

Social Cohesion in Community Participation in The Ruwat Air Tradition in Penanggal Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the forms of social cohesion in community participation in the Ruwat Air Tradition in Penanggal Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency. The method used was descriptive qualitative with an ethnographic approach. The data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with key informants such as the tradition's caretaker, village elders, village heads, and participating residents, as well as field documentation over eleven days in January 2025. The results indicate that community participation in the Ruwat Air Tradition is carried out through the active involvement of all levels of society, from children to village elders, in every series of the process, such as the procession of the mountain-shaped arrangement of agricultural produce (kirab gunung hasil bumi), communal prayers, traditional dances, the face-washing ritual, kembul bujana (a communal feast), and the wayang ruwat (ritual puppet performance). This participation reflects the formation of strong social cohesion, marked by a growing sense of togetherness, mutual cooperation, solidarity, and collective responsibility among residents regardless of background or social status. The Ruwat Air tradition not only serves as a spiritual ritual and preserves local culture, but also serves as a means of community unification, strengthening the identity and social solidarity of Penanggal Village amidst the tide of modernization.

Keywords: *social cohesion, community participation, ruwat air, solidarity, local tradition*

Introduction

Indonesia is a nation characterized by a diverse array of races, ethnic groups, religions, languages, cultures, customs, and traditions. One such tradition—observed specifically in Penanggal Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency is the Ruwat Air (Water Cleansing/Blessing) ceremony, which takes place annually. This tradition is carried out to ensure the smooth flow of the spring at the Tirtosari Natural Baths and serves as an expression of gratitude from the residents of Penanggal Village for the abundant water supply. The entire village community participates in this tradition, particularly the residents of Dusun Summersari, whose area is directly supplied by the Tirtosari spring. The event is intended to foster cooperation, mutual assistance (gotong royong), a sense of togetherness, and solidarity, while also promoting social harmony among the residents. As social beings, humans need to maintain harmony with others and their surrounding communities¹. The Javanese people

¹Putri Ayu Windi Agustin, *et all*, "Makna Simbolis pada Tradisi Grebeg Suro Desa Sumbermujur Kabupaten Lumajang (Kajian Etnolinguistik)", *Disastra: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia* vol. 7, no. 1 (Januari 2025): p. 119.

are one such community that continues to uphold these values of harmony and togetherness.

Etymologically, the word "culture" derives from the Latin "colere", meaning to cultivate or work upon something related to nature² (Salsabila et al., 2023). According to Koentjaraningrat (2005:70), culture is the product of human activity encompassing systems of ideas, sentiments, actions, and creations that individuals acquire through learning within a social environment³ (Alkifah, 2023). In his book "A Scientific Theory of Culture" (1944), Bronislaw Malinowski stated that culture is fundamentally based on various systems of human needs, with each level of need giving rise to a distinctive cultural pattern⁴ (Dzikrullah & Setiawan, 2017). The word "budaya" itself originates from the Sanskrit term "Buddhayah", the plural form of "Budhi" (intellect or reason)⁵ (Rosliya, 2016). Culture can thus be defined as anything created through human intellect or ideas. It encompasses not only customs, traditions, habits, and language but also belief systems, values, and norms that shape human identity⁶ (Febrian et al., 2025). This capacity of culture to shape identity fosters greater order and structure in societal life. The values and norms embedded in culture particularly within traditions encourage people to exercise greater care in their behavior and actions. The Javanese people are an example of a community that remains deeply rooted in local culture and tradition.

Javanese society remains deeply rooted in local culture and traditions, particularly those centered on communal bonds (paguyuban) and mutual cooperation (gotong royong). They are also known for customs and traditions that endure to this day, largely because they prioritize safety, health, and the abundance of surrounding natural resources. Water springs are among these vital natural resources; consequently, the Javanese people place great importance on the steady flow and abundance of these springs. Typically, they perform traditional rituals to express gratitude to God Almighty for the region's abundant natural resources and to seek blessings for their continued plenty. This practice is mirrored by the community of Penanggal Village in Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency. They regularly perform the Ruwat Air (Water Cleansing/Blessing) ritual

²Annisa Anastasia Salsabila, et al., "Pengaruh Penggunaan Tiktok terhadap Peningkatan Hasil Belajar Keragaman Budaya Indonesia", Jurnal Pendidikan dan Konseling vol. 5, no. 1 (2023): p. 3417.

³Ayu Nur Alkifah, Thesis: "PEMENUHAN KEBUTUHAN MANUSIA MELALUI PERMAINAN OTOME GAME "TEARS OF THEMIS" (Jakarta: Universitas Nasional, 2023): p. 16.

⁴Muhamad Rohidi Dzikrullah & Wawan Setiawan, Thesis "PERANCANGAN BUKU ILUSTRASI TENTANG TATA KRAMA BERKUNJUNG DI WILAYAH KASEPUHAN KANEKES (BADUY)" (Bandung: Universitas Pasundan, 2017) np..

⁵Wa Ode Rosliya, Skripsi: "Perspektif Islam Terhadap Buday Kabuenga Di Kecamatan Wangi-Wangi Selatan Kabupaten Wakatobi"(Kendari: IAIN Kendari, 2016), p. 8.

⁶Rio Febrian, et al., "Peran Budaya dalam Pembentukan Identitas Manusia", Jurnal Riset Sosial Humaniora dan Pendidikan vol. 3, no. 2 (2025), p. 25.

at the Tirtosari Natural Baths to give thanks to God and to ensure the springs continue to flow abundantly. Beyond the ritual focused on the spring itself, the ceremony involves offerings of agricultural produce as an expression of gratitude for the village's abundant natural resources. The tradition is observed annually, featuring varying themes and forms of entertainment. The entire community participates in the preparations with enthusiasm, harmony, and a spirit of mutual cooperation. Participants range from traditional elders (sepuh), who provide guidance on the ritual, to the transitional generation comprising everyone (from parents to young people) who assist in the ritual and help preserve it by continuing the practice and sharing it with the wider public. Such involvement is crucial, given that many young people today remain unfamiliar with or unaware of the Ruwat Air tradition. The tradition illustrates the harmonious coexistence of traditional and transitional generations a dynamic essential for preserving Ruwat Air, as the ritual relies heavily on community solidarity and togetherness.

Community participation in the Ruwat Air tradition is essential, as the tradition is deeply linked to survival, social significance, and the very function of the culture within the community. Such participation ensures the preservation of the tradition which aims to strengthen local identity and social solidarity, reflect local wisdom, and enhance social and economic functions meaning the community acts not merely as practitioners but also as beneficiaries of the tradition. Robust participation from the local community ensures the tradition endures and continues to be observed properly, thereby fostering a sense of solidarity and togetherness in communal life. By actively involving the community, the tradition can survive and gain wider public recognition.

Cohen and Uphoff (1977), as cited in Kalesaran et al. (2015), explain that participation is influenced by two primary factors: direct community involvement and the potential benefits to be gained. In this theory, direct community involvement is precisely what constitutes community participation⁷. This theory of participation is relevant to the Ruwat Air (Water Cleansing) tradition in Penanggal Village, Candipuro District. Community participation fosters an awareness of the need to preserve this tradition. Furthermore, such participation ensures the tradition's continuity, strengthens local identity and solidarity, reflects local wisdom, and enhances social and economic functions through the tradition's observance. Through the Ruwat Air tradition, community members are not merely participants or observers; they also act as beneficiaries and driving forces behind the tradition across social, economic, cultural, and religious dimensions. The annual participation of the community creates a harmony that bridges divides and unites the diverse elements of society. This engagement fosters a deeper

⁷Ferdinand Kalesaran, et al, "PARTISIPASI DALAM PROGRAM NASIONAL PEMBERDAYAAN MASYARAKAT MANDIRI PERKOTAAN KELURAHAN TAAS KOTA MANADO", *Acta Diurna* Vol. 4, no. 5 (2015): np.

understanding of togetherness, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), diversity, tolerance, peace, unity, helpfulness, and mutual respect.

J.L. Gillin and J.P. Gillin, in their book “Cultural Sociology” (1954), explain that society is...

“the largest grouping in which common customs, traditions, attitudes. And feelings of unity are operative...”

in this context, a social group represents the largest form of grouping characterized by shared habits, traditions, attitudes, and a sense of unity within that environment. Consequently, society is defined by this collective nature, as it constitutes a large group of people in a specific location sharing a common culture, traditions, values, norms, and customs. Social life inherently involves togetherness and cooperation often manifested as “gotong royong” (mutual assistance) as well as social cohesion or solidarity. According to Emile Durkheim (1893), social cohesion is formed through two types of solidarity: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity⁸ (Razak, 2017). Social cohesion, or solidarity, can be understood as a sense of togetherness, closeness, cooperation, or unity within a society, whether occurring between individuals, between groups, or between individuals and groups. It encompasses a strong sense of solidarity, mutual trust, and active participation within the community. This is because social cohesion fosters the togetherness necessary for a society to achieve shared goals. Such cohesion or solidarity emerges when members of a community help and support one another. This aligns with Durkheim’s theory, which defines social cohesion as the degree of social attachment and sense of togetherness shared by members of a society or community⁹ (Razak, 2017). In his view, social cohesion serves as the bond that unites individuals within a society.

Community participation is essential for achieving social cohesion or solidarity within a society. Participation is defined as taking part, joining in, or being present; specifically, community participation refers to the involvement or active contribution of community members to a given activity. According to Keith Davis, participation entails an individual's mental and emotional involvement in a group, motivating them to contribute to the group's activities in alignment with its goals while also accepting responsibility for that involvement¹⁰ (Siregar, 2020). Thus, community participation can be understood as the conscious and full engagement of individuals or community groups in activities, thereby fostering a sense of interconnected togetherness.

Based on the background outlined above, this study is limited to an examination of the social cohesion inherent in community participation in the

⁸Zulkifli Razak, PERKEMBANGAN TEORI SOSIAL (MENYONGSONG ERA POSTMODERINISME) (Makassar: CV SAH MEDIA, 2017), p. 12.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Esli Zuraidah Siregar, “Partisipasi Masyarakat Dalam Pemberdayaan Lingkungan”, *JURNAL AT-TAGHYIR: Jurnal Dakwah dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Desa* Vol 3, No. 1 (2020), p. 133

Ruwat Air tradition in Penanggal Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency. The research focuses on the forms of community participation, the social values embodied in the tradition, and the tradition's role in strengthening social ties among residents specifically the solidarity (social cohesion) fostered through participation in the Ruwat Air ceremony. The study's uniqueness lies in the continued preservation of the Ruwat Air tradition as a local cultural practice that holds not only spiritual and cultural significance but also serves as a means to reinforce community solidarity and togetherness amidst the advancements of the modern era and technology. Furthermore, the tradition demonstrates the active involvement of community members from diverse backgrounds in safeguarding local cultural heritage. Given these parameters and the research focus, the problem statement for this study is: what form does social cohesion take within the community participation surrounding the Ruwat Air tradition in Penanggal Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with an ethnographic approach. The qualitative descriptive method is used to understand and describe social phenomena in depth based on natural conditions in the field, while the ethnographic approach is utilized to examine the values, meanings, behaviors, and lifestyle patterns of the community regarding the Ruwat Air tradition in Penanggal Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency. The research focuses on social cohesion within community participation in the Ruwat Air tradition, a form of local culture that continues to be preserved to this day.

The data sources for this study comprise both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly through in-depth interviews with informants considered knowledgeable about and involved in the execution of the Ruwat Air tradition: Mr. Abu (the tradition's caretaker), Mr. Winanto (a native resident and village elder of Penanggal), Mrs. Ngatipah (responsible for preparing ritual materials and equipment), and Mr. Cik Ono, S.H. (the Head of Penanggal Village). Primary data were used to gather accurate information regarding the conduct of the tradition, the nature of community participation, and the social values embodied in the event. Meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from various written sources such as books, scholarly journals, articles, e-books, archives, and documentation from previous research relevant to the study topic to serve as supporting data.

Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observation took place at the research site, focusing on the execution of the Ruwat Air tradition and community involvement in the various stages of the event. In-depth, structured interviews were conducted with informants to gather information regarding the tradition's history, the execution process, forms of community participation, and the social and cultural meanings embodied in the tradition. Documentation involved collecting event photographs,

village archives, field notes, interview recordings, and other research-related documents.

The research instruments employed included interview guides, recording devices, interview transcripts, field notes, and research documentation. In this study, the researcher served as the primary instrument, directly conducting data collection, observation, and interviews, as well as interpreting the data obtained in the field. The research was conducted in Penanggal Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency, over an 11-day period from January 20 to January 31, 2025. The research site was selected based on the continued observance of the Ruwat Air tradition, which is still performed annually as an expression of community gratitude for water sources and as a ritual to ward off misfortunes such as water scarcity.

The data analysis technique employed in this study utilizes the Miles and Huberman analysis model, which comprises three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and verification or conclusion drawing. Data reduction is carried out by selecting, sorting, and focusing on data relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, the data is presented systematically in a narrative format to facilitate the researcher's understanding of the relationships between the data points. The final stage verification and conclusion drawing involves interpreting the gathered data to identify meanings, patterns, and conclusions regarding social cohesion within community participation in the Ruwat Air tradition in Penanggal Village. The data analysis process is conducted continuously until the data is deemed valid and reaches the point of saturation.

Results and Discussion

The Implementation of the Ruwat Air Tradition

This study was conducted in Penanggal Village, located in the Candipuro District of Lumajang Regency. Indonesia is a country rich in natural resource diversity. This diversity including water sources must be safeguarded and preserved. Consequently, the Javanese people consistently strive to utilize, protect, and conserve these natural resources, often holding traditional rituals to express gratitude for the abundance of resources found in Java. The Ruwat Air (water purification/blessing) ceremony is one such tradition frequently observed by the community of Penanggal Village year after year.

Water springs are vital to life on Earth. Consequently, the Javanese community places great importance on the steady flow and abundance of these springs. They regularly perform the Ruwat Air (water purification and blessing) ritual at the Tirtosari Natural Baths to express gratitude to God and to ensure the spring continues to flow abundantly. This ritual takes place annually on 1 Suro. Residents of Penanggal Village participate in every stage of the event from preparation to conclusion working together in a spirit of communal harmony and mutual cooperation.

Traditionally, this event was merely a thanksgiving ceremony. However, for the past thirteen years or so, it has become a much grander affair featuring a

spectacular water purification festival. Preparing for this water purification tradition requires a considerable amount of time, given the event's sacred nature and the numerous rituals involved. The proceedings are as follows:

1. Procession or Parade of 44 Gunungan Hasil Bumi



On 28 June 2025

This harvest procession features 44 gunungan (conical offerings of produce) contributed by representatives from various neighborhood units (RT) in Penanggal Village, all paraded toward the Tirtosari spring. The procession serves as an expression of gratitude for the Tirtosari spring, which irrigates local farmlands and enables the cultivation of crops such as secondary food crops (palawija), rice, and corn. The harvested produce is gathered and arranged into these gunungan to demonstrate to the community the bountiful yields made possible by the flow of the Tirtosari spring.

2. Sambutan



On 28 June 2025

This speech was made by several representatives as an opening for the Ruwat Air Tradition which was conveyed by the Head of Penanggal Village, as well as other high-ranking officials and institutions. This speech was delivered not only as an opening but as an expression of gratitude for the participation of all the people who took part in the Ruwat Air event.

3. Tari-Tarian



On June 28, 2025

One of the dances performed during the Ruwat Air (Water Purification) tradition is the Beksa Telaga Angsa. Performed upon the water, the dance signifies a hidden lake home to a pair of swans that symbolize the harmony and balance of the natural world we inhabit. It depicts a spiritual journey dedicated to protecting the lake from degradation and pollution thus, it serves as a reminder of our shared responsibility to preserve these waters so that the springs we enjoy may remain clear and pure.

4. Pray Together and Reading The Ujub-Ujub



On June 28, 2025 at 11.25 WIB

This joint prayer and recitation of traditional invocations are performed to express gratitude for the abundant spring water and bountiful harvests. The ritual is led by a respected elder a role entrusted to the same individual year after year who recites specific invocations or mantras as a mark of respect for the guardian spirit of the spring.

5. Face-Washing Ritual



On June 28, 2025

This face washing ritual uses spring water in Tirtosari as a symbol of self-purification and salvation in the afterlife.

6. Scramble for the Gunungan (Mountain-shaped Offering) of Produce (Rebutan Gunungan Hasil Bumi)



On 28 June 2025

Once the ceremonial mounds of produce have been blessed, the public is free to scramble for the offerings. People are highly enthusiastic about this ritual, as they can take the produce home adding to the excitement, the produce is also used for a "tomato war," where participants hurl the items at one another.

7. Kembul Bujana (Eating Together)



On June 28, 2025

This procession involves the entire community tumpeng (conical rice mounds) set on banana leaves and the necessary ritual offerings such as pala pendem (root crops), ingkung (whole boiled chicken), pencok bakal, gedang ayu (ceremonial bananas), and others have been prepared. The tumpeng and offerings are distributed among the community members, while the remainder is shared during a communal meal.

8. Ruwat Puppetry



On June 28, 2025

This procession marks the final event and the conclusion of the proceedings. The wayang ruwat performance takes place after all other rituals have been completed, continuing into the night. This ritual is performed as a means of cultural preservation. Furthermore, the specific type of wayang selected is chosen with care the puppets used for wayang ruwat typically carry the significance of dispelling all forms of misfortune.

Community Participation in the Ruwat Air Ritual to Foster Togetherness and Solidarity in Community Life

Community participation is essential for the Ruwat Air (Water Cleansing) tradition, as it directly impacts the survival, social significance, and function of the tradition itself. According to the theory of community participation proposed by Cohen and Uphoff (1977) as cited by Kalesaran et al. (2015) participation is driven by two primary factors: community involvement in decision-making and the benefits derived from that participation. This theory is clearly reflected in the Ruwat Air tradition held in Penanggal Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency, where local residents actively participate in all associated activities. The tradition engages not only the residents of Penanggal Village but also people from neighboring villages.

Participants span all age groups, ranging from children to village elders, and the community shows great enthusiasm whenever the Ruwat Air ceremony takes place. This participation fosters solidarity and a sense of togetherness, as people from diverse backgrounds unite to prepare for the event, arrange the venue, and take part in the rituals from start to finish. Through these activities, community members interact and engage in gotong royong (mutual cooperation) transcending differences in background, age, and social status to ensure the successful execution of the Ruwat Air event.

Social Cohesion can Strengthen The Community Through Participation In The Ruwat Air Tradition

According to Emile Durkheim, social cohesion or solidarity is a bond capable of uniting the diverse elements within a society into a cohesive whole (Razak, 2017). It is defined as the interconnectedness and closeness found within a community. Consequently, this social cohesion fosters a sense of togetherness aimed at achieving shared goals, provided that community members assist and support one another. This sense of togetherness has proven to be effectively realized; the community actively participates in every stage of the Ruwat Air (Water Cleansing) tradition, from the extensive preparations and the main event itself to the concluding activities.

Community participation in the Ruwat Air tradition serves as tangible evidence of a high level of awareness regarding the importance of strengthening harmony and mutual care. It reflects a shared sense of responsibility to preserve this tradition which is deeply ingrained in the community's identity without the need for external coercion. Instead, a spontaneous awareness drives the community to continue upholding this tradition, ensuring that the water sources keep flowing and that local wisdom endures.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the Ruwat Air tradition in Penanggal Village, Candipuro District, Lumajang Regency, is a local tradition that effectively fosters and strengthens social cohesion within the community. Active and comprehensive community participation spanning the preparatory phase through to the entire series of ceremonial proceedings reflects the concept of "mechanical solidarity" as

proposed by Durkheim; that is, a form of social bonding rooted in shared values, beliefs, and common goals. The involvement of community members across generations and diverse social backgrounds demonstrates that social cohesion is forged without coercion, arising instead from a collective awareness of the need to preserve the tradition as an integral part of the village's identity. Thus, the Ruwat Air tradition holds not only spiritual and cultural value but also serves as a social bond that strengthens relationships among residents and reinforces the solidarity of the Penanggal Village community in a sustainable manner.

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