

# *Temu Ageng*: knitting the wisdom of *sedulur sikep* in Cerita dari Blora festival



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# **ABSTRACT**

Cerita dari Blora; Knitting the Wisdom of Sedulur Sikep was the festival title of its second year (2019) in Blora Regency, which was part of the Indonesiana Platform. The name of the festival is taken from the title of a short stories collection with the same title by a Blora-born author, namely Pramoedya Ananta Toer. This study aims to determine the festival format with the mutual cooperation (gotong royong) concept, which was carried out together by the Tourism and Culture Office of Blora Regency, the community and the Director General of Culture. This research is a qualitative research conducted during the preparation stage and during the festival in order to gain knowledge on how to strengthen the capacity of festival governance through the Indonesiana Platform. Cerita dari Blora Festival was part of the mutual cooperation platform to strengthen the management capacity of cultural activities, as a forum for strengthening cultural ecosystems, as well as to know the concept of tradition and local wisdom at the Temu Ageng Sedulur Sikep event. The results of the study show that through the Temu Ageng event, there is synergy between local governments, where the cultural services synergize and work together with communities, artists and the development of cultural ecosystems in the area, and also work together with the UPT (Technical Implementation Unit) of the Ministry of Education and Culture in the area such as Archaeological Halls, Museums, Cultural Heritage Preservation Centers, as well as various institutions, companies, and CSR in each region.

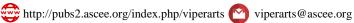


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# 1. Introduction

The facts relating to cultural governance are that various cultural activities such as festivals, competitions, training workshops, exhibitions, residencies, and other forms of cultural activities are organized either by the local government or the community. These activities are often not connected to one another and do not lead to the strengthening of the cultural ecosystem [1]-[3]. There are so many programs that seem to run independently and do not form a unified whole that drives the survival of culture [4]. This reality was taken into consideration by the Directorate General of Culture in designing programs trying to strengthen cultural ecosystems, namely the interaction between elements that support each other in the protection, development, utilization and fostering of culture in the regions [5]. The elements of the cultural ecosystem include the unity of social relations, each of which is strung in creation, production, distribution, consumption, appreciation, and education related to local cultural activities, as well as related regulatory development systems [6]–[8]. For this reason, the Directorate General of Culture designed the Indonesiana Platform which has the goal of improving the quality of festival governance, both new festivals and existing festivals. The main targets are management quality which must be increased, cultural access, cultural exchange (cross-cultural) and productive expansion of networks at the local, regional, national and international levels.





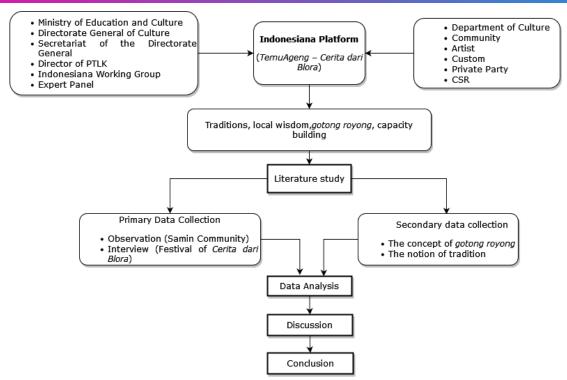
This is in accordance with the five pillars of the Indonesiana Platform, namely diversity, connectedness, participation, mutual cooperation, and local strengthening, which must work together and support each other. Some things that are also considered important are (1) the development of quality cultural management human resources distributed throughout Indonesia, (2) the promotion and development of networks, as well as cooperation that is encouraged in a broader direction with various cultural stakeholders at the local, national level as well as internationally, and (3) the management standards for organizing festivals that can be improved to be better, so as to bring greater cultural impact. Various activities held in various cities or regions so far were often not connected to one another and did not lead to the strengthening of the cultural ecosystem. Even far from that thought, so far, what has been initiated is what product will happen on the stage. This happens in almost all corners of the archipelago. Even many cities that have programmed calendars of events every year cannot guarantee that the festival will run well and can become a system or that the festival will run in an established manner. What is more important is how a festival is a form of cooperation between cultural stakeholders, namely the artists across genres, the humanists, the government, and the private sectors, especially because this collaboration has an achievement goal beyond the staging issue [9].

Based on the explanation above, it is very necessary to improve the quality of cultural activities, especially good management of activities, as well as the organization of work together (gotong royong), which starts from the stage of ideas or concepts making of organizing activities, planning (including budgeting), management, to implementation activity. Gotong royong was the main requirement for the work of the festival held in Blora Regency, namely Cerita dari Blora. In other words, the main requirement was mutual cooperation and connectedness in organizing activities under the Indonesiana Platform. Another element that must also be fulfilled and was an absolute requirement is the involvement of the cultural ecosystem [10]. Therefore, every cultural activity that is based on the Indonesiana Platform is not limited to crowds or cultural performances but also has a 'duty' to create impacts that can strengthen the cultural ecosystem. The art and cultural festivals in various regions so far have been held fragmentarily, in the sense that they are carried out separately with different orientations. It is inherent with various socio-cultural characteristics following various practical goals. This diversity does show the richness of Indonesian culture, but the various art and cultural festivals, which are managed separately, must be placed on a well-consolidated foundation. This foundation aims to optimize synergies between the Central Government, Regional Governments, and key stakeholders such as arts and cultural communities.

Cerita dari Blora; Knitting the Wisdom of Sedulur Sikep is the title of the second year's festival in Blora Regency, which is part of the Indonesiana Platform. This festival was first held in Blora Regency on 12-15 September 2018, where the icon or name of the festival was taken from the title of the short stories collection by a Blora-born author named Pramoedya Ananta Toer or also known as Pram. He was a writer who contributed and raised the name of Blora City to the national and even international level [11], [12]. The short story works Cerita dari Belora contain the power of story meaning, moral, and aesthetic values. Pram could describe social reality without burdening sympathy for a group of people, except for humanity. Elements of experience and memories seem to be a portrait of Blora at that time against a background of socio-political problems, suffering, oppression, violence, and arbitrary power. By reading Cerita dari Blora, we can be brought to the imagination of Blora city, which feels real with the setting at the time the story was made [13].

# 2. Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method, namely through direct research on the object condition and as the key instrument. The data collection technique used is triangulation [14], which is a combination of interviews, observation, and documentation. The data obtained were then analyzed through critical thinking with the psychological theory of art [15], [16]. This study uses theories about tradition and beauty [17], as well as the concept of mutual cooperation to reveal the approach and function of the *Temu Ageng* or *Tumbuk Ageng* events of the Samin community or commonly called *Sedulur Sikep*, so that they become a discourse and tradition to convey ideas about local wisdom and beauty. Based on the topic, this research requires the involvement of researchers in the data collection methods [18], because it is a fieldwork method that requires a better understanding of the behaviour and teachings of the subjects studied. Observations and interviews were carried out before the festival and during the festival. Fig. 1 is a conceptual framework that also depicts the relationships, stages, and outcomes of *gotong royong* work in the Blora Story Festival.



**Fig. 1.** The framework of the work description, research methods, relationships, and results of *gotong royong* work in the Festival of *Cerita dari Blora*.

### 3. Results and Discussion

# 3.1. Art festivals as mutual cooperation work

Indonesiana is a new initiative of the Education and Culture Ministry of the Republic of Indonesia to encourage and strengthen efforts to advance culture in accordance with Law No. 5 of 2017 and other laws and regulations. In essence, Indonesiana is a regional capacity-building activity in organizing cultural activities in accordance with the principles, goals and objects of promoting culture as stipulated in Law No. 5 of 2017. This initiative has been designed for three years of implementation, which was from 2018 to 2020, in the form of mutual cooperation across ministries and agencies, across levels of government, and across sectors to organize national standard cultural activities within the Indonesiana platform. The purpose of this activity is to revitalize the ecosystem of cultural promotion objects in an equitable and sustainable manner [19], as well as to strengthen cultural identity in the regions to balance the strengthening of political identity that utilizes culture [20]. The goal of Indonesiana was to work together to promote a culture with a high level of effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability in 2020, which was realized through the implementation of national standard cultural activities on the Indonesiana platform. The manifestation of mutual collaboration on the Indonesiana platform emerges in two main aspects; (1) Funding cooperation. Funding cooperation on the Indonesiana platform refers to the matching fund's scheme, namely proportional funding between the parties funding the festival (1:1), for example, proportional funding between the Directorate General of Culture, City Government, related Ministries/Institutions, and private funding agencies. Mutual cooperation in terms of funding is expected to lighten the burden together as well as bind the commitment to work together; (2) Cooperation in the festival management, with the division of the roles as follows:

- The Directorate General of Culture and other Central Government units that were willing to be involved would form and manage the Indonesiana Secretariat; then, there was a national board of curators who would develop national standards for organizing the festival.
- The Central Government will manage a support network at the national and international levels
  and take care of the institutional requirements of actors and cultural artefacts traffic from
  abroad.

- The Regional Government manages the administration of the Regional Curatorial Team to formulate activity themes and event concepts and show designs according to local characteristics based on input from the Indonesiana National Curatorial Council.
- Local governments would provide transportation and accommodation for festival performers (event performers) in their respective areas (including accommodation for cultural actors while living in those areas and transfers to other areas), as well as carry out financing and organizing festivals in their respective areas.

What are the benefits of the Indonesiana platform? (1) Increasing regional income; (3) Increasing tourism potential; (4) Encouraging the transfer of knowledge and increasing human resources in the culture field in the regions; (5) Encouraging the realization of widespread, equitable and just access in the field of culture; (6) Encouraging the growth of independent public initiatives; (7) Encouraging the implementation of development from the periphery. Expectations with the Indonesiana platform; (1) The growth of a healthy climate for the birth of cultural initiatives in the region; (2) Mutual cooperation between stakeholders in the cultural sector has intensified; (3) The number of cultural festivals in various regions has multiplied; (4) Regional income from the cultural sector has multiplied; (5) State revenue from the tourism sector has multiplied; (6) Improving the quality of festival human resources. The Culture Secretary General of the Education and Culture Ministry, Sri Hartini, conveyed, 'Cerita dari Blora; Knitting the Local Wisdom of Sedulur Sikep' can present a very extraordinary program, namely Tumbuk Ageng. After more than 100 years or a century, there has never been a Sedulur Samin or Sikep meeting held, so through the Indonesiana Platform and Cerita dari Blora, Temu Ageng or also called Tumbuk Ageng was expected to be a milestone for Samin-Sikep as a whole.

Temu Ageng is a sacred meeting about how the participants "match" what teachings, procedures, and values they have so far believed in. For example, they discussed the procedure for holding a wedding, the procedure for burying a body, what conditions had to be met and prepared, not wanting to go to school, not being registered on an ID card, and also deciding where the Temu Ageng event would be held next year. This activity shows that the value teachings of Samin, which have been passed down from generation to generation, are still firmly adhered to; therefore, the Temu Ageng moment is a milestone for Sedulur Sikep as a whole [21]. In the value teachings of Samin, what is said and what is carried out are the same [22]. This shows that the values of the teachings are very strong, local wisdom that must be maintained and continuously preserved. Hence Cerita dari Blora; Knitting Local Wisdom of Sedulur Sikep 2019 is one of the best practice products of Indonesiana platform implementation. There were many records of good practices carried out in Blora Regency, which was a form of mutual cooperation in the context of promoting culture by Blora Regency. For example, through the Tumbuk Ageng Sedulur Sikep occasion in Blora district, which is indeed part of Cerita dari Blora.

# 3.2. Cerita dari Blora; Knitting the local wisdom of Sedulur Sikep

Samin was born in 1859, in Ploso Kedhiren Village, Randublatung, Blora, with the name Raden Kohar, see Fig 2. His father's name was Raden Surowijaya. Raden Kohar then changed his name to Samin to make it more popular. In 1890, Samin Surosentiko began to develop his teachings in the Klopoduwur area, Blora [23]. Many residents in the surrounding area were attracted by his teachings. In a short time, he already has many followers. In 1903, residents of Rembang reported that there were a total of 722 Samin followers spread across 34 villages in the southern part of Blora and the Bojonegoro area, and they were actively developing Samin teachings [24]. In 1907, the followers of Samin reached 3,000 people. As a result of its increasingly massive spread, the colonial government began to feel anxious. Samin himself spearheaded a movement against the Dutch colonial policies that were detrimental to the common people at that time [25]. Rejection of the occupiers was shown by refusing to pay taxes, refusing to deposit rice into the village granary, refusing to do village services, and refusing to give up yard land for the expansion of teak forests. Not only in the field of policy, but the Samin community has also put up resistance through the cultural sector, among others, by refusing to use the Krama Jayanese language (refined Jayanese language) to the aristocracy; instead they tend to use the Ngoko Javanese language (less refined Javanese language) to all levels of society [26].



Fig. 2. Samin Surontiko

The Samin community was also refuse to educate their offspring in formal educational institutions, something they were still doing until recently. Resistance to this colonial policy resulted in many followers of Samin being arrested and imprisoned. Samin himself was arrested and exiled to Sawahlunto, West Sumatra, where he died in 1914 under the status of a prisoner [27]. However, the departure of Samin did not disband the community he had built. His teachings even continue to be maintained until now by his followers. *Tumbuk Ageng* or *Temu Ageng* was held in order to strengthen friendship and to re-align the teachings of Samin in life practices for descendants and followers of teachings spread by Samin Surosentiko in various districts, see Fig 3. This was done because, for about 100 years, there had never been a meeting held; in fact, fellow *Sedulur Sikep* did not know each other. Therefore, this event is historical, as Samin teachings followers came and attended the *Temu Ageng* event from various cities such as Tuban, Bojonegoro, Rembang, Purwodadi, Blora and so on.



Fig. 3. The atmosphere of guyub rukun at the Temu Ageng Sedulur Sikep event

The Samin teachings (also known as the Samin Movement or Saminism) are one of the tribes in Indonesia. They are the descendant of Samin Surosentiko followers who has inflamed the resistance spirit against the Dutch in other forms other than violence. The Samin people also isolated themselves until the 1970s, when they only found out that Indonesia had become independent [28]. The Samin group is spread over several regions, but the largest concentrations are in the Blora region (Central Java) and in the Bojonegoro region (East Java), where each of which lives on the border of the two regions. Their numbers are not large, and they live in the mountainous Kendeng area on the border of the two provinces [29]. The Samin group prefers to be called *wong sikep* [30], because the word Samin for them has a negative meaning since Samin outsiders often perceive them as a group that is innocent, does not like to steal, refuses to pay taxes, and often becomes the butt of jokes, especially among people outside Blora because it connotes fooling or playing dumb. Regardless, the main teachings of Samin Surosentiko were honesty and non-violence [31]. The Samin people in Blora have unique and different living habits, but this has had a good influence on the Samin people themselves and the Blora people in general. Thus the traditions, customs and culture, as well as Samin teachings in Blora, have a deep meaning for the life development of the Blora people. The teachings of Samin,

which were also known as the Adam Religion, are conveyed to its followers by lectures (*sesoroh*) at home or in the field [32]. This was done because the earlier followers of Samin consisted of small rural communities who could not read and write. Samin Surosentiko teaches the noble values of life, mental attitude, and *pranata mangsa* (a system of agricultural calendar found in Java) to his followers [22], [33]. The teaching was poured in written form into several *kepek* (a kind of primbon book). The *kepek* was known as the Book of Jamus Kalimasada [34]. The main teachings of Samin concerning the values of human life are used as a guide in behavior by his followers. There are 3 core teachings, namely *angger-angger pangucap* (law of speech), *angger-angger pratikel* (law of behavior), and *angger-angger lakonono* (law of things that need to be implemented). *Adeg-adeg* or the basic principles that have been instilled since childhood in the Samin community, namely "*aja drengki srei*, *tukar padu, dahwen kemeren, kutil jumput, lan mbedhog colong, mbegal kecu aja dilakoni, nemu wae emoh"* [34]–[36].

Gunretno, a *Sedulur Sikep* figure from Pati Regency, Central Java, conveyed the teachings of Samin regarding perseverance and loyalty in carrying out the teachings, that they adhere to the teachings not to use violence to demonstrate protest and to always exercise self-restraint [37]. The teachings that are still adhered to for more than a century include honesty, nationalism, and loyalty. The attitude of honesty that *Sedulur Sikep* adheres to is deeply ingrained [38]. As happened in the village of Mblimbing, Sambongrejo, Blora, Mbah Pramugi said that there was once a resident who had corn in his field eaten by the goat of a neighbour, and without any disputes or anger, they resolved it in a calm manner, "*suk nek awakem genti nandur jagung ya sing dipangan wedus ijolono sak patutte*" (tomorrow when you plant corn, replace my corn according to what your goat have eaten). Everything is resolved wisely without emotion, without disputes or violence, and always calmly accepts any situation. The Deputy Regent of Blora at the time, Arief Rohman (now the Regent of Blora for the 2021-2026 period), stated that the existence, independence and resilience of *Sedulur Sikep* were extraordinary.

The independence allows them to survive in the midst of the times until now. Arief hopes that the values, teachings and local wisdom of *Sedulur Sikep* will be widely known by the public. "*Sedulur Sikep* always respects other people, is obedient, sincere, and knows no envy. Many residents from various regions miss the advice of *Sedulur Sikep* when they visit Blora". Fig 4 is a Story Poster from Blora 2019 as publication material. Among the contributions of *Sedulur Sikep* to the development of Blora was to protect the environment by continuing to cultivate crops and protect teak forests, as well as building retention basins to deal with drought, which is the main problem for the people of Blora. Agricultural and livestock products of *Sedulur Sikep* were also able to meet the needs of Blora people. On the same occasion, Amrih Widodo, who was specially present from Melbourne, an anthropologist who once wrote 'Samin in the Order: The Politics of Encounter and Isolation', said that usually *Sedulur Samin Sikep* was discussed together, but through *Temu Ageng* they were invited to have private conversations. "*Biasane diomongke, sak iki omong dewe*" (usually discuss it, now talking about it alone). This is called matching the play (*lakon*). Why? Because the teachings of *sikep* are oral.



Fig. 4. Poster of Cerita Dari Blora 2019 as publication material

"The teachings were matched with events (Kang Dumadi, Java) 100 years ago," explained Amrih Widodo when attending *Tumbuk Ageng*. Thus, he continued, this was an extraordinary and historical moment. Because the number of *Sedulur Sikep* was relatively stable in the past, there were 3,000 people; now there are approximately 5,000 people spread across several regencies, Blora, Purwodadi, Bojonegoro, Pati, Tuban, Rembang, and Kudus. The *Temu Ageng* was divided into three event

sessions, namely introductions, matching practices (*nyocokke laku*, Javanese) and matching methods (*cara kang ditindakke*, Javanese) through group discussions, the results of which were returned to *Sedulur Samin Sikep* to be finalized, regarding anything which *Sedulur Sikep* has always believed to be something that has stuck and become a tradition. Tradition is any form of work, style, convention or belief that is represented as a continuation from the past to the present. Semantically, there is an impression that tradition is something that is passed down from one generation to the next as something that is taken for granted, that it is accepted as knowledge without any room for interpretation. Tradition is considered something that is fixed on a stake and never moves. Fig. 5 is Samin Village, where the Ngenger Samin program was held.



**Fig. 5.** Samin Village, where the Ngenger Samin program was held, is one of the *Cerita dari Blora* Festival activities, knitting the wisdom of *Sedulur Sikep* 

The misunderstanding of tradition as something that is anti-interpretation is what causes the decline in the attractiveness of tradition. Nevertheless, tradition always opens up historical space for the continuous reinterpretation of itself. Tradition does resist change, but it opens itself up to transformation. Therefore, the semantic difference between the concepts of change and transformation is very central in the context of tradition. Transformation, in Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, is defined as the application of changing a configuration or expression into another configuration or expression following certain rules [39]. The Tumbuk Ageng or Temu Ageng event of the Samin people or commonly called *Sedulur Sikep* has become a discourse of a tradition that conveys the idea of local wisdom and beauty, Fig. 6 shows how researchers became part of the Temu Ageng Sedulur Sikep event, with Samin women from various regions. According to observations during this research, the existence of Sedulur Sikep and what was presented in the Tumbuk Ageng event is a beauty, such as how to dress, how to convey greetings, as well as the rituals of kenduren (a banquet) and eating together. Furthermore, they also brought ethics and ways of discussing things like scenes in ketoprak (a kind of folk show), such as discussing beautiful things according to them, how to bury the body according to their teachings, how to marry their children, and how to do rituals or ways to fulfil their needs.



**Fig. 6.** The author was part of the *Temu Ageng Sedulur Sikep* event, along with Samin women from various regions.

This concept of beauty is in line with the formulation of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) that beauty must include three qualities, namely integrity or completeness, great proportion or harmony, and brilliance [40]. These qualities have been seen many times in history in the context of tradition in *Sedulur Sikep*; there are connectedness and precision with each other. One more thing that needs to be known is that beauty occurs when the direction of the subject appears through contemplation or sensory knowledge [41]. That way, in essence, the senses associated with beauty are the most important for human knowledge. For example, humans talk about beautiful sights and nice sounds but do not talk about beautiful feelings and nice smells and do not talk about beauty with reference to the other three senses of humans. In general, this idea of Thomas was a summary of all the elements of the previous philosophy of beauty [42]. Indeed, there is an opinion that traditional art must be freed from thoughts of contrast between modern art and original art. That is, traditional art must be placed as art that is supported and developed by traditional communities (with oral traditions and oral discourse). Meanwhile, modern art begins with a writing tradition using electronic visual media and is then supported by global capitalism, which places a close relationship between art and commodities.

The intended deconstruction was to return to the roots of artistic traditions as sources for wider art [43], for example, Indonesian art. Thus, traditional art will always be explored and developed when it encounters modern contemporary art or new Indonesian art. How is this related to the tradition of *Sedulur Sikep*? The 2019 *Cerita dari Blora* Festival was part of the Directorate General of Culture program of the Culture Ministry of the Republic of Indonesia in the Indonesiana Platform. Blora, which is a small district in Central Java, of which one-third is a teak forest area, holds a million cultural potentials. In addition to the *tayub* art which thrives in almost all areas of Blora, *ketoprak, wayang krucil, kentrung, salawatan*, and local wisdom in the form of teachings from the Samin community, the majority of whom live in Blora district, were also continue to live. 2019 was the second year that the Blora regency festival had become part of the Indonesiana Platform. This festival was initiated by a community that collaborated with the local government of Blora Regency, in this case, through a program from the Department of Culture and Tourism. Thus, starting from the festival preparations, the draft of the concepts and ideas, committee structure, up to the implementation, were carried out together with the concept of mutual cooperation.

The highlight of the festival series, which was part of the Indoneisana Platform program entitled *Cerita dari Blora*; Knitting the Wisdom of *Sedulur Sikep*, which took place on September 22nd, 2019, was the holding of *Temu Ageng* between *Sedulur Sikep* in several areas in Central Java and East Java namely Blora, Kudus, Pati, Rembang, Tuban and Bojonegoro. *Temu Ageng* was held at the *Sedulur Sikep* Hall in Mblimbing village, Sambongrejo Blora, see Fig 7. This *Temu Ageng* was a very historic moment for *Sedulur Sikep*, after nearly a hundred years since Samin Surosentiko was exiled to Sawah Lunto by the Dutch. Interestingly, *Temu Ageng* did not only bring together the leaders of *Sedulur Sikep*, but also several other elements, such as youths and women. The *Temu Ageng* was held in the context of strengthening friendship, as well as linking the teachings of Samin and the life practices for the descendants and followers of *Sedulur Sikep*, who had spread out.



**Fig. 7.** The situation of the *Sedulur Sikep Temu Ageng* at the *Sedulur Sikep* Mblimbing community pavilion, Sambong, Blora

#### 4. Conclusion

The result of this research is the formation of a cultural ecosystem, which includes; (1) the Establishment of an interaction system between elements of stakeholders that support each other in the protection, development, utilization, and fostering of culture in the region; (2) Involvement and movement of all appointed stakeholders in the creation, production, distribution, consumption, appreciation, and education related to local cultural activities, as well as related knowledge development systems; (3) Increasing the capacity of organizing festivals; (4) Network expansion. The implementation of cultural festival series that are incorporated in the Indonesiana platform is no less important than the creation of the festival concept, the determination of human resources, and event programs which are aspects of production to organize an event or a festival. This series of festivals consists of a production work team and a management team, in other words executing the operational tasks of an event program or performance. The hallmark of organizing the Indonesian festival is the concept of gotong royong. Gotong royong is a term for working together to achieve a desired result. The output targets and impacts of the Indonesiana Platform are achieving governance standards for organizing festivals, increasing the number of qualified cultural actors and managers, realizing equity and expanding access in the cultural sector, inter-regional and inter-nation relations that can enhance the role of culture, cultural governance improves by effective and efficient way, increasing the preservation and promotion of culture through the protection, development, utilization and guidance in the field of culture.

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