

## Increased Understanding of Indonesian Culture through the International Cultural Festival in Kumamoto Japan

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**ABSTRACT.** *The International Cultural Festival - Indonesia Negeriku, held at the Prefectural University of Kumamoto, Japan, in July 2023, aimed to introduce Indonesia's rich culture to the Japanese community, particularly school students in Kumamoto. The event featured various aspects of Indonesian culture, including traditional dance, music, cuisine, and angklung and batik performances. The festival not only introduced Indonesian culture but also promoted cultural diplomacy in an engaging and interactive manner. Evaluation through observation and interviews with visitors revealed that the activity increased their understanding and appreciation of Indonesia's cultural diversity. The use of digital media to showcase Indonesian flora and fauna further enriched participants' experiences, reinforced Indonesia's positive image in the eyes of the Japanese public, and strengthened relations between nations. By involving active community participation and government support, the festival succeeded in creating a platform for cultural dialogue that enhanced global understanding of Indonesia.*

**Keywords:** *International Cultural Festival, Cultural Diplomacy, International Diplomacy, Cultural Experience*

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization and advancements in information technology have created significant opportunities for cultural exchange among nations (Audi et al., 2022). Such cross-cultural interactions not only broaden perspectives but also strengthen international relations through the understanding and appreciation of each culture's uniqueness (B. E. Saaida, 2023). International cultural festivals serve as one of the most effective platforms for introducing and promoting the diverse cultural heritages of various countries to the global stage (Dychkovskyy & Ivanov, 2020).

Globalization has introduced foreign cultural elements into regions that were previously relatively homogeneous (Kirmayer & Minas, 2023). Consequently, in many parts of the world, young people are increasingly interacting with individuals, information, and products from diverse foreign cultures, both directly and indirectly through various media such as television and the Internet (Sarwatay et al., 2021). As a result, individuals today are progressively developing both local and global identities, fostering a sense of belonging not only to their local nations and communities but also to the broader global society (Ozer & Kamran, 2025).

Market globalization has facilitated companies' access to new markets and resources, but it has also intensified and complicated global competition (Sudirjo, 2023). This condition demands the development of more effective international strategies, including the building and management of cross-cultural relationships (Setti et al., 2022). In this context, cultural diplomacy emerges as a crucial approach for strengthening interactions among nations and promoting national cultural identities on the global stage (Lautenschlager et al., 2024).

Cultural diplomacy is pursued for a variety of purposes, including advancing economic interests, promoting trade, strengthening bilateral relations, and easing tensions during challenging periods (Shehu & Muhammad, 2024). It involves a range of actors such as artists, academics, government officials, and cultural institutions (Rodner et al., 2020). Cultural diplomacy serves as a means for states to maximize their soft power and is characterized by two-way communication, with cultural exchange playing a central role (Cejudo et al., 2024). The concept's boundaries extend beyond national interests, encompassing international cultural relations, cultural exchanges, and international cultural cooperation (Kolokytha, 2022).

Trusted business partnerships and collaborations require organizations to adapt to cultural differences in order to overcome language barriers, divergent beliefs, assumptions, and behavioral norms (Ishchuk & Ishchuk, 2023). In this context, an organization's success in managing cultural differences largely depends on adopting a learning organization approach to developing cross-cultural competencies at both the individual and organizational levels (Hobbs et al., 2023).

The digitization of political culture has enabled the younger generation to participate more actively and contribute to Indonesian politics (Saud et al., 2020). Indonesian millennials and Generation Z possess political perceptions that are heavily influenced by social media.

Social media facilitates easy access to political information and encourages interaction with diverse views and opinions (Hutajulu et al., 2024).

The rise of social media has redefined the environment of cultural and identity formation (Judijanto & Al-Amin, 2024). Although engagement on social media is primarily quantitative, it has qualitative implications that actively contribute to reshaping global perspectives and self-perceptions (Purnama & Asdlori, 2023). Moreover, social media has become a crucial medium for communication, fostering friendships and maintaining societal norms (Novales et al., 2025).

North Sumatra State Islamic University (UINSU) views the festival as a valuable opportunity to introduce Indonesian culture to the younger generation in Japan. The Indonesian booth organized by North Sumatra State Islamic University's at the festival will showcase various aspects of Indonesian culture, including traditional food, dance, music, clothing, as well as Indonesian flora and fauna. This initiative allows students in Kumamoto Prefecture to experience and appreciate the richness of Indonesian culture firsthand.

In a broader context, this activity is part of North Sumatra State Islamic University's efforts to support Indonesia's cultural diplomacy. By introducing Indonesian culture on the international stage, North Sumatra State Islamic University contributes to strengthening Indonesia's positive image in the eyes of the world and promoting the values of unity in diversity. This initiative aligns with the vision and mission of North Sumatra State Islamic University to become an institution that fosters national character development, respects diversity, and upholds the values of peace and tolerance.

## **METHOD**

This community service activity is conducted using a community-based participation approach, aimed at introducing Indonesian culture to Japanese students and the public through the organization of the International Cultural Festival - Indonesia Negeriku. The festival took place in Prefectural University of Kumamoto, Japan, in July 2023, with the primary target audience being school students from Kumamoto Prefecture and the general public. During this event, students and lecturers collaborated with local educational institution partners in Japan to organize various Indonesian cultural attractions, such as angklung music performances, traditional dances, batik-making demonstrations, and introductions to Indonesian culinary specialties. Digital media, including interactive videos, posters, and music shows, were also utilized to enhance participants' understanding of Indonesian culture.

The evaluation method for this activity was descriptive, utilizing participatory observation conducted by the implementation team during the festival. Additionally, brief interviews with festival visitors were conducted to gain deeper insights into their understanding and impressions of the Indonesian culture presented. A short questionnaire with a Likert scale was also employed to assess participants' enthusiasm and their appreciation of the cultural information shared. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis for the interview responses and tabulation for the questionnaire results, which were subsequently presented in percentage form to illustrate the activity's impact on participants' understanding of Indonesian culture.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The International Cultural Festival, held on July 29, 2023, at Kumamoto Prefectural University, successfully achieved its main goal of introducing Indonesian culture to elementary, junior high, and high school students in Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. The participation of Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU) in this festival received an enthusiastic response from over 100 participants. During the event, the Indonesian cultural booth showcased various cultural elements, such as traditional dances, music, clothing, Indonesian flora and fauna, and culinary specialties. Interactive and participatory activities, including cultural introduction sessions, quizzes, traditional games, and angklung playing simulations, allowed participants to engage directly with Indonesian culture. These activities not only provided an enjoyable learning experience but also strengthened the relationship between Indonesia and Japan.



Figure 1 Directing Japanese students on how to wear a traditional Balinese hat



Figure 2 Directing Japanese students to recognize Javanese customs

Overall, the event successfully promoted Indonesian culture and highlighted cultural diversity as a unifying force in the era of globalization. The students not only observed or heard about Indonesian culture but also experienced it firsthand through interactive activities. By introducing traditional foods, such as tempeh and crackers, and demonstrating

traditional Indonesian music, participants gained a deeper understanding of Indonesia's rich culture. Additionally, the use of technology, including interactive videos and presentations on Indonesia's unique flora and fauna, added an educational dimension to the event. This not only enhanced participants' knowledge but also reinforced Indonesia's positive image in the eyes of the Japanese public. The event broadened participants' perspectives on the importance of cultural diversity and its role in fostering unity and international cooperation.

Through the direct interactions that took place during the festival, both organizers and participants gained new insights into the significance of respecting and learning from other cultures. The festival successfully conveyed the message of unity in diversity to the younger generation in Japan. By introducing Indonesian culture, UINSU participated in cultural diplomacy, strengthening bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan, while promoting understanding and appreciation of the diversity of world cultures. It is hoped that activities like this will continue to positively impact the creation of closer and more respectful relations between nations.

Overall, the results of this activity demonstrate that international cultural festivals can be a highly effective means of introducing and promoting a country's rich culture. Not only did the festival provide participants with new insights into Indonesian culture, but it also showcased great potential for strengthening international relations through cultural diplomacy. One of the festival's main successes was the direct interaction between Japanese students and Indonesian representatives, which allowed them to experience firsthand the uniqueness of Indonesian culture, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation.

The interactive activities offered at the festival, such as traditional games, cultural quizzes, and angklung-playing simulations, also proved effective in deepening participants' understanding of Indonesian culture. This indicates that by using engaging and participatory methods, cultural understanding can be more easily embraced by the younger generation. Through activities like these, students can learn that cultural diversity is not a barrier, but rather a strength that can enhance relations between nations, in line with Indonesia's motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

International cultural festivals play a crucial role in Indonesia's public diplomacy. In addition to introducing Indonesian culture to the international community, these festivals help strengthen national identity, promote the values of Pancasila, and enhance diplomatic relations with other countries. Through the cross-cultural interactions that occur during



the festival, it serves as a platform for intercultural dialogue, showcasing Indonesia's cultural diversity and promoting tolerance and understanding between nations (Firdaus et al., 2024).

In line with the findings from the service, the Jember Fashion Carnival (JFC) has become a cultural phenomenon that has significantly influenced the image of Jember City. Once known for its conservative character, Jember is now a global fashion carnival destination. The festival not only creates a spectacular cultural event but also fosters economic empowerment through a thriving tourism sector and related industries. This finding aligns with the activities of the International Cultural Festival held in Kumamoto, which also successfully introduced Indonesian culture to the Japanese public and strengthened relations between nations through interactive cultural exchanges (Ali et al., 2023).

This finding is particularly relevant to international cultural festivals, as it demonstrates how events such as Isen Mulang serve as platforms for cultural diplomacy. These festivals not only promote the richness of local culture but also introduce Indonesian cultural values to the international community. This aligns with the objectives of the International Cultural Festival - Indonesia Negeriku, which also aims to introduce Indonesian culture through various interactive cultural attractions while strengthening international relations through cultural exchange (Saputra & Suparta, 2023).

The findings from the Dongdang Cultural Festival in Bogor District are highly relevant to the International Cultural Festival - Indonesia Negeriku, as both aim to introduce Indonesian culture and promote local economic empowerment. Just as the Dongdang Festival successfully revived the arts and tourism sectors, the International Cultural Festival in Kumamoto also enhanced cultural understanding through active community participation. Both festivals demonstrate that the government's role is crucial in cultural diplomacy, strengthening relations between nations and introducing Indonesian cultural values to the international community (Anggini et al., 2022).

Overall, the International Cultural Festival - Indonesia Negeriku has proven to be an effective platform for introducing Indonesia's rich culture, strengthening relations between nations, and promoting local economic empowerment through the tourism and creative economy sectors. The festival also demonstrated that cultural diplomacy can be successfully implemented through active community participation and government support, resulting in positive social and economic impacts (Ocón, 2021). This success serves as a clear example that cultural festivals, in addition to being

tools for cultural preservation, can also play a significant role in enhancing Indonesia's positive image on the global stage, while fostering stronger relations between nations in the face of globalization.

## CONCLUSION

The International Cultural Festival - Indonesia Negeriku, held in Kumamoto, Japan, demonstrated that international cultural festivals can be highly effective in introducing Indonesian culture to the world. The event not only enhanced cultural understanding but also strengthened bilateral relations between Indonesia and Japan through direct and interactive cultural exchanges. The success of this festival in attracting the enthusiasm of the Japanese public proves that cultural diplomacy can be effectively carried out through engaging and participatory activities. The festival also successfully promoted Indonesian values, such as Unity in Diversity, and illustrated how culture can strengthen relations between nations. It is hoped that similar activities will continue to enhance Indonesia's positive image globally and foster stronger international relations in the face of globalization's challenges.

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