

Deliberative Democracy Practice In Kasepuhan Gelar Alam As A Distinctive Form Of Democracy In Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the practice of deliberation in Kasepuhan Gelar Alam indigenous community as a culturally embedded form of deliberative democracy in Indonesia. While indigenous governance is often characterized by hierarchical or hereditary authority structures, this article addresses the apparent tension between monarchical leadership and participatory decision-making processes. Drawing on the theoretical framework of deliberative democracy, this research aims to analyze how deliberative practices are institutionalized and negotiated within a customary political system. The research method used a descriptive qualitative research method. The data collection was done through interviews and documentation. The results show that deliberation is institutionalized through forum such as sarasehan and ritual processes surrounding Seren Taun. The study argues that deliberative democracy in Kasepuhan Gelar Alam operates in a contextualized form, where hierarchy and deliberation coexist and mutually shape one another. Rather than conforming to liberal-democratic assumptions of inclusivity and equality, deliberation is embedded within customary institutions that regulate participation and legitimize outcomes. This finding contributes to literature by demonstrating that deliberative democracy is not a uniform model, but a context-dependent practice shaped by cultural norms and power relations.

Keywords: deliberative democracy, kasepuhan Gelar Alam, indigenous, participation, political culture

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has indigenous communities spread across various regions. By limiting their interactions with contemporary civilization, certain indigenous groups in Indonesia take on a closed-off mindset. This mindset is one of the strategies they employ to find a genuine balance between the principles they uphold and the existence of universal principles. They believe that engagement with contemporary society will result in the encounter of values and cause social transformation for the established order of society. However, a sizable number of indigenous tribes choose the opposite position, methodically assimilating modern society's ideas and values in order to incorporate them with the diversity of traditional values. For instance, there are two kinds of indigenous communities in Banten Province and West Java Province: the Kasepuhan Community (West Java), which is usually open, and the Kanekes (Banten) Community, which is usually closed.

Indigenous communities in West Java can be found in several areas, such as Garut, Tasikmalaya, and Sukabumi. Sukabumi Regency, which is the location of this research, has its own indigenous community, namely Kasepuhan Gelar Alam. Kasepuhan Gelar Alam has rules that are unique to this indigenous community. Where the rules or customary laws of the Kasepuhan Gelar Alam community are unwritten. These rules serve as a guide for the indigenous community's way of life, regulating all aspects of their existence. All these rules ultimately influence the agreed-upon decision-making processes and procedures that must be adhered to by both the government (Abah) and the governed (the Kasepuhan Gelar Alam indigenous community). Wood (1999) has discussed the role of culture and religious systems in politics and power, stating that the cultural background of a community will influence its political culture, which in turn is projected into social power to act.

Terry Christensen (1995: 1) asserts that by definition, local politics emphasizes decision-making, voting, and public policy conducted at the local level where an individual or a small group of people can directly engage and

influence. This is also indicated in the decision-making carried out by Abah in Kasepuhan Gelar Alam. Which means that in the indigenous community, a political system is formed along with its processes.

Kasepuhan Gelar Alam is divided into small villages. In representing Abah in his region, which is divided into small villages, there is a village elder who becomes the leader. His main task is to control everything related to customs and traditions in the region. If the capital of Kasepuhan Gelar Alam conducts a traditional ritual, then every village led by the village elder must also hold a similar activity. In carrying out traditional activities, meetings in the form of deliberations between Abah and the village elders are usually held. The deliberation between the village elders and Abah as the traditional leader sufficiently reflects the presence of democracy in decision-making.

The word democracy comes from the Greek words "Demos," which means people, and "kratein," which means to rule. From these two words, the term democracy was created, which means "government by the people." The similarity in the meaning of democracy above is in line with what Abraham Lincoln expressed, who defined that democracy is people-centric and places the ownership of political governance and the direction of the nation's life in the hands of ordinary people (Roberts, 2005).

Discussions of democracy in Indonesia have long emphasized its cultural embeddedness, particularly at the village level. Rather than being merely "adopted" from Western political traditions, democratic practices in Indonesia are often understood as being adapted to local socio-cultural contexts. According to Bung Hatta, democracy has existed since the village level. Bung Hatta argued in Padmo Wahyono (1990), that villages in Indonesia have already been practicing democracy, for example, through village head elections and village deliberations. That is what is called "original democracy."

Drawing on the theory of deliberative democracy by Habermas, this study analyzes how deliberation functions as a mechanism of decision-making and legitimacy within Kasepuhan Gelar Alam. Deliberative democracy

emphasizes the importance of dialogue, argumentation, and collective reasoning in producing legitimate political decisions. However, its application in non-Western and indigenous contexts raises questions about inclusivity, authority, and the role of cultural norms in shaping deliberative processes.

Several previous studies also mention the existence of democracy at the level of traditional villages in Indonesia, as stated by Hatta above. Nasih et al. (2021) proved the existence of a deliberative process in determining political choices conducted by the chief and the ranks of traditional leaders, with no coercion in choosing or exercising the right to vote. Additionally, the community has quite an active participation in seeking information and engaging in discussions to evaluate the results of previous leadership.

The above opinion is quite in line with what HAW Widjaja (2008) stated, that a village in the political view is a democratic society, a society that is based on the sovereignty of the people. Village democracy is considered a modern democracy at the national level, characterized by deliberation, village discussions, and the election of village heads by the villagers themselves, from candidates they propose. So, the village has been officially recognized as a democratic entity with autonomous power to govern itself independently according to the will and needs formulated by its own residents.

However, among scholars, two opposing viewpoints have emerged regarding this matter. On one hand, some argue that the administration of village governance, including the selection process of its leaders through village head elections, is not a form of democracy. On the other hand, others argue that village governance with its leadership selection process is a tangible manifestation of direct democracy, even referred to as pure democracy.

This article argues that Kasepuhan Gelar Alam represents a contextualized form of deliberative democracy in which deliberation operates within, rather than in opposition to hierarchical and customary authority structures. Rather than conforming to liberal-democratic ideals of equality and open participation, deliberative practices in this context are structured by

cultural norms, roles, and traditional institutions that define who participates and how decisions are made.

Despite the growing recognition of deliberative practices in village and indigenous governance, there remains limited understanding of how such practices operate within systems characterized by strong hierarchical and customary authority. This raises an important research problem; *how can deliberative democracy be understood in contexts where decision making authority is both hierarchical and culturally regulated?* To address this gap, the article will examine deliberation in Kasepuhan Gelar Alam indigenous community which has long maintained a structured division of authority rooted in tradition. This study aims to examine how deliberative practices are enacted, particularly in terms of participation, authority, and the production of legitimate decisions. The contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that deliberative democracy in indigenous contexts cannot be fully understood through liberal-democratic assumptions of equality and open access. Instead, it reveals how deliberation is embedded within hierarchical and culturally regulated systems, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of how democratic practices are adapted and reconfigured in non-Western societies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the deliberation process in Kasepuhan Gelar Alam as a form of locally embedded democracy. This approach is considered appropriate for exploring the meanings, values, and socio-cultural practices that shape decision-making within indigenous communities. Descriptive research is research intended to investigate the state, condition, or other matters that have been mentioned. In this case, "the researcher only captures what happens to the object or area being studied, then presents what happens in the form of a straightforward research report" (Sugiono, 2007). Through this method, the researchers will observe the phenomenon of the development of values.

Data were collected through a combination of in-depth interviews,

participant observation, documentation, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Informants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals who are directly involved in customary governance and deliberative processes. These included the customary leader (Abah), members of Baris Kolot, kolot lembur (village elders), and selected community members. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility to explore participants' experiences and perspectives on deliberation, participation, and decision-making.

Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from different informants and methods. The data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of participation, authority relations, and deliberative practices within the customary system.

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process. Informants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained prior to participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, particularly for non-public figures, to ensure the protection of participants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Kasepuhan Gelar Alam

Kasepuhan Gelar Alam is an indigenous village located in Sirnaresmi Village, Cisolok District, Sukabumi Regency, West Java. Previously known as Kasepuhan Ciptagelar, this village underwent a name and location change in 2023, a tradition called Ngalalakon, which is the relocation of the customary government center based on ancestral prophecy. Kasepuhan Gelar Alam is part of the Sundanese indigenous community that still firmly upholds traditional values, local wisdom, and ancestral culture. Led by a traditional leader known as Abah, the position is currently held by Abah Ugi Sugriana Rakasiwi. This Kasepuhan is not only known for its rich traditions and culture but also for its

harmony with nature and extraordinary food resilience.

Kasepuhan Gelar Alam has a long history that began in 1368, coinciding with the establishment of the Ciptagelar Traditional Village. According to historical records, this village was established by the forces of the Sunda Kingdom under the leadership of Prabu Siliwangi, who then formed traditional villages after the king attained moksha. One of the villages that became a center is Kampung Gede, which has now developed into Kasepuhan Gelar Alam. Since then, this kasepuhan has experienced 20 relocations of its administrative center, with the last move from Ciptagelar to Gelar Alam as the 20th manifestation of the Ngalalakon tradition.

The name "Gelar Alam" itself has a profound meaning. The word "Gelar" is taken from the suffix of the name Ciptagelar, while "Alam" refers to the new location that is close to the forests and wilderness in the Gunung Halimun Salak National Park area. This relocation is not just a change of place, but also a symbolic mission to preserve the natural environment and ancestral culture. The Ngalalakon tradition is carried out based on spiritual guidance, such as visions or dreams, which determine the new time and place for the kasepuhan.

Kasepuhan Gelar Alam is led by an Abah, currently held by Abah Ugi Sugriana Rakasiwi. In carrying out his duties, Abah is assisted by Baris Kolot, a group of advisors responsible for various fields, such as customs, agriculture, and culture. Baris Kolot is equivalent to the cabinet in a modern government system, and they ensure that traditional norms are maintained. Under Baris Kolot, there is Sepuh Lembur or the village head, as well as the kasepuhan residents who consist of various families.

The Kasepuhan Gelar Alam community, known as Urang Gelaralam, is predominantly Muslim with the influence of the local Sunda Wiwitan belief system. They use the Sundanese language in their daily lives, although most are also fluent in Indonesian, except for a few elderly individuals. This community lives by the principles of mutual cooperation, respect for one another, and maintaining harmony with nature, which is reflected in their

various traditions and customs.

The Kasepuhan Gelar Alam community earns their livelihood in the agricultural sector. In other words, to meet their livelihood needs, the Kasepuhan community is highly dependent on natural resources oriented towards traditional agricultural systems in various ways, namely ngahuma 'farming', rice paddy cultivation, and gardening. The traditional agricultural system is carried out according to the customs of Banten Kidul, which means harvesting only once a year, and the rest of the time the land is left to rest. The community believes that the land, after being cultivated, needs to be restored and returned to achieve balance and harmony with nature. The land is also not allowed to use chemicals other than those available in nature.

In addition, the philosophical side of the Gelar Alam indigenous community bases all the pillars of their customary life on the rice cycle calendar. For example, the rice planting period of four until nine months is metaphorically likened to a mother who can only give birth once a year. With the guidance of the constellations in the sky, namely when the constellation of Kidang starts to lean towards the West, the planting of local rice can begin. This local wisdom is able to avoid rice pest attacks because when the constellation of the deer starts to set, which in Sundanese is called "tilem kidang turun kungkang" in May, rice pests begin to appear, so the crops must already be harvested. Another local wisdom related to the cultivation of local rice, which highlights the superiority of farmers in Kasepuhan Gelar Alam, is viewing the earth, which contains rice fields, as the mother and the sky as the father.

Deliberative Democracy in Kasepuhan Gelar Alam

Musyawaharah is a forum for exchanging thoughts, ideas, or concepts, including suggestions put forward to solve a problem before arriving at a decision (Azhari, 2004). Deliberation is different from liberal democracy, which adheres to the formula of "half plus one" or a majority vote that results in one party's defeat and another party's victory. (Salman & Susanto, 2007).

Kasepuhan Gelar Alam has a monarchical characteristic in its governance, which refers to the very central role of Abah as the Traditional Leader, where almost all of his policies are top-down. However, there is deliberation in decision-making as a reflection of democratic values. This reflects a high level of primordialism towards Indonesian principles and culture, namely musyawarah-mufakat, which is enshrined in the Fourth Principle of Pancasila: "Democracy Guided by the Inner Wisdom of Deliberation through Representation." The term for placing deliberation as the basis for decision-making is called deliberative democracy.

Deliberative Democracy means that it is not the sum of individual wills nor a 'general will' that is the source of legitimacy, but rather the source of legitimacy is the process of deliberative, argumentative-discursive formation of a political decision that is weighed together, which is always provisional and open to revision (Hardiman, 2013).

The deliberative process referred to by Habermas is the occurrence of communicative action between the rulers and their people. This is intended so that the policies produced by democracy are not merely the result and process of an elitist nature, but also involve the people in the process of their formulation. Deliberative democracy demands that public participation be dialogical in nature to create policies that favor the interests of the people. The deliberation process in the deliberative democracy model, as briefly mentioned earlier, can practically be realized through musyawarah.

'Indigenous knowledge is the local knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. It is the basis for agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, environmental conservation, and a host of other activities. Much of such knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, usually by word of mouth. Indigenous people have a wide knowledge of the ecosystem they live in and ways to ensure that natural resources are used sustainably. Therefore, indigenous knowledge which has been accumulated over centuries has potential value for sustainable development. It can also help other people

learn how to live in harmony with nature and the environment in a sustainable fashion' (Indigenous Knowledge and Sustainable Development, ,1996).

It means that the local knowledge of indigenous communities plays a very important role in influencing daily life and has great potential to support sustainable development. As an indigenous legal society that has both recognized and practiced the values of Indonesian-ness, it is not surprising that Kasepuhan Gelar Alam cultivates deliberation as a consideration for Abah, the customary chief, in making decisions. Abah, as the traditional leader, plays a central role in the development of Kasepuhan Gelar Alam. This includes the process of decision-making together with the community through the Sesepuh Lembur, who are representatives of the community.

Deliberative democracy is a model of democracy that emphasizes the decision-making process through open, inclusive, and rational discussions, where all parties have the opportunity to express their views and reach a consensus. This concept differs from representative democracy, which relies on voting, or direct democracy, which sometimes neglects in-depth discussions. In the context of indigenous communities, such as Kasepuhan Gelar Alam in Sirnaresmi Village, Sukabumi Regency, West Java, deliberative democracy can be analyzed through leadership structure, deliberation traditions, community participation, and involvement in customary decision-making. Kasepuhan Gelar Alam, led by Abah Ugi Sugriana Rakasiwi, exhibits strong characteristics of deliberative democracy, despite being within the framework of traditional Sundanese customs.

Kasepuhan Gelar Alam has a hierarchical yet collaborative leadership system, with Abah as the highest leader who acts as the final decision-maker. In deliberative democracy, the presence of a leader is not contradictory as long as the decision-making process involves open discussion. In Gelar Alam, Abah is assisted by Baris Kolot, a group of traditional advisors who function as a deliberative body. Baris Kolot consists of experienced figures who represent various aspects of life, such as agriculture, culture, and religion. They act as

mediators in discussions, ensuring that every decision reflects the common interest.

Traditional deliberations, called *saresehan*, are the core of the deliberative process in this *kasepuhan*. *Saresehan* is held to discuss important issues, such as determining planting times, conducting the *Seren Taun* ceremony, or even major decisions like *Ngalalakon* (the relocation of the traditional government center). In the *saresehan*, all members of the community, including *Sepuh Lembur* (village head) and ordinary citizens, have the right to speak. Although *Abah* has spiritual authority based on ancestral prophecies, the final decision is usually made after hearing input from *Baris Kolot* and the community. This process reflects the principles of deliberative democracy, namely the importance of dialogue to reach a mutually accepted consensus. One of the indicators of deliberative democracy is the level of community participation in decision-making. In *Kasepuhan Gelar Alam*, citizen participation is very high, especially in customary and social activities. Traditions like *Seren Taun* are not only ritual events but also deliberative forums where the community gathers to discuss harvest results, village issues, and future plans. In this event, people from various backgrounds—men, women, old, young—are involved in processes such as *ampih pare ka leuit* (carrying rice to the barn) and open discussions. Although women have a more limited role in formal *saresehan* due to customary norms, they still contribute their views through informal groups, such as when preparing traditional events.

Deliberative democracy demands inclusivity, where all parties affected by a decision have the opportunity to participate. In *Kasepuhan Gelar Alam*, this inclusivity is manifested in the tradition of mutual cooperation and cross-generational involvement. However, there are limitations that need to be noted. Customary norms tend to give a greater role to men and elders in formal decision-making, so the participation of women and the younger generation is sometimes limited to the informal realm. For example, women rarely become

part of Baris Kolot, and young people are more often involved in the implementation of decisions rather than their formulation.

Although Kasepuhan Gelar Alam demonstrates strong deliberative democracy practices, there are several challenges that need to be addressed. First, the influence of modernization and globalization can erode the tradition of deliberation. The younger generation, exposed to technology and formal education, may prefer an individualistic approach rather than a collective one. To address this, Abah Ugi has selectively introduced technology, such as micro-hydro power plants and limited internet access, while still emphasizing the importance of saresehan as a discussion forum.

Second, Abah's spiritual authority, which often relies on divine inspiration, can limit the space for deliberation in some cases. For example, the decision by Ngalalakon in 2023 to move the kasepuhan center from Ciptagelar to Gelar Alam was based on spiritual guidance that was not fully discussed openly with all the residents. Although deliberations were held to formulate the implementation of the relocation, this spiritual aspect shows that deliberative democracy in Gelar Alam is still influenced by non-deliberative elements.

Third, interaction with the outside world, such as tourism and government policies, can challenge the deliberative sovereignty of the kasepuhan. For example, the promotion of Seren Taun as a national tourism event requires the kasepuhan to negotiate with the local government, which sometimes uses a top-down approach. However, Kasepuhan Gelar Alam has shown resilience by continuing to involve Baris Kolot and the community in determining the extent to which external influences are accepted, such as limiting the commercialization of traditional ceremonies.

Seren Taun

Seren taun is one of the most well-known traditional ceremonies of Kasepuhan Gelar Alam. The implementation of this traditional ceremony is

carried out once a year, with various sequences and the final procession being the storage of rice in the leuit, also known as ngadiukkeun pare. The essence of practicing this tradition, besides preserving the ancestral way of life, is to express gratitude (tasyakur) to God and to honor the historical legend of Dewi Sri as the Rice Goddess.

The Seren Taun ritual in Kasepuhan Gelar Alam is not merely a cultural or ceremonial event, but also functions as a key deliberative arena within the community's governance system. While it is often understood as a form of thanksgiving and cultural preservation, the processes leading up to and surrounding the ritual reveal important dynamics of participation, consultation, and collective decision-making.

The mantras recited during the stages of the rice planting ritual are also believed to determine the success of the harvest. The stages of the rituals performed by the kasepuhan community during rice planting: (1) nyacar pihumaeun: a ritual to open the fields by burning incense and offering prayers; (2) ngaseuk: planting rice in the fields by inserting seeds into the soil; (3) beberes mager: a ritual to protect the rice from pest attacks; (4) ngarawunan: a ritual to ask for blessings so that the rice grows abundantly and perfectly; (5) mipit: harvesting the first rice done by Abah Asep; (6) ngadiukkeun pare di leuit: ritual of storing rice in the barn; (7) nutu: the activity of pounding the first harvested rice. (8) ngabukti or nganyaran: the ritual of cooking the first harvest rice performed by Ambu (the chief's wife); followed by tasting the first harvest rice; (9) closing ceremony: marking the completion of all agricultural activities, highlighted by a celebratory event (Mulyani et. al, 2017).

In particular, forums such as sarasehan and preparatory meetings embedded within the Seren Taun sequence provide spaces where community members, customary leaders, and representatives engage in discussions regarding crucial matters, including the timing of the ceremony, agricultural evaluations, and resource management. These interactions reflect structured forms of participation, where individuals contribute based on their roles

within the customary system. From a deliberative democracy perspective, the Seren Taun process illustrates how consensus is constructed through culturally embedded mechanisms. Rather than relying on formal voting procedures, decisions are reached through dialogue, consultation, and mutual consideration among key actors, particularly Abah and kolot lembur. This process emphasizes social harmony and collective agreement, which are central to the legitimacy of decisions within the community.

The peak of the ritual is concluded with the seren taun 'year-end' ceremony, which is held for three days and three nights. This ceremony can be interpreted as the responsive attitude of the community around the kasepuhan to express gratitude for the harvest, as well as a testament to their respect for ancestral heritage through the preservation of customs, and as entertainment for the community that has worked throughout the year of farming. In this event, all the village elders from 568 villages gather in the main village to report the harvest results and the condition of their respective villages for that year to the chief elder. In addition, they also discuss the programs that will be carried out in the coming year, while evaluating the results of the previous year's programs. In the Seren Taun traditional ceremony, there are several processes. The first procession begins with "Ngadiukeun," which is the handing over of the harvest by the community to the traditional leader or Abah. The best rice is selected to be stored in the Leuit Ageung (traditional granary), as a symbol of food security and collective awareness of the importance of preserving ancestral heritage.

In this context, the community voluntarily surrenders a portion of the harvest, reflecting trust in the customary system and awareness of shared social responsibility. After that, it continues with the "Ngunjal Pare" process, which is the procession of rice from the fields to the cultural center. The villagers carried the rice with great respect while wearing traditional attire, accompanied by the sounds of angklung and kendang pencak. This procession becomes a symbol of gratitude as well as a form of community participation in

celebrating collective success.

In this procession, there are no barriers between the traditional leaders and the community; everyone is involved, signifying equality in social life. The next procession is a ritual of prayer and offerings, directly led by the tribal chief and the key bearers. Prayers are offered to God and to the ancestors who are believed to always maintain the balance between humans, nature, and spiritual forces. The offerings prepared are the fruits of the earth and symbols of life's harmony.

This procession becomes a sacred reflective space, connecting the community with transcendent dimensions and cosmic spirituality. In the evening, traditional art performances are held, such as pencak silat, angklung buhun, and other local art shows. This performance is not just entertainment, but also a medium for value transmission, cultural education, and strengthening the identity of the kasepuhan. Children and young generations are usually actively involved as part of the cultural regeneration process before the final ceremony, which is Sarasehan.

The Seren Taun ritual can be understood not only as a cultural tradition but also as a site where deliberative democracy is enacted and reproduced. It demonstrates how ritual practices serve as institutionalized spaces for negotiation, consensus-building, and the legitimization of collective decisions in an indigenous governance context.

Sarasehan

Sarasehan is an open dialogue forum attended by various elements of society, ranging from traditional leaders, community figures, rorokan (traditional assistants), women, youth, to outsiders such as academics and representatives from local government. The sarasehan forum is usually held just before or after the peak of the Seren Taun event. Usually, the deliberation is conducted in a rempug (consensus gathering) manner with the following discussion points:

1. Setting the time for the ceremony. The time of Seren Taun is not fixed, depending on the harvest time based on the planting time. In addition, the implementation of Seren Taun is adjusted according to spiritual guidance such as visions and the customary calendar. The determination is made after Abah, as the customary leader, discusses it with the elders and timekeepers. That became one of the ways the traditional leader considered making decisions.
2. Evaluation of the previous planting season. In this point, there are several discussions such as how the harvest was that year and identifying any obstacles that occurred, such as pests and extreme weather or even crop failure. In this evaluation, the community can share their experiences from the planting season to the harvest season. Although they rarely experience crop failures, Abah, as the traditional leader, still considers the worst-case scenario as a reference to determine preventive measures that can be taken in case of a disaster.
3. Management of *Leuit* (Rice Barn). Rice barns are a form of local Indonesian architectural wisdom, serving as a way to cope with seasonal uncertainties that can hinder the lives and economies of farmers. These rice barns have different names and unique characteristics in each region. In the Kasepuhan indigenous community, it is often referred to as 'leuit' (rice barn) and serves as a storage place for harvested crops (rice) because, within Kasepuhan customs, the community is required to have at least one Leuit even though they are not obligated to have personal rice fields (such as plantations/farming). The function of the 'leuit' is also considered a symbol of prosperity, meaning the number of Leuit owned by each family represents the prosperity of that family. The more leuit that are built, the more it indicates that the family has abundant or plentiful fortune (Prabowo & Sudrajat, 2021).

Kasepuhan Gelar Alam has a rice reserve for the next 95 years. However, despite this, discussions regarding the sufficiency of the community's food needs are still held during the Seren Taun traditional ceremony. How food distribution in the event of a crisis is also a point of discussion in the deliberations at the Seren Taun traditional ceremony. Kasepuhan Gelar Alam pays great attention to the food needs of its community, as Abah does not want his people to lack, especially in access to rice.

4. Preparation of the Ceremony Sequence. In this discussion, we will talk about who is responsible for the various processes leading up to the peak event of *Seren Taun*, such as *Ngajayak Pare*, *Ngadiukeun*, and others. Due to the *Seren Taun* ceremony being held on a large and grand scale, including art performances, guests, logistics, and communal meals. Therefore, it was also discussed who would be responsible for the procession. This determination is important for the Seren Taun ceremony to proceed smoothly.

The sarasehan forum represents one of the most visible forms of deliberative practice in Kasepuhan Gelar Alam, bringing together various elements of the community, including customary leaders, rorokan, community figures, and, to a certain extent, women and youth. At first glance, this inclusivity suggests a participatory and dialogical process aligned with the principles of deliberative democracy. However, a closer examination reveals that participation within sarasehan is shaped by underlying power relations embedded in the customary structure. Although multiple actors are present, the deliberative process is largely guided and influenced by Abah and senior customary figures, who hold both symbolic and decision-making authority. Their role in directing discussions and validating outcomes indicates that deliberation is not entirely horizontal, but operates within a hierarchical framework.

In terms of inclusion, while the forum is formally open to different

segments of the community, not all participants have equal opportunities to influence the direction or outcome of discussions. Customary norms and social roles implicitly regulate who is expected to speak, whose opinions carry more weight, and how disagreement is expressed. This suggests that inclusion in sarasehan is structured rather than fully egalitarian.

The participation of women and youth further illustrates these dynamics. Although they may be present in the forum, their roles tend to be more limited compared to male elders and customary authorities. Women's contributions are often situated within socially accepted domains, while youth participation may be more passive or consultative rather than decisive. This indicates that generational and gender hierarchies continue to shape deliberative practices, potentially constraining the diversity of perspectives represented in decision-making.

While sarasehan embodies key elements of deliberation, it also reflects structured inequalities in participation and influence. Therefore, sarasehan should not be understood simply as an open deliberative forum, but as a culturally embedded space where deliberation is mediated by authority, social norms, and role differentiation. This reinforces the argument that deliberative democracy in indigenous contexts is not defined by equal participation alone, but by negotiated forms of inclusion shaped by local cultural frameworks.

CONCLUSION

The practice of deliberation in Kasepuhan Gelar Alam is seen as a culturally embedded form of deliberative democracy within an indigenous governance system. The findings demonstrate that deliberation plays a central role in decision-making processes, particularly through forums such as sarasehan and ritual-based interactions surrounding Seren Taun. However, these deliberative practices are not organized along fully egalitarian lines, but are instead structured by customary authority, social roles, and hereditary leadership.

The study argues that Kasepuhan Gelar Alam represents a contextualized form of deliberative democracy, in which hierarchy and deliberation coexist and mutually shape one another. Participation is present but regulated, consensus is prioritized over contestation, and legitimacy is derived not only from rational deliberation but also from adherence to cultural norms and recognition of traditional authority.

The case of Kasepuhan Gelar Alam demonstrates that deliberative practices can persist and remain meaningful even within hierarchical and culturally bounded systems, thereby expanding the analytical scope of deliberative democracy beyond Western institutional contexts. More broadly, this study has implications for understanding democracy in Indonesia, especially in relation to indigenous governance. It reinforces the idea that democratic practices in Indonesia are not merely adopted from external models, but are deeply rooted in local traditions. At the same time, it highlights the need to critically engage with issues of inclusion and representation within these systems, particularly concerning gender and generational dynamics.

In conclusion, Kasepuhan Gelar Alam illustrates that democracy in practice is plural and context-dependent. Recognizing these diverse forms of deliberative practice is essential for developing a more inclusive and culturally sensitive understanding of democracy in Indonesia and beyond.

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