



PRESERVATION OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE THROUGH THE LAKE TOBA TRADITIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL

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Abstract

Medium for introducing, collaborating on, and regenerating cultural works. This paper examines the 2021 Lake Toba Traditional Music Festival as a model of preservation based on creative participation. This festival involved twelve composers, selected through an open process by a team of curators, to create a musical work sourced from the traditions of four ethnic groups around Lake Toba: Batak Toba, Karo, Simalungun, and Pakpak. Each composer was required to conduct field research and interact directly with local musicians to understand the musical, social, and ecological contexts of the cultures they were adapting. This research uses participatory qualitative methods and draws on field observations, interviews, audiovisual documentation, and festival archives. The analysis is carried out using a musicological and ethnographic approach to examine the cross-cultural creative process. The results of the research show that this program produces a diversity of musical forms that combine instrumental, vocal, and traditional poetry elements, and that it reveals a dialogue between modernity and tradition. This festival is not only a performance event, but also a space for transcultural creation that strengthens the cultural identity and musical ecology of the Lake Toba region.

Keywords: WBTb Preservation, Cross-Cultural Composition, Traditional Music, Lake Toba Festival

INTRODUCTION

Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) is a form of cultural expression that is alive, constantly evolving, and passed down from generation to generation, encompassing various knowledge, skills, and traditions that serve as markers of a community's identity (UNESCO, 2003). In Indonesia, the national inventory system has recorded 2,455 cultural works as of 2025 (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2025). However, this number represents only a small fraction of the nation's cultural wealth; more than 20,000 local traditions remain officially undocumented (UNESCO, 2023; Supriyanto, 2022). This situation highlights the significant challenges in preservation efforts, particularly due to declining appreciation among supporting communities, limited regeneration of artists, and the gradual penetration of global culture that is shifting traditional values (Lenzerini, 2011; Bortolotto, 2020). Ethnographic research in Southeast Asia also indicates that ICH forms not supported by community-based regeneration systems are likely to disappear within the next two to three decades (Nguyen, 2021; Chaves et al., 2023).

To address the challenges of sustaining Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) amid rapid social, economic, and technological changes, a participatory and creative approach is an inevitable strategy in revitalization efforts. This approach places communities not merely as objects of preservation, but as active subjects who have cultural authority to interpret, transmit, and develop their cultural practices in accordance

with the context of their time. Within this framework, revitalization is not understood as an effort to "preserve" traditions, but rather as a dynamic process that keeps traditions alive, relevant, and meaningful for future generations.

Deacon and Smeets (2013) emphasize that the preservation of ICH cannot stop at documentation activities alone, such as recording, filming, or archiving. Although important as a knowledge base, documentation is passive and risks separating cultural practices from their social context. Therefore, they propose the concept of creative transmission, the process of transforming values, knowledge, and cultural practices into new spaces through media such as art, technology, and contemporary cultural practices. Creative transmission emphasizes sustainability through innovation rooted in tradition, enabling a dialogue between local knowledge and modern creative expression without losing its authenticity and cultural meaning.

In the Indonesian context, cultural festivals have proven to be an effective medium for carrying out creative transmission. Festivals not only serve as venues for performances but also as public learning spaces, creative laboratories, and arenas for collaboration among various actors—from traditional artists and local communities to academics, government, and the younger generation. Research by Sunarto (2020) and Setyaningrum and Siswantari (2020) shows that festivals can expand public access to cultural knowledge, build experiential learning, and foster intergenerational awareness through dialogic and participatory interactions. Thus, festivals serve as a bridge between tradition and the contemporary public, as well as a mechanism for cultural regeneration. One innovative model of festival-based preservation is evident in the 2021 Lake Toba Traditional Music Festival, with the theme *Suara Danau: Doa Komposer* (Voices of the Lake: Composers' Prayers). This festival was initiated by Rumah Karya Indonesia (RKI) in collaboration with the Directorate General of Culture, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, and local governments in the Lake Toba region.

This festival not only presents traditional music as a performance artifact, but also as a reflective practice that responds to the natural landscape, history, and social life of the Lake Toba community. The theme of *Composer's Prayer* affirms artists' position as spiritual and cultural mediums that bridge local traditions with contemporary musical expressions. Since 2014, RKI has consistently developed an integrative approach by combining festival activities, cultural education, and participatory research. This approach enables a two-way learning process: local communities are actively involved in producing cultural knowledge, while researchers and artists gain a deeper contextual understanding. Through workshops, residencies, discussions, and creative collaborations, the festival becomes a space for knowledge production and the negotiation of cultural meaning. This model shows that the sustainable preservation of intangible cultural heritage depends not only on formal policies and institutions, but also on a creative ecosystem that encourages participation, innovation, and a collective sense of ownership of cultural heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ICH encompasses a wide range of knowledge, skills, rituals, artistic expressions, and social practices that serve as markers of a community's collective identity (UNESCO, 2003; Smith, 2006). Unlike tangible cultural heritage, the sustainability of ICH depends heavily on the active involvement of its supporting community, as its meaning and value can be preserved only through social practices that are continuously carried out and reinterpreted in accordance with the times (Harrison, 2013; Kurin, 2004). Therefore, the sustainability of ICH is closely correlated with cultural transmission processes, social relevance, and the ability to adapt to socio-cultural changes.

In Indonesia, efforts to protect and document ICH have increased through the development of a national inventory system. By 2025, 2,455 cultural elements have been included in the official list of national intangible cultural heritage (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2025). However, various studies confirm that this figure does not reflect the full extent of Indonesia's cultural wealth. It is estimated that more than 20,000 local traditions, especially those rooted in communities' daily practices, have not been formally documented (UNESCO, 2023; Supriyanto, 2022; Hafstein, 2018). This imbalance indicates structural problems in cultural preservation, such as limited documentation capacity, the dominance of certain cultural narratives, and the marginalization of non-institutional local knowledge.

Several studies have identified various factors that cause the vulnerability of intangible cultural heritage. Declining interest among the younger generation, weak regeneration of cultural practitioners, and massive penetration of global culture are often cited as significant threats to the sustainability of ICH (Lenzerini, 2011; Bortolotto, 2020; Appadurai, 1996). This process often triggers a shift in values and the transformation of cultural practices towards more commercial or globally standardized forms. Ethnographic studies in Southeast Asia also show that traditions not supported by community-based regeneration systems are at high risk of extinction over the next two to three decades (Nguyen, 2021; Chaves et al., 2023; Taylor, 2016). These findings confirm that preservation strategies that focus solely on archiving and documentation are inadequate.

In response to this situation, recent literature emphasizes the importance of participatory and creative approaches in efforts to revitalize intangible cultural heritage. Deacon and Smeets (2013) emphasize that ICH protection must go beyond documentation practices and be directed towards creative transmission, the process of transforming cultural values into new media and spaces through art, technology, and contemporary cultural practices. This approach positions cultural heritage not as static artifacts of the past, but as living resources that can interact with new audiences and ever-changing social contexts (Harrison & Rose, 2010; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004). In the Indonesian context, cultural festivals are often seen as one of the strategic models for implementing such creative transmission. Various studies show that festivals not only function as performance venues but also as educational and collaborative spaces that bring together

artists, communities, academics, and the public in a dialogical manner (Sunarto, 2020; Setyaningrum & Siswantari, 2020; Quinn, 2005). Through a participatory approach, festivals encourage intergenerational knowledge transfer and increase public awareness of the value of traditional arts. One example of this implementation is the Lake Toba Traditional Music Festival (2021), with the theme *Suara Danau: Doa Komposer* (Sounds of the Lake: Composers' Prayers), initiated by Rumah Karya Indonesia in collaboration with government stakeholders and local communities.

METHOD

This study uses a participatory, qualitative approach with an ethnographic orientation to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between the cultural environment of Lake Toba and the creative processes of composers from diverse cultural backgrounds. This approach not only describes musical phenomena but also examines the meanings, values, and creative experiences of artists in the social and ecological contexts in which they interact (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam (1998), it is essential to distinguish between field methods and field techniques. Methods encompass the theoretical orientation that underpins the entire research process, while techniques refer to specific data-collection procedures, such as informant selection, relationship building, and visit timing. Based on this view, the field method in this study refers to the ethnomusicological fieldwork paradigm (Rice, 2014), which integrates musical analysis, cultural observation, and active participation in the arts community. The field techniques used include participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and audiovisual documentation.

The primary technique used in this study was participatory observation, as described by Musante (2015) as a method in which researchers participate in daily activities, rituals, and group interactions to understand the explicit and implicit dimensions of their lives and culture. In the context of this study, the researcher participated directly in workshops and field explorations with traditional composers and musicians in the Lake Toba region, and observed their interactions with local communities in four cultural areas: Batak Toba, Karo, Simalungun, and Pakpak. This approach enabled researchers to capture the dynamics of the relationships among composers, curators, and local artists across both musical and social dimensions. The observations focused on several key aspects: (1) patterns of musical and nonverbal communication between participants; (2) composers' emotional responses to the natural environment, such as lakes, forests, and waterfalls; (3) adaptation of local sounds in the composition exploration process; (4) ritual activities, discussions, and improvisations during the workshop.

Documentation data, including video recordings, photos of activities, and musical works, were used as empirical evidence to identify musical and visual elements reflecting Lake Toba's environmental and cultural influences on the compositions. All data were analyzed using a visual-musical analysis approach

(Kivy, 2009; Leman, 2016). Data collection was carried out during the Lake Toba Traditional Music Festival (2021) program in several prominent locations: Huta Tinggi Village (Samosir) as the center of gondang sabangunan; Sidikalang District (Pakpak), where genderang sisiba music is played; Simalungun Regency with gondrang sipitu-pitu performances; and Karo Regency with lima sidalanen drum practice. The researchers participated in the entire series of activities, from workshops and cultural and nature exploration to recording processes and live performances. This participatory approach aligns with Rice's (2014) view that an ideal ethnomusicologist should live with the community, participate in musical events, interview musicians and audiences, and learn to play and understand music directly.

Thus, this research is not merely observational, but rather a process of mutual learning between the researcher and the artists. Data analysis was conducted in three stages (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2018): (1) Data reduction, which involved selecting field notes, interview transcripts, and audiovisual documentation to identify the main themes namely the influence of the natural environment, local culture, and musical transformation; (2) Data display, which is the grouping of findings based on composer categories, cultural regions, and types of musical inspiration; (3) Drawing conclusions and verification, namely connecting the results of thematic analysis with ethnomusicology theory, eco-cultural theory, and transcultural composition. Data validity is maintained through source and method triangulation strategies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018): (1) source triangulation by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and audiovisual documentation; (2) method triangulation through a combination of ethnographic and musicological analysis approaches; (3) member checking by confirming the results of interpretation with the composer and curator. In addition, the researcher conducted field reflections at the end of each activity to evaluate his position as an active participant who maintained a critical distance in the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lake Toba is located in North Sumatra Province and is administratively under the jurisdiction of seven districts: North Tapanuli, Humbang Hasundutan, Toba Samosir, Samosir, Simalungun, Pakpak Dairi, and Karo. Each of these districts encompasses an area of Lake Toba, collectively referred to as the Lake Toba Region. These seven administrative regions are inhabited by four ethnic groups (often referred to as clans), namely: Batak Toba, Pakpak, Simalungun, and Karo. Each of these ethnic groups has its own culture, including traditional music that has become the identity of each tribe.

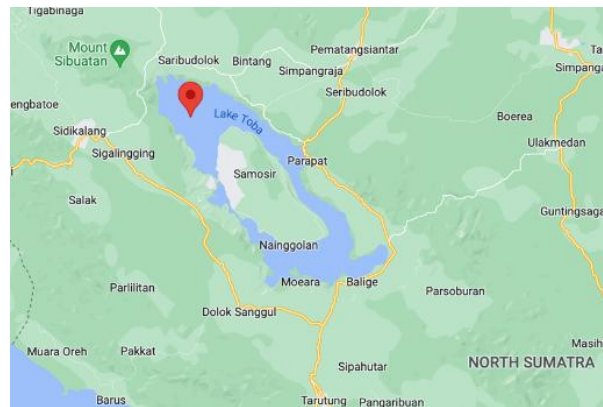


Figure 1. Map of Lake Toba Region

The traditional music introduced to the twelve composers came from four main ethnic groups in the Lake Toba region. Representative music ensembles were selected from each tribe to perform and engage in direct dialogue with the composers. The musical traditions that were the focus of the introduction consisted of *gondang sabangunan* and *gondang hasapi* from Batak Toba, *genderang sisiba* from Pakpak, *gendang lima sidalanan* from Karo, and *gondang sipitu-pitu* from Simalungun.

1. Pre-production

The pre-production stage covers the entire series of activities, from the design of the festival concept to the determination of each composer's musical inspiration sources. In the initial stage, the festival design was intended to support sustainable tourism development in the Lake Toba region, emphasizing a balance between environmental preservation and local cultural values. These considerations stemmed from several current issues facing the Lake Toba region, including reduced water discharge and increased pollution levels resulting from fish cage operations and tourist waste. On the other hand, rapid tourism development has also led to the marginalization of local community cultural values. These conditions then became a source of thematic inspiration for the composers in designing their works.

As an artistic response to these issues, the committee chose "Voices of the Lake: Composers' Prayers" as the central festival's theme. This theme is intended as a musical reflection on the ecological and spiritual condition of Lake Toba, inviting composers to use sound as a medium for contemplation and as a call to preserve the region's natural environment and culture. In the initial implementation stage, the committee opened an open invitation to composers through social media and art community networks. The selection process focused on the regions of Sumatra and Java, taking into account transportation efficiency and logistics costs. Enthusiasm for this program was very high, as evidenced by the 90 composers who registered from various provinces on the two islands. The selection was conducted in two stages. The first stage resulted in 20 selected composers.

In contrast, the second stage involved online interviews to assess their portfolios, creative ideas, and the suitability of their artistic vision to the festival theme. From this process, 12 foremost composers were selected, each representing the music group they belong to. Thus, the creative process was not only individual but also collaborative between the composers and their ensembles throughout the production stages.

Four of them are from North Sumatra, namely Zakki Fuadi (Soerkam), Ivan Sanjaya Siahaan (Komet), Sintong BM Pasaribu (Komunal Primitive Percussion), and Junita Batubara (Ansambel Nomensen). The other eight composers include Rizki Mona Dwi Putra (Jalur Rampak Aceh), M. Hario Efenur (Sarueh Buni Bumi, West Sumatra), Rino Deza Pati (Riau Rhythm), Jimmi Jangkrik (Muara Performing Arts Group), Said Fakhruh Ar Rozie (Sarvati Indonesia, Riau Islands), Davidson Halomoan Pasaribu (Horja Bius, Jakarta), Arita Bagia Pramudita (Biramanata, West Java), and Mochamad Pungki Hartono (Munsing, East Java). The research and workshop stages were conducted directly in the Lake Toba area, with the twelve composers and five curators living together for seven days. The program focused on introducing research models and exploring compositional forms to be developed. During the activities, participants exchanged ideas on strategies for collecting relevant field data to be used as material for creating works. The main challenge that arose stemmed from the composers' varying levels of experience with traditional music in the Lake Toba region. Five of them were already familiar with the local musical traditions, while the other seven were encountering the region's musical wealth for the first time.

The field research was conducted through direct visits to four central cultural regions surrounding Lake Toba: Karo, Pakpak Dairi, Simalungun, and Toba. These four ethnic groups were selected based on geocultural and administrative considerations that are directly related to the lake area. The composers and curators visited local artists' villages to witness traditional music performances firsthand, followed by discussion, Q&A, and instrument practice sessions. Each composer documented these activities using personal recording devices during field data collection.

The research team was highly mobile, as each visit spanned multiple cultural regions, requiring accommodation to be adjusted according to the location of each day's activities. Every evening, the activities continued with reflective discussions of the field findings, which enriched the composers' understanding of the local community's social and musical context. Through this process, each composer began to consider the most suitable source of inspiration for their musical work (Suranto, 2020). At the end of the activity, each composer selected a traditional music source for their work, as well as an accompanying curator with the appropriate musical cultural background. In addition, potential locations were surveyed for later use as shooting locations for the video composition, taking into account the administrative suitability of the four tribes. In general, compositions created must use

acoustic instruments and avoid electric instruments as much as possible. The musical structure was developed from each composer's musical style, while the traditional elements of the four tribes served as a source of creative renewal. The duration of each composition was limited to a maximum of ten minutes, with no more than twelve musicians in each group.

2. Production

The production process began after the composers returned to their respective regions. The creation stage was carried out together with their music groups, resulting in a process of sharing ideas and creative experiences among the members. The field recording data and workshop experiences served as the primary sources for developing the compositions. This collaboration not only enriched musical ideas but also broadened the musicians' understanding of the archipelago's cultural diversity. Based on the results of the activities at Lake Toba, it was found that only a small number of composers had previously worked with musical traditions from cultures outside their home regions. Through online communication, the composers continued to interact with the curators to discuss musical ideas, instrument usage, and the structure of the works. Once the composition process was complete, the next stage was audio recording in the studio. Each group chose the best studio in their respective areas, balancing cost efficiency with sound quality standards suitable for publication. The 555859 results are then sent to the committee and curators for evaluation as a requirement for eligibility to perform at the music festival in Samosir, Lake Toba (Adi & S. Ma'arif, 2020).

Twelve composers who passed the selection were then invited back with their groups to record videos in the Lake Toba area. The filming locations were tailored to each composer's musical inspiration, emphasizing the connection between the work and its geographical and cultural context. Instruments, costumes, and props were prepared to reflect each group's aesthetic character. Filming took place before the festival began, so that after shooting was complete, the participants could immediately proceed to the dancers to strengthen the cultural context of their work. At this stage, the visual and musical diversity reflecting different cultural backgrounds, combined with the distinctive natural landscape of Lake Toba, was clearly evident (Tjahjawulan, 2021). The final stage of the activity was the holding of a composition festival in the Samosir tourist area. Local artists who had previously served as resource persons and collaboration partners were invited to witness the final results of the work. This festival became a meeting place and forum for exchanging experiences among traditional artists from Lake Toba and composers from various regions of Sumatra and Java. The performance of twelve compositions born from diverse cultural backgrounds made the festival a celebration of national music that highlighted the plurality of creative processes and forms of creation.

3. Post-production

Each participating music group performed at various locations. The purpose of holding performances in several places was not only to introduce new works but also to capitalize on the momentum of participants from distant areas, including the group from Banyuwangi, East Java. After the performance, there was a discussion session on the process of composing, open to the art community in the Lake Toba area. This activity became a space for the exchange of ideas, where local musicians could recognize that artists from outside the region could also draw on the natural elements, culture, and traditional music of Lake Toba as inspiration for their work. This awareness fostered enthusiasm among local musicians to explore new musical ideas in their creative process.

Another vital aspect is publishing the work as a DVD recording, which expands the audience reach. The DVD album contains twelve compositions and is accompanied by documentary interviews with the composers and an introduction by the presenter. In addition, promotional material is disseminated through social media, particularly YouTube, which remains accessible to the public today. The entire recording features elements of water, natural landscapes, culture, and the life of the Lake Toba community as the primary sources of inspiration for the creative process. Interviews with the composers provide insight into how they chose one of the four main musical traditions in the Lake Toba region as the basis for their creations. The selection was often based on subjective factors, as were the form, actors, and filming location. Each group displays its own uniqueness, representing the cultural and natural diversity of Lake Toba. For example, the Horja Bius group raises the theme of tonggo-tonggo, a part of Toba folklore, demonstrating how oral traditions can serve as a source of inspiration in contemporary music (D.H. Santosa, H. Siswantari, N. Mukarromah, 2021).

In the future, a promotional strategy should be developed so that every musical composition and group can serve as ambassadors of Indonesian culture on the international stage. Traditional music has great potential in cultural diplomacy, as exemplified in the study of Yospan dance diplomacy to China (D. Fadillah, Wajiran, and U. Jandevi, 2021) and I. Kozymka's (2014) thoughts on cultural diplomacy. The Traditional Music Festival in the Lake Toba region is part of efforts to fill the national cultural calendar in the Lake Toba priority tourist area.

Through this activity, international tourists can learn about cultural diversity while strengthening Lake Toba's image as a leading Indonesian destination. The festival, attended by young musicians, became a cross-cultural learning event, enabling them to learn about and interpret the diverse musical traditions of North Sumatra. Conversely, the twelve compositions offered musical diversity, providing a new aesthetic experience for the audience. Audio and video publications from this festival broadened the public's understanding of the richness of traditional music in the archipelago. Musically, the album's works fall into two main categories: compositions rooted in North Sumatra's musical traditions and those by composers from outside the region. Five composers rooted in the traditions of North Sumatra,

Zakki Fuadi (Soerkam), Ivan Sanjaya Siahaan (Komet), Sintong BM Pasaribu (Komunal Primitive Percussion), Junita Batubara (Ansambel Nomensen), and Davidson Halomoan Pasaribu (Horja Bius Jakarta)—presented the strong musical characteristics of four ethnic groups in the Lake Toba region: Toba, Karo, Simalungun, and Pakpak. Traditional instruments remain dominant, while modern instruments such as electric guitars, drums, and keyboards serve only to add color to the sound (A.R. Mulyana & J. Suranto, 2021).

Meanwhile, seven composers from outside North Sumatra, including Rizki Mona Dwi Putra (Aceh), M. Hario Efenur (West Sumatra), Rino Deza Pati and Jimmi Jangkrik (Riau), Said Fakhruh Ar Rozie (Riau Islands), Arita Bagia Pramudita (West Java), and Mochamad Pungki Hartono (East Java), present more exploratory interpretations of Toba musical idioms. Elements of rhythm, tone, instruments, and chanting serve as markers of traditional inspiration, even though they have undergone creative transformation according to each composer's character. Visually, all works explore the landscape of Lake Toba, from settlements, lakes, rivers, and waterfalls to protected forests, flora and fauna, and the community's cultural activities. In the visualization of the twelve compositions, water is the main symbol, appearing in various forms, such as lakes, waterfalls, showers, and soul-cleansing rituals. Water is not only an element of nature but also part of the Toba community's belief system and a source of life. Through a collaborative effort between local musicians and videographers, these works capture the deep connection among humans, nature, and culture in the Lake Toba region.

The Influence of the Natural Environment: From Landscape to Sonic Landscape

1. Ecology as Aesthetics. The environment of Lake Toba strongly influences composers' timbral imagination. The sound of water, the rustling of the wind, the echoes of the cliffs, and natural harmonies are sources for creating rhythmic patterns and sound textures. This concept, known as ecoacoustic music composition, reflects the interaction between humans and nature through sound (Schafer, 1994; Farina, 2021). In the context of the festival, many composers use natural sounds such as waterfalls, canoe paddles, or local birds as textural layers in their compositions. It demonstrates a form of site-specific composition, in which the work is designed according to the location's acoustics and symbolism. Research by Yan & Su (2025) in Religions found that spiritual expression in totemic art often arises from "the emotional relationship between humans and the natural environment." A similar phenomenon can be seen in the work "Suara Danau: Doa Komposer" (Sounds of the Lake: Composers' Prayers), where the sounds of water and the rhythm of the gonggang serve as a medium for prayer and ecological reflection.
2. The Environment as Sonic Identity. Lake Toba has a distinctive sonic identity: the majestic sound of the gonggang sabangunan, the rhythm of the Pakpak drum, and the lyrical patterns of the hasapi. The

composers' interaction with these local traditions creates an “idiomatic shift” in which they do not imitate, but transform local musical idioms into new contexts. For example, composers from Java or West Sumatra interpret gongang rhythms into modern polyphonic patterns. Composers from Riau adapt the responsorial (question-and-answer) structure characteristic of Batak music into contemporary forms for percussion ensemble. This phenomenon aligns with the idea of transcultural composition (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2017), in which encounters between cultures produce hybrid musical forms without eliminating their local roots.

The Influence of Local Culture: Spirituality, Rituals, and Collective Narratives

1. **Ritual Culture as Compositional Structure.** Batak music culture is not merely entertainment, but is laden with social and spiritual functions. Every traditional ceremony, from birth and death to agriculture, is accompanied by gongang music that serves as a form of prayer (*tonggo-tonggo*). During the workshop and field exploration, the composers absorbed these ritual values into their compositions. Interviews revealed that most composers felt a meditative atmosphere while watching local traditional music performances, and this experience was then translated into musical dynamics: from slow to climax, depicting the process of ritual transformation. It aligns with the findings of Zhang & Qian (2024) that the relationship between religion, ritual, and visual/musical art always forms "a pattern of symbolic communication between humans and sacredness."
2. **Cultural Narrative and Identity.** Cross-cultural interactions in festivals give rise to new musical narratives: music as a medium for dialogue between identities. Composers from other cultures not only borrow local sounds, but also understand their meaning—that rhythm is not merely a pattern, but a representation of social relationships. As emphasized by Bortolotto (2020), practical preservation of intangible cultural heritage occurs when external artists "collaborate empathetically" with the community, rather than simply extracting its aesthetic elements. Some works even raise ecological and spiritual issues related to water, inspired by the Batak people's view that Lake Toba is the guardian spirit of life. The symbolism of water is processed into a repeating musical motif (*ostinato*), reinforcing the message of cultural and natural sustainability (Zhang & Qian, 2024).
- 3) **The Influence of Social and Transcultural Interaction.** The interaction between composers and local musicians in the festival creates a learning ecology (Fadel & Zhao, 2019), a cross-cultural learning ecosystem. Through observation, dialogue, and joint practice, there is an exchange of musical idioms and cultural values. Composers from outside the region learn about local tonal systems and rhythms. Traditional musicians become familiar with the concepts of harmony, improvisation, and modern recording.

This encounter gave rise to a new musical hybridity (Homi Bhabha, 1994), neither purely traditional nor modern, but rather a lively and dynamic blend. In the context of Lake Toba, the resulting works demonstrate how the local environment and culture have become catalysts for the creation of a cross-border practice that enriches the intangible cultural heritage itself.

CONCLUSION

This music festival featuring young Indonesian musicians has become a space for learning and cross-cultural exploration, bringing together the traditional music of North Sumatra with the creativity of composers from across the region. Through the process of composition and audiovisual production, this festival has succeeded in showcasing the richness and diversity of traditional Indonesian music in a new, fresher, and more experimental context. Musically, the works of composers with a North Sumatran cultural background display strong characteristics from the four main traditions in the Lake Toba region (Toba, Karo, Simalungun, and Pakpak). Traditional instruments are the primary identity, while modern instruments such as electric guitars, drums, and keyboards are used only as complementary sounds. In contrast, composers from outside North Sumatra adopt an interpretive approach, engaging with Toba's rhythms, tones, and instruments more conceptually, thereby signaling a dialogue between local traditions and outside perspectives.

From a visual perspective, all works place the Lake Toba region at the center of aesthetic exploration. Water is a dominant symbolic and narrative element, appearing as lakes, rivers, waterfalls, and ritual water, depicting the vital function of water in the lives and spirituality of the local community. The resulting visualizations not only showcase the beauty of the natural landscape but also emphasize the ecological and cultural connections between humans, nature, and tradition. Overall, the festival successfully presented a synthesis of tradition and innovation, strengthening the understanding of North Sumatran musical identity while opening up space for creative intercultural dialogue within the contemporary Indonesian music ecosystem. The natural environment of Lake Toba and the culture of the surrounding community have a multidimensional influence on the composer's work:

1. Ecological influences through landscapes, natural sounds, lakes, and the rhythms of life form textural and thematic inspiration.
2. Cultural influences, through ritual values, spiritual symbols, and local identity, give the composition narrative direction and ethnographic meaning.
3. Social influences through collaboration with local musicians encourage cross-cultural dialogue and create new hybrid forms of music.
4. The influence of digitalization through the use of recording and video media expands the space for representing WBTb and strengthens Indonesia's cultural diplomacy.

Festivals such as the Lake Toba Traditional Music Festival play a role that goes far beyond mere entertainment or performance. They serve as cultural laboratories, experimental spaces where various disciplines and artistic practices interact to create new knowledge about culture. In this context, festivals become places of living research, bringing together artists, composers, researchers, and local communities in a collaborative creative process. From an artistic perspective, this festival presents a creative process that relies not only on musical skills but also on an understanding of the symbols, meanings, and structures of traditional music. Composers are invited to reinterpret local idioms with a contemporary approach, producing works that bridge the past and the present. Ethnographically, this festival places social interaction between modern artists and indigenous communities as an integral part of creation. Through fieldwork, interviews, and musical collaboration, participants do not simply "take" inspiration but build reciprocal relationships that enrich cross-cultural understanding. It makes the festival a form of participation-based revitalization, where local communities become active subjects, not mere objects of research or preservation.

From a cultural ecology perspective, the festival shows how nature, in this case the landscape of Lake Toba, is not only a visual backdrop, but also a source of spiritual and sonic inspiration. The sounds of water, wind, and surrounding life become part of the musical composition, emphasizing that cultural preservation cannot be separated from environmental preservation. Thus, this festival practices eco-cultural aesthetics, which unite ecological awareness with artistic expression. Meanwhile, in the framework of creative diplomacy, this activity serves as a medium for Indonesia's cultural soft power. Through audiovisual documentation, digital publications, and dissemination via global platforms, local cultural heritage is introduced to international audiences. This process shows how tradition can become a universal language, strengthening Indonesia's image as a country with high cultural diversity and creativity. Overall, the Lake Toba Traditional Music Festival demonstrates a progressive and transdisciplinary model of intangible cultural heritage preservation. It not only preserves but also revives this heritage in a new context relevant to the challenges of the times, connecting tradition with technology, local communities with global networks, and spiritual values with ecological awareness. In this way, the festival becomes a space for dialectics between the past and the future, between local identity and global discourse, thereby enriching the arts ecosystem at both the national and international levels.

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