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The Bekasi Regency Government's Efforts to Preserve Local Culture at Gedung Juang 45

Rifqi Ramadhani¹, Yudhistira Ardi Poetra²

¹Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya, Jakarta, Indonesia, rifqi.ramadhani19@mhs.ubharajaya.ac.id

²Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya, Jakarta, Indonesia, yudhistira.ardi@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id

Corresponding Author: rifqi.ramadhani19@mhs.ubharajaya.ac.id¹

Abstract: This study explores the efforts of the Bekasi Regency Government in preserving local culture through the Gedung Juang 45 Museum as a historical and cultural landmark. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the research seeks to understand how the local government, cultural institutions, and community members collaboratively sustain cultural identity amidst urban modernization. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, involving key informants such as cultural division staff, heritage experts, and museum visitors. The results reveal that cultural preservation initiatives extend beyond physical restoration to include educational programs, public participation, and symbolic communication practices that strengthen local heritage awareness. Gedung Juang 45 functions as a communicative space linking the past and present through exhibitions, historical narratives, and participatory activities. The study highlights the importance of cultural interaction, government policy, and public involvement in maintaining social and cultural continuity. Ultimately, cultural preservation in Bekasi is shown not only as a governmental obligation but as a shared responsibility in cultivating collective memory and regional identity.

Keyword: Cultural Preservation, Local Identity, Qualitative Research, Government Policy, Gedung Juang 45

INTRODUCTION

Culture represents the living habits, traditions, and values that are continuously practiced by members of a community within a particular geographical and social setting. It embodies the long historical journey of human civilization, passed down from generation to generation as a symbolic and behavioral heritage. Within smaller contexts, culture manifests as local culture—defined as the original, authentic form of cultural expression within a particular community or region. According to Setyaningrum (2018), local culture arises from spiritual and ritualistic practices that hold significant material and symbolic value in a community's social life. These traditions reflect the intimate connection between human societies and their surrounding environment, as seen through rituals, traditional festivals, and communal ceremonies intended to honor ancestral heritage. In the Indonesian context, local

culture is a vital component of social identity and cohesion, linking people's sense of belonging to their environment and history.

Wisconsin Teacher of Local Culture defines local culture as the collection of habits, behaviors, and practices that communities share as part of their everyday existence, whether at home, at work, or in social interactions. Local culture, therefore, is not only limited by geography or ethnicity but is also shaped by collective values, belief systems, and social practices that distinguish one community from another. Puji (as cited in Fallahnda, 2021) explains that Indonesian local culture has been shaped primarily by religion, customs, and ancestral traditions. This diversity is further highlighted by Indonesia's vast ethnolinguistic landscape—Freddy H. Tulung reports that the country possesses 742 local languages or dialects and approximately 478 ethnic groups. Such diversity contributes to a broad spectrum of local cultures across the archipelago, each reflecting unique combinations of belief systems, values, and historical experiences.

Bekasi, one of the urban regions situated within the greater Jakarta metropolitan area (Jabodetabek), represents a distinctive case of cultural hybridity in Indonesia. Historically part of West Java, Bekasi has undergone significant demographic and cultural transformations due to urbanization and migration. According to Adeng (2014), Bekasi was initially dominated by the Sundanese ethnic group, whose language and customs shaped the early cultural foundation of the region. Over time, however, waves of migration—especially from Jakarta and surrounding provinces—introduced Betawi, Javanese, Balinese, and Chinese cultural elements, which gradually merged with the local Sundanese traditions. This process has resulted in what scholars refer to as *hybrid local culture*, a blending of indigenous and external influences that coexist and interact in everyday life.

One of the most notable manifestations of Bekasi's hybrid culture is its distinctive dialect. Adeng (2014) notes that while the phonetic tone of Bekasi speech retains Sundanese characteristics, its vocabulary and diction are strongly influenced by Betawi and other linguistic elements. This linguistic fusion illustrates how local identity in Bekasi has evolved through continuous cultural exchange and adaptation. Apart from language, other traditional forms such as *wayang kulit Bekasi*, *tari topeng Bekasi*, *tanjidor*, *kleiningan tanji*, *calung dalengket*, and *samrah* performances also reflect the dynamic synthesis of local and external cultural traditions.

Historically, Bekasi's position as a cultural crossroads can be traced back to the Dutch colonial era. Idris (2022) explains that during the 17th century, Governor-General Jan Pieterszoon Coen distributed land outside Batavia (Jakarta) to Chinese and indigenous allies of the Dutch, creating the *Ommelanden*—newly developed areas surrounding Batavia. The eastern Ommelanden, which included Bekasi and Karawang, became zones of intercultural contact where Sundanese, Betawi, Javanese, Balinese, and Chinese settlers coexisted and exchanged cultural practices. This early process of assimilation laid the foundation for Bekasi's multicultural identity, which continues to shape its urban and social landscape today.

A key site representing this historical and cultural legacy is *Gedung Juang 45 Bekasi* (also known as *Gedung Juang Tambun*), located in South Tambun. Originally constructed during the early 20th century as *Landhuis Tamboen* by the Khouw van Tamboen family—a prominent Chinese-Indonesian landowning family—the building later served as a stronghold for local resistance during the Indonesian independence movement (Rohmat Kurnia, 2009). Over time, Gedung Juang witnessed multiple historical transitions—from Dutch colonial rule to Japanese occupation, and finally to Indonesian independence—becoming an enduring symbol of Bekasi's resilience and collective memory (Oktaviani, 2022).

In recent years, the Bekasi Regency Government has undertaken extensive revitalization efforts to transform Gedung Juang into a digital heritage museum. Supported by

the local government's annual budget since 2017, the restoration was completed in 2021, converting the building into a modern digital museum that documents the region's social and cultural history from the pre-colonial era to the present (Infobekasi.co). This revitalization reflects the government's strategic use of *government public relations* (GPR) as a tool for cultural communication and heritage preservation.

Preserving local culture is essential not only as a means of protecting historical artifacts but also as a process of reinforcing community identity and continuity. As Triwardani and Rochyanti (2014) argue, cultural preservation involves protecting, maintaining, and developing cultural assets that embody collective values. Koentjaraningrat (1983) further conceptualizes cultural preservation as a systemic effort that integrates various aspects of community life, ensuring that traditions remain relevant amid societal transformation. However, the rapid globalization of information and the dominance of foreign popular cultures—especially those disseminated through digital and mass media—pose significant challenges to local cultural sustainability. Nahak (2019) notes that local cultural expressions, such as traditional theater (*lenong*), music (*gamelan*), and dance, have gradually been marginalized by global entertainment forms, particularly Western and East Asian pop cultures.

In the digital age, communication plays a critical role in cultural preservation. Communication not only serves as a medium to disseminate cultural knowledge but also functions as a tool to shape public understanding and appreciation of heritage. Through communication, individuals and institutions can reinterpret and represent cultural meanings in ways that resonate with contemporary audiences. In this regard, public relations—particularly government public relations—emerges as an essential communication mechanism for promoting, preserving, and revitalizing local culture.

According to Harlow (as cited in Suwanto, 2018), public relations is a management function that fosters mutual understanding and cooperation between organizations and their publics. When applied in a governmental context, this function is referred to as *government public relations* (GPR). Arofi (2018) defines GPR as a communication bridge between government institutions and the public, serving as a channel for policy dissemination, public education, and reputation management. Unlike corporate PR, which focuses on profit generation, GPR prioritizes public trust, transparency, and participation.

In the context of cultural preservation, government public relations can act as a mediator between policy formulation and community engagement. As Rachmadi (2010, as cited in Lani & Handayani, 2021) explains, effective government PR ensures that public policies are communicated in a manner that aligns with public interests and fosters societal support. Cutlip and Center (2000) further emphasize that government PR should ideally be integrated within decision-making structures, ensuring that communication strategies align with institutional objectives and public expectations.

Bekasi's initiative to transform Gedung Juang into a digital museum exemplifies this communicative approach. By merging historical preservation with digital innovation, the government not only conserves tangible heritage but also enhances public accessibility to cultural knowledge. This initiative demonstrates how communication strategies—framed within the principles of public relations—can be instrumental in sustaining local identity amid rapid modernization.

Culture and communication are inherently interdependent. Edward T. Hall (as cited in Suryani) famously asserted that “culture is communication and communication is culture.” Similarly, Martin and Nakayama (as cited in Afdhilah, 2019) argue that culture cannot exist without communication, as cultural meaning is continuously created, shared, and negotiated through communicative acts. In this sense, cultural communication refers to the process of exchanging messages that carry cultural values, symbols, and practices among individuals or

groups. Kusumastuti and Prilianti (2017) define cultural communication as the transmission of messages containing cultural elements between communicators and audiences, where both participants interpret meanings through their respective cultural lenses.

Therefore, efforts to preserve Bekasi's local culture cannot be separated from effective cultural communication. Whether through digital museums, community events, or educational campaigns, communication serves as the primary means of sustaining cultural awareness and participation. As Phillipsen and Gudykunst (as cited in Suryani) emphasize, communication functions as the balancing mechanism that maintains cultural health by preserving both individual creativity and collective identity.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study focuses on examining how the Bekasi Regency Government utilizes government public relations strategies to preserve local culture through the revitalization of Gedung Juang 45. It also explores the communicative challenges encountered in implementing cultural preservation initiatives within an increasingly globalized and digital society.

The central focus of this research is: "*The efforts of the Bekasi Regency Government in preserving local culture through the revitalization of Gedung Juang 45.*" This research aims to contribute to the broader understanding of how communication—particularly government public relations—functions as a strategic instrument in maintaining cultural continuity and fostering civic engagement. In doing so, it highlights the importance of cultural communication as a form of governance that integrates historical awareness, technological innovation, and public participation in sustaining local identity.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research method, which is appropriate for understanding social and cultural phenomena that cannot be measured through numerical or statistical analysis. According to Ghony and Almanshur (2012), qualitative research is specifically designed to investigate objects that cannot be quantified, such as social behavior, cultural life, spirituality, and symbolic processes. It is rooted in a non-positivist paradigm, emphasizing subjective understanding, contextual interpretation, and the meaning of social interactions. In this sense, descriptive qualitative research seeks to describe events, situations, or phenomena as they naturally occur and to interpret them in a comprehensive and detailed manner. The inductive nature of qualitative research allows the researcher to explore phenomena without imposing preconceived frameworks, letting patterns and meanings emerge from the data itself.

The subject of this study is the effort of the Bekasi Regency Government in preserving local culture, specifically through the revitalization of *Gedung Juang 45*. As defined by Arikunto (2016), a research subject refers to the entity—whether individual, group, or institution—upon which variables of the study are attached and examined. In this research, the local government of Bekasi serves as the primary subject because it plays a direct role in policy formulation, management, and implementation of cultural preservation programs. Meanwhile, the object of the study refers to the particular focus of inquiry, namely *Gedung Juang 45* as a representational heritage site and documentary institution that encapsulates the historical and social life of Bekasi society (Sugiyono, 2016). This museum symbolizes the intersection between heritage conservation, cultural communication, and government public relations practice in the digital era.

In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the main instrument of data collection, engaging directly with informants and field settings to obtain in-depth information (Ghony & Almanshur, 2012). Data were collected using three primary techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation.

The observation technique was used to examine the social and cultural dynamics surrounding Gedung Juang 45 and to understand how cultural preservation efforts are implemented in practice. Ghony and Almanshur (2012) describe observation as a systematic method that involves the researcher's direct involvement in recording spatial, behavioral, and emotional aspects of the observed phenomenon. In this study, observations were conducted at Gedung Juang 45 and in related government offices to capture real-time interactions between cultural staff, visitors, and communication activities.

The interview technique was conducted through in-depth, semi-structured conversations with key informants to explore their perceptions, experiences, and interpretations. Quill and Patton (1980) emphasize that interviews in qualitative studies allow researchers to access participants' subjective meanings and emotional insights through open-ended dialogue. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, selecting participants based on specific relevance to the research focus. Informants were classified into three categories: (1) *key informants*—comprising staff from the Cultural Division of the Bekasi Department of Culture, Youth, and Sports and the Bekasi Cultural Heritage Expert Team; (2) *main informants*—comprising tour guides and museum staff at Gedung Juang 45; and (3) *supporting informants*—consisting of visitors and members of the Bekasi community who have experienced the government's cultural preservation efforts firsthand.

The documentation technique complemented the primary data collection. It involved analyzing relevant documents such as government reports, books, journal articles, online news articles, photos, and archival videos related to the revitalization of Gedung Juang 45. As noted by Ghony and Almanshur (2012), documentation helps triangulate and strengthen findings obtained from interviews and observations, ensuring credibility and reliability of data sources.

After the data collection process, all information was analyzed using the interactive data analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman (1992). This model involves three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction involves selecting, simplifying, and categorizing raw data to focus on essential patterns. Data display organizes findings in structured formats for easier interpretation, while conclusion drawing synthesizes the main insights to answer the research questions. The study also employed source triangulation, comparing information from multiple data sources—such as government officials, museum staff, and visitors—to validate interpretations and enhance research credibility.

This methodological approach enables the researcher to provide a deep, contextualized understanding of how the Bekasi Regency Government's public relations strategies contribute to the preservation of local culture through the revitalization of Gedung Juang 45.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Cultural Preservation in Bekasi Regency

The research findings reveal that the Government of Bekasi Regency, through the Department of Culture, Youth, and Sports (*Dinas Kebudayaan, Pemuda, dan Olahraga* or Disbudpora), has adopted a dual approach to preserving local culture: (1) cultural inventorying and (2) art performance organization. These two strategies demonstrate a balanced attempt to preserve both tangible and intangible cultural heritage while simultaneously engaging the public.

According to Kresna Karlingga, a staff member in the Cultural Division, inventorying is an administrative process that aligns with Law No. 5 of 2017 on the Advancement of Culture, which mandates local governments to document, protect, and promote regional cultural expressions (Karlingga, personal communication, May 23, 2023). The process involves cataloging traditional dances, culinary arts, local crafts, music ensembles, and

historic sites such as Saung Ranggon and Gedung Juang. This stage reflects what UNESCO (2011) calls “heritage safeguarding,” emphasizing systematic documentation as a foundation for cultural policy-making.

The second method, organizing art performances and festivals, functions as an applied form of cultural revitalization. Events such as the *Bekasi Cultural Parade (Kirab Budaya)*, *Bekasi Lebaran Festival*, *Ramadhan Festival*, and the *Anniversary of Bekasi Regency (HUT Kabupaten Bekasi)* exemplify how local traditions are performed in public spaces, creating a participatory and celebratory atmosphere. As Himayatul Ulya (tour guide at Gedung Juang) explained, these events not only serve as entertainment but also as a medium for reintroducing heritage to younger generations. Through these practices, the Bekasi Government merges traditional cultural promotion with modern event management principles, a form of cultural communication strategy described by Fill (2013) as “experiential engagement” in public relations.

Gedung Juang and the Symbolic Meaning of Cultural Space

Gedung Juang, established in 1906, stands as a historic and symbolic structure representing the region’s struggle and identity. Formerly known as *Landhuis Tamboen*, the building initially belonged to a Chinese landlord, Khouw Tjeng Kee. Over time, it evolved from a colonial residence into a resistance center during Indonesia’s independence war and was later designated a cultural heritage site in 1999.

Since 2020, the building has undergone revitalization and now functions as the Bekasi Digital Museum, integrating technology and interactive displays. The revitalization initiative reflects a shift toward digital museology, where heritage institutions utilize digital tools to engage audiences (Parry, 2010). However, the integration of digital interfaces also poses new challenges. As Karlingga noted, many visitors are still unfamiliar with interactive technology, leading to operational difficulties during museum visits.

This digital gap among visitors mirrors Indonesia’s broader digital literacy divide (Kementerian Kominfo, 2022), indicating that cultural modernization must go hand in hand with public education. The digitalization of Gedung Juang thus represents both a symbolic and practical effort to merge cultural preservation with the digital transformation agenda. It also exemplifies what Giddens (1984) describes in his structuration theory as the duality of structure: the museum is both a product of cultural policy (structure) and a medium through which visitors continuously recreate meaning through interaction (agency).

Cultural Policy as Government Public Relations

This study interprets the Bekasi Government’s cultural initiatives through the lens of Government Public Relations (GPR). GPR refers to the strategic communication practices employed by public institutions to build relationships, legitimacy, and trust among citizens (Lee, 2012). In this context, cultural preservation serves not only as a policy obligation but also as a communication tool to foster civic engagement and regional identity.

Five main components of public relations identified in the data—event management, publicity, public information, community relations, and lobbying—reflect a structured communication framework similar to the one proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984) in their four models of public relations.

a. Event Management

Cultural events in Bekasi Regency, such as *Kirab Budaya*, *Lebaran Bekasi*, and *Ramadhan Festival*, serve as central mechanisms for citizen participation. These events reinforce a sense of belonging while promoting inclusivity across ethnic lines, notably between Betawi and Sundanese communities. As per Ulya’s testimony, festivals are designed to “invite residents to participate directly,” which aligns with the concept of interactive

communication in public relations, where two-way engagement replaces one-way information dissemination (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006).

By incorporating performances from local artists and guest appearances by national celebrities, the government successfully creates what Hall (1997) terms a “cultural spectacle”, where local identity is reconstructed through public display and collective experience.

b. Publicity and Public Information

The Bekasi Government’s publicity efforts are still limited. As Karlingga admitted, there are no specialized campaigns or videos promoting Bekasi’s distinctive culture because the region lacks a single “original” cultural form. Instead, Bekasi’s culture reflects a blend of Betawi and Sundanese traditions. This hybridity poses a challenge for branding, as cultural identity becomes diffuse.

However, the Bekasi Digital Museum’s social media accounts (Instagram and TikTok) serve as indirect publicity channels. They showcase museum events and cultural education content, aligning with the information dissemination function of public relations (Varey, 2002). Yet, the content remains more descriptive than narrative-driven, limiting its potential to build emotional connections with digital audiences.

c. Community Relations

Community relations play a crucial role in ensuring sustainability. Disbudpora actively engages local art groups and traditional dance studios through technical guidance programs (*bimbingan teknis*). The aim is to make these groups more technologically literate and capable of self-promotion via social media platforms. As Karlingga described, the goal is to help artists “no longer depend on the government for promotion.”

This initiative reflects the empowerment-oriented approach within public communication, where institutions shift from a top-down model to a facilitative one (Heath, 2010). By encouraging cultural actors to utilize digital platforms, the government fosters participatory cultural dissemination and decentralizes communication.

d. Lobbying

Lobbying activities were most evident during the revitalization of Gedung Juang. The government had to negotiate with local communities and organizations that felt displaced by the restoration project. Through dialogue and mediation, Disbudpora managed to resolve the tension, illustrating the negotiative dimension of GPR (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010).

This instance shows how government communication transcends publicity—it requires conflict management and stakeholder negotiation to maintain legitimacy. The case also reinforces that effective cultural policy involves balancing modernization with the protection of local communities’ emotional and historical attachment to heritage spaces.

Challenges in Cultural Communication

Despite these efforts, several challenges persist in implementing cultural preservation programs. The most significant issues include:

1. **Public Apathy Toward Traditional Arts.** As Karlingga noted, many citizens “are not yet accustomed to traditional art forms.” The lack of public enthusiasm limits audience engagement and cultural continuity.
2. **Historical Authenticity Debates.** Ulya reported that some visitors question the museum’s historical narratives, claiming discrepancies with family oral histories. This issue reflects what Lowenthal (1998) calls the “heritage dissonance” problem—where multiple interpretations of the past coexist and occasionally conflict.
3. **Technological Literacy Gaps.** Visitors’ unfamiliarity with digital installations often hampers the museum experience. This gap underscores the need for digital literacy education as part of cultural policy implementation (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007).

4. Limited Budget and Institutional Coordination. The absence of consistent publicity initiatives indicates structural constraints. Cultural promotion often relies on ad hoc or event-based projects, which may not yield sustained public engagement.

These challenges illustrate that cultural communication in Bekasi Regency operates within a complex interplay of administrative, social, and technological factors, confirming Giddens's (1984) notion that social practices are continuously shaped and reshaped by both structural and individual agency.

Interpretive Discussion: Culture, Communication, and Local Identity

From an interpretive perspective, the Bekasi case represents how local government communication functions as both a managerial and symbolic act. The use of events, digital museums, and collaborations with local artists collectively produce what Fairclough (1995) would call a "discursive construction of locality"—a way for institutions to narrate place identity through communication.

In this regard, the Government of Bekasi Regency serves as both a communicator and a curator. It mediates between historical authenticity and contemporary branding, between traditional arts and digital culture. By revitalizing Gedung Juang as a digital museum, the local government repositions heritage as an interactive narrative rather than a static monument.

The government's approach also highlights the transition from authority-centered communication to participatory communication. Through its community relation programs, Disbudpora invites collaboration with cultural practitioners, transforming them from policy subjects into co-creators of cultural narratives. This shift echoes contemporary models of networked governance (Castells, 2009), where communication networks replace hierarchical control as the main driver of policy legitimacy.

Nevertheless, the duality of preservation and modernization remains a core tension. While the Bekasi Digital Museum introduces innovation, it risks alienating older generations unfamiliar with interactive displays. Similarly, while digital platforms enable cultural promotion, they also commodify culture, reducing heritage to content for consumption (Throsby, 2010).

Therefore, sustainable cultural communication requires balancing digital adaptation with cultural authenticity, ensuring that modernization does not dilute historical meaning. This balance aligns with the objectives of Indonesia's *National Strategy for Cultural Advancement* (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2018), which emphasizes both technological adaptation and value preservation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the preservation of local culture by the Bekasi Regency Government through the Gedung Juang 45 Museum represents a conscious and strategic effort to maintain regional identity amidst modernization. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, this research reveals that the preservation process is not only limited to physical restoration of heritage buildings but also involves social and cultural engagement with the community. The findings indicate that the government's initiatives—ranging from revitalization programs to educational tours and cultural exhibitions—have created a participatory space for citizens to reconnect with their historical roots.

The study highlights the significance of symbolic interaction between government institutions, museum staff, and the public in sustaining cultural continuity. Gedung Juang 45 serves as both a historical monument and a medium of communication that conveys collective memory. By involving the Cultural Division, heritage experts, and tour guides as

key actors, the preservation process becomes multidimensional—encompassing historical conservation, public education, and cultural revitalization.

The results also show that public participation plays a crucial role in strengthening these preservation efforts. Visitors' emotional attachment and civic pride, as expressed through community involvement, have become an integral part of sustaining the museum's relevance. However, challenges remain, particularly in ensuring consistent funding, digital documentation, and the integration of cultural education into formal and informal learning environments.

In broader terms, this research contributes to understanding how cultural preservation functions as a communicative practice that links policy, heritage management, and social awareness. The Bekasi Regency Government's efforts at Gedung Juang 45 demonstrate that preserving local culture is not merely about maintaining artifacts but about nurturing cultural meanings that continue to evolve through public participation and institutional collaboration. Future research may explore how digital media can further support cultural preservation, enabling broader public access and intergenerational knowledge transfer.

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