is close to Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. With more than 11 million residents, Greater Bandung (Bandung Basin Metropolitan Area, or BBMA) is the second-largest and most populous metropolitan area in the nation. Meanwhile, according to BPS (Badan Pusat Statistik/Central Statistics Agency), the city of Bandung had about 2,5 million inhabitants in 2023. The city is situated in the island of Java. Located around 140 kilometres (87 miles) Southeast of Jakarta at an elevation of 768 meters (2,520 feet) above the sea level, Bandung experiences consistently lower year-round temperatures than most other Indonesian cities. The primary justification for the former Dutch East Indies government's proposal to relocate the capital from Batavia (modern-day Jakarta) to Bandung in the colonial period was the city's location in a river basin encircled by volcanic mountains that served as a natural defense system.



Fig 1: Map city of Bandung, Indonesia

Source: <https://www.citypopulation.de/en/indonesia/cities/>

Dominated by an urban culture, Bandung has unique characteristics, and the city is known as the city of a creative industry. Modernity and traditionality have intertwined in the city, which makes it an exciting place for negotiating cultural identity. Bandung has a long history as a centre for creativity and arts. The city has rich modern artistic expressions and traditional culture simultaneously. As a city of arts and culture, Bandung has long been known for artists and musicians, from indie music to independent fashion outlets.

Since the 1970s, Bandung has become a hub for popular culture, and independent fashion brands have emerged since the 1990s. Since the 2000s, creative industries have encompassed music and fashion. When Ridwan Kamil was the mayor of Bandung in 2008, he established the Bandung Creative City Forum to aid the creative sector. Through several creative festivals, he worked to establish Bandung as “a creative city” (Yujin, 2017).

Not only did he strengthen the city as a creative city, but with his professional background as an architect, Kamil paid much attention to building public spaces. When appointed as the mayor of Bandung City, he revitalized parks and provided suitable public spaces, including a creative center for the youth. Kamil believes that the availability of public spaces in one city can increase the quality of life of its people. When he became the governor of West Java, he brought his ideas to the province level to build suitable public spaces. In our observations, some cities and regencies copied the model of parks and town squares in Bandung to be applied in other regions in West Java. Thus, creating public spaces has been the central policy in his leadership period since he was a mayor and then he became the governor of West Java.

Further, since May 21, 2022, Bandung has also been declared as ‘a city of angklung’. Angklung is a traditional musical instrument made of bamboo and has a long history in West Java. UNESCO has also recognized the uniqueness of angklung as an intangible culture in Bandung, West Java, in 2010.

According to the head of the culture and tourism office of Bandung, Arif, the increase in tourists visiting Bandung has been supported by the office's Calendar of Events (CoE), including the Asia Africa Festival. In 2023, the government official in Bandung's Tourism and Culture office stated that 7,7 million tourists visited Bandung, national and international.³

Since the existence of Law No. 5 of 2017, on the Advancement of Culture, the government of Indonesia has reformulated its cultural politics by making several regulatory instruments, such as PPKD (*Pokok-pokok Pikiran Kebudayaan*/the main ideas of culture) at the provincial and city levels, data collection of ten objects of the advancement of culture, an index for the advancement of culture. As a derivative of this policy, the government plays a more active role in cultural preservation, protection, and development programs. One of the programs is to make cultural arts attractions part of tourism, which has now become the government's

³ <https://www.detik.com/jabar/berita/d-7151129/7-7-wisatawan-kunjungi-kota-bandung-sepanjang-2023> accessed 28 August 2024.

flagship program to improve the economic sector through the Tourism and Creative Industry Office.

The existence of public space in the city of Bandung is dated back to the colonial time. Bandung was a planned city following Ebenezer Howard's Garden city principles, where each public space was meticulously designed and sought after (Kunto, 2011). Nowadays, with ever-expanding city boundaries, the presence of public spaces is highly sought after by urban dwellers, which eventually helps redefine and contest the definition of public space due to the availability of such spaces in the city (Putra, 2019). Through the presence of an inclusive urban public space, vibrant social and cultural activities will become inevitable in Bandung, leading to increased living quality of the urban dwellers, thus creating a people-centred public space, as mentioned by Khassawneh & Khasawneh (2023) in their research.

Every year, the government official of Bandung city releases a curated calendar of events (CoE). In 2023, there were 74 events, and among them, the government highlighted the top ten festivals that contribute to the economy of the city, as described in the table below.

Table 1: 10 top festivals highlighted in the Calendar of Events (CoE) of Bandung in 2023

Source: Author, processed from different online media platforms in August, 2024.

No.	Date/month	Name of Festival	Location
1	11-12 February 2023	Playlist Love Festival	Bandung
2	3-5 March 2023	Now Playing Festival	Bandung
3	3-5 March 2023	Festival Bakso Juara	Bandung
4	6-9 April 2023	Trade Mark Market Festival	Bandung
5	July 29 2023	Asia Africa Festival	Bandung
6	15-20 Agustus 2023	Bandung Art Month	Bandung
7	22-23 September 2023	Bandung Great Sale	Bandung
8	Agustus- Oktober 2023	Bandung Angklung Festival	Bandung
9	20-23 Oktober 2023	The Papandayan Jazz Festival	Bandung
10	November	Kickfest Festival	Bandung

Although the Bandung Art Festival (BAF) was not included in the top ten festivals recommended by the government, the 9th BAF was included in the calendar of events and scheduled for 27-30 July 2023.

Art festivals become the hallmark of arts and cultural life in Bandung. Besides festivals initiated by the community, the Bandung government official has an annual calendar event for various festival activities. Among them are some significant festivals organised by the government, such as the Asia Afrika Festival (AAF), and some are held independently by community groups, such as the Bandung Art Festival (BAF). Both festivals were attended by massive audiences and received much public attention, and both also have different characteristics, including using public spaces for their activities. The main distinguishing feature is how they create meaning by employing public spaces in festivals. Bandung Art Festival aims to show the quality of performance in open spaces that are natural and close to the community. At the same time, the Asia Africa Festival has more of a political meaning to show the culture of Asia Africa and send the message of peace through its diversity. Here, we will discuss two different festival characteristics that took extensive attention from the public in Bandung City.

Bandung Art Festival (BAF)

Bandung Arts Festival (BAF) is an international-scale activity initiated by several Bandung artists, including Deden Buleng, from the art community named Bongkeng Art Space. One of the hallmarks of the festival is always using natural public areas as venues for its festival activities. In addition, each festival has its philosophical values. For example, on the Water Day Festival, they danced for 7 hours non-stop at the Cikapundung River in the middle of Bandung. On Earth Day, they spent 7 hours dancing in Juanda Forest, Bandung. At the Kartini Day Festival, celebrated on April 21, they danced for 21 hours non-stop along the city roads to Bandung City Square. On August 17, the Independence Day celebration in Indonesia, they

danced for 17 hours. For those activities, the Bongkeng Arts community has teamwork involving local community members and experts (Interview with Deden, July 14, 2023).

The Bandung Art Festival utilizes open space in Nature as a place for its project, namely the waterfall, which is related to the concept of the BAF, about human beings and Nature. Community empowerment is also a part of the BAF project, which involves all surrounding communities implementing BAF activities.

Bandung Arts Festival is a place for activities related to culture and performing arts. It allows the community to do creative activities and cultural interactions, especially performing arts, dance, music, theatre, fine arts, etc. It is also a space to build dynamic cultural opinions from the development of the creative and innovative community. It can also create a discourse for exchanging ideas through formal and non-formal discussions. During its development, several art communities emerged in various regions in Indonesia, especially in West Java, which also added to the richness of artistic works and cultural treasures despite some obstacles they faced (Interview with Deden Buleng, July 14, 2023).

Bandung Arts Festival is an international scale festival attended by representatives from different provinces in Indonesia and other countries. Furthermore, the artists involved were coming from Jakarta, Solo, Yogyakarta, Pacitan, Lampung, Kalimantan, Surabaya, Batu Malang, Makassar, Kediri, and outside the country, such as Malaysia, Morocco, Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, the Netherlands, Ireland, Iran, America, Hungary, Japan, and India.

The Bandung Arts Festival always involves artists and performers from various cities and abroad. At the fifth BAF, there were 5,000 participants and a colossal dance performance. Interestingly, artists from abroad constantly challenge BAF to hold festival events in outdoor public spaces. They even had a dance show at the traditional market.

Festivals always have a tourism impact on their surroundings. For example, in the case of BAF, the residents' houses were used as places to stay for the guests from abroad and outside the region. The economic ecosystem around the location also grew, including street vendors, and even now, several residents have renovated their houses to become accommodations for tourists. Apart from the tourism aspect, people also gain knowledge, and most importantly, they enjoy the festival.

BAF itself is a reasonably inclusive festival. Apart from involving residents, disabled groups also joined the Bandung Arts Festival as talents. For example, deaf people perform a dance accompanied by a conductor. Deden stated that dancers with disabilities could dance like dancers in general. After the show, there is always a question-and-answer session with the audience. Bongkeng Arts Space has collaborated with Diffable School so that they can perform regularly at the Bandung Arts Festival (interview, July 14, 2023).

However, there are several challenges. First, to include the word 'International' in the Bandung International Arts Festival has made some preparations much more complicated, including getting permits from the government and police officers and other additional expenses for logistics and unofficial parking costs. Therefore, since 2018, the Bongkeng Arts Space has no longer used the name Bandung International Arts Festival but has changed it to the Bandung Arts Festival. The impact of this change is that permits will be more accessible, and unofficial activities will be minimized. This means that using a festival with local names is more acceptable among the different communities. Even though the Bandung Arts Festival remains at the international level and brings in cross-country guests, as a festival initiated by the communities, BAF tried to avoid government interventions. Deden Buleng argued that he rejected the festivals only for tourism by neglecting the quality of performances. In short, the characteristics of BAF are as summarized in the table 2.

Table 2: Characteristics of Bandung Art Festival

Source: Author

No	Description
1	Community initiative by Bongkeng Art Space/independent
2	Venue: natural open space (river, waterfall, roads, etc.)
3	Participants: local, national and international communities (community artists' network)
4	Events: Traditional music and dance performances, workshop
5	Time for festival: 3 days (in July)
6	Location: Bandung
7	Characteristics: avoid government intervention, keep idealism in arts.

Asia Africa Festival (AAF)

Differing from the BAF, which is initiated by the community and brings more independent views, AAF is a regular event held by the government of Bandung City to commemorate the Asia Africa Conference held in 1955 in Bandung and attended by the top leaders of Asia and Africa. After three years of hiatus because of the pandemic, the festival started in 2023, and people have shown great enthusiasm for attending.

AAF is a yearly event that is considered an international event because several delegations from Asian-African countries joined. In the Asia Africa Festival 2023, 250 people from 13 communities, representatives from 14 countries, and six regencies in Indonesia became participants and joined the parade, representing Asian and African cultures. The festival used the main road in the heart of Bandung, Asia Africa Road, as a venue, where the Asia Africa Conference Museum is also located there. The festival was named after the momentous event of the Asia Africa Conference in 1955. During the event, thousands of people poured into Asia Afrika Road to enjoy the 68th Asia Africa Festival on Saturday, July 29, 2023. During the event, the road was closed, and some alternative routes for the passengers were created.

There are two different activities at this festival. First was the parade or carnival, which was the main activity. The parade represented ethnic and unique cultures that embrace particular identities. Participants attended this parade as representatives from different cultures and places, as mentioned above. The second was a stage performance presenting various traditional and contemporary performances by Ega Robot group, a renowned Bandung artist, to entertain the crowd who came to the event. The stage performance was performed after the parade. Most of the performances on stage were Sundanese music traditions.

With the theme “Universe of Creative Culture”, the Asia Afrika Festival successfully presented a national and international cultural parade and various arts. According to Dahlia Kusuma Dewi, the government official representative, the festival promotes inclusivity and world solidarity through the Asia-Africa message. It is hoped that in the future, many cultural collaborations will occur between Asian-African nations—the Asia Africa Festival with the participants from neighbouring countries and other cities attending.

The 2023 Asia Afrika Festival (AAF) symbolizes collaboration in the diversity of arts and culture between nations and a message of peace from Bandung to the world. The Asia Africa 2023 theme embodies the spirit of inclusivity, innovation and diversity, which play a crucial role in developing the world culture.

The festival carnival presents several traditional expressions, including Sundanese arts that consist of *barong* and *benjang*, peacock dance, Indonesian dance costumes, etc. In addition, *barongsai* and *liong*, the traditional Chinese performance, the *Boboko* creative community from Ciamis, and the Marching Band from the *Gita Pakuan* group, opened the parade line. Several ambassadors and representatives from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Libya, Sudan, Philippines, Syria, Nigeria, Kenya, North Korea, Bangladesh, India, Zimbabwe, Egypt, Malaysia, Thailand and Mozambique were also present by bringing their unique cultures together.

The acting mayor of Bandung, Ema Sumarna, contends that attaining this festival brings economic growth because of tourist visits. Data from the Culture and Tourism Office of

Bandung stated that until June 2023, 2,252,966 tourists visited Bandung. Moreover, in the first quarter, the number of tourists visiting reached 1,422,673 people (<https://www.bandung.go.id/>). Meanwhile, by the end of December 2023, the total number of tourists visiting Bandung were 7,7 million people. This strengthens the statement that Bandung is a city of creative industry and tourism, with many tourists visiting. Thus, art festivals and tourism are inseparable. Indeed, from the government's perspective, the significant economic impact of the festival is the most important goal.

Table 3: Asia Africa Festival

Source: Author

No	Description
1	Organised by the government, Bandung Cultural and Tourism Office
2	Venue: Asia Africa Road, one of the main road in Bandung
3	Participants: local, national and international communities (include Asia Africa countries delegates)
4	Events: Carnival/parade (main event) and traditional/contemporary music performance (supporting event)
5	Time for festival: 1 day
6	Location: Bandung
7	Characteristics: government official program

Arts Festival, Vernacularity, the Construction of the Place and Cultural Tourism

From a sociological perspective, a place, following Giddens (1990) as cited in Stokes (1997), is defined as “the physical setting of social activity as situated geographically” (p.3). Further, Stokes also explains that the place is constructed through different expressions involving differences and social boundaries (1997: 4). As an expression in the public sphere, a festival creates social boundaries. It does not simply provide a pre-structured social space marker, but how this space can be transformed (1997:4). In the festival, places are always political. People give meanings and create social boundaries. In this case, some festivals we studied in West Java use symbols of the local traditions, the Sundanese, vernacularity, which defines itself as the preserver of local knowledge that can only be understood by knowing the symbols of the past. However, for other communities or social groups, attending the festival event, through its symbolic place, also creates possibilities to find a connection to understand their cultural roots, which is significant, as we saw in the Bandung Art Festival. This resonates with the findings by Setiadi et al. (2023), where public space functions as a place of cultural activities.

Furthermore, art festivals have different messages, including promoting culture and preserving tradition and vernacular culture, as we found in the abovementioned festivals. Moreover, art festivals also deliver messages of peace and diversity, as found in the Asia Africa Festival mission. Meanwhile, for other social groups, especially the younger people in the city, the place also creates a social boundary where they can learn and know more about local knowledge and vernacular culture. Above all, art festivals have become a place for negotiating cultural identity in West Java, where the politics of culture is established through the law of Cultural Advancement No. 5, 2017, and implemented by the local government. Because of this law, the local government pays more attention to policies on cultural practices and their preservation, including through art festivals where the interactions between modernity and vernacularity happens to negotiate cultural identity.

Waterman (1990), as cited in Stokes (1997), considers art festivals with their artistic forms, such as music, dance, and theatre performances, as being not static symbolic objects that have to be understood in a context but are themselves a patterned context within which other things happen. In this case, festivals give spaces “for socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places and the boundaries which separate them” (Stokes 1997: 5).

The politics of culture in Indonesia is defined based on the state policy, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), as the ultimate statement in expressing differences of cultural expression for decades. Thus, how cultural and artistic expressions are defined in public spaces is determined by formulating the politics of culture. In Indonesia, the politics of culture was predominantly determined by the government. Nevertheless, the situation has been changed after the Reform era. Although the government is still a solo policymaker in making regulations and measurements on culture and artistic expression, the involvement of different communities that give varied perspectives to the festivals has been considered. Here, public participation is highly increased in defining cultural expressions, as are society's meanings. It is not only the government territory that explains how the festivals should be done, but the public participation has been increasingly significant for the last decades.

Another significant change was when the Indonesian government enacted the *Undang-undang Pemajuan Kebudayaan* (Law for Cultural Advancement) number 5, 2017, where the law protects local knowledge, various traditional art expressions and vernacular culture including vernacular settlements. Art communities, academics, and the public respond to this regulation positively and hope to increase artistic and cultural works more widely through policies at local levels. So do the creative industries that were encouraged by law number 24 in 2019. Not only for preserving tradition where local identity is negotiated, but festivals in most situations are also more touristic. These are also found in BAF and AAF as major festivals with different characteristics, yet both consider their events to contribute significantly to improving local economic growth and tourism. On the other hand, inclusivity and the message of peace through the arts are also regarded as necessary.

Conclusion

Bandung Art Festival and Asia Africa Festival are among the several festivals in Bandung that have some uniqueness and specific characteristics with the scope of international level. Despite the primary purpose of celebrating cultural identity, inclusivity and the appreciation of diversity, festivals are also essential for cultural commodification, where the tourism industry becomes the government's flagship program.

Through the Bandung Art Festival and the Asia Africa Festival, we can see that art festivals are essential to defining cultural identity in the Indonesian society. In this case, we use the politics of the public sphere to analyze how the place in the festival has political meanings where cultural identity is negotiated, and local knowledge and vernacular culture are preserved. By using symbols from the past, the genuine, and the native, and then bringing them to the modern context, art festivals in West Java have offered dynamic interactions between the politics of identity and cultural tourism, symbolised by vernacularity.

Interestingly, some people visit the festivals for various reasons: for entertainment, to spend time with family and friends, to do tourism, to feel the excitement, and to enjoy a different environment than they have in daily life in the city. Bringing the setting and the concept of festivals that mostly contain symbols of vernacular culture and modernity at the same time are the efforts to negotiate between the two symbols in shaping cultural identity and to bring the economic and tourism needs.

This article has contributed to theorizing and developing methods in placing the festival and vernacular culture as a space for negotiating cultural identity and promoting cultural tourism. However, this research has some limitations, where the case we studied is still very limited among diverse festivals in West Java and the richness of festivals in Indonesia. Various aspects of art festivals and vernacular culture in diverse places with their cultural context that vary can give different points of view. Those issues can be studied further to examine the role of the politics of culture through Law Regulation no 5, 2017, on Advancing Culture in Indonesia.

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