

The 'Ogoh-Ogoh' Youth Festival: A Living Structure of Folklore Transmission in the International Tourist Town of Ubud, Bali

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Abstract: This ethnographic study examined the annual festival of *ogoh-ogoh* (giant sculpture) held by youth in the international tourist town of Ubud, Bali. Using participant observation supplemented by semi-structured interviews with youth organizations, ritual specialists, master craftsmen, and artists, along with documentary analysis of institutional protocols and competition frameworks, the study reveals that the intersemiotic translation from narrative to sculptural form maintains the link with Balinese folklore, transforming it into desirable cultural capital through hermeneutic problem-solving that requires consultation of palm leaf *lontar* manuscripts and the involvement of elders. Visual-spatial and kinesthetic processing generates mnemonic amplification, producing mythological preservation, while adaptive transmission demonstrates young people's mastery of contemporary technologies and administrative skills, reinforcing traditional knowledge, enabling organizational sovereignty, and maintaining epistemic authority through strategic opacity. These findings redefine cultural sustainability beyond the conservation-innovation dichotomy, revealing the folkloric vitality that emerges through modernity and touristic culture.

Keywords: sculptural hermeneutics; folklore transmission; material remedy; *ogoh-ogoh* festival; mutual cultural amplification

1. Introduction

The perennial tension between cultural continuity and transformation has long occupied academic discourse in folklore studies, heritage management, and cultural anthropology, where traditional knowledge systems confront the

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pressures of urbanization, digital mediation, and generational shifts in literacy practices (Baron et al., 2024; Hafstein, 2024). In this contested terrain, oral narratives, once transmitted through intergenerational rituals, face what heritage scholars document as context erosion (Finnegan, 2012), in which the social occasions and participatory frameworks that historically supported folklore transmission are attenuated by processes of modernization (Bauman, 2023).

Cruikshank's ethnographic work (2010) with Yukon elders reveals how changes in narrative authority occur when institutional structures, residential schooling, wage-based economies, and bureaucratic governance replace traditional knowledge-sharing practices rooted in seasonal gatherings, kinship ceremonies, and apprenticeship relationships. Noyes (2016) expands on this insight, demonstrating that the vitality of folklore depends on continuous re-enactment within evolving cultural contexts, where communities adapt modes of transmission to maintain narrative relevance through socio-economic transformations.

However, emerging cultural phenomena challenge deterministic narratives of the inevitable decline of folklore, revealing instead adaptive strategies in which communities recode oral traditions into alternative performative registers that ensure narrative persistence through socio-cultural transformation (Foley, 1992; Titon, 2016; Wells, 2006). The *ogoh-ogoh* festival in the International Tourist Town of Ubud exemplifies this process of remediation, in which Balinese youth collectives (*Sekaa Teruna* or *Yowana*) translate mythological narratives from oral repertoires and *lontar* (palm leaf) manuscripts into monumental sculptural forms that parade annually before the Hindu New Year (Nyepi). This material transposition constitutes what we theorize as mutual cultural amplification: folklore provides the thematic framework and cosmological authority for sculptural design.

The urgency of investigating this phenomenon intensifies when contrasted with global patterns of erosion of intangible cultural heritage documented by UNESCO and studies on folklore conservation (Alivizatou, 2011; Kurin, 2004). Throughout Indonesia and Southeast Asia, rapid modernization has diminished traditional storytelling practices (Cohen, 2016; Wessing, 2006). Unlike museum-based preservation strategies that remove folklore from living practice (Robinson, 2024), or digital archiving initiatives that transform narratives into inert databases (Vallejos-Fabres & Silva Flores, 2025), the Ubud *ogoh-ogoh* festival keeps folklore in active community use through aesthetic innovation. The *ogoh-ogoh* reveals a dialectical synthesis in which technological sophistication and mythological fidelity operate as mutually reinforcing values.

To understand this cultural vitality, it is essential to recognize the problem of epistemic transmission in post-oral societies: how communities maintain

complex systems of mythological knowledge when younger generations no longer master textual Sanskrit/Kawi languages or participate in traditional contexts of oral storytelling. Throughout Bali, scholars document challenges to the continuity of *lontar* palm leaf manuscripts, in which the canonical Hindu epics, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and Puranic cosmologies, are concentrated among specialized ritual practitioners (*pedanda* [priest], *dalang* [puppet master]) rather than circulating through broader community literacy (Creese, 1999, 2014; De Vet, 1996; Peters & Wardana, 2013). Zurbuchen (1987) reveals how *wayang* performances have historically functioned as pedagogical infrastructures by translating Kawi texts into a language accessible to the local population, but contemporary pressures, compressed tourist schedules, and attenuated apprenticeships diminish the depth of mythological exegesis. This threatens not only narrative familiarity, but also the cosmological frameworks that structure ethical reasoning, ecological relationality (*Tri Hita Karana*), and communal ritual practice. The literature on cultural heritage studies emphasizes multimodal transmission strategies, translating oral/textual knowledge into experiential registers, dance pedagogy, ritual performances, and visual arts, incorporating narratives into embodied practice (Chung, 2024; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2005; Mills & Doyle, 2019). Cognitive anthropology confirms that narrative memory is strengthened through multisensory engagement, in which spatial, kinesthetic, and emotional associations enhance mnemonic retention beyond simple verbal recitation (Connerton, 2012; Lee et al., 2020; Reavey, 2017).

The *ogoh-ogoh* tradition of Ubud puts this multimodal transmission into practice through what we call sculptural hermeneutics: the systematic interpretation and material embodiment of mythological texts by youth collectives who simultaneously function as cultural archaeologists, excavating appropriate folkloric narratives from vast mythological archives, and as aesthetic translators, translating abstract cosmological concepts into legible three-dimensional forms.

Previous approaches to festive arts and folklore transmission emphasize either anxieties about commodification, in which market pressures erode authentic traditions (Picard, 1996; Wood, 1998), or romantic conservation frameworks that position change as inherently threatening (Bai & Weng, 2023; Handler & Linnekin, 1984). Academic literature on Bali documents tensions between tourist spectacle and ritual integrity, framing cultural performances as sites of contested authenticity (Dunbar-Hall, 2001; Olsen, 2007; Putra, 2011). Recent research on *ogoh-ogoh* has examined technological dimensions (Crisnapati et al., 2022; Triandini et al., 2024), ontological presence in Nyepi rituals (Telle, 2023), and interreligious tolerance functions (Rahmadani & Prasetyo, 2024), but these studies rarely analyze the festival as a mechanism for transmitting

folklore in which material practice actively supports narrative knowledge rather than replacing it. Comparative studies on the remediation of folklore, the transitions of Javanese *wayang kulit*, the literary industrialization of European fairy tales, and translations of indigenous oral traditions into the visual arts typically position material culture as secondary or derivative of “primary” oral forms, implicitly privileging textual/verbal knowledge over embodied/material epistemologies (Dundes, 1980; Lloyd, 2023; Mills & Doyle, 2019; Zipes, 2012).

Folklore studies lack theoretical frameworks that describe the bidirectional reworking in which material culture regenerates oral traditions, challenging disciplinary biases that conceptualize orality-materiality as a unidirectional attenuation. Second, cultural heritage studies fail to explain how competitive festival structures reinforce the acquisition of traditional knowledge, revealing conditions in which market-related incentives valorize rather than commodify cultural skills. Third, existing literature fails to theorize mnemonic materiality; the function of effigies as cognitive prostheses that encode complex mythologies into forms that require less specialized knowledge, thereby democratizing access to elite religious literature while maintaining interpretive depth for initiated practitioners.

This research investigates how the annual *ogoh-ogoh* festival in Ubud sustains folkloric knowledge across generations through material remediation practices that recode oral/textual narratives into sculptural pedagogical tools. Our analytical intervention aims to document the specific creative processes through which youth collectives translate mythological narratives into three-dimensional forms, revealing the mechanisms of competitive acquisition of folkloric literacy. Second, we theorize sculptural hermeneutics as a distinctive epistemological mode in which material practice generates narrative knowledge, challenging assumptions of oral primacy in folklore studies. Third, we conceptualize reciprocal cultural amplification to explain bidirectional flows in which folklore provides a thematic scaffold for aesthetic innovation, while material embodiment ensures narrative persistence in declining oral/textual transmission contexts.

The theoretical novelty of the study lies in synthesizing folklore studies, material culture theory, and cognitive anthropology to explain how tangible creative practice sustains intangible heritage through adaptive remediation, maintaining narrative authority within contemporary aesthetic forms. Empirically, we provide a processual ethnography of collaborative narrative selection and sculptural interpretation during the 2025 Yowana Festival in Ubud, documenting how *Sekaa Teruna* collectives negotiate between mythological fidelity and contemporary relevance, revealing that tradition survives not despite innovation, but through it.

2. Literature review

Folklore studies have documented the transformations that accompany narrative transposition across media, from oral recitation to printed anthologies, from shadow theater to digital animation, from ritual performances to museum exhibitions (Fast & Örnebring, 2017; Javanshir et al., 2020; Masasabi, 2022; Ökmen, 2019); however, this literature conceptualizes remediation through hierarchical logics that privilege oral and textual forms, treating material and performative translations as derivative, simplified, or commercially corrupted iterations (Littau, 2016). Comparative analyses of the industrialization of European fairy tales reveal how publishing capitalism and Disney animation extracted narratives from community contexts, standardizing regional variants into commodifiable intellectual properties separated from their ritual contexts (Bottigheimer, 2010; Harkin, 2022; Marzolph, 2019). Similarly, studies of indigenous knowledge systems document concerns that museum curation and tourist representations “freeze” living traditions into static ethnographic artifacts, separating cosmological meanings from pragmatic applications (Leischner, 2022; Mendoza, 2024; Sohns et al., 2024). This theoretical orientation produces a critical gap: the inability to theorize a bidirectional remediation in which material culture regenerates oral traditions.

Studies of Javanese *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) illustrate this limitation; while recognizing the pedagogical function of shadow theater (Bronner & Creese, 2021; Keeler, 2017; Prasetya et al., 2023; Sears, 1996), analyses examine how the *wayang* becomes reference material for subsequent oral narration, creating recursive cycles rather than unidirectional flows. Folklore studies lack frameworks for recognizing when sculptural, performative, or visual practices function as primary knowledge infrastructures that sustain narrative traditions that might otherwise fade, reflecting what Taylor (2007) identifies as the archival bias of Western culture, in which textual documents receive validation while embodied repertoires remain analytically marginalized.

The literature on cultural tourism exacerbates these limitations through the thesis of the inevitability of commodification: the assumption that market integration erodes ritual integrity and cultural authenticity (Larsson & Ouattara, 2024; Syafrini et al., 2020; Zhao et al., 2024). Early anthropology of tourism (Greenwood, 1989; MacCannell, 1973) positioned market integration as corrosive to ritual integrity, warning that cultural performances staged for tourists separate spiritual meanings from lived practice. Balinese studies exemplify this analytical trajectory, documenting the transformative impacts of tourism on ritual practice, artistic production, and cultural identity (Ardhana, 2020; Mulyana, 2025). However, subsequent studies complicate deterministic narratives; Bruner (2005) demonstrates how tourist representations generate

emerging authenticities, while Errington (2000) critiques Western discourses on authenticity that dismiss market-oriented cultural production as degraded. Recent studies extend the debate on commodification to the digital world, examining how Instagram tourism and social media virality reshape aesthetic priorities towards photogenic spectacle (Kang et al., 2019; Rogers, 2021; Smith, 2021).

However, this literature presents an inability to theorize mechanisms of counter-commodification in which communities maintain narrative authority and epistemic sovereignty within commercial circuits rather than against them. Comparative studies of festivals reveal similar limitations; analyses of New Orleans Mardi Gras document a progressive erosion of popular control as corporate sponsorships and municipal tourism agencies assume curatorial authority, standardizing performances to meet the expectations of external audiences (Ancelet, 2022; Gotham, 2005b, 2005a), but academic research rarely identifies the institutional architectures, governance protocols, or aesthetic strategies that allow for exceptions to this trajectory. The result is a theoretical determinism that positions commodification as structurally inevitable, obscuring analytical attention to conditions in which market participation reinforces cultural autonomy (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020; Hall, 2023). At the same time, the literature on heritage management recognizes competitions as mechanisms of governance, but analyses typically frame evaluation criteria as homogenizing forces that impose external aesthetic standards that erode regional distinctiveness (Foroudi et al., 2020).

Anthropology of education and heritage pedagogy addresses the challenges of intergenerational knowledge transmission when modernization disrupts traditional apprenticeship contexts (Hikmat, 2024; Maynard et al., 2024), documents the decline in youth participation in ritual practices, crafts, and oral storytelling as formal education, digital entertainment, and urban migration restructure temporal rhythms and cultural priorities (Cochrane, 2023; Kendrick et al., 2022; Ufuophu-Biri & Ijeh, 2021). Responses to heritage preservation typically follow two trajectories: romantic revival initiatives that attempt to recreate idealized traditional contexts through cultural camps and apprenticeship programs, or pragmatic modernization strategies that incorporate heritage content into formal curricula through textbooks and multimedia resources (Achille & Fiorillo, 2022; Sun et al., 2021; Yan & Li, 2023). Academic criticism questions both approaches (Buragohain et al., 2024; Ryu & Kang, 2023; Wang, 2022), but it produces an impasse: the inability to conceptualize hybrid transmission pedagogies that neither romanticize isolationist preservation nor capitulate to total institutionalization.

These interconnected gaps reveal a broader theoretical limitation: studies on cultural heritage lack an analytical vocabulary for practices that transcend the nostalgia-innovation dichotomy, in which communities sustain tradition precisely through adaptive transformation rather than despite it. The consequence proves methodologically significant; without processual ethnographies documenting collaborative creative work across festival cycles, academic research fails to grasp how the tradition-innovation dialectic unfolds through daily negotiations between cosmological responsibility and contemporary relevance, between elder authority and youth experimentation, between ritual integrity and aesthetic spectacle.

This study addresses these gaps through an ongoing engagement with the annual *ogoh-ogoh* festival in Ubud, examining how youth collectives manage cultural sovereignty through institutional innovation that positions folklore not as a heritage requiring protection, but as a generative resource that enables transformation, thus revealing the general conditions under which material remediation reinforces rather than erodes narrative traditions. At the same time, communities maintain epistemic authority within commercial circuits through a strategic aesthetic complexity that resists decontextualization.

3. Method and Theory

3.1 Method

The 2025 Ubud Yowana Festival in Ubud constitutes the primary analytical unit, selected through purposive sampling (Patton, 2010), based on three strategic considerations: (1) Ubud's documented emphasis on mythological fidelity derived from *wayang*, which distinguishes it from regions that favor spectacular gigantism, (2) the competitive structure of the festival, which imposes narrative authenticity and cosmological consistency in its evaluation protocols, thus making knowledge of folklore operational as competitive cultural capital, and (3) the institutional accessibility facilitated by formal research partnerships with Puri Agung Ubud and Sabha Yowana Desa Adat Ubud, which allow for deep ethnographic involvement in the pre-production, execution, and post-event reflection phases of the festival. The research adopts an interpretive epistemology, recognizing that cultural meanings are constructed through experiences, symbolic interpretations, and institutional practices, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This epistemological position requires methodological approaches that privilege participants' perspectives, contextual understanding, and thick description over quantitative measurement or the testing of causal hypotheses (Geertz, 1973).

Participants were selected using targeted sampling (Palinkas et al., 2015), capturing diverse perspectives within the *ogoh-ogoh* production

ecosystem. The final sample was distributed across five stakeholder categories: (1) **Representatives of youth organizations** (*Sekaa Teruna*) from fourteen participating *banjar* collectives, including creative coordinators, chief sculptors, and narrative consultants responsible for mythological selection and aesthetic translation; (2) **Master craftsmen and competition judges** with specialized technical and cosmological knowledge; (3) **Ritual specialists and cultural advisors**, including *pedanda* (Hindu priests), *dalang* (puppet masters), and traditional authorities (Penglingsir Puri Agung Ubud, Prof. Tjokorde Gde Raka Sukawati) who validate cosmological appropriateness; (4) **Government and institutional actors**, including the organizers of the *Sabha Yowana* festival, security personnel and tradition *pecalang*, and members of the *Majelis Desa Adat* council responsible for regulatory protocols, financial transparency systems, and coordination *between banjars*. Cokorda Gde Bayu Putra, the author of *Abhinaya Budaya: Tapak Perjalanan Tata Kelola Pawai Ogoh-ogoh di Catuspata Ubud* (2023), served as cultural mediator and institutional liaison, providing contextual interpretation of governance protocols documented during COVID-19-induced interruptions (2020-2022) and the festival's resumption.

Data collection spanned three months (January-March 2025) using the methodological triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Participant observation was the main ethnographic method, divided into four phases: Phase 1 documented the *bale banjar* creative workshops in which the *Sekaa Teruna* collectives conducted deliberations on narrative selection, consulted ritual specialists, and initiated sculptural design through collaborative experimentation, focusing on consultation of mythological sources (*lontar* manuscripts, oral histories of elders, participation in *wayang*), debates on aesthetic translation, and dynamics of intergenerational knowledge transmission. Phase 2 captured the construction of the *ogoh-ogoh*. Phase 3 involved intensive observation of *melaspas* consecration ceremonies, the choreography of the main parade in Catuspata, multilingual oratory performances, and *mecaru* purification rituals. Phase 4 involved participation in debriefing sessions and reflection meetings.

Field notes used a descriptive-reflective format (Emerson et al., 2011), recording observations alongside interpretative notes. Semi-structured interviews provided an in-depth exploration (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), in this case through three phases: before the festival, exploring the motivations for narrative selection and competitive strategies; during the festival, capturing experiential reflections; after the festival, addressing retrospective evaluation. Interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred languages, recorded in audio format, and transcribed verbatim. Documentary analysis incorporated institutional governance documents, regulatory frameworks, competition rubrics, media coverage, and historical ethnography, using thematic content

analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), identifying recurring institutional logics and discursive frameworks.

3.2 Theory

Giddens' structuration theory (1984) provides the fundamental framework through the duality of structure: social structures function both as a means and as a result of recursive practices that conscious agents transform through situated actions. In the context of festival sculpture production, cosmological protocols, mythological repertoires, and ritual frameworks constitute structural resources. Youth collectives demonstrate conscious action by using inherited frameworks to generate innovation while maintaining evaluative consistency. This highlights three mechanisms: 1) Interpretative flexibility, in which narratives function as generative patterns that allow mobilization towards new ends while remaining faithful to standards of authenticity; 2) Institutional recursion, in which evaluation protocols paradoxically reinforce the acquisition of traditional knowledge by transforming cultural literacy into competitive capital that requires active mastery; and 3) Temporal stratification that distinguishes long-term cosmological continuities from conjunctural technological adaptations, demonstrating navigation through multiple temporalities without radical breaks.

The festival's sculptural production exemplifies Jakobson's intersemiotic translation or transmutation: systematic interpretation of verbal signs through nonverbal sign systems. Intersemiotic translation generates an interpretative transformation, negotiating between narrative complexity and material-technical constraints, between sequential temporal narration and simultaneous spatial representation. This is confronted with Mitchell's ekphrastic impossibility, the semiotic gap between diachronic narration and synchronic sculptural forms.

Bolter and Grusin's theory of remediation illuminates a contradictory dual logic: hypermedia highlights materiality constructed through visible technological processing (electronic systems, kinetic mechanisms, surface treatments), making mediation spectacular while rejecting transparent representation; at the same time, immediacy operates through ritual processes that transform constructed objects into spiritually powerful presences, allowing direct experiential access without the need for specialist skills. This dual operation creates a material hermeneutics, an interpretative work that translates abstract conceptual systems into tangible pedagogical tools, making esoteric philosophies perceptually accessible through multisensory engagement. Physical objects stabilize abstract ideas through manipulable and shareable substrates. Sculptural forms function as cognitive scaffolds in which abstractions become materially anchored in collaboratively constructed

objects, displayed in a processional manner and ritually transformed, with each engagement creating motor memory and affective associations that enhance conceptual retention beyond textual learning.

Research on multimodal memory in cognitive anthropology (Connerton, 2012; Rubin, 2023), combined with Taylor's repertoire theory (2007), reveals sculptural production as mnemonic infrastructure. Connerton distinguishes practices of embodiment (bodily habits through performance) from practices of inscription (external textual memorization), positioning embodied transmission as a robust system of knowledge. Rubin's research demonstrates that memory is strengthened when multiple sensory modalities are integrated: visual images, spatial organization, kinesthetic activity, and emotional relevance, rather than single-channel verbal transmission. Material production creates composite learning environments that engage visual-spatial processing through design decisions, kinesthetic memory through material manipulation, socio-emotional coding through collective work and ritual intensity, and narrative testing through ongoing mythological discussion. This produces recursive literacy; cyclical processes in which narrative engagement informs material production, while aesthetic translation challenges deepen narrative understanding, creating knowledge that transcends both textual study and material practice independently.

Taylor's archive-repertoire framework challenges hierarchies that privilege textual documents over embodied practices, positioning performance-based transmission as epistemologically parallel systems of knowledge. This allows for the theorization of bidirectional flows of knowledge in which material culture actively regenerates oral/textual traditions through material-narrative recursion, iterative processes in which neither oral nor material forms have primacy, but instead mutually constitute integrated ecologies of knowledge resistant to unidirectional narratives of attenuation.

Hall's framework of resistance through rituals positions cultural practices as sites of counter-hegemonic struggle in which marginalized groups encode layered meanings, superficial narratives that satisfy external consumption, while embedded meanings require cultural initiation to be decoded. Multilingual frameworks create multi-layered semantic accessibility through tactical communication: primary languages convey cosmological depth to initiated members, regional lingua francas provide broader access, and international languages offer surface syntheses. Strategic opacity, the deliberate rejection of complete legibility, manifests itself through gradients of aesthetic density in which technological processing functions as tactical diversion, redirecting external attention toward consumable surfaces, while cosmological frameworks remain accessible through sustained community participation. This

constitutes epistemic sovereignty: the ability of communities to determine what knowledge circulates publicly, how it is translated for external audiences, and what remains protected, reversing the dynamics of cultural tourism in which external stakeholders typically monopolize interpretive authority. Resistance operates through semantic complexity, resisting decontextualization, in which forms remain intelligible on multiple levels, simultaneously serving tourism functions and transmission needs.

4. Results and Discussion

The *ogoh-ogoh* festival began in the 1980s in the city of Denpasar, where the *pengrupukan* ritual, celebrated on the eve of *Nyepi*, the Balinese Day of Silence, was performed with torchlight processions and noisy, chaotic parades aimed at symbolically driving away evil spirits. This purification marks the transition to *Nyepi*, which begins in total silence the following day as the Balinese New Year according to the *Saka/Caka* calendar, which is 78 years behind the Gregorian calendar.

In 1983, *Nyepi*, which was previously a local Balinese holiday, was officially recognized as a national holiday under the administration of President Suharto. To celebrate this recognition, Balinese Hindus began to celebrate *Nyepi* with even greater enthusiasm, introducing processions with *ogoh-ogoh* effigies, which became increasingly elaborate and festive. The effigies are now built on a much larger scale, with greater aesthetic complexity and technological sophistication. To better organize these events and prevent chaos during the processions, local governments began organizing *ogoh-ogoh* competitions, with large participation by many young people.

4.1 Intersemiotic translation as an activation of folklore

Observational documentation of deliberations on *bale banjar* design during the preparation period for the 2025 Ubud Yowana Festival (Figure 1) reveals that youth collectives approach this translational challenge as an interpretive problem to be solved, requiring recursive consultation with multiple sources of knowledge. When *Sekaa Teruna* groups deliberate on how to render characters whose mythological descriptions emphasize metaphysical qualities, the eternal anguish of cursed warriors, the cosmic imbalance embodied by *Bhuta Kala* entities, the maternal pain of mythological figures, they engage in a process of hermeneutic engagement.



Figure 1. Ubud Yowana Festival brochure 2025 (Source: Ubud Yowana Festival Committee, 2025)

Fundamentally, this impossibility does not function as an impediment, but as a generative constraint that imposes a deeper engagement with the source materials. Field observations documented young people collectively discussing iconographic choices; the appropriate symbolism of colors drawn from *wayang* conventions, the gestural configurations that convey the psychology of the characters, the compositional arrangements that suggest narrative relationships, with deliberations that make explicit reference to multiple textual and oral sources. One extended session of the *bale banjar* observed involved a three-hour discussion on how to materially represent the dual nature of a character, divine consciousness trapped in a corrupt physical form, which required consultation of descriptions in *lontar* manuscripts, comparison with previous *wayang* accessible through remembered performances, and interpretive negotiation among members of the collective.

In the interstices of the sculpting process, the young members of Sekaa Teruna Udayana, Taman Kelod, Ubud, frequently engage in discussions that reveal the dilemmas of material representation. When confronted with decisions about how to physically embody abstract ideas (the weight of *karma*, the balance of *dharma*), a collective awareness emerges that merely knowing the narrative plot proves insufficient. Understanding the underlying philosophy, cosmological principles, and symbolic systems becomes an urgent epistemological necessity. Within this process of material negotiation, sculptural production itself functions as a pedagogy that diagnostically exposes the limits of their comprehension. This attempt at material representation demonstrates that sculptural production operates as an infrastructure for mobilizing knowledge, activating dormant textual resources that might otherwise remain unutilized in everyday life.

The Ubud process maintains interpretive authority within communities of practice: young people simultaneously serve as bearers of tradition, accessing knowledge inherited from active interpreters. Outside observers (tourists, researchers, media) witness spectacular results but do not have access to the interpretive deliberations that constitute the epistemological core of production.



Figure 2. Young people from Banjar Sekaa Teruna Santih Graha Ubud Kaja created *Ogoh-ogoh* (Source: Ubud Yowana Festival Committee, 2025)

The sculptural form becomes a catalyst for oral transmission. Older community members interviewed referred to specific *ogoh-ogoh* from the past when recounting mythological narratives, using material memory as a mnemonic support for oral performance.

Hutchins' concept of "material anchors for conceptual fusions" (2005) provides a cognitive mechanism that explains this improvement. Abstract cosmological concepts, such as the inexorable causality of karma, the cosmic imbalance of *Bhuta Kala*, and the tripartite harmony of *Tri Hita Karana*, become materially anchored through sculptural embodiment, providing stable and manipulable substrates for conceptual work. During collaborative construction (Figure 2), young people physically manipulate materials and simultaneously manipulate ideas: deciding how to balance opposing forces in composition mirrors an understanding of philosophical equilibrium; designing structural stability while maintaining dynamic postures parallels an understanding of the tension between order and chaos in cosmological narratives. This embodied cognition creates what Rubin (2023) demonstrates as multimodal memory enhancement: information encoded through visual-spatial processing (shape design), kinesthetic engagement (material manipulation), verbal-semantic systems (mythological discussion), and emotional salience (ritual intensity) produces significantly higher retention than monomodal textual study. Post-festival interviews revealed that young people were able to articulate complex mythological relationships, trace narrative genealogies across multiple textual sources, and explain cosmological principles in greater detail than community members who had studied *lontar* manuscripts without material involvement in translation.

The theoretical implications redefine folklore studies' engagement with material culture. Our findings demonstrate that strategic reclamation of materials constitutes a robust pedagogy of transmission under specific conditions: (1) When interpretive authority remains within cultural communities rather than external commercial entities, (2) When aesthetic production requires consultation of sources rather than imaginative invention alone, and (3) When validation mechanisms prioritize cosmological accuracy alongside aesthetic innovation. These conditions enable what Connerton (2012) theorizes as practices of embodiment, the transmission of embodied knowledge that is resistant to extraction or commodification because it requires sustained participatory engagement within interpretive communities. Sculptural form cannot be purchased and transported without the interpretive frameworks that make it culturally meaningful; tourists can purchase photographs or even commission replicas, but they do not have access to the mythological culture, ritual knowledge, and social networks of the community that constitute the epistemological substance of the practice.

These challenges prevailing assumptions in cultural tourism research, which position market integration as an inevitable factor in the erosion of cultural authenticity. The festival operates within commercial circuits, attracting international tourists, generating media coverage, and interacting with government cultural promotion, but it maintains epistemic sovereignty through what Spivak (2010) conceptualizes as strategic opacity: the deliberate construction of multi-layered accessibility in which the superficial spectacle satisfies external consumption, while the deeper cosmological frameworks remain interpretatively complex, requiring cultural initiation to be fully decoded.

The spectacular technological elaboration observed during the parade's nighttime performances functions as what we call tactical diversion, redirecting tourists' attention toward immediately consumable visual elements (dazzling LEDs, kinetic movements, chromatic sophistication) while protecting mythological depth from extractive appropriation. Data from interviews with international spectators and community participants revealed a clear interpretative divergence: external observers emphasized aesthetic impressions ("beautiful," "dramatic," "colorful"). In contrast, community members discussed narrative accuracy, cosmological appropriateness, and philosophical consistency, demonstrating differential levels of involvement in which communities maintain hermeneutic authority, determining legitimate interpretation.

4.2 Material anchors as mnemonic amplification

The literature on heritage pedagogy has struggled to develop models of cultural transmission that avoid both idealizing strict preservation and relying on formal curricula that are disconnected from living cultural practices. This conceptual impasse reflects deeper epistemological tensions: conservationist approaches risk reifying culture as a static archive requiring protection from the contamination of modernity, while institutional pedagogies risk extracting knowledge from embodied contexts, transforming living practices into educational content susceptible to standardized evaluation but deprived of ritual efficacy and community rootedness (Macdonald, 2013). However, ethnographic documentation of *ogoh-ogoh* production in Ubud reveals a third trajectory, which we call mnemonic amplification through material anchoring, in which sculptural creation functions as a composite cognitive environment that simultaneously engages multiple memory systems, generating a preservation of knowledge and a depth of understanding that surpasses both textual study and oral transmission considered separately.

This mechanism operates through what Hutchins (2005) theorizes as material anchors for conceptual fusions: physical objects that stabilize abstract ideas by providing manipulable and shareable substrates that allow conceptual work to be distributed between internal mental representations and external material structures. Applied to the context of *ogoh-ogoh*, abstract cosmological concepts, the *Bhuta Kala* philosophy, which posits a cosmic balance between destructive and creative forces, the *Tri Hita Karana* principles that articulate harmonious relationships between humans, the environment, and the divine realms, and the inexorable causal mechanics of *karma* (Figure 3), become materially anchored through sculptural embodiment. Observational documentation collected during three months of fieldwork reveals that this anchoring operates through five interconnected cognitive channels, simultaneously involved during collaborative construction processes.



Figure 3. Aswatama karmic lament (Source: Ubud Yowana Festival Committee, 2025)

Visual-spatial processing is the most obvious dimension: young people must translate verbal narrative descriptions into three-dimensional forms, engaging their mental rotation skills, proportional reasoning, and compositional planning. Field observations documented lengthy deliberations on how to arrange multiple narrative elements within a single sculptural composition, spatially positioning antagonistic figures to suggest conflict, resizing characters to indicate cosmological hierarchy, and orienting postures to convey psychological states. One *bale banjar* session involved a two-hour debate over whether a character's gaze should be directed upward (suggesting divine supplication) or downward (indicating shame or defeat), with participants ultimately consulting *lontar* descriptions and recalling *wayang* representations to resolve the interpretive question. This design work involves the visuospatial sketchpad and spatial working memory systems, which, according to cognitive research, constitute neural substrates distinct from verbal-linguistic processing (Baddeley, 2000), creating redundant encoding pathways that enhance subsequent retrieval.

Observational documentation reveals apprenticeship patterns in which expert sculptors guide beginners through proprioceptive demonstrations, adjusting hand position, modeling pressure variations, correcting postural alignment, and transmitting procedural knowledge that, according to neurological research, is encoded in the motor cortex and cerebellum through repetition (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004). This creates what Connerton (2012) defines as incorporative practices: bodily habits that imprint memory through habitual execution, resisting extraction because they cannot be fully articulated verbally or documented textually. Post-festival interviews revealed that young people described mythical-cosmological concepts through gestural reenactment of construction movements: they explained karmic weight by mimicking the heaviness of the sculpture in their posture, articulated divine grace through demonstration of the sweeping movements used to create representations of flowing fabrics. This somatosensory coding creates memory traces that are qualitatively different from verbal-semantic systems, providing alternative retrieval paths when verbal memory proves difficult.

Verbal-narrative repetition occurs continuously during construction, as young people discuss the mythological sources that inform aesthetic choices. Participants narrate episodes as they work, discuss the motivations of characters, trace genealogical relationships between textual variants, and explain the cosmological principles underlying narrative events. This differs fundamentally from classroom recitation or ceremonial listening; young people discuss mythology to resolve genuine aesthetic uncertainties. Cognitive research shows that the generation effect (information self-generated during

problem solving) and elaborative repetition (linking new information to existing knowledge) produce superior retention compared to passive reception (Craik & Lockhart, 1972).

Socio-emotional encoding operates through the intensity of collective labor and ritual performance, creating affective associations and strengthening memory consolidation. Neuroscience research shows that emotional arousal enhances hippocampal consolidation through amygdala modulation, with emotionally salient information receiving encoding priority (McGaugh, 2004). The production of *ogoh-ogoh* involves prolonged, high-intensity collective engagement: multi-week construction marathons involving work from dawn to midnight, collaborative problem-solving that generates interpersonal bonds, competitive pride for the reputation of the *banjar*, ritual anticipation culminating in the *melaspas* consecration and the climax of the night parade.

Post-festival reflections revealed that young people articulated mythological knowledge through emotional narratives embedded in material experience. The curse of Aswatama became internalized through three nights of sleepless labor completing the character's face, when their physical exhaustion served as a medium for comprehending his eternal fatigue. The environmental destruction experienced by *Campah* acquired concrete reality when collective deliberations concerning ecological principles in material selection took place (Figure 4). These testimonies demonstrate what cognitive psychology defines as flashbulb memories, vivid and persistent memories of emotionally intense experiences (Brown & Kulik, 1977).

The development of procedural skills through mastery of craft techniques creates an additional substrate of memory. Construction processes convey technical knowledge, bamboo joining methods, structural engineering principles, color mixing techniques, and surface treatment applications, which neural research shows to be encoded in distinct procedural memory systems independent of declarative knowledge (Squire, 2004). These technical procedures carry cosmological meanings: the flexibility of bamboo, which allows for dynamic postures, reflects the philosophical concepts of strength through flexibility; the requirements of structural balance mirror the principles of cosmic balance; color symbolism systems encode moral and metaphysical qualities. Young people thus acquire mythological competence through procedural competence, understanding the principles of balance in *Tri Hita Karana* through the design of stable but dynamic structures and understanding cosmic duality through the management of opposing compositional forces.



Figure 4. *Ogoh-ogoh Campah* with environmental damage on its back (Source: Ubud Yowana Festival Committee, 2025)

The mnemonic advantages that this multimodal engagement creates are empirically and demonstrable. Post-festival interviews conducted with young participants revealed an ability to articulate complex mythological relationships, trace narrative genealogies across multiple textual traditions, and explain cosmological principles with greater specificity than community members who have no experience in sculptural production. When asked to recount the mythological significance of Aswatama, the youth who had

created the *ogoh-ogoh* representations provided elaborate narratives: tracing the character's origins to the narratives of the Mahabharata war, explaining the theological significance of the curse of immortality as an example of karma, and connecting to broader Hindu philosophical frameworks concerning violations of *dharma* and cosmic justice. Comparative analysis with young people from the same communities who participated in school-based cultural education but had no practical experience of production revealed notable differences in understanding: the latter were able to identify Aswatama as a cursed warrior but had difficulty explaining the theological implications or tracing narrative genealogies, demonstrating a superficial familiarity without deeper cosmological integration.

Another testimony from an interview with Ida Bagus Nyoman Surya Wigenem (personal communication, July 11, 2025), an expert master sculptor, judge, and influential *ogoh-ogoh* figure in Gianyar, expressed the opinion that when young people make *ogoh-ogoh*, they need to have a better understanding of philosophy, which is sometimes not taught in school. This testimony captures what cognitive science refers to as depth of processing: information processed through multiple elaborate connections creates more lasting mnemonic traces than superficial processing (Craik & Tulving, 1975). Sculptural production requires deep processing, linking mythological narratives to visual representations, cosmological principles to structural decisions, and theological concepts to aesthetic conventions, creating richly interconnected networks of knowledge that are resistant to forgetting.

Longitudinal persistence proves particularly revealing. Informal follow-up conversations with young people who participated in previous cycles of the festival revealed lasting mythological memory years after production. Participants spontaneously referred to specific construction experiences when discussing cosmological concepts. This exemplifies what Rubin (2023) demonstrates about multimodal memory enhancement: information that engages multiple sensory systems (visual + kinesthetic + verbal + emotional + spatial) produces retention rates approaching 80-90% compared to approximately 40% for single-mode verbal transmission. The sculptural experience creates what Hutchins calls "material anchors," stable physical reference points that can be accessed even when direct memory traces fade, with mental images of constructed forms activating associated mythological knowledge.

The comparative analysis highlights the uniqueness of Ubud in relation to institutionalized cultural heritage education (2005). Museum cultural education, as analyzed by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, typically positions young people as passive recipients who consume knowledge curated by experts through

educational exhibition formats, with “hands-on” activities that often involve simplified craft demonstrations detached from authentic production contexts and cosmological frameworks. School programs that incorporate cultural content, extensively documented by Smith (2006), often extract practices from their community context, transforming rituals into performative units assessed through standardized rubrics that measure superficial replication rather than cosmological understanding or ritual efficacy. UNESCO’s pedagogical initiatives on intangible heritage, while theoretically valuing transmission through practice, often struggle with what Alivizatou (2011) calls pedagogical extractivism: processes of documentation and curriculum development that privilege external expert knowledge over community autonomy of transmission.

In contrast, the Ubud model maintains what we call rooted epistemic pedagogy: knowledge transmission occurs within authentic production contexts that perform genuine community functions (ritual efficacy, social cohesion, cosmological maintenance) rather than simulated educational exercises. Financial autonomy through the direct allocation of micro-grants (IDR 14 million for *Sekaa Teruna*) allows youth collectives to control creative decisions and maintain accountability to community validation rather than external evaluation parameters. Ritual integration through *melaspas* consecration and *mecaru* purification ceremonies ensures that productions meet criteria of spiritual efficacy in addition to aesthetic standards, avoiding reduction to mere cultural performance. Intergenerational collaborative structures in which elders serve as advisors rather than instructors preserve youth autonomy while providing authoritative guidance, creating apprenticeship relationships distinct from the teacher-student hierarchies that dominate institutional education.

The theoretical implications are substantial for reconsidering the transmission of cultural heritage beyond the conservation-innovation dichotomy. Bolter and Grusin’s (1999) theory of remediation demonstrates how new media reshape previous forms through a dual logic, but our findings reveal a third dimension: recursive epistemic enhancement in which the processes of remediation themselves generate a deepening of knowledge that surpasses that of the source media independently. Taylor’s archive-repertoire framework (2007) distinguishes textual knowledge systems from embodied ones, but *ogoh-ogoh* demonstrates that these constitute mutually amplifying rather than parallel systems; the material repertoire regenerates archival engagement by creating interpretive demands that textual study alone cannot satisfy.

4.3 Beyond the conservation-innovation dichotomy

The discourse on heritage pedagogy has remained trapped in what we identify as the conservation-innovation impasse: conceptual frameworks that

position cultural sustainability as a tragic choice between a nostalgic revival that attempts to recreate 'pure' traditional contexts isolated from modernity and a pragmatic modernisation that accepts the inevitable erosion of authenticity through institutional curricularisation and market integration (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2005; Lowenthal, 1998). Romantic conservatism positions modernity as a contaminating force that requires defensive isolation to maintain cultural authenticity (Bendix, 1997), while institutional extraction approaches, in which heritage becomes decontextualized curricular content or tourist performances separated from living community practice, accept commodification as an inevitable cost of continuity of transmission (Handler & Linnekin, 1984). However, neither model adequately theorizes how communities can sustain cultural vitality through a strategic engagement with modernity that neither romanticizes tradition as a frozen artifact nor surrenders to extractive institutionalization.

Ethnographic documentation of the *ogoh-ogoh* festival in Ubud reveals what we call adaptive transmission: an integrated framework in which tradition survives precisely because of technological and organizational innovation, and not despite it, with young people's mastery of contemporary skills functioning not as cultural dilution but as an enabling infrastructure for the protection of traditional knowledge and the strengthening of intergenerational transmission. These challenges prevailing academic assumptions that position technological adoption and administrative modernization as inevitable factors in the erosion of cultural authenticity, demonstrating instead the conditions under which innovation serves traditional epistemological and cosmological ends while maintaining the community's epistemic sovereignty. The festival's material production processes create optimal learning environments that simultaneously engage multiple memory systems: visual-spatial processing, kinesthetic-motor encoding, verbal-narrative rehearsal, socio-emotional consolidation, and procedural skill development, producing what cognitive research demonstrates to be superior retention through multimodal engagement (Rubin, 2023). Post-festival interviews confirm young people's ability to articulate complex mythological relationships, trace narrative genealogies, and explain cosmological principles with a specificity that exceeds that of community members who rely exclusively on ceremonial exposure or classroom instruction, confirming that composite cognitive architecture enhances rather than dilutes the acquisition of traditional knowledge.

Fundamentally, this mnemonic advantage emerges through the strategic appropriation of technology, demonstrating that innovation serves traditional purposes rather than replacing them. LED lighting systems and sophisticated color treatments, technologies integrated into conventional bamboo structures, metal wire, and iron, enhance the effectiveness of transmission by creating an emotional awakening during the night parade that activates amygdala-mediated

hippocampal consolidation (McGaugh, 2004), with young people encoding mythological knowledge through flashbulb autobiographical memories formed within emotionally intense construction experiences. The environmental destruction experienced by *Campah* acquired tangible reality through collective deliberations concerning the energy consumption of LEDs, when moral tensions emerged regarding whether electrical usage honored the ecological principles being represented (Figure 5). Such ethical negotiations transformed mythology from abstraction into lived experience, embedding cosmological narratives within the material contradictions of contemporary practice.



Figure 5. Application of LEDs in the *Ogoh-ogoh* parade of the Yowana Festival (Source: Ubud Yowana Festival Committee, 2025)

The integration of LEDs thus enhances ritual presence through chromatic intensification, amplifying the emotional impact of the parade, with technology subordinated to cosmological purposes validated through *melaspas* consecration rather than replacing spiritual efficacy with secular spectacle. Structural innovations similarly demonstrate instrumental appropriation: iron structures allow for previously impossible scales and dynamic postures but remain evaluated through criteria of theological adequacy. Structural ambition honors the cosmological significance of the character, rather than merely measuring technical achievements, revealing how communities master contemporary materials and engineering principles toward traditional epistemological ends.

This technological engagement operates within a broader framework of incorporation practices, which Connerton (2012) theorizes as bodily habits that transmit memory through habitual performances, resisting extraction precisely because knowledge remains embodied rather than textualized. Cosmological understanding is inscribed through craft techniques, including bamboo joining methods that require an intuitive sensitivity to the material, structural engineering calculations that integrate load distribution principles with aesthetic requirements, wire bending techniques that create gestural expressiveness, and applications of chromatic symbolism that encode theological meanings accessible through performance rather than abstract instruction. Young people acquire mythological knowledge through procedural competence, understanding the principles of balance in *Tri Hita Karana* through the design of stable yet dynamic structures that must remain processually mobile, understanding cosmic duality through the management of opposing compositional forces within the limits of materials, validating Ingold's intuition (2021) that understanding emerges through doing rather than preceding it.

This embodied dimension creates intrinsic mechanisms of anti-commodification that distinguish adaptive transmission from the institutional extraction approaches documented by Macdonald (2013) and Smith (2006), in which traditional practices become educational content susceptible to standardized assessment, extracting knowledge from embodied contexts and transforming ritual efficacy into an aesthetic replica measurable through assessment rubrics. Observational data reveal that expert sculptors describe techniques through gestural demonstration rather than verbal explanation, which young participants must perceive when the bamboo wants to bend, when the tension of the wire balances the weight, when the iron structure distributes the load correctly, which cannot be explained in words but can be shown and perceived with the hands and experience. This embodied tacit knowledge resists commodification because it cannot be purchased as a textual manual or video tutorial, but requires prolonged participation in apprenticeship within

community contexts, maintaining transmission within interpretive communities rather than becoming extractable commercial content.

Fundamentally, technological processing reinforces rather than undermines this embodied resistance by creating recursive learning cycles in which digital documentation tools paradoxically reinforce embodied practices. Young people reviewing smartphone recordings identify technical refinements in bamboo binding techniques or wire manipulation procedures, elders provide advice on appropriate structural proportions or iconographic details, and archived footage becomes a pedagogical resource for subsequent cycles, enabling comparative analysis of construction methods across different editions of the festival. Sometimes *Sekaa Teruna* asks elders or anyone with remote access for a message via digital technology about the appropriate gestures of *wayang* when uncertain, asks for information about difficult structural problems, and coordinates the procurement of materials. At this moment, technology connects everyone to the holders of tradition but does not replace them.

This demonstrates that technology functions as a transmission infrastructure that extends rather than supplants embodied apprenticeship, enabling more frequent consultations with elders, broader peer learning networks across multiple *banjar* collectives, and accessible archives of accumulated knowledge during festival cycles, while maintaining transmission within relationships that require prolonged physical co-presence. The components of tacit knowledge, including material insights into the flexibility tolerance of bamboo, aesthetic judgments about compositional balance, and ritual sensibilities related to cosmological appropriateness, continue to be transmitted through guided participation rather than technological substitution, exemplifying how digital tools extend the reach of practices by incorporating them without extracting knowledge from performative contexts or rendering it fully textualized and commodifiable.

These dynamics operate internally and are made possible by the theoretically most significant dimension of adaptive transmission: young people's mastery of contemporary administrative skills that function as an infrastructure of institutional sovereignty, enabling the traditional protection of knowledge against external pressures of appropriation. Documentary analysis reveals that youth collectives manage substantial financial resources through microfinancing of IDR fourteen million for *Sekaa Teruna*, navigating complex regulatory frameworks that include environmental mandates restricting certain building materials and safety protocols governing participation in parades, coordinating multi-stakeholder logistics that include route permits and security measures, and producing accountability documentation that meets government

transparency requirements. These administrative skills, typically conceptualized as forces of modernization that erode traditional authority structures, instead enable organizational autonomy, preventing external stakeholders from monopolizing interpretive or financial control. Comparative analysis with historic villages in Bali documented by Picard (1996) and Cole (2008) highlights this meaning: where external tourism agencies control festival programming (Figure 5), narrative framing, and revenue distribution, communities lose control over cultural representation as administrative complexity exceeds local institutional capacity, with external “experts,” including tourism consultants and heritage managers, becoming necessary intermediaries who gradually accumulate interpretive authority and economic control.



Figure 6. Tourists eagerly await the *Ogoh-ogoh* parade at the Ubud Yowana Festival (Source: Ubud Yowana Festival Committee, 2025)

In contrast, the administrative competence of Ubud’s youth collectives allows for direct engagement with municipal authorities, regulatory agencies, and external stakeholders without sacrificing decision-making autonomy. Observational data collected by *Sabha Yowana* organizers reveal capacity-building strategies aimed at training young people so they can negotiate directly with the government and maintain independence from commercial sponsors who want to modify their traditions for profit.

The 2018 Bali governor’s regulation limiting the use of expanded polystyrene is reinterpreted through *desa adat* governance as a catalyst for the

revival of traditional materials, with youth collectives researching alternatives and discovering that bamboo, natural fibers, and paper-based materials are historically authentic construction methods that were replaced by the adoption of expanded polystyrene in the mid-20th century, while iron structures represent an acceptable technological evolution that allows for structural innovations within traditional aesthetic vocabularies.

Ogoh-ogoh producers describe this transformation as the creation of a hybrid *ogoh-ogoh*: it has a traditional soul (bamboo material) but a modern skeleton (iron structure). They have not discarded the progress of the times. The use of iron (welded) structures offers structural advantages (strength, possibility of creating dynamic poses, larger dimensions) that pure bamboo structures did not have in the past. This demonstrates creative compliance in which modern regulatory requirements are met through innovation towards traditional practices rather than away from them, positioning environmental sustainability mandates in line with cultural continuity rather than in opposition to it, while allowing the adoption of technologies in the service of traditional purposes.

Furthermore, the development of administrative skills creates byproducts of civic training, strengthening the community's governance capacity beyond the context of festivals. Young people who acquire skills in collective decision-making, resource management, and interorganizational coordination subsequently contribute to improving the civic capacity of *banjar* governance, demonstrating the accumulation of social capital (Putnam, 2001). Post-festival interviews reveal that young people become *banjar* officials, youth organization leaders, and community representatives in district governance forums, with the administrative experience of the festival providing a training ground for broader civic management. Adaptive transmission thus provides a theoretical framework that transcends the conservation-innovation dichotomy, revealing how technological adoption and administrative modernization reinforce cultural vitality.

Innovation serves traditional ends through instrumental appropriation in which communities master contemporary materials and technologies, LED systems, iron structures, digital documentation tools, toward traditional epistemological purposes rather than experiencing technological change as a determinant of cultural transformation, with innovations evaluated primarily through criteria of cosmological adequacy and ritual efficacy rather than metrics of technical sophistication or commercial appeal. The incorporation of practices also maintains transmission within embodied contexts despite technological elaboration, with artisanal knowledge related to bamboo manipulation, structural engineering, and iconographic execution continuing to be transmitted through guided apprenticeship relationships requiring prolonged physical

co-presence, ensuring that material insights and aesthetic sensibilities remain embedded in performative contexts that resist textual extraction or commodified simplification.

Communities that maintain organizational autonomy through financial independence, decentralization of validation authority through spiritual advisors and elder experts, and integration of an emphasis on practice demonstrate the capacity for innovation that strengthens tradition. These mechanisms redefine cultural sustainability as emerging from institutional sophistication that allows for strategic hybridization in which tradition and modernity are reconceptualized as potentially synergistic when communities possess the organizational capacity to appropriate modern tools for traditional purposes and engage market systems through selective permeability. The *ogoh-ogoh* festival in Ubud embodies this possibility through young people who navigate regulatory frameworks that restrict certain materials while allowing for structural innovations.

5. Conclusion

This ethnographic study of the 2025 Ubud *ogoh-ogoh* festival systematically addressed three interrelated objectives through ongoing ethnographic engagement with the Ubud *ogoh-ogoh* production ecosystem. First, we documented the creative processes through which youth collectives translate mythological narratives into sculptural forms, revealing competitive mechanisms of folkloric literacy acquisition in which festival participation transforms endangered textual traditions into desirable cultural capital, thus responding to how material practice mobilizes rather than replaces oral/textual knowledge transmission.

Second, we theorized sculptural hermeneutics as a distinctive epistemological mode in which material translation generates rather than simply represents narrative understanding, challenging the assumptions of oral primacy in folklore studies by demonstrating bidirectional flows of knowledge in which neither textual nor material forms have ontological priority but mutually constitute integrated systems of transmission.

Third, we conceptualized reciprocal cultural amplification, explaining how folklore provides a thematic scaffold for aesthetic innovation, while simultaneously material embodiment ensures narrative persistence in declining oral contexts, addressing the fundamental research problem of how communities sustain complex cosmological literacies across generational cohorts with divergent literacy practices.

These findings collectively redefine the impasse between preservation and innovation, demonstrating that folkloric vitality emerges not despite, but

through adaptive remediation when communities maintain organizational autonomy, validation authority, and epistemic sovereignty over knowledge circulation protocols.

The single-case design of this study, which allows for ethnographic depth while recommending further future research, calls for comparative longitudinal research across multiple festival contexts to establish the generalizability of adaptive transmission mechanisms.

First, comparative ethnographies examining *ogoh-ogoh* production in coastal versus mountainous regions, in urban versus rural contexts, would clarify how socioeconomic stratification, gradients of tourist intensity, and differential access to ritual specialists shape the effectiveness of folklore remediation, testing whether mutual cultural amplification operates uniformly or requires specific conditions beyond organizational autonomy.

Second, longitudinal studies following young participants at 5–10-year intervals could assess the durability of mythological knowledge retention, examining whether multimodal mnemonic benefits persist into adulthood or attenuate in the absence of continued festival involvement, thereby validating cognitive claims regarding the superiority of practice transmission.

Third, a cross-cultural comparative analysis with contexts of similar material recovery, such as the transformations of the Japanese Nebuta matsuri festival and innovations in the ceremonial art of Australian Indigenous peoples, would test theoretical transferability beyond Balinese Hindu cosmologies, identifying universal and culturally specific mechanisms that sustain folklore through aesthetic innovation.

Fourth, participatory action research that co-designs transmission pedagogies with heritage practitioners could operationalize the findings into replicable institutional models, addressing the challenges of UNESCO intangible heritage through evidence-based interventions.

Finally, digital ethnography examining the impact of social media on festival aesthetics and narrative selection would illuminate how virtual spectatorship reshapes competitive priorities, potentially threatening or enhancing cosmological accountability depending on the possibilities offered by the platform and the community's governance responses.

This research has significant implications in the fields of heritage governance, cultural policy, and community development. For heritage operators, the findings demonstrate that the vitality of transmission emerges through strategic institutional architecture: decentralized financial mechanisms, validation protocols that prioritize cosmological literacy over tourist spectacle, and governance structures that maintain community interpretive authority within commercial circuits. UNESCO's intangible heritage frameworks could

operationalize these principles, replacing extractive documentation paradigms with investments in capacity building that enable communities to master contemporary administrative skills while protecting epistemic sovereignty.

For cultural policymakers, the findings challenge the conservation-innovation dichotomy that dominates governmental approaches, revealing how regulatory mandates, environmental material constraints, and safety protocols become catalysts for strengthening traditional knowledge when communities possess the institutional literacy to creatively appropriate constraints rather than experience them as external impositions that erode autonomy. For educational institutions, adaptive transmission models offer alternatives to curricularization, extracting practices from embodied contexts and suggesting apprenticeship-based pedagogies in which young people acquire traditional knowledge through problem-solving tasks that require consultation with elders and textual engagement, thereby generating composite skills inaccessible through classroom instruction alone.

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