

Pentahelix Model of Cultural Transmission in Wayang On The Street Performances in Semarang's Old Town

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ABSTRACT

The sustainability of traditional performing arts in the modern era requires innovative strategies to ensure cultural relevance and intergenerational transmission. This study investigates the cultural transmission process within the Wayang On The Street (WOTS) performance, held in the Old Town area of Semarang in 2024, as a collaborative model integrating traditional values into contemporary public spaces. Employing a descriptive qualitative case study, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with artists, cultural officials, and community members, and documentation of the Pandawa Pitu performance during the Semarang Old Town Festival. The analysis focuses on the interaction among actors within the pentahelix framework—academics, government, business, media, and community—in sustaining traditional performing arts in urban contexts. Findings reveal that WOTS serves not only as a platform for artistic expression but also as a medium for cultural education, public participation, and community empowerment. The synergy among stakeholders strengthens the adaptive capacity of traditional arts and fosters sustainable cultural ecosystems. This study contributes to the theoretical development of cultural transmission by emphasizing the role of multi-stakeholder collaboration as a foundation for innovative cultural preservation in contemporary society.

KEYWORDS

Wayang On The Street
Cultural Transmission
Performing Arts
Public Space
Pentahelix Theory

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has a wealth of traditional arts which are an important part of its national cultural identity, one of which is the performing art of wayang (Suprihatin and Pratamawati 2019). Wayang not only functions as entertainment, but also as a medium for moral education and a means of transmitting cultural values between generations (Ketiti 2023). However, amidst the tide of modernization, urbanization, and changing lifestyles, the existence of traditional arts faces serious challenges, particularly in terms of the regeneration of audiences and artists.

The public sphere, increasingly dominated by popular culture, is displacing traditional arts from the social sphere. This situation has spurred new initiatives from various cultural actors attempting to reposition wayang in contemporary spaces that are more open, inclusive, and interactive. Several previous studies have addressed the preservation of traditional arts (Suprihatin & Pratamawati, 2019; Wibowo et al., 2020) and the dynamics of cultural transmission (Whiten, 2017; Yeh et al., 2019), but most have focused on the context of closed spaces or specific arts communities. Research on cultural transmission practices within the context of performing arts in urban public spaces remains very limited. This gap

is crucial to fill, given that changes in the function of public spaces influence how cultural values are passed down and internalized by society.(Jeong et al. 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the process of cultural transmission in the Wayang On The Street performance in the Old City area of Semarang through the perspective of pentahelix collaboration. The main questions to be answered are: (1) how the process of cultural transmission occurs in the practice of WOTS performances in public spaces, and (2) how the role of each actor in the pentahelix model supports the sustainability of traditional performing arts in the context of urban culture. In this context, the pentahelix theory becomes a very relevant framework for understanding how cultural transmission can occur effectively in the collaborative era (Sievers 2021). This theory emphasizes the importance of synergy between the five elements of academics, entrepreneurs, civil society, government, and media in encouraging social innovation and sustainable development (Aveling 2012).

In cultural studies, the pentahelix theory can be used to analyze how traditional values are retransmitted in contemporary contexts, through mutually reinforcing cross-sector collaboration (Subiyantoro, Kristiani, and Wijaya 2020). Cultural transmission in this case is not just the preservation of traditional forms, but also the creation of new meanings that are relevant to the needs of today's society (Simons 2020). The Wayang On The Street performance represents a cultural transmission practice that is not one-way, but rather dialogic and interactive (Stengelin, Haun, and Kanngiesser 2023). The performance not only presents classical stories from the Mahabharata or Ramayana, but also addresses contemporary issues with a more contextual artistic approach. Its open-air presentation allows for direct interaction between the wayang orang artists, the audience, and the surrounding environment (Gupta and Tanenbaum 2019). This interaction indirectly forms a new pattern of cultural transmission processes, where old values are packaged through new mediums and spaces that are more adaptive to changes in the times (Yeh, Fogarty, and Kandler 2019).

Through a pentahelix approach, this performance becomes a collaborative space that brings together various interests: local governments provide support in terms of regulations and facilities, academics contribute through research and public education, local communities act as participatory drivers, entrepreneurs provide support for the creative economy, and the media serves as a channel for disseminating cultural narratives (Rodrigues-Ferreira et al. 2023). This collaboration results in a healthy and productive cultural ecosystem, which ultimately allows cultural transmission not only to continue consistently, but also to develop in new forms that are socially and culturally relevant (Marradi and Mulder 2022).

This research also aims to examine how the roles of each actor involved in the pentahelix collaborative framework, namely academics, entrepreneurs, society/community, government, and media, contribute to supporting the sustainability and transformation of traditional arts performances (Hilger, Rose, and Keil 2021). In addition, this research attempts to explain how forms of performance in public spaces can be an effective medium for preserving and innovating local cultural values, as well as demonstrating the potential of urban cultural spaces as a forum for inclusive and transformative cultural interaction (Landman 2020).

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative case study approach to examine in-depth the phenomenon of Wayang On The Street (WOTS) performances in Semarang's Old Town area. This approach was chosen to explore the dynamics of cultural transmission within the context of wayang orang performances that move from buildings to open public spaces. This study focuses on one main play, Pandawa Pitu, performed at the 2024 Semarang Old Town Festival (FKL). The research locations were centered in Semarang's Old Town area, the WOTS performance space, and the Ki Narto Sabdo Arts Building, the original venue for the Ngesti Pandowo wayang orang performance. These locations were chosen based on the transformation of the performance space and the accompanying changes in the socio-cultural context.

Data were collected through three main techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participant observation was conducted during the 2024 Old City Festival to document the dramatic aspects of the performances, interactions between performers and audiences, and forms of arts community engagement in public spaces. In-depth interviews were conducted with WOTS artists, Ngesti Pandowo administrators, cultural officials, and audience members to gain cross-actor perspectives on the cultural transmission process. Documentation included the collection of the Pandawa Pitu play script, photographs, videos of the performances, and relevant regional cultural policy archives. Each technique was chosen purposively to represent the performative, social, and policy dimensions of the performance practices studied.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively-interpretively with a theoretical triangulation approach that integrates three main analytical frameworks: (1) George Kernodle's dramatic structure theory to examine dramatic elements and performance forms; (2) Maruska Svasek's transit and transition theory to interpret the shift in space and meaning of performances from conventional stages to public spaces; and (3) Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman's cultural transmission theory to identify patterns of cultural value inheritance through the pentahelix model. These three theories are used in a complementary manner, where the results of dramatic analysis (Kernodle) become the basis for socio-cultural interpretation (Svasek), which is then contextualized within the framework of cross-sector cultural transmission (Whiten 2017).

Triangulation was conducted through three stages, namely: (1) data triangulation, by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation; (2) theory triangulation, by linking the findings to three theoretical frameworks; and (3) researcher triangulation, through peer debriefing with colleagues and member checking with key informants to ensure the validity of interpretations. To clarify the relationship between data and theory, this article includes an analysis mapping table, which displays the relationship between empirical findings and conceptual foundations. This approach is expected to produce an in-depth, verified, and reflective analysis of cultural transmission practices in the context of traditional performing arts in urban public spaces.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Patterns, Dialogues, and Urban Cultural Dynamics

The cultural transmission process manifested in Wayang On The Street (WOTS) performances in Semarang's Old Town demonstrates a complex and layered mechanism of inheritance, negotiation, and reinterpretation of traditional values within an urban public space. Rather than operating through a single linear pathway, WOTS reveals at least four interrelated patterns of cultural transmission—vertical, horizontal, diagonal, and collaborative—that collectively illustrate how traditional performing arts adapt, survive, and gain renewed relevance in contemporary urban contexts (Raharjo et al. 2021). These patterns do not function in isolation; instead, they intersect and dialogue with one another, forming a dynamic cultural ecosystem in which tradition is continuously reproduced, contested, and recontextualized.

At its core, WOTS represents a significant shift in the locus of cultural transmission. Traditional wayang orang performances, which historically took place in enclosed and institutionally defined spaces such as royal courts or formal performance halls, are relocated into open urban public spaces. This spatial relocation has profound implications for how cultural values are transmitted, who becomes involved in the process, and how meaning is negotiated between performers and audiences. In this sense, WOTS is not merely an artistic innovation but a cultural experiment that exposes the mechanisms of transmission to broader social forces, including urban lifestyles, tourism economies, and cross-sector collaboration.

Within this urban setting, the four transmission patterns operate as relational processes rather than fixed categories. Vertical transmission, which emphasizes intergenerational inheritance between senior and junior artists, undergoes a contextual transformation when enacted in public space. The authority of senior artists is no longer exercised solely through closed pedagogical relationships, but is performed openly before heterogeneous audiences. This visibility creates a dialogical condition in which inherited values must be continuously translated into performative expressions that remain intelligible and engaging within the immediacy of urban life. As a result, cultural transmission shifts from a purely instructional mode toward an experiential and performative one, without abandoning its ethical foundations.

Horizontal transmission further intensifies this dialogical character by foregrounding collective negotiation among artists. In WOTS, artistic decisions emerge through peer-based discussion, improvisation, and shared adaptation to the unpredictable conditions of public space. Noise, spatial constraints, audience mobility, and temporal limitations compel performers to engage in ongoing dialogue, both verbally and performatively. Through this process, cultural knowledge is produced collectively and situationally, reinforcing communal solidarity while enabling flexibility and innovation. Horizontal transmission thus becomes a crucial mechanism through which traditional performance remains responsive to the fluid rhythms of urban cultural life.

Diagonal transmission introduces another layer of dialogue by mediating between artistic practice and institutional frameworks. Academics, cultural policymakers, and urban stakeholders engage with WOTS as interpreters and facilitators who translate embodied artistic knowledge into discursive, educational, and policy-oriented forms. This mediation expands the reach of cultural transmission beyond the performance itself, embedding it within broader narratives of cultural heritage, urban identity, and public education. However, this process is not neutral; it involves negotiations of authority and representation, as

institutional interpretations may influence how artists understand and articulate their own practices.

These dialogical interactions culminate in the collaborative transmission model structured through the pentahelix framework. By integrating government, academia, artistic communities, business actors, and media, WOTS operates within a complex urban cultural network. Public space performances become nodes where artistic values intersect with city branding, tourism agendas, media visibility, and economic considerations. This integration offers opportunities for sustainability and wider recognition, yet simultaneously introduces tensions related to commodification and cultural simplification. The dialogue between cultural integrity and urban market logic thus emerges as a central dynamic shaping the transmission process.

Taken together, the interaction between patterns, dialogues, and urban cultural dynamics reveals that cultural transmission in WOTS is neither linear nor uncontested. It is an ongoing process of negotiation shaped by spatial openness, social diversity, and institutional entanglement. Rather than signaling the dilution of tradition, this complexity underscores its resilience. WOTS demonstrates that traditional performing arts can function as dialogical systems—capable of absorbing urban influences while maintaining ethical continuity—thereby redefining cultural transmission as an active, relational, and context-sensitive practice within contemporary urban life.

Continuity, Authority, and Intergenerational Ethics

Vertical transmission in WOTS is most evident in the relationship between senior and junior wayang orang artists within the artistic community. This pattern reflects the classical mode of cultural inheritance, where knowledge, skills, and values are passed down from older generations to younger ones through direct mentorship, apprenticeship, and embodied practice. Senior artists function not only as instructors of technique but also as custodians of artistic ethics, narrative philosophy, and moral values embedded in wayang stories (Triyanto, Syakir, and Mujiyono 2019).

In the context of WOTS, vertical transmission takes place through rehearsals, joint performances, and informal interactions before and after shows. Younger performers learn vocal techniques, movement vocabularies, character interpretation, and dramaturgical timing by observing and imitating their seniors. More importantly, they internalize the philosophical dimensions of wayang narratives—ideas of dharma, leadership, loyalty, and moral struggle—which constitute the ideological backbone of the tradition. This process aligns with the classical understanding of cultural transmission as described by Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman (1981), where inheritance is not limited to technical knowledge but extends to symbolic and ethical systems.

However, vertical transmission within WOTS is not without tension. The urban context introduces new challenges that complicate intergenerational continuity. Younger artists are increasingly shaped by digital media, popular culture, and shifting entertainment preferences, which sometimes clash with the disciplined, time-intensive learning process demanded by traditional wayang orang. As Pérez Escoda, Barón-Dulce, and Rubio-Romero (2021) note, contemporary youth often experience an identity crisis shaped by fragmented cultural references and accelerated consumption patterns. In this situation, vertical transmission alone is insufficient to ensure sustainability; it requires adaptation and support from other transmission patterns.

Community Solidarity and Collective Learning

Horizontal transmission emerges through interactions among artists within the WOTS community who occupy relatively equal positions in terms of age, status, or expertise. This pattern is particularly visible in collaborative rehearsals, cross-group coordination, and collective problem-solving during preparations for public performances. Unlike vertical transmission, which emphasizes hierarchy and authority, horizontal transmission is characterized by reciprocity, dialogue, and mutual learning.

Within WOTS, artists from different backgrounds and artistic groups exchange ideas about staging, choreography, music, and audience engagement strategies. Performing in an open public space requires a level of adaptability that is not always addressed in traditional training. As a result, artists learn from one another through experimentation—adjusting vocal projection to outdoor acoustics, modifying movement patterns to accommodate spatial constraints, or improvising interactions with spontaneous audiences. This peer-based learning process strengthens communal bonds and fosters a sense of shared ownership over the performance.

From a theoretical perspective, horizontal transmission resonates with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of observation, imitation, and social interaction in shaping behavior and values. In WOTS, learning occurs not through formal instruction but through participatory engagement, reinforcing values such as solidarity, discipline, and empathy. Ishiguro, Ishihara, and Morita (2023) argue that such collaborative artistic environments contribute not only to skill development but also to social cohesion and collective identity formation.

Importantly, horizontal transmission also democratizes cultural authority. Knowledge is no longer monopolized by senior figures but circulates within the community, allowing innovation to emerge organically. This dynamic is particularly crucial in urban public performances, where responsiveness to audience diversity and spatial unpredictability becomes a shared responsibility.

Mediation Between Art, Policy, and Knowledge Systems

Diagonal transmission operates at the intersection between the arts community and external actors such as academics, cultural bureaucrats, and policy makers. In the WOTS context, this pattern manifests through documentation efforts, conceptual framing, policy support, and institutional legitimation. Academics contribute by researching, theorizing, and contextualizing WOTS within broader discourses of cultural transmission, urban studies, and performance theory. Their work transforms tacit artistic knowledge into explicit academic discourse, expanding the reach of cultural transmission beyond the immediate community.

Simultaneously, local government plays a facilitative role by providing permits, infrastructure, and promotional support. This institutional involvement extends cultural transmission into the realm of policy, embedding traditional performance within urban cultural planning and tourism strategies. Such mediation exemplifies diagonal transmission, where knowledge and values move between different social strata and institutional frameworks (Barnabe et al. 2023).

Figures such as art lecturers, senior practitioners with academic affiliations, and cultural officials function as cultural brokers. They translate artistic needs into policy language and, conversely, interpret bureaucratic frameworks for artists. As Gordon, Davila, and Riedy (2023) suggest, this form of mediation is essential for sustaining cultural practices in

complex socio-political environments. However, it also raises questions about power, representation, and the potential instrumentalization of art for non-artistic agendas.

Toward a Cultural Ecosystem

Beyond the three classical patterns, WOTS demonstrates a collaborative transmission model structured around the pentahelix framework, which integrates government, academia, community, business, and media. This model reflects a contemporary approach to cultural sustainability, emphasizing cross-sector collaboration as a means of maintaining relevance and resilience in changing urban contexts (Ottaviani et al. 2023).

In practice, each actor contributes a specific function. Government institutions act as facilitators by providing spatial access and regulatory support. Academics serve as concept developers and documentarians, ensuring that performances are critically contextualized and archived. Artistic communities remain the primary agents of creation and performance, safeguarding the authenticity of tradition. Businesses contribute through sponsorships and creative economy networks, while media outlets disseminate performances to wider audiences, amplifying visibility and public engagement (Choi 2021).

This collaborative ecosystem enables cultural preservation to move beyond symbolic gestures toward structural and economic sustainability (Rivas-Aceves and Schmidt 2022). However, research findings indicate that collaboration within WOTS remains uneven. Private sector and media involvement often remains symbolic, focused on short-term visibility rather than long-term commitment. This imbalance highlights the fragility of collaborative transmission and the need for clearer frameworks of shared responsibility.

The Paradox of Collaboration: Commodification and Cultural Integrity

The integration of market-oriented actors introduces a paradox inherent in collaborative cultural models. While economic support and media exposure are essential for sustainability, excessive reliance on market logic risks commodifying cultural expressions. De Vaujany, Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, and Holt (2020) warn that when artistic practices become subservient to commercial imperatives, intrinsic values may be diluted or distorted.

In the WOTS context, the transformation of wayang orang into a tourist-friendly spectacle raises critical questions: To what extent can performances adapt to audience expectations without sacrificing philosophical depth? How can artists balance accessibility with authenticity? These tensions underscore the importance of ethical reflection within cultural transmission processes. Marçal (2022) emphasizes that cultural preservation requires sensitivity to the “in-between” spaces where tradition and innovation intersect.

Ultimately, Wayang On The Street functions as a living laboratory for examining cultural transmission in contemporary urban settings. It demonstrates that tradition is not a static inheritance but a dynamic process shaped by dialogue, negotiation, and collaboration. The four transmission patterns—vertical, horizontal, diagonal, and collaborative—collectively illustrate how traditional performing arts can survive and evolve without losing their cultural roots.

As Etxaniz (2011) argues, preserving the external form of art is insufficient without safeguarding its inner meaning. WOTS exemplifies an adaptive, reflective, and ethically grounded approach to cultural transmission, proving that the revitalization of traditional performing arts is not an abstract ideal but a tangible possibility within today’s urban cultural landscape (Ishizuka, Kuo-Che, and Kishi 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrates that the process of cultural transmission in Wayang On The Street (WOTS) performances in Semarang's Old Town area occurs not only through conventional inheritance patterns such as vertical and horizontal transmission, but also through diagonal and collaborative patterns involving various actors across sectors. These findings broaden the understanding of cultural transmission by presenting a collaborative transmission model, namely a pattern of cultural value inheritance that occurs through synergy between the government, academics, arts communities, business actors, and the media. In this model, cultural transmission is not understood as a linear or one-way process, but rather as a dynamic, dialogical practice that continuously negotiates with social, spatial, and temporal changes. Thus, traditional arts such as wayang orang are not merely preserved as static heritage but are actively recontextualized within contemporary urban society.

Academically, this research enriches the study of cultural transmission by emphasizing that the process of value inheritance is not solely genealogical or based on internal communities, but also institutional and intersectoral, in line with the principle of pentahelix collaboration. The findings of this study demonstrate that the pentahelix model is not only relevant as a development or innovation strategy but can also serve as an epistemological framework for understanding how culture is maintained, transformed, and legitimized in modern society. Wayang On The Street provides empirical evidence that the preservation of traditional culture can evolve into a social practice that adapts to the demands of the modern urban context without losing its philosophical and ethical foundations as a local cultural heritage.

This study also confirms that the shift in the performance space of wayang orang from conventional enclosed spaces to open public spaces has significant implications for audience engagement patterns and the cultural learning process. Public spaces enable more inclusive, spontaneous, and participatory encounters between artists and the community, allowing cultural values to be transmitted not only through narrative but also through bodily experiences, direct interactions, and the collective atmosphere created during the performance. In this context, WOTS functions as a vibrant cultural education space, where learning takes place informally through observation, emotional engagement, and social participation. This confirms that urban public spaces have strategic potential as a medium for cultural education and intergenerational dialogue.

In terms of practical implications, this research makes important contributions to the formulation of cultural policies, arts practices, and the development of arts institutions. The collaborative patterns established in WOTS can serve as a reference model for local governments in designing traditional arts preservation programs based on participation, inclusivity, and sustainability. Traditional arts should not be positioned solely as ceremonial attractions or tourism commodities, but rather as social resources that contribute to increasing cultural literacy, social cohesion, and strengthening the local creative economy. Meanwhile, academics and educational institutions play a crucial role in documenting, developing discourse, and disseminating knowledge about traditional arts to ensure their sustainability, both in the scientific and public spheres.

However, this research also identifies several challenges that require serious attention to ensure the sustainability of collaborative cultural transmission. The imbalance in contributions between actors within the pentahelix framework particularly the involvement of the private sector and the media, which remains largely symbolic has the potential to weaken the program's sustainability. Furthermore, the increased exposure of traditional arts in public spaces and digital media also raises the risk of cultural commodification, which

could displace the intrinsic values of performing arts. Therefore, future cultural transmission strategies need to be accompanied by ethical awareness, critical reflection, and a clear value orientation so that innovations do not obscure the meaning and authenticity of culture.

In conclusion, Wayang On The Street is a concrete example of how traditional performing arts can survive and thrive through adaptive, reflective, and collaborative cultural transmission strategies. By combining tradition and innovation, along with community practice and institutional support, WOTS demonstrates that the revitalization of traditional arts is not merely an idealistic discourse, but a real, sustainable possibility in today's urban cultural landscape. This research confirms that collaborative innovation is key to maintaining cultural sustainability amidst globalization.

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