



## Sound System Culture and Local Creative Economy: An Ethnographic Study of Rural Communities in Sukorambi, Jember

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### ABSTRACT

This study explores how participatory spaces are formed within the sound system community through the Sound Miniature Contest in Sukorambi Village, Jember, Indonesia. Emerging from shared interests and collective enthusiasm for sound technology, this community has evolved into a distinctive cultural movement that integrates leisure, creativity, and local entrepreneurship. Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The analysis employs a postmodern theoretical framework to interpret how sound system enthusiasts construct new forms of social interaction, identity expression, and symbolic capital. The findings reveal that this subcultural practice not only redefines rural youth engagement and social cohesion but also contributes to the dynamics of the local creative economy. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that the sound system culture in Sukorambi functions as a hybrid arena where cultural expression, technology, and economic participation converge, thereby stimulating community-based economic growth.

### KEYWORDS:

Sound system culture; youth participation; ethnography; creative economy; Sukorambi Village; postmodernism

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's rapid demographic growth and youthful population structure continue to reshape its cultural and economic landscapes. As of 2022, the country's population reached approximately 274.2 million, with the majority within the productive age group (BPS, 2023). This demographic potential, however, has not been fully matched by equitable employment opportunities, particularly in rural areas. Villages often depend heavily on agriculture and face structural limitations in diversifying their local economies. In this context, rural cultural practices and community-based initiatives are increasingly recognized as alternative sources of livelihood and creative expression that contribute to local economic resilience (Syaifullah & Wibowo, 2016; UNCTAD, 2021).

Sukorambi Village, located in Jember Regency, East Java, provides a compelling case for examining the intersection between culture, youth participation, and the creative economy. Traditionally, Sukorambi's residents have relied on agriculture, small-scale trading, and construction work. Yet, in recent years, the village has witnessed the emergence of a distinctive youth-led cultural phenomenon known as *sound system culture*. Rooted in collective enthusiasm for music, technology, and public performance, this subculture has evolved from informal gatherings into organized events such as the *Sound Miniature Contest*. These events not only serve as recreational outlets but also generate economic activities through equipment rental, event organization, and local trade.

Globally, sound system culture has been discussed as a form of grassroots creativity that bridges entertainment, identity construction, and informal entrepreneurship (Henriques, 2011; Mould, 2020). Within the Indonesian rural context, such phenomena remain underexplored despite their growing

role in shaping community-based creative economies. The sound system community in Sukorambi illustrates how technology and popular culture are localized to form new modes of collective participation and cultural innovation. This process aligns with the broader theoretical perspectives of postmodernism, which emphasize hybridity, decentralization of cultural authority, and the blurring of boundaries between high and popular culture (Setiawan & Sudrajat, 2018; Jameson, 2020).

This study aims to investigate how spaces for community participation are constructed within the sound system culture in Sukorambi Village and how these participatory practices contribute to the transformation of local economic structures. Using an ethnographic approach, it explores how shared enthusiasm among rural youth for sound systems leads to the formation of unique traditions that simultaneously embody creativity, identity, and economic agency. By doing so, the study contributes to the growing discourse on Indonesia's rural creative economy and offers insights into how cultural innovation can serve as a catalyst for inclusive economic development at the village level.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Sound system culture has emerged as a distinctive form of postmodern social practice that merges technology, creativity, and community participation. Originating in grassroots musical movements, particularly in the Caribbean and urban British contexts, sound systems have historically served as platforms for collective expression and identity formation (Henriques, 2011; Stolzoff, 2020). These cultural practices transcend entertainment by functioning as participatory arenas where individuals collaborate through performance, sound engineering, and audience interaction. The sound system phenomenon exemplifies what Jameson (2020) and Featherstone (2021) describe as the postmodern blurring of boundaries between high and popular culture, production and consumption, and art and everyday life. Through this lens, sound systems are not only artistic expressions but also social institutions that embody hybridity and decentralized creativity.

In rural Indonesian contexts such as Sukorambi Village, this postmodern dynamic acquires localized meaning. The enthusiasm for sound systems among rural youth reflects both cultural adaptation and technological appropriation. It demonstrates how global cultural forms are reinterpreted within local moral and social frameworks. This localization process aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) notion of "assemblages," where people, technologies, and emotions converge to produce new social realities. These sound-based gatherings, like the *Sound Miniature Contest*, therefore become performative spaces where creativity, identity, and economic agency intersect. The community-based nature of such practices transforms music into a vehicle for both social cohesion and livelihood creation, illustrating Bourdieu's (1986) idea of cultural capital as a resource that can be socially and economically mobilized.

Youth participation is central to the development and sustainability of these creative practices. Contemporary literature emphasizes that active youth engagement is a crucial driver of social innovation and community transformation (Cornwall & Coelho, 2021; UNDP, 2022). In the Indonesian context, rural youth increasingly navigate structural unemployment and limited mobility by turning to creative, informal, and collaborative endeavors (Utomo & McDonald, 2020). Participation in sound system activities reflects what Hartley (2019) terms *vernacular creativity*, or creativity grounded in everyday life that is shaped by local resources and collective imagination. It also functions as a site of empowerment where young people negotiate social hierarchies, experiment with technology, and assert their agency in redefining community life. Participation, in this sense, is both cultural and political—it reshapes relations of power, visibility, and representation while generating new economic opportunities through performance, equipment rental, and event organization.

This relationship between cultural expression and economic participation situates sound system culture within broader discussions on the creative economy. According to UNCTAD (2021), the creative economy lies at the intersection of culture, technology, and entrepreneurship, serving as a catalyst for sustainable development. However, much of the existing scholarship focuses on urban creative clusters, often overlooking rural creative ecosystems. Recent studies highlight that rural areas are equally capable of fostering creativity, innovation, and social entrepreneurship when cultural heritage is combined with new media and community networks (Gibson & Connell, 2022; Florida, 2023). In

Indonesia, the government has incorporated creative economy strategies into national development plans, yet implementation in rural areas remains uneven due to infrastructural and institutional limitations (Wicaksono, 2022). Ethnographic attention to local practices like the sound system community thus offers valuable insight into how informal creative economies function and evolve outside formal industry frameworks.

Furthermore, the interplay between cultural production and economic sustainability can be understood through the concept of *cultural sustainability* (Throsby, 2019). Sustainable cultural practices preserve local identity while fostering innovation and livelihood diversification. The sound system movement in Sukorambi exemplifies this synergy: it preserves community solidarity and shared identity while simultaneously generating micro-economies that support local vendors, technicians, and event organizers. This demonstrates how the creative economy in rural Indonesia can be viewed not simply as a sector but as a social process grounded in local knowledge, intergenerational collaboration, and ethical participation.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws from postmodern cultural theory, which emphasizes plurality, hybridity, and the decentralization of authority (Lyotard, 1984; Jameson, 2020). Postmodernism provides an interpretive lens through which the hybrid, participatory, and affective dimensions of sound system culture can be understood. The ethnographic approach adopted in this research situates these cultural practices within the lived experiences of rural youth, highlighting how they navigate between global media influences and local social values. By examining the interrelations of culture, participation, and economy, this study contributes to a growing understanding of how creativity operates as both an expressive and economic force within Indonesia's rural transformation.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design with an ethnographic approach to explore how community participation spaces were constructed among members of the sound system community in Sukorambi Village, Jember Regency. Ethnography was chosen because it enables a deep understanding of cultural meanings, everyday interactions, and the lived experiences of individuals within a social setting (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). By engaging directly with the community, the researcher aimed to interpret the values, norms, and social processes that shape the collective practices of sound system enthusiasts and their contribution to local economic dynamics.

The fieldwork was conducted in Sukorambi Village, a semi-rural area in East Java known for its emerging youth-driven sound system scene. The site was selected purposively because it represents a growing form of cultural entrepreneurship in a rural Indonesian context. Participants consisted of community members actively involved in organizing or supporting the *Sound Miniature Contest* and other related events. These included youth leaders, sound system operators, event organizers, technicians, and local business owners who benefited economically from such activities. The sample was determined using a purposive and snowball sampling technique to capture diverse perspectives within the community (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data collection relied on three primary techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participant observation allowed the researcher to engage directly with the sound system events, observe social interactions, and understand community dynamics from an insider's perspective. This included attending rehearsals, competitions, and informal gatherings. In-depth interviews were conducted with fifteen participants, including both male and female community members aged between 18 and 45. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility to explore emerging themes such as motivation, collaboration, cultural meaning, and economic benefit. Documentation methods complemented these techniques by collecting event flyers, photos, online posts, and local government reports that reflect the public presence of the sound system culture.

Data analysis followed a qualitative interpretive process that involved several iterative stages: transcription, coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation (Saldaña, 2021). Field notes and interview transcripts were analyzed inductively to identify recurring themes and symbolic patterns related to participation, cultural identity, and economic agency. The analysis was informed by

postmodern cultural theory, emphasizing multiplicity, hybridity, and the fluid nature of meaning within community practices (Lyotard, 1984; Jameson, 2020). Through this theoretical lens, the researcher interpreted how rural youth negotiate between traditional cultural frameworks and contemporary technological aesthetics in forming a distinct participatory culture.

To enhance research validity, data triangulation was applied across multiple sources and methods, ensuring consistency between observation findings, interview narratives, and documentary evidence. Member checking was also conducted by presenting preliminary interpretations to selected participants, allowing them to confirm, clarify, or refine the researcher's analysis. This reflexive engagement helped maintain authenticity and minimized researcher bias. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, pseudonyms were used to protect privacy, and sensitive information related to community conflict or personal identity was treated confidentially. The research adhered to ethical principles outlined in the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) *Code of Ethics* (2020).

Overall, this ethnographic methodology provided a comprehensive understanding of how sound system culture functions as a participatory and economic practice in Sukorambi. By integrating field immersion with interpretive analysis, the study sought to illuminate the complex ways in which cultural creativity and social cooperation can stimulate local economic growth within Indonesia's rural creative economy landscape.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Participatory Structures and Collective Organization

The sound system community in Sukorambi Village represents a distinctive model of grassroots participation, where social organization and cultural expression are deeply intertwined. Rather than being structured through formal hierarchies or institutional leadership, the community operates through informal, trust-based networks. Coordination is achieved collectively, often through verbal agreements, friendship, and shared enthusiasm for sound technology. These social dynamics reflect what Lyotard (1984) calls *micro-narratives*—localized, participatory structures that replace centralized authority with fluid, democratic forms of collaboration.

Participant observation revealed that the *Sound Miniature Contest* functions as a key arena of participation, attracting diverse social groups within the village—from technicians and youth to local vendors and small business owners. Decision-making about the event, such as timing, venue, and setup, is conducted through open discussion rather than hierarchical directives. This participatory flexibility allows multiple actors to contribute based on their capacities, generating a sense of shared ownership.

The community's collective organization also demonstrates the embodiment of *social capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). Each member contributes resources—skills, materials, or labor—and in return gains recognition and belonging within the collective. This reciprocity ensures continuity and cohesion, particularly among young participants who see the sound system not only as entertainment but also as a platform for self-expression, skill development, and community identity formation. Through this participatory model, Sukorambi's youth display agency in shaping their cultural and economic landscape, bypassing traditional gatekeepers of authority.

### Economic Value and Micro-Entrepreneurial Practices

A significant finding of the study is that sound system activities in Sukorambi have become a locus of micro-entrepreneurial innovation. What was once a leisure pursuit has gradually transformed into a community-based economic system, linking culture, creativity, and livelihood. Interviews with participants indicated that young people invest in sound equipment, lighting technologies, and transport services to support events. These investments are financed through collective pooling, informal loans, or shared ownership among friends, reflecting the communal ethos of resource-sharing typical of rural creative economies (Gibson & Connell, 2022).

Beyond the core event, the sound system ecosystem stimulates ancillary economic activities. Local vendors sell food, drinks, and souvenirs during contests; carpenters produce stage materials; and small



digital printing businesses design promotional banners. The entire process creates a multiplier effect that benefits multiple sectors of the local economy. This pattern is consistent with UNCTAD's (2021) framework, which recognizes that the creative economy's strength lies not merely in production output but in its ability to generate linkages across industries.

Furthermore, technical expertise—such as sound mixing, wiring, and event coordination—becomes an economic asset. Skilled participants are often hired for regional events, weddings, and religious gatherings, demonstrating the portability of creative labor. The emergence of such micro-entrepreneurial practices underscores the potential of sound culture to serve as a *developmental driver* in peripheral regions where formal employment opportunities are limited. Thus, participation in sound system culture simultaneously fulfills social, aesthetic, and economic functions, embodying the intertwined nature of postmodern cultural production and rural entrepreneurship.

### **Symbolic Capital and Cultural Recognition**

Beyond material benefits, involvement in the sound system community grants members a distinct form of symbolic capital. Within the local hierarchy of status and recognition, technical skill and aesthetic innovation confer prestige. The ability to produce a clear, powerful, and aesthetically synchronized sound performance is celebrated as a sign of mastery and creativity. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, symbolic capital—unlike economic capital—derives from social recognition and legitimacy within a cultural field.

This cultural prestige carries tangible consequences. Members who achieve recognition in local competitions often receive invitations to regional events, enhancing their reputation and expanding their social networks. The symbolic economy surrounding sound performance thus reinforces local pride and contributes to what Florida (2023) calls *creative identity formation*.

Moreover, these cultural practices foster inclusion. Youth who may have previously felt alienated due to unemployment or limited educational attainment find belonging and validation within the sound community. Through collaboration and recognition, they gain confidence and social standing. This process redefines the meaning of work and success within the village, framing creative participation as both a form of labor and an expression of dignity.

### **Digital Mediation and Cultural Expansion**

Digital technology has become an essential dimension of Sukorambi's sound system culture, expanding its visibility and reconfiguring its modes of participation. The community actively uses platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook to share performance highlights, announce contests, and engage with broader audiences. These digital practices embody Postill's (2020) concept of *vernacular digital activism*, where everyday media use fosters self-representation and cultural continuity.

Through online circulation, sound system performances transcend geographical boundaries, positioning Sukorambi within a broader network of rural creative practitioners across Indonesia. Digital visibility also facilitates sponsorships and collaborations, bridging the gap between local creativity and regional market opportunities. Importantly, digital platforms enable participants to frame their narratives—portraying rural culture as modern, innovative, and technologically sophisticated.

However, this digital mediation also introduces new complexities. The pursuit of online recognition sometimes fosters competition and commercialization, challenging communal ideals of inclusivity. Elders occasionally express concern that excessive digital exposure may dilute the community's moral and cultural essence. Yet, such tensions reflect an inevitable negotiation between tradition and modernity—a process central to postmodern cultural formation. The digital sphere, rather than replacing local participation, extends it, allowing the community to sustain its presence both offline and online.

### **Negotiating Tradition and Modernity**

The sound system phenomenon in Sukorambi encapsulates a creative negotiation between heritage and innovation. Traditional forms of communal gathering, once centered on religious or ceremonial events, are now intertwined with modern technologies of sound and light. Elders in the community often regard the sound contests as culturally disruptive, citing concerns over noise, late-night activities,

or moral decline. Conversely, the youth view these events as expressions of artistic freedom and collective pride.

Rather than representing generational conflict, this negotiation signals what [Deleuze and Guattari \(1987\)](#) describe as a *rhizomatic adaptation*—a dynamic process where cultural roots grow in multiple directions while remaining connected to their origins. The youth reinterpret local identity through performance aesthetics, aligning with contemporary trends yet embedding them in community values such as cooperation (*gotong royong*) and respect for shared space. This hybridization of tradition and technology illustrates the flexibility of local culture in responding to modernity without erasing its moral foundation.

By transforming sound into a participatory medium of expression, the community demonstrates cultural resilience. The sound system becomes a symbolic bridge linking past and future—a sonic manifestation of how Indonesian rural communities navigate globalization while preserving their sense of belonging and authenticity.

### **Toward a Postmodern Understanding of Rural Creativity**

The findings from Sukorambi reaffirm the postmodern character of rural creativity, marked by hybridity, fluid identity, and the decentralization of meaning. Sound system culture blurs conventional distinctions: between art and labor, leisure and livelihood, tradition and modernity. It embodies [Featherstone's \(2021\)](#) description of postmodern culture as a realm of “aesthetic pluralism,” where meaning is constantly produced and reinterpreted through everyday practices.

Participation in this cultural sphere is not merely an act of attendance but a form of *world-making* [Cornwall & Coelho \(2021\)](#), a collective redefinition of values, economy, and social relations. By transforming cultural enthusiasm into economic action, the community generates new pathways for empowerment and self-determination. The study thus challenges the urban bias often associated with creative economy discourse. Sukorambi's sound system culture demonstrates that innovation and cultural productivity are not confined to metropolitan centers but can flourish within rural environments through participatory, culturally embedded, and socially adaptive practices.

This synthesis of creativity, technology, and cooperation exemplifies the postmodern ethos of multiplicity and local autonomy. It underscores that the future of Indonesia's creative economy depends not only on industrial expansion but on nurturing community-based cultural ecosystems that sustain both human and cultural development. The sound system movement of Sukorambi, in this sense, offers a living example of how postmodern cultural forms can generate inclusive, sustainable, and contextually grounded models of rural modernization.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the dynamics of the *sound system culture* in Sukorambi Village as a postmodern and participatory phenomenon that bridges cultural expression, economic entrepreneurship, and community identity. Through an ethnographic approach, the research revealed that the community of sound enthusiasts has cultivated a unique ecosystem of cooperation, creativity, and livelihood, demonstrating how rural societies actively reconfigure modernity in culturally embedded ways.

The findings indicate that participation within the sound system community is not merely recreational but transformative. It redefines social interaction through collective organization, fosters inclusion among youth, and generates social and economic capital in the absence of formal institutional support. The *Sound Miniature Contest* and other local performances serve as participatory arenas that sustain intergenerational engagement, enhance symbolic recognition, and stimulate the local economy. Such participatory practices echo [Lyotard's \(1984\)](#) notion of *micro-narratives*, where meaning and legitimacy arise from local experiences rather than universal systems of authority.

Economically, the sound system movement functions as a micro-entrepreneurial platform. Technical skills, creativity, and collaboration translate into financial and social value, aligning with the global discourse on the creative economy ([UNCTAD, 2021](#)). These activities demonstrate that cultural creativity can be a catalyst for inclusive rural development when nurtured within participatory and community-based frameworks. Culturally, the sound system scene generates *symbolic capital* [Bourdieu](#)

(1986), empowering youth to achieve social recognition and transforming aesthetic performance into a mode of identity formation and social mobility.

At a broader conceptual level, the study confirms that postmodern cultural forms—hybridity, pluralism, and decentralized organization—are not confined to urban spaces but thrive within rural settings through local innovation and digital mediation. The adoption of modern technologies such as sound equipment and social media exemplifies *cultural hybridity* Bhabha (1994), where global influences are reinterpreted through local values. This hybridization process allows rural communities to assert modernity without abandoning cultural continuity.

Theoretically, the research contributes to postmodern cultural studies by illustrating how *rhizomatic social structures* Deleuze & Guattari (1987) operate within grassroots cultural movements, producing interconnected yet non-hierarchical networks of creativity. It also expands creative economy discourse by demonstrating that cultural entrepreneurship can emerge organically from participatory ethics rather than profit-driven motives. Practically, the findings underscore the importance of integrating cultural participation into rural development policy. Recognizing informal creative networks like Sukorambi's sound system community can open pathways for sustainable cultural industries rooted in cooperation, inclusivity, and local pride.

In conclusion, the *sound system culture* of Sukorambi represents a living manifestation of postmodern rural creativity. It challenges the binary between tradition and modernity, demonstrating that innovation and sustainability can coexist when grounded in community values. As Indonesia continues to expand its creative economy, the lessons from Sukorambi highlight that the most enduring models of development emerge not from imposed frameworks, but from the resonant harmonies of local participation, cultural adaptation, and social imagination.

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### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the publication of this study.

### Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the design, data collection, analysis, and writing of this manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the paper.

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