

Local Cultural Governance and the Ngalaksa Tradition in Rancakalong

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Abstract

This study analyzes local cultural governance in the preservation of the Ngalaksa Tradition in Rancakalong District, Sumedang Regency, within the framework of regional autonomy. Ngalaksa, a harvest thanksgiving ritual rooted in local wisdom, continues to be practiced annually, yet its sustainability faces modernization pressures and limited integration into formal local policy instruments. Using a descriptive qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving customary leaders, village officials, district government representatives, cultural practitioners, and youth. Data were analyzed using Dwiyanto's (2006) governance dimensions—participation, transparency, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness—supported by the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019). The findings show that Ngalaksa governance is predominantly driven by customary community actors. Participation is high, and the tradition is effective in strengthening social solidarity and intergenerational learning, while efficiency is supported by gotong royong and voluntary resource mobilization. However, transparency and accountability remain informal due to limited documentation and reporting, and government responsiveness is largely symbolic, with minimal budget allocation and weak incorporation into village planning (APBDs) and the district mid-term development plan (RPJMD). This study recommends strengthening collaborative cultural governance through formal planning integration, adaptive documentation, and sustained policy support to ensure cultural continuity without undermining authenticity. The novelty lies in applying a public governance framework to local cultural preservation under regional autonomy and proposing an adaptive governance model grounded in local wisdom.

Keywords: governance, local culture, Ngalaksa, regional autonomy, local wisdom, community participation.

INTRODUCTION

The preservation of local culture is an important part of regional development because culture not only represents the social identity of the community, but also serves as social capital and a strategic asset that can promote sustainable development. In the global context,

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intangible cultural heritage is understood as practices, expressions, and knowledge that are passed down from generation to generation and continue to evolve in accordance with the social dynamics of society (UNESCO, 2017). Therefore, cultural preservation cannot be viewed merely as a ceremonial activity, but requires support from public policies, institutional systems, and the continuous involvement of local actors.

One of the local cultural traditions that still survives in Sumedang Regency is the Ngalaksa tradition, which has developed in Rancakalong District. This tradition functions not only as a customary ritual, but also as a symbol of social collectivity within the community, while strengthening the values of mutual cooperation and local identity. The existence of the Ngalaksa tradition can still be empirically observed through the implementation of the 2024 Ngalaksa event, which is documented in this study.



Figure 1. Ngalaksa 2024 Event Documentation

Source: Documentation Results, 2024

Figure 1 shows that the documentation Ngalaksa continues to be practiced as part of the community's cultural agenda. However, its continuity requires a more structured and well-planned preservation system so that it does not merely survive as an annual tradition, but instead develops into a sustainable cultural heritage integrated into the regional development agenda.

Although the Ngalaksa tradition is still carried out, the sustainability of local cultural traditions such as this faces challenges from modernization, social change, and the weakening participation of younger generations. These challenges may lead to a decline in the continuity of local traditions if they are not supported by systematic preservation strategies. In the context of public administration, cultural traditions are not only viewed as social symbols, but also as public assets that require policy intervention and appropriate institutional management. This

aligns with (Bason, 2018), who emphasizes that the public sector must be capable of building governance innovation so that public policies can respond adaptively to societal needs, including in the management of local culture.

Problems in preserving local cultural traditions often do not originate solely from internal factors within indigenous communities, but also from weak integration between indigenous communities and local governments in developing cultural preservation policies. In many cases, local governments still tend to position culture as an annual ceremonial event, without establishing a long-term preservation system that involves indigenous communities as the main actors. In fact, effective public policy requires cross-sectoral coordination, institutional capacity, and meaningful public participation in order to address public problems appropriately (Cairney, 2019). This condition indicates that local cultural traditions such as Ngalaksa require not only community-based preservation, but also strong and collaborative governance.

In the context of local government in Indonesia, cultural preservation should receive strategic space through the implementation of regional autonomy. Regional autonomy provides local governments with the authority to design policies based on the characteristics and needs of local communities, including in the cultural sector. However, reality shows that this authority has not always been utilized optimally. Many local governments still face limitations in bureaucratic capacity, weak program planning, and minimal mechanisms for collaboration with local communities. Ansell and Torfing (2016) assert that the success of local governments in addressing public issues depends greatly on their ability to develop governance based on collaboration, policy innovation, and stakeholder involvement.

This phenomenon illustrates that preserving local cultural traditions requires a local cultural governance approach, namely local cultural governance that emphasizes interactive relationships between local governments, indigenous communities, local communities, and other supporting actors. In the modern governance paradigm, the implementation of public affairs does not rely solely on the government as a single actor, but involves multi-actor cooperation through interdependent policy networks (Torfing, Peters, 2020). Thus, cultural traditions such as Ngalaksa can be understood as a governance arena, because their sustainability is determined by local regulations, financial support, institutional coordination, and social legitimacy built through the participation of indigenous communities.

A number of previous studies have discussed the preservation of local culture and indigenous traditions, but most have been oriented toward anthropological or socio-cultural approaches. Studies that specifically position cultural traditions as objects of governance analysis within the framework of regional autonomy remain relatively limited. In fact, the governance approach provides a strong analytical framework to explain how cultural policies can operate effectively when supported by institutional rules, participation mechanisms, and sustainable resource management (Pierre, 2020). In addition, Ostrom (2015) emphasizes that the success of managing common resources is strongly determined by the existence of shared rules, collective agreements, and institutional mechanisms that support system sustainability. In the context of local culture, tradition can be understood as part of collective social resources that require a clear governance system.

Based on this discussion, this research is important because it aims to analyze how local cultural governance in preserving the Ngalaksa tradition in Rancakalong District is implemented within the framework of regional autonomy. This study is expected to contribute scientifically to strengthening governance studies based on local culture, while also providing strategic recommendations for local governments in building stronger integration with indigenous communities. Therefore, the preservation of the Ngalaksa tradition will not only continue as an annual symbolic activity, but will also develop into a well-planned, participatory, and sustainable cultural policy as part of regional development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study examines the governance practices embedded in the Ngalaksa Tradition in Rancakalong District, Sumedang Regency, by analyzing six key governance dimensions: participation, transparency, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness. The findings reveal that Ngalaksa is not merely a cultural ritual, but also represents a living governance system driven by local social norms, community leadership, and collective cultural identity. The results demonstrate that governance practices in Ngalaksa are strongly community-based, yet still face institutional challenges in terms of formal policy integration under the regional autonomy framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Participation

The findings show that community participation in the Ngalaksa Tradition in Rancakalong is highly active and inclusive. Participation is visible throughout the entire event cycle, starting from planning and preparation to the implementation stage. Various local actors—customary elders, community leaders, art groups, youth, women’s organizations (PKK), and school children—are directly involved in processions, the preparation of ritual equipment and traditional decorations, and cultural performances. This involvement reflects a strong collective commitment to preserving Ngalaksa as part of the community’s cultural identity.

Field observations indicate that participation is largely voluntary and driven by cultural and spiritual responsibility rather than material incentives. The community perceives Ngalaksa not merely as an annual ceremonial event, but as a collective obligation that strengthens social cohesion and reinforces local identity. This pattern demonstrates that Ngalaksa functions as both a cultural tradition and a social institution that binds the community together through shared values and mutual cooperation.

However, despite the high level of informal participation, the study found a governance limitation in the absence of a formal institutional platform dedicated to cultural preservation. There is no specific village deliberation forum or structured mechanism that integrates Ngalaksa preservation into official village development planning. As a result, participation remains strong at the community level but is not yet systematically connected to formal governance processes. This condition suggests an institutional gap between cultural practice and local policy formulation. This finding is illustrated in the conceptual diagram 1.

Analytically, the participation pattern observed in Ngalaksa aligns with the concept of community-driven participation, where local actors act not only as implementers but also as the main drivers of cultural sustainability. Recent studies emphasize that participation grounded in collective identity and local wisdom tends to be more resilient and sustainable in the long term (Muda, 2025). In the context of Ngalaksa, this sustainability is reflected in the consistent involvement of diverse social groups across all stages of the event.

At the same time, the lack of formal participatory institutions indicates that cultural governance in Rancakalong has not yet been fully institutionalized. This supports findings from Ginting et al. (2025), who argue that cultural integration into village development planning

often remains sporadic when it is not supported by structured governance mechanisms. Strengthening institutional participation—such as establishing a village cultural forum or formally including cultural agendas in village deliberation meetings—can provide a stronger linkage between cultural practice and development policy, thereby ensuring continuity of traditions within the regional autonomy framework (Ambarwati, 2025).

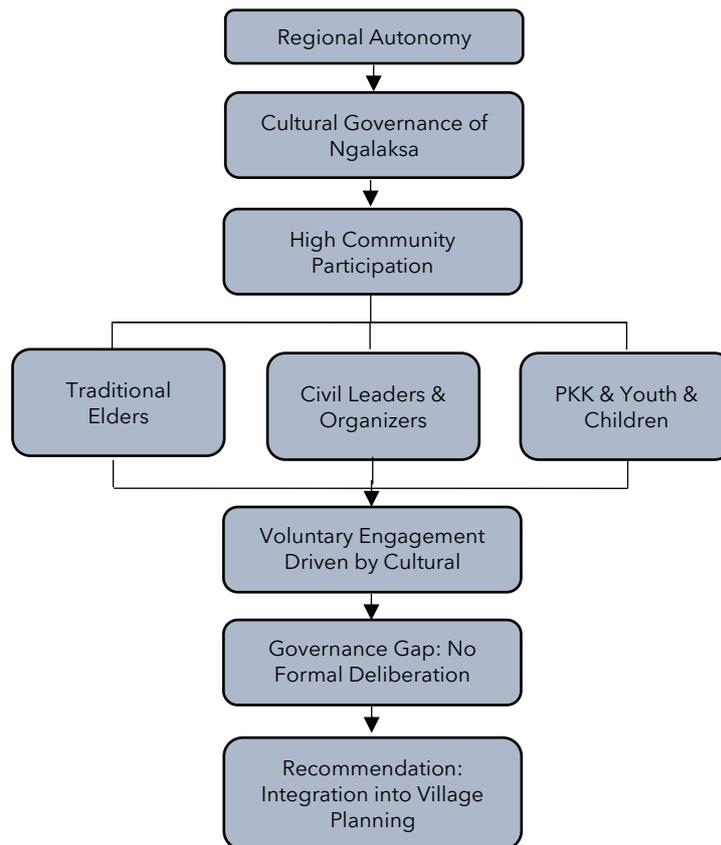


Diagram 1. Conceptual Diagram of Research Findings: Participation Dimension

Source: Research Results, 2025

Participation dimension in the Ngalaksa Tradition demonstrates strong community ownership and cultural resilience, but it also highlights the need for governance reform to formalize participation through institutional mechanisms that connect cultural preservation with village development planning.

Transparency

The study found that transparency in the implementation of the Ngalaksa Tradition remains largely informal and is primarily maintained through mutual trust and oral

communication. Information regarding budgeting, funding sources, and the division of responsibilities is generally communicated verbally among customary leaders and community members. There is no formal written record that systematically documents financial contributions, expenditure details, or task allocation. Despite this, field evidence shows that the community does not perceive this system as problematic, as the tradition has long been managed through inherited customary norms and strong social cohesion.

However, the absence of formal documentation presents a governance vulnerability, particularly in terms of long-term sustainability. While the current trust-based system functions effectively in a close-knit community, it may become less reliable as generational transitions occur. Younger community members may not fully understand the traditional mechanisms of financial and task management that have historically been transmitted orally. As a result, transparency may weaken over time, potentially leading to misunderstandings or reduced legitimacy, especially if external actors such as local government institutions or donors become increasingly involved. This transparency pattern is illustrated in the conceptual diagram 2.

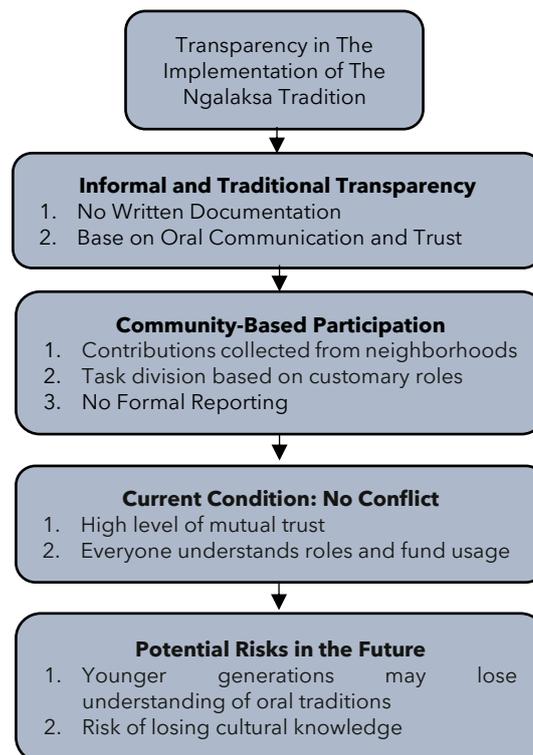


Diagram 2. Conceptual Diagram of Research Findings: Transparency Dimension

Source: Research Results, 2025

From a governance perspective, transparency is not only about information being shared but also about ensuring that information is accessible, clear, and verifiable for stakeholders. (Fox, 2007) emphasizes that transparency must enable stakeholders to understand and assess how collective resources are managed. In the case of Ngalaksa, transparency exists in a cultural and relational form—based on trust and shared norms—but it has not yet been institutionalized through standardized documentation. This indicates that transparency is socially maintained, but administratively weak.

Recent studies suggest that traditional cultural events without written documentation may face challenges in maintaining accountability and legitimacy over time, particularly when governance environments become more bureaucratic and digitally oriented (Hariri, 2021). Therefore, the findings imply the need for an adaptive transparency model that preserves the cultural foundation of mutual trust while introducing simple documentation mechanisms. This may include basic written records of community contributions, funding sources, and expenditure summaries, which could strengthen intergenerational continuity and enhance governance credibility without undermining traditional values (Tanno et al., 2025).

Transparency dimension in the Ngalaksa Tradition reflects a strong reliance on informal cultural mechanisms, yet it also highlights the importance of gradually strengthening administrative transparency to support sustainable cultural governance in the era of regional autonomy.

Accountability

The findings indicate that accountability in the implementation of the Ngalaksa Tradition is primarily based on moral and customary responsibility. Traditional elders and community leaders are regarded as the main actors responsible for organizing the event, ensuring that rituals are properly conducted, and maintaining cultural legitimacy. Accountability is expressed through community trust, respect for customary authority, and collective expectations rather than through formal administrative procedures.

However, from an institutional and governance perspective, the study found that there is no formal accountability mechanism to the village government or the wider public. No written financial reports, official evaluations, or formal documentation are produced and submitted to policy stakeholders. This suggests that accountability remains embedded in customary norms and social control systems, but has not yet been integrated into formal

governance structures within the framework of regional autonomy. This accountability pattern is illustrated in the conceptual diagram 3.

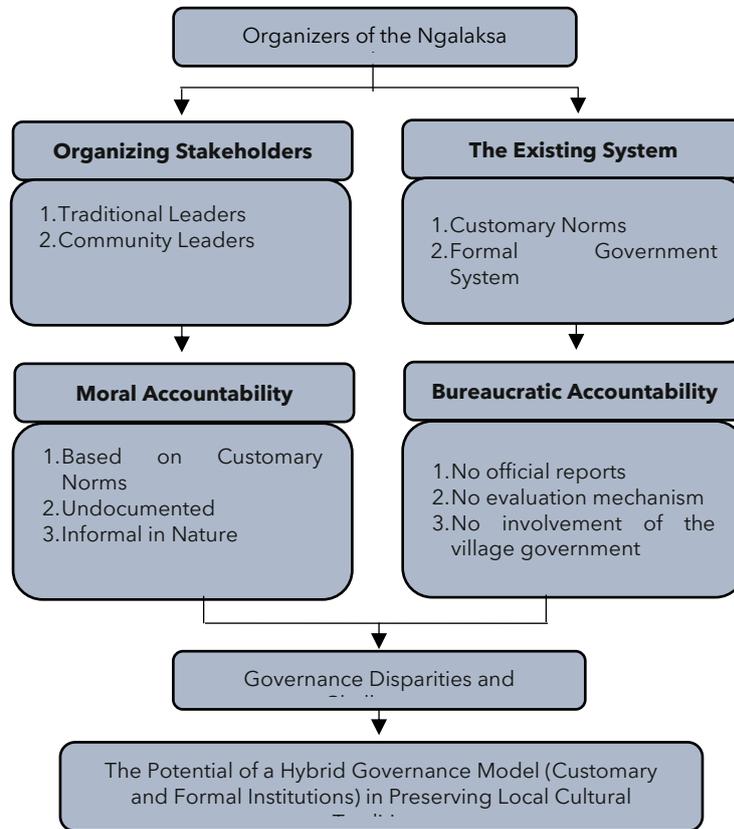


Diagram 3. Conceptual Diagram of Research Findings: Accountability Dimension

Source: Research Results, 2025

Analytically, (Bovens, 2007) defines accountability as a relationship in which actors are obliged to explain and justify their conduct to a forum that can question and evaluate their actions. In the case of Ngalaksa, such a formal accountability relationship is largely absent. Instead, accountability is maintained through informal cultural mechanisms, including social reputation, collective monitoring, and moral responsibility toward the community. This aligns with (Diab, 2024), who argue that accountability in rural cultural settings is often enforced through social legitimacy rather than administrative reporting.

Despite its cultural effectiveness, the lack of formal accountability creates limitations for sustainability and institutional recognition. Without documentation and reporting, it becomes difficult to integrate Ngalaksa into village development planning, to justify public budget

allocation, or to strengthen collaboration with external stakeholders such as local government agencies. As (Chumo et al., 2022) note, cultural traditions that rely solely on informal accountability may face vulnerability when social structures shift and younger generations demand more institutional clarity.

Therefore, the findings suggest the need for a dual accountability model, where customary moral responsibility is maintained while introducing basic administrative accountability practices. Simple reporting formats, reflective evaluations, or community-based documentation could strengthen governance legitimacy without undermining customary authority, as recommended by (Purwanti, 2024). Such gradual institutionalization would enhance the sustainability of the Ngalaksa Tradition and support its alignment with formal governance systems under regional autonomy.

Effectiveness

The findings indicate that the Ngalaksa Tradition is highly effective in achieving its core cultural objectives, particularly in preserving local cultural values, strengthening social solidarity, and transmitting indigenous knowledge across generations. Ngalaksa continues to be consistently implemented as an annual ritual in Rancakalong, reflecting its strong cultural legitimacy and institutional endurance within the community. Field evidence suggests that the tradition remains sustainable not because of formal government intervention, but because it is rooted in strong internal values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), respect for ancestors, and collective cultural identity.

This effectiveness is also demonstrated by the expanding recognition of Ngalaksa beyond the village context. The tradition has increasingly gained visibility at the regional and provincial levels through cultural festivals, tourism promotion, and academic discussions. Such recognition indicates that Ngalaksa has been able to maintain its cultural relevance while adapting to broader public platforms, without losing its community-based foundation.

A key element of effectiveness is the role of Ngalaksa as an informal learning space for younger generations. Youth and children are actively involved in the procession and supporting activities, ensuring that cultural values are transmitted through direct experience rather than only through oral narratives. As expressed by a local elementary school teacher (2024), "Ngalaksa is our way of giving thanks. The children are also involved so they can learn about history and culture." This illustrates that Ngalaksa functions not only as a ritual event but

also as a living educational process embedded in everyday community life. This effectiveness pattern is summarized in the conceptual diagram 4.

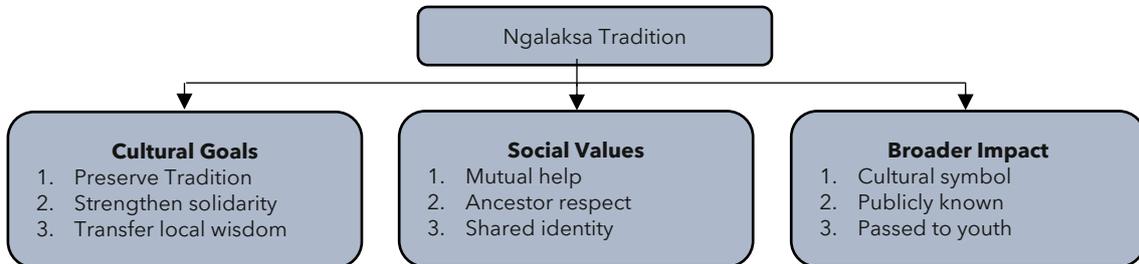


Diagram 4. Conceptual Diagram of Research Findings: Effectiveness Dimension

Source: Research Results, 2025

Analytically, the findings reflect the concept of cultural resilience, where communities sustain cultural practices through internal capacity, collective meaning, and adaptive social mechanisms. Ungar (2008) emphasizes that resilience is not only the ability to survive external pressures, but also the capacity to maintain identity and continuity through social organization. In the context of Ngalaksa, the tradition operates as an informal yet effective cultural institution that is maintained through strong community ownership.

However, the strong effectiveness of Ngalaksa also presents strategic opportunities for governance integration. While the tradition thrives independently, its increasing public recognition suggests the need for careful policy support to strengthen sustainability, particularly in education and cultural development planning. Tyfield & Yuille (2022) argue that culturally effective traditions can serve as assets for sustainable local development if supported through appropriate governance mechanisms. Nevertheless, such integration must be managed carefully to prevent commodification and to preserve the authenticity of cultural meaning.

Effectiveness of Ngalaksa lies in its ability to preserve cultural identity, reinforce social cohesion, and sustain intergenerational continuity through community-driven practices. This demonstrates that local traditions can remain effective and adaptive even without heavy dependence on formal government structures, provided that cultural legitimacy and collective commitment remain strong.

Efficiency

The findings show that the implementation of the Ngalaksa Tradition is highly efficient, particularly in terms of resource mobilization and cost management. Most resources—

including labor, materials, and funding—are contributed voluntarily by community members through a gotong royong (mutual cooperation) system. Field evidence indicates that the event is organized without excessive spending, formal contracts, or reliance on paid professional services. Community members collectively manage logistics, preparation, and execution based on long-established social mechanisms. As stated by a PKK member (2024), “We never hire an event organizer or anything like that. Everything is done by the residents—even the costumes are sewn by the women in the community.” This efficiency pattern is illustrated in the conceptual diagram 5.

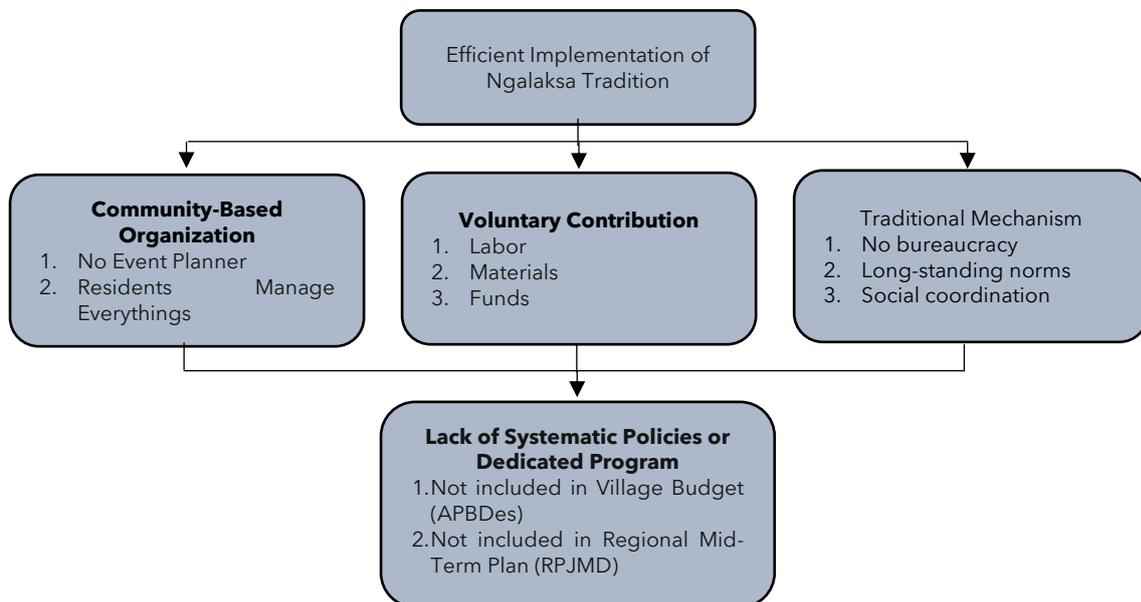


Diagram 5. Conceptual Diagram of Research Findings: Efficiency Dimension

Source: Research Results, 2025

Analytically, the efficiency observed in Ngalaksa reflects the strength of community-based resource management, where shared norms and trust enable effective coordination without bureaucratic procedures. (Ostrom, 2015)) emphasizes that collective action supported by reciprocity and social trust can reduce transaction costs and strengthen local governance efficiency. In the case of Ngalaksa, the community’s ability to organize the event through voluntary contributions demonstrates a strong form of social capital that supports cost-effective implementation.

Moreover, the findings suggest that efficiency in Ngalaksa is not merely about minimizing financial costs, but also about maximizing community ownership. When local actors manage the entire process independently, the tradition becomes less dependent on

external funding and remains culturally authentic. Similar evidence has been reported in rural cultural events, where community-driven organization tends to achieve high efficiency while maintaining strong social engagement (Nugraha et al., 2021). However, despite its efficiency, the absence of formal administrative support may limit long-term development, particularly in documentation, reporting, and broader institutional collaboration. Therefore, light institutional support that respects community autonomy may enhance sustainability without reducing the grassroots efficiency of the tradition (Madania et al., 2025).

Efficiency dimension of Ngalaksa demonstrates that strong social cohesion and collective labor division can produce highly effective cultural event management, even without formal bureaucratic systems.

Responsiveness

The findings indicate that the responsiveness of both village and regional governments toward the preservation of the Ngalaksa Tradition remains largely symbolic rather than substantive. Government representatives regularly attend the annual event, demonstrating recognition of Ngalaksa as an important cultural practice. However, this recognition has not been followed by systematic policy facilitation, program development, or sustainable institutional support. The tradition has not yet been formally integrated into the village budget (APBDes) or included as a strategic agenda within the district's mid-term development plan (RPJMD). As expressed by the Village Secretary (2024), "The government attends every year, but there's no dedicated program yet. It would be great if it could be included in the village budget or promoted as a regional tourism agenda." This responsiveness pattern is summarized in the conceptual diagram 6.

Analytically, responsiveness refers to the ability of public institutions to identify community needs and translate them into timely and relevant policy actions. In the case of Ngalaksa, the government's presence during the event reflects cultural acknowledgement, yet the absence of structured follow-up indicates limited institutional responsiveness. This suggests that cultural preservation is still treated as a ceremonial matter rather than a strategic development issue that requires formal planning, budgeting, and cross-sector coordination.

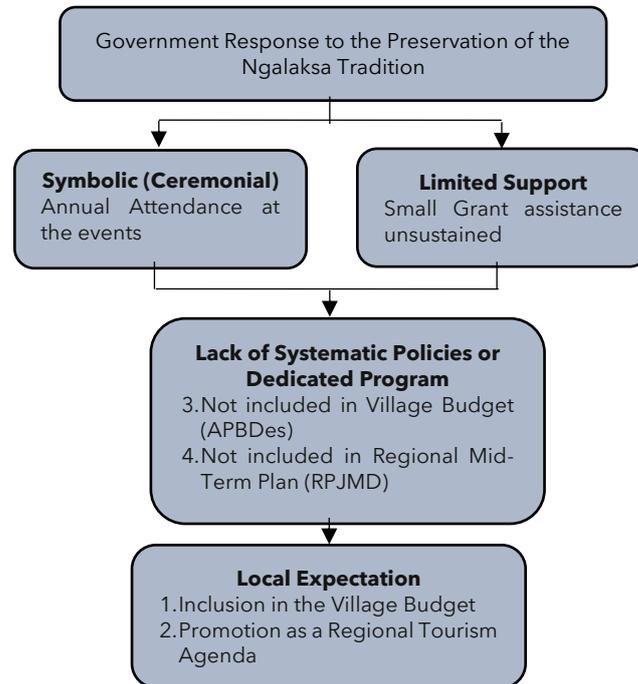


Diagram 6. Conceptual Diagram of Research Findings: Responsiveness Dimension

Source: Research Results, 2025

Although minor support has occasionally been provided, such as small grants or logistical assistance, the findings show that these efforts remain sporadic and lack continuity. This pattern limits the potential of Ngalaksa to contribute to broader development goals, including cultural sustainability, local education, and regional tourism development. Studies have shown that cultural traditions can become effective drivers of local development only when supported through coherent planning instruments and long-term governance commitment (Saputra, 2024; Sulis Cahyani et al., 2025)

Therefore, the findings highlight the need for stronger institutional responsiveness through policy integration. Incorporating Ngalaksa into village development planning and formal budget allocation, as well as aligning it with cultural and tourism programs at the district level, would strengthen cultural governance and reduce the community's sole burden in sustaining the tradition. Overall, responsiveness in the governance of Ngalaksa must evolve from ceremonial recognition into structured and sustainable policy commitment.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Ngalaksa Tradition in Rancakalong District represents not only a cultural ritual but also a living model of local cultural governance sustained by strong

community-based institutions. The findings show that governance practices in Ngalaksa are characterized by high participation, strong cultural effectiveness, and efficient resource management through *gotong royong* and collective social solidarity. These elements demonstrate the resilience of local wisdom in maintaining cultural continuity despite modernization pressures.

However, the study also identifies key institutional weaknesses in the dimensions of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. Governance mechanisms remain largely informal, with limited written documentation, reporting systems, and structured policy integration. Government involvement is still mostly symbolic and has not yet translated into consistent programs, formal budgeting, or integration into village and district development planning frameworks such as APBDes and RPJMD.

Overall, this study highlights that the sustainability of Ngalaksa is currently driven by strong informal cultural institutions, yet its long-term preservation requires adaptive governance strengthening. Integrating Ngalaksa into formal policy instruments while maintaining cultural authenticity is essential to ensure that this tradition remains sustainable and recognized as a strategic cultural asset within the regional autonomy framework.

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