

Sandur as a Digital Chronicle of Ecology, Humanity, and Local Wisdom in Bojonegoro

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ABSTRACT

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Sandur Bojonegoro is a traditional folk performance rich in ecological values, agrarian spirituality, and local wisdom. Amid environmental degradation and the rapid rise of digitalization, Sandur has not only endured as cultural heritage but also evolved into a digital chronicle that aesthetically and narratively portrays the human nature relationship. This study explores how the Sandur Rumah performance, specifically the Sandur Rumah Selendang Kuning video on YouTube functions as a medium for articulating ecological, spiritual, and sociocultural values of the Bojonegoro community. Using a qualitative approach, this research applies visual content analysis, guided by theories of visual semiotics, eco spirituality, folk religion, cultural mediation, and the concept of the living archive. The analysis focuses on the visual, symbolic, and performative aspects of agrarian ecology, local spirituality, and adaptation to digital media. Findings reveal four main insights: (1) agrarian ecology is represented through performance aesthetics depicting rice fields, planting rituals, and fertility symbols; (2) agrarian spirituality is expressed through tembang, prayer, and ritual as forms of cultural resilience; (3) adaptation to digital media is achieved via cinematic editing aligned with YouTube's algorithmic logic; and (4) Sandur acts as a living archive, preserving and renewing cultural memory in digital form. This study concludes that Sandur Rumah is both a traditional art form and a digital chronicle that sustains and reinterprets local wisdom through contemporary media.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and automation have brought significant transformations to agrarian communities around the world, including in Indonesia (Simanullang et al., 2024). Changes in economic structures, agricultural modernization, and the influx of popular culture pose substantial challenges to the continuity of local identities rooted in traditional values and indigenous knowledge. These processes affect not only technological and economic aspects but also significantly impact rural culture, leading to shifts in life orientations, weakened social solidarity, and the erosion of collective and spiritual cultural practices (Patta Rapanna, 2016). In this context, the transition from traditional agrarian value systems to industrial modern culture becomes a critical issue in contemporary cultural and anthropological studies.

This condition is clearly observable in Bojonegoro Regency, East Java, a region known as a major agricultural center as well as the largest oil and gas producer on the island of Java, particularly through the Cepu Block project (Subadi, 2023). The entry of extractive industries—especially following the operations of ExxonMobil Cepu Limited has brought major transformations to Bojonegoro's social, economic, and cultural structures. According to data from BPS Bojonegoro 2023, around 43.25% of the population still depends on agriculture, while urbanization and a shift toward the service and industrial sectors are steadily increasing (Pemkab Bojonegoro, 2025). Additionally, rural youth migration and the disconnection from local values signal a significant identity crisis among Bojonegoro's agrarian communities.

Within this context, the *Sandur* tradition Bojonegoro's distinctive folk performance art serves as a site of reflection on agrarian community dynamics amid globalization and industrialization (Firdaus & Sukmawan, 2021). *Sandur* integrates elements of song, dance, theater, ritual, and traditional music, flourishing in the rural heartlands of Bojonegoro (Hidajad et al., 2022). Beyond its function as entertainment, *Sandur* operates as a medium of value transmission, local spirituality, and social critique. Symbolically, it represents the relationship between humans, nature, and spiritual forces, as reflected in its narrative and visual structures, such as the character Cawig, the song *Tembang Sandur*, and the rhythmic beats of the kendang, which symbolize the agrarian life cycle (Utomo, 2025).

However, academic inquiry into *Sandur* remains limited, particularly studies that examine it as a form of local knowledge production responding to sociocultural transformations driven by modernization and industrial extractivism. Previous studies have primarily focused on folklore, performance aesthetics, or historical perspectives without linking them to contemporary contexts and the cultural crises experienced by rural communities (Utomo, 2025). For example, (Khusnawiyah, 2019) examined *Sandur*'s dramatic structure, while (Hidajad et al., 2022) emphasized its ritual functions, without exploring its relevance to identity discourse and cultural resilience under modernization pressures.

Addressing this gap, the present article analyzes how the chronicle or cultural narrative within *Sandur* performances articulates agrarian community strategies to sustain and reproduce their cultural identities amid the forces of globalization and automation (Utomo et al., 2025). The study employs semiotic and narrative analysis, focusing on symbolic elements, performance structure, and the meaning relations between cultural texts and their social contexts (Hidajat, 2025). *Sandur* is positioned as a cultural dialectical space where traditional values are not merely preserved but reinterpreted as forms of critique and resistance against structural inequalities and the marginalization of agrarian identities (Hidayat, 2019).

The findings of this research are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the fields of performance studies, cultural anthropology, and community-based development (Geertz, 1973a; Hall, 1997). Furthermore, the article argues that traditions like *Sandur* should not be regarded as relics of the past to be confined to museums, but rather as living knowledge constantly evolving and offering foundations for developing just, inclusive, and culturally grounded development models (Hidajat, 2025). As such, this study not only examines representational aspects but also repositions traditional art as a discourse of cultural resilience in the face of disruption.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using visual content analysis of the *Sandur* Rumah performance video uploaded to the *Sandur* Kembang Desa YouTube channel in 2020. The method aims to examine the visual and narrative representations embedded in the video as a form of digital chronicle reflecting the ecological dynamics, agrarian spirituality, and cultural resilience of the Bojonegoro community (Barber, 2016). The analysis technique involves identifying visual elements, dialogue, music, symbols, and performance spaces, following the framework of visual semiotics in cultural studies (Rose, 2006, 2022). The analytical focus is directed toward how the performance

aesthetics portray agrarian landscapes and human-nature relationships within a contemporary local context.

The dimension of agrarian spirituality is explored by engaging with discourses on *Kejawen* mysticism, locality, and the eco social practices of Bojonegoro communities. This approach draws on the theory of eco-spirituality (Fox, 1990) and studies on folk religion within the Javanese context (Headley, 2000). The research interprets spiritual practices such as *tirakat* (ascetic rituals), *sesaji* (offerings), and *tembang* (chants) as symbolic forms of resistance against ecological crisis, as well as part of the cultural resilience of agrarian communities. Here, spirituality is understood not merely as a belief system, but as an adaptive strategy in response to environmental change and modern pressures.

Thirdly, *Sandur*'s adaptation to digital automation and social media is examined through the concept of cultural mediation (Sánchez-Vera, 2025) and the sustainability of traditional arts on digital platforms (Fernández Valdés, 2023). YouTube is conceptualized not merely as a distribution channel, but as a mediated space where local values are rearticulated through aesthetic forms and visual styles aligned with algorithmic logic. This transformation signifies a paradigm shift from community-based participatory art to digital content aimed at broader audiences, while still carrying local narratives.

Finally, the *Sandur Rumah* video is analyzed as a living archive that documents collective memory and local narratives through audiovisual form (De Cesari & Rigney, 2014). In this context, *Sandur* functions not only as a cultural performance but also as a repository of ecological memory, spirituality, and local wisdom that is continually updated through digital practices. This approach enables an understanding of *Sandur* as a dynamic and evolving cultural form, whose meaning and function adapt in accordance with shifting social, economic, and technological contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sandur as a Chronicle of Crisis and Hope

Sandur Rumah, as a representation of folk performance art in Bojonegoro, underwent a significant functional transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. No longer functioning merely as entertainment, the performance became an expressive vehicle for agrarian communities to confront a multidimensional crisis spanning health, social, economic, and spiritual domains. In 2020, the *Sandur Kembang Desa* YouTube channel broadcast several performances under the theme *Sandur Rumah: Selendang Kuning* in figure 1, reinterpreted with lyrics that conveyed the profound grief of the COVID-19 period, including the disruption of agricultural production activities and the hunger experienced by farming families as food supplies dwindled. In this context, *Sandur Rumah* functions not only as an artistic narrative but also as a social chronicle reflecting the structural pressures and pandemic-induced suffering endured by the Bojonegoro community.



Figure 1. Perform in Youtube *Sandur Rumah: Selendang Kuning*

This function aligns with (Zhang & Nekmat, 2024) perspective that cultural expressions during times of crisis possess the capacity to act as social chronicles forms of documenting collective experience through symbolic performance rather than written texts. In *Sandur Rumah*, in Figure 2 elements such as the facial expressions of performers, the slow and melancholic vocalization of *tembang* (chants), and the use of simple musical instruments create an affective atmosphere that resonates emotionally with the audience. The spectators are not merely passive viewers; they become emotionally immersed in a shared communal experience. As (Bial & Brady, 2025) suggests, folk theatre can serve as a space for “restorative behavior,” functioning as cultural and social therapy, particularly Amidst disaster and public trauma.



Figure 2. Expressions of performers, the slow and melancholic vocalization of *tembang*.

Moreover, the agrarian aesthetics prominent in the visual presentation of *Sandur* reinforce dimensions of locality and spirituality. The performance setting features vegetables and rice jars (*gentong*) as symbols of simplicity and human connectedness to nature specifically to agrarian life in Figure 3. These symbols are not merely artistic props but act as reminders of the crises endured by farmers: crop failures, droughts, restricted distribution access, and supply chain disruptions due to the pandemic.

According to data from the Bojonegoro Department of Agriculture 2021, approximately 23% of farmers experienced a decline in productivity during the pandemic, largely due to distribution challenges and the reallocation of village funds from agriculture to healthcare. In such a context, *Sandur* emerged not only as entertainment but also as a form of symbolic resistance, representing the survival struggles of grassroots communities.



Figure 3. The performance setting features vegetables and rice jars (*gentong*).

Agrarian Spirituality and Cultural Resilience

Sandur Rumah, a local performance art unique to Bojonegoro, articulates a deep agrarian spirituality rooted in the cosmology of Javanese farmers. Belief in the cycles of nature and fertility is not merely presented as a narrative backdrop but is symbolically and performatively manifested through sacred figures such as *Cawig* (*Cahya Wiguna*), who represents *Dewi Sri*, the goddess of fertility in Javanese *kejawen* tradition. In the performance, *Cawig* is not a mere fictional character but a transcendent figure who bridges the profane and the sacred, the earth and humanity, hope and continuity of life. Her presence reflects the collective efforts of agrarian communities to maintain spiritual harmony, particularly when ecological relationships are disrupted by global crises such as pandemics or climate change.



Figure 4. figures such as *Cawig* (*Cahya Wiguna*), who represents *Dewi Sri*.

As a community based folk art, *Sandur Rumah* consistently preserves agrarian rites in symbolic forms. Scenes such as sprinkling water from a *kendi*, balancing it on the head, or scattering rice seeds on stage are ritualistic acts deeply embedded in the spiritual practices of farming communities. According to (Geertz, 1973b), who theorized religion as a system of symbols, such acts structure lived experience through symbols laden with profound cultural meaning. These rituals serve not only as religious expression but also as resistance to the erosion of meaning in the digital and globalized era that often alienates people from nature's rhythms.

The spiritual symbols embedded in *Sandur Rumah* may also be interpreted through the lens of religious ecocriticism, in which nature is viewed not merely as a resource but as a sacred entity. For example, the earth is not simply a work object but revered as "*Cawig*" (mother earth) figures woman, possessing vitality and deserving of respect. In the face of agricultural industrialization and the neglect of indigenous wisdom, *Sandur Rumah* offers a form of cultural resilience not through direct confrontation, but through the language of symbols, poetry, and embodied dance. Cultural resilience in this context refers to the community's capacity to sustain meaningful existence and spiritual practices amid rapid sociotechnical transformation.

Through its ritualistic and spiritual aesthetics, *Sandur Rumah* addresses contemporary anxieties over ecological crises and the automation of life. As modern society increasingly loses connection with the land and its spiritual dimensions, this performance emerges as a form of collective reflection—asserting that agrarian life is not solely about production, but about the intricate relationships among humans, nature, divinity, and community. In this sense, *Sandur Rumah* is not merely a cultural artifact but a form of living spirituality, reinforcing local communities' adaptive strength. This resonates with (Titon, 2009) view that local cultural expressions are integral to a "cultural ecology" that sustains life through practices rooted in place-based knowledge and values.

Adapting to Automation and Social Media

Although rooted in oral tradition, agrarian rites, and collective expression based in communal spaces, *Sandur Rumah* demonstrates that traditional arts are not static entities trapped in the past. On the contrary, it reveals a high degree of flexibility and adaptive capacity in response to digital technological developments. The *Sandur Kembang Desa* YouTube channel, active since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, has served as a primary medium for distributing performance documentation. The uploaded videos showcase *Sandur* performances with cinematic quality, employing modern editing techniques such as close-ups, slow motion, smooth transitions, and bilingual subtitles (Javanese-Indonesian) in Figure 5, thereby bridging digital generations with traditional heritage.



Figure 5. bilingual subtitles (Javanese–Indonesian).

This transformation is not merely a shift in visual aesthetics, but rather a cultural survival strategy in the age of automation and digital algorithms. On one hand, *Sandur Rumah* retains its local distinctiveness of *ngoko* and *krama* Javanese, agrarian symbols, and ritualistic dramatic structures. On the other hand, the performances are curated to suit the characteristics of the digital medium: adjusted durations, engaging visual rhythms, and the use of optimized hashtags and descriptions for discoverability on YouTube. This exemplifies the practice of glocalization, as theorized by (Robertson, 1995), wherein local values are adapted and contextualized within global frameworks without losing their core identity.

Furthermore, *Sandur Rumah* has created a new performative space that transcends geographic and social boundaries. Previously limited to live audiences in local Bojonegoro communities, *Sandur* can now reach national and even global audiences. This opens wider dialogues on local issues such as agrarian spirituality, climate crisis, and food sovereignty. Such dynamics align with (Jenkins, 2006) concept of convergence culture, where the boundaries between cultural producers and consumers are fluid, and digital communities participate in the circulation and interpretation of cultural content. Despite existing on social media often associated with superficial and fast-paced content *Sandur Rumah* has not lost its reflective and ritual dimensions. Instead, it cultivates a digital cultural ecology where traditional arts coexist with technology, not as antagonists, but as partners in evolution. In this context, digitalization does not diminish cultural values; rather, it opens new terrains for performative transformation. In practice, *Sandur Rumah* also engages in ongoing digital archiving. Each performance video is titled distinctively, dated, and often accompanied by curatorial notes. This strengthens its position as a living archive, an evolving archive maintained not by formal institutions but by its own community through creative digital practices. *Sandur* is no longer dependent on state institutions or art organizations for preservation and distribution; it is self-sustaining, a critical feature in the post-pandemic era where access to physical spaces is increasingly limited.

***Sandur* as a Living Archive**

Sandur Rumah can be interpreted as more than just a performance; it is a living archive that records and transmits the collective experiences of an agrarian society through performative forms. Unlike passive textual or audiovisual documentation that is merely an object of observation, *Sandur* stores and disseminates knowledge through the body, movement, sound, and space four essential elements of performing arts that are

inseparable from the social and historical context of its community. Each *Sandur* performance is not a repetition, but a reinscription of meaning to constantly changing experiences: from pandemics and changing planting seasons to ecological threats and digital disruption.



Figure 6. Knowledge through the body, movement, sound, and space are four essential elements of performing arts.

Within the (Taylor, 2003) theoretical framework, cultural archives are divided into two forms: archive and repertoire. Archive is a form of physical data storage (books, photographs, recordings), while repertoire is a form of cultural inheritance through the body, movement, sound, and social practices that are ephemeral yet constantly alive. *Sandur*, in this context, is a form of repertoire that refuses to be frozen in a single format, choosing to live in performance and collective memory. Even when transferred to the digital realm via YouTube, the performance remains vibrant: the narrative, emotions, and symbols continue to transform according to societal circumstances.

Thus, the *Sandur Rumah* YouTube channel serves not only as a distribution platform but also as an active archival space where cultural memory is not only stored but also replayed, commented on, transformed, and disseminated by new audiences, the example in Figure 7. This digital archive enables *Sandur* performances to function not only for documentation but also as a tool for education, reflection, and intergenerational dialogue. In oral traditions, which do not always have a written record, this form is crucial for bridging the continuity of cultural values and practices.



Figure 7. Shift of repertoire to digital archives.

Sandur's uniqueness as a living archive is also evident in its responsiveness to social situations. For example, when communities face a pandemic or ecological crisis, *Sandur* performances spontaneously adapt their song content, dramatic structure, and even symbolic elements to convey collective anxieties or hopes. This makes *Sandur* not just a repository of memories, but a medium for negotiating new meanings in changing situations, a key function of a true living archive.

As Ann (Cvetkovich, 2003) wrote in "An Archive of Feelings", archives can also store collective emotions and trauma. *Sandur* articulates this through the performers' bodies, the ritual atmosphere, and the melancholic or meditative sounds of the songs. The audience not only witnesses but also experiences them and this marks a significant difference between living archives and formal documentation. When YouTube channels become a space that brings together oral performance and digital traces, we witness a form of "archival hybridity" that combines technology with cultural spirituality.

CONCLUSION

Sandur Rumah, a traditional folk performing art form from Bojonegoro, has demonstrated its capacity to transform from mere entertainment into a medium for social, spiritual, and ecological narratives relevant to the current context. During the COVID-19 pandemic, *Sandur* serves as both a chronicle of crisis and hope, capturing the suffering and resilience of agrarian communities through symbols, lyrics, and the emotionally charged atmosphere of the performances. Through representations of sacred figures such as *Cawig* and agrarian rituals, *Sandur Rumah* emphasizes its role as a guardian of agrarian spirituality and a manifestation of cultural resilience capable of maintaining a harmonious relationship between humans, nature, and the divine.

The adaptation of *Sandur Rumah* to the digital space through a YouTube channel demonstrates an effective glocalization strategy, where local values are maintained while adapting to social media aesthetics and algorithms. This transformation broadens audience reach, opens dialogue across geographic boundaries, and creates a digital cultural ecology that combines oral tradition with modern technology. Moreover, *Sandur Rumah* positions itself as a living archive, a living archive that not only preserves collective memory but also revives it, reinterprets it, and disseminates it through performance practices that are responsive to social and ecological changes.

These findings confirm that the sustainability of traditional performing arts depends not solely on the preservation of their form, but on their ability to respond, adapt, and establish new relevance without losing their cultural roots. Consequently, strengthening traditional arts ecosystems like *Sandur Rumah* requires collaborative support between communities, academics, and digital platforms, so that the agrarian, spiritual, and ecological values they uphold can continue to be passed down across generations amidst the dynamics of an increasingly digitalized world.

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