


# The Role of Mentawai Night in Cultural Preservation and Increasing Social Participation of the Mentawai Community

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Lise Asnur, Serly Dwi Fransiska, Mardhiyah, Sandra Yusda Putra,

Vino Gion Vanni, Nofrializa<sup>abcdef</sup>

<sup>123456</sup>Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: [liseasnur1@gmail.com](mailto:liseasnur1@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

Mentawai Night is a regular cultural agenda serving a dual and crucial role in preserving local cultural heritage and increasing social participation among the Mentawai community. By featuring traditional arts and rituals, such as the *Sikerei* dance or *gong* music, and actively involving all community segments, the event not only provides a platform for authentic cultural expression but also significantly strengthens social cohesion and bonds. Nevertheless, organizers face significant challenges: a massive surge in visitors is typically observed only on the opening night, followed by a sharp decline in attendance during the subsequent week of the event. Therefore, innovative sustainability strategies – including program diversification or interactive workshops – are essential to maintain the event's appeal and relevance throughout its entire duration. By addressing these challenges, Mentawai Night holds substantial potential to evolve into an inclusive, self-sufficient, and sustainable model for community-based cultural activities for other island territories.

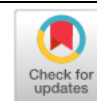
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## INTRODUCTION

Mentawai, is the outermost archipelago that is still within the administrative area of West Sumatra Province. It has a rich local culture and traditions that are distinctive and unique. Traditions in Mentawai are still thick such as traditional clothing, dances, traditional houses, traditional houses (*uma*) of traditional ceremonies that are still preserved to this day. However, in the dynamics of modernization and globalization, the Mentawai people are faced with the challenge of maintaining cultural identity while improving economic welfare (Erwin et al., 2024). In response to these challenges, the Mentawai Regional Government together with local communities and youth groups put together a program entitled Mentawai Night, which is a "people's party" activity that is held regularly every Saturday night in the Mapaddegat beach tourist area, Sipora Island.

Ethnographically, the Mentawai Islands are known as a Paleo-Mongoloid cultural enclave that has a distinctive animist belief system (Arat Sabulungan) and social structure, characterized by patrilineal clans centered on a communal traditional house called *Uma*. These cultural peculiarities, including traditional tattoo practices, *Sikerei* rituals, and close dependence on rainforest environments, have made them the subject of global anthropological research (Schefold, 1988). In the modern context, Mentawai culture is often at the crossroads between the purification of tradition and the need to adapt to economic development and tourism flows. Therefore, every cultural program, including Mentawai Night, must be understood not only as entertainment, but as a socio-cultural mechanism that seeks to balance the preservation of tribal identity with the reality of modernization dynamics.

The Mentawai Night program is not only a space for artistic expression and local cultural preservation but also encourages community social participation through the involvement of

artists, musicians, and cultural actors. Not only that, the participation of local communities in cultural events can strengthen their sense of belonging to their cultural heritage and encourage the regeneration of local wisdom values to the younger generation (Setiawan, 2022). So the participation of the local community in the implementation of Mentawai Night is needed because it can strengthen social cohesion and the continuation of Mentawai Night.

Therefore, this study aims to examine in depth the role of Mentawai Night in cultural preservation and how to increase the social participation of the Mentawai community in the Mentawai Night event. This research is expected to provide an overview of how culture-based activities become a strategy to strengthen cultural identity and social development of the community.

## METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type that focuses on case studies of cultural activities. The main objective of this research is to describe and interpret in depth the role of Mentawai Night in cultural preservation and increasing the socio-economic participation of the community. The location of the research was specifically determined in Mapaddegat Hamlet, Tuapeijat Village, North Sipora District, Mentawai Islands Regency, which is the routine center of the implementation of these activities. The primary data collection technique used is participatory observation which is carried out intensively during the event implementation period to observe social and economic dynamics directly. In addition, documentation techniques were also used for official archives, activity reports, and publication materials related to Mentawai Night as supporting data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Preservation of Local Culture through Traditional Art Expressions

Mentawai Night serves as an authentic cultural platform to express Mentawai's traditional values through art performances. Specifically, the event features the Sikerei (duku/shaman) dance, which is a core ritual *Arat Sabulungan*, accompanied by traditional music (such as *gong* and *drum* local ornaments and artifacts, such as headdresses *Lulut* and traditional woven fabrics. The official poster of the event entitled "Mentawai Nature Symphony" visually reflects the tribal identity with the dominance of endemic flora and fauna motifs (such as Mentawai monkeys or sago trees), and the use of bright colors (red, yellow, white) that symbolize the community's cosmological mission towards sea and land flows. From an anthropological perspective, this visualization and staging presents an effective mechanism for the transmission of cultural values to the younger generation through visual and performance mediums. Documentation of activities shows the active participation of young people in the performance of the arts, from leading traditional dances to mastering the sound architecture of the event's heritage (such as the use of ancient musical instruments), signaling the occurrence of qualitative regeneration and the transfer of educational values within the community. As stated by Hobsbawm and Ranger (2022), the preservation of values must have modern reserves in order to connect heritage practices with the mission of the historical period.



Figure 1. Mentawai Night opening poster .

### **Mentawai Night as a Medium to Increase Social Participation**

The role of the community in Mentawai Night goes beyond the role of spectators; It extends to active participation in the organization and implementation of events. In the collective uploads found on [Name Specific Platform/Account, e.g.: @MentawaiNight's official Instagram account and local residents' uploads], it can be seen that various elements of the population –ranging from PKK mothers' groups (as consumption providers), local art studios (as performers), to the local photography community (as documentation photographers)–contributed concretely to the success of the event. This collective active attitude reflects the existence of deliberative practices that clearly strengthen social capital. According to Claridge (2020), social capital can be interpreted as a network of collective relationships that rely on norms of trust and reciprocity, which in turn strengthens social cohesion. In the context of Mentawai Night, social capital is built through repeated collective interactions in the cultural public space of Mapaddegat Beach. In addition, this regular activity every Saturday night creates a new collective rite that unites cross-generational populations in the same location. Observational and documentation data (such as an average of 50-70 people per night outside of opening night) show the participation of families, children, and various age groups, confirming that the event is inclusive and cross-generational, and serves as a forum for recreation and education.

In the context of Mentawai Night, collective capital is built through repeated collective interactions in cultural public locations. In addition, this event strengthens the function of public locations as a place for collective activities that are simultaneous This Sunday night routine event creates a new collective rite that unites the population in the same location. The participation of families, children, and various age groups in the event documentation shows that the event is inclusive and cross-generational.

Figure 2. One of the performances at *Mentawai Night*



Figure 3. One of the posts of the community that went to *Mentawai Night* *Dher Sababalath - Bernachtuu weekuu dolo #mentawainight... | Facebook*



Figure 4. *Last night's story of the sexy part of consumption... - Mardianis Sagari | Posted on Facebook*

### Visualization of Local Identity in Architectural Space and Stage Aesthetics

One of the interesting aspects of Mentawai Night is the use of traditional physical forms as a fundamental element in the construction of the stage. The stage roof that resembles a Mentawai traditional house and the ornamentation of classic motifs show that the preservation of heritage is not only achieved through art performances, but also manifested in the form of physical design. This visual beauty creates an authentic Heritage living experience for the audience.

This is in line with the idea of "cultural performance" introduced by Schechner (2021), which emphasizes the importance of the context of space and time in bringing tradition to life. Thus, the stage and decoration are an important part of the heritage narrative presented.

Figure 5. Dances performed during *Mentawai Night*Figure 6. *Mentawai Night Stage*

### **Sustainability Challenges and Participatory Management**

In spite of *Mentawai Night* this shows a very high participation of visitors, especially at the time of launch, even causing excessive crowds in the Mapaddegat area. The surge of visitors both from local and off-island circles on the launch day shows the great potential of the *Mentawai Night* event in attracting tourists.

However, as time went by, these visitors began to decline and the visitors who came were dominated by the local community. This phenomenon indicates that the sustainability of cultural events like this requires a long-term strategy that can maintain its appeal.

To overcome these challenges, it is necessary to develop innovations in the program and strengthen cross-regional promotion. In addition, strengthening cooperation with tourism actors, local media, and cultural communities can contribute to creating an ecosystem that supports the sustainability of events consistently.



Figure 7. The Quiet Atmosphere of *Mentawai Night*

## CONCLUSIONS

Mentawai Night is a tangible manifestation of the transmission of the heritage of community values that is consolidated through the development of community action and collective participation. The active and cross-generational involvement of various age groups and social elements in the performance of art and cultural activities makes Mentawai Night a fundamental forum that significantly strengthens the identity and collective cohesion of the Mentawai community. However, the sustainability of this activity still requires an inclusive and responsive management strategy, especially in the face of the dynamics of visitor participation. By continuing to prioritize community action and the preservation of local values, Mentawai Night has the potential to be used as a model for sustainable community-based cultural activities – not just a tourism program, but as a strategy for social progress and value defense.

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