

The Tabot Festival in Bengkulu Indonesia: Synergy between Culture, Religion, and Socioeconomic Empowerment

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Abstract: This study investigates the Tabot Festival in Bengkulu Indonesia focusing on its cultural, religious and socioeconomic impacts, with the aim of demonstrating how local traditions can both preserve cultural heritage and empower the community economically. The study involves examining the festival's transition from a Shiite religious ceremony commemorating Imam Husein bin Ali's martyrdom, to a broader cultural celebration that attracts significant tourism. Employing a qualitative ethnographic method, data were analyzed through extensive literature reviews. The findings reveal that the festival retains its deep cultural and religious roots, reflecting humanitarian and Islamic values such as courage, sacrifice and justice through its rituals and processions. Despite its evolution into a lively cultural event, the festival continues to uphold significant Islamic traditions and symbols. Economically, the Tabot Festival provides substantial benefits to the local economy, boosting sectors such as hospitality, restaurants and transportation. It also creates a multiplier effect by stimulating the creative economy and generating temporary employment opportunities for vendors, artisans and service providers. The local community's active participation further strengthens social cohesion and economic welfare.

Keywords: tabot festival, culture, religion, economic empowerment

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A. Introduction

The Tabot Festival in Bengkulu, Indonesia has a long history and is rich in cultural and religious values. The festival was first performed in 1685 by Syeh Burhanuddin, also known as Imam Senggolo. He was a figure who spread Islam in Bengkulu and married a local girl, so his descendants are known as the Tabot family. The term "Tabot" comes from the Arabic word "Tabut," which means a wooden box or chest, which in the context of Islamic history refers to the chest containing the Torah. Initially, the festival was a religious ceremony to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husein bin Ali, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, in the Battle of Karbala, Iraq, on the 10th of Muharram 61 Hijriyah (681 AD). Over time, the ceremony evolved into a cultural festival involving various local arts and cultural activities, such as Dhol music attractions, traditional games, and Tabot creative dances (Hidayah, 2023).

The Tabot Festival plays an important role in preserving and maintaining the culture and traditions of the Bengkulu community. Besides commemorating the tragic event in Karbala, it also serves to strengthen the cultural and religious identity of the local community. The government and local communities, such as the Kerukunan Keluarga Tabot (KKT), actively participate in organizing this festival every year to ensure that the tradition is not eroded by modern times. The festival has also become an important moment in the Islamic calendar, especially in welcoming the Islamic New Year on the 1st of Muharram. The processions and rituals performed during it reflect Islamic and humanitarian values, such as respect for martyrs and the spirit of brotherhood (Sapriansa & Prayogi, 2023).

In exploring the Tabot Festival's multifaceted impacts, several previous studies have made valuable insights. Fahimah and Jafar (2020) illustrate how the festival, despite its Shiite origins, has seamlessly woven itself into the predominantly Sunni community, creating a fascinating blend of cultural and religious practices. It acts as a beacon for cultural preservation and religious observance, promoting social cohesion and fostering tolerance within the community. Their study, through the sociological lens of Islamic law, underscores the festival's pivotal role in upholding religious values while adapting to local cultural contexts. In addition, Japarudin and Syaputra (2023) emphasize the profound influence of Syekh Burhanuddin and Kadar Ali on the festival in Bengkulu and Pariaman, Indonesia. They note how these traditions, rooted in the commemoration of Imam Husein's martyrdom, have been preserved and adapted over time, reflecting the region's rich cultural and religious heritage. Kurniawan and Jamiah (2023) highlight the festival's effectiveness as a

medium for intercultural da'wah (Islamic preaching), with its rituals and processions fostering Islamic values and promoting cultural understanding among diverse communities. Sapriansa and Prayogi (2023) observe that the meaning of the Tabot tradition in Bengkulu has evolved significantly, transitioning from a Shiite religious ritual to a broader cultural celebration that incorporates local traditions and attracts tourism. This transformation underscores the dynamic nature of cultural practices and the importance of historical analysis in understanding their contemporary significance. Moreover, Sapriansa and Prayogi note that the Tabot tradition has undergone significant changes in meaning and practice, evolving from a Shiite religious ceremony into a major cultural event, emphasizing the interplay between historical events and cultural adaptation. Sativa, Irham, and Wanto (2023) conclude that the Tabot tradition is a pivotal cultural event that facilitates the spread of Islam and promotes cultural interaction, with the festival's integration of Islamic rituals and local customs enhancing religious observance and cultural preservation. In addition, Ferreira and Villares (2023) explore how literary festivals, such as *Escritaria* in Spain, significantly boost tourist activity and contribute to the local economy, stressing the importance of strategic planning and community involvement in maximizing the economic and cultural benefits of such events. Finally, Valentine and Talalu (2022) delve into the ideological and power contestations surrounding the Tabot ritual in Bengkulu, revealing how different community groups interpret and engage with the festival in ways that reflect their beliefs and interests. This highlights the intricate interplay between cultural practices, ideology and power dynamics in shaping the meaning and significance of traditional rituals.

In terms of the research problem, this article investigates the multifaceted impacts of the Tabot Festival in Bengkulu City, focusing on its cultural, religious and economic dimensions. The core research problem addresses how the festival, originally a Shiite religious ceremony, has evolved into a broader cultural celebration that preserves cultural heritage while simultaneously empowering the local community economically. It aims to demonstrate the festival's role in maintaining significant Islamic traditions and values, fostering social cohesion, and stimulating local economic growth through tourism and associated sectors. The study seeks to analyze the festival's transformation and its current significance in terms of cultural preservation, religious observance and economic benefits for the Bengkulu community.

The research aims to identify and analyze the cultural and religious values contained in the Tabot Festival, as well as to explore the humanitarian and Islamic

values reflected in the festival. Additionally, it will assess the economic impact of the Tabot Festival on the Bengkulu community, particularly in the context of empowering the people's economy. The relevance of this topic is very important, considering that the festival is not only part of the cultural heritage of the region that needs to be preserved, but is also a tourist attraction with great potential to boost the local economy. By understanding the values contained in this festival, it is hoped to provide deeper insights into how local traditions and culture can contribute to the social and economic development of the community.

B. Methods

The primary sources for our research on the Tabot Festival in the Bengkulu community are ethnographic studies that focus on qualitative research methodologies; ethnography is such a method, which emphasizes participant observation and immersive engagement with the community being studied. This approach allows researchers to document intricate patterns of social interaction and analyze participants' interpretations of their behaviors within their cultural contexts (Cleland, 2017). In the context of our research, the ethnographic methods will enable us to gather firsthand insights into the cultural, religious and humanitarian values associated with the Tabot Festival, as well as its economic impacts. This immersive approach is essential for understanding the community's identity and pride linked to the festival. With regard to secondary sources, literature reviews from various published materials such as journal articles, previous research reports, and media coverage provide valuable context and background information. These sources can enrich the data analysis by offering insights into existing research on similar cultural festivals and their significance. They can also help identify gaps in the current understanding of the Tabot Festival, guiding our recommendations for local communities and government efforts to preserve and develop the festival (Sutton & Austin, 2015). By combining primary ethnographic data with secondary literature, our research is expected to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the Tabot Festival's multifaceted aspects, ultimately contributing to its preservation as a cultural symbol for the Bengkulu community.

C. Results and Discussion

Cultural and Religious Values in the Tabot Festival

The Tabot Festival in Bengkulu has long and complex historical roots, originating from Shiite traditions to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husein

bin Ali at the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD. The traditions were brought to Bengkulu by Shiite Muslim workers from Madras and Bengali, South India, who were employed by the British in the construction of Fort Marlborough in the early 18th century. The Persian cultural influence is also evident in the ritual elements and symbolism used in this festival, such as the use of the "tabot" or chest, symbolizing the sacred chest in Islamic tradition. The chest was initially used to carry soil from holy places as a symbol of sanctity and reverence. Additionally, the Persian influence is also seen in the use of traditional music and dances that accompany the processions, enhancing the sacredness and beauty of the festival. Over time, it developed from a sacred religious ritual into a more inclusive and festive cultural celebration (Fahimah & Jafar, 2020).

Initially, the Tabot ceremony had a strong religious tone, with various rituals performed to commemorate the tragic events at Karbala. However, as it was conducted in Bengkulu by a predominantly Sunni community, its sacred values began to diminish and move towards a more cultural nature. The festival now not only serves as a religious commemoration, but also to preserve and promote local culture, as well as attracting tourists to Bengkulu (Widanita et al., 2021). This transformation reflects the cultural dynamics in Bengkulu, where religious and cultural elements blend and evolve together. Moreover, the festival provides a platform for the younger generation to learn about and appreciate their cultural heritage, thereby strengthening local identity amidst the currents of globalization (Megayanti & Elcaputera, 2019).

The festival consists of a series of ritual processions lasting ten days, from the 1st to the 10th of Muharram. One of the important stages in these processions is the "Gam," the ritual of taking soil from a place considered sacred, which is then placed in a container called a "Tabot," symbolizing the sacred chest. This ritual reminds the community of the origins of human creation from soil and the importance of purity in daily life. Another significant stage is the "Tabot Tebuang," which is the climax of the entire procession. On the 10th of Muharram, the Tabot, decorated with colorful paper and other ornaments, is paraded to a specific location, usually around the tomb of Imam Senggolo in Karabela, Bengkulu City. There, it is then "discarded" into the sea or river as a symbol of releasing sorrow and paying final respects to Imam Husein bin Ali. The procession is attended by thousands of residents and tourists who come to witness the grandeur and sacredness of the event (Fahimah & Jafar, 2020).

From the above discussion, it can be seen that the Tabot Festival exemplifies the intricate fusion of cultural and religious values, originating from Shiite traditions

commemorating Imam Husein bin Ali's martyrdom. Introduced by Shiite Muslim workers from Madras and Bengali, the festival's Persian influences are evident in its symbolic rituals, such as the "tabot" chest. Over time, this solemn religious ritual has evolved into a vibrant cultural celebration, blending sacred traditions with local customs and attracting tourism. This transformation highlights the festival's role in preserving heritage, fostering social cohesion, and boosting the local economy. The ten-day series of ritual processions, culminating in the "Tabot Tebuang," maintains its spiritual significance, while celebrating communal unity. Ultimately, the festival symbolizes the harmonious integration of cultural and religious values, promoting cultural preservation and economic empowerment.

Preserving Faith Amid Festivity: the Enduring Religious Elements of the Tabot Festival

Despite the Tabot Festival's transformation into a lively cultural celebration, various religious elements are still preserved in the different stages of the procession. One of the strongest is the recitation of prayers and dhikr during the processions, such as reciting Surah Al-Fatihah, Shalawat, Tasbih, and others. These are usually led by religious leaders or community figures who have a deep understanding of the history and significance of the Karbala event. Additionally, the use of religious symbols such as the Tabot, which symbolizes the sacred chest, and the "Mengambik Tanah" procession, which reminds people of their origin from the earth, also reflect deep Islamic values. Although some view that certain rituals may contain elements not entirely aligned with Islamic creed, the essence of these rituals is to remind the community of the importance of religiosity and spiritual values in daily life. Therefore, the festival not only serves to preserve local culture, but also acts as a means to strengthen religious and spiritual values (Syaputra, 2019).

The festival is the result of a long process of acculturation between local culture and foreign cultural influences, particularly from Persia and India. Initially, the tradition was introduced by Shiite Muslim workers from Madras and Bengali who worked for the British in the 18th century. They introduced the Tabot ritual as a commemoration of Imam Husein's martyrdom at Karbala. Over time, this tradition was assimilated with the predominantly Sunni local culture of Bengkulu, undergoing various adjustments and modifications. For instance, local elements such as dhol music and traditional Bengkulu dances were added to the processions, creating a unique festival rich in local cultural values. This acculturation not only enriches Bengkulu's culture, but also demonstrates how culture can develop and adapt to different social environments (Juniarti & Aman, 2020).

The Kerukunan Keluarga Tabot (KKT) plays a crucial role in preserving and maintaining the Tabot Festival tradition in Bengkulu. It is a community consisting of direct descendants of Syeh Burhanuddin, who first introduced the Tabot ritual in Bengkulu in 1685 (Japarudin & Syaputra, 2023). They are responsible for ensuring that the Tabot processions and rituals are conducted according to the traditions passed down through generations. KKT also organizes various activities during the festival, including training for the younger generation in understanding and correctly performing the Tabot rituals (Valentine & Talalu, 2022). Additionally, KKT collaborates with the government and other parties to promote the festival as a cultural and religious tourist attraction in the city, ensuring that the tradition not only remains alive, but also becomes more widely known. KKT's role is vital in maintaining the authenticity and continuity of the Tabot Festival amidst modernization and globalization pressures (Sativa et al., 2023).

Humanitarian and Islamic Values in the Tabot Festival

The Tabot Festival embodies various humanitarian values, conveyed through its processions and symbols. One prominent humanitarian value is the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity, which is reflected in the active participation of the community in every stage of the processions. Processions such as "*Gam*" and "*Tabot Tebuang*" involve many people from diverse backgrounds, working together to ensure the smooth running of the event. This fosters a sense of togetherness and strengthens social bonds among the residents. Additionally, symbols such as the Tabot, adorned with colorful paper and other ornaments, represent the beauty and creativity of the community, while also reminding them of the importance of preserving cultural heritage and traditions (Juniarti & Aman, 2020).

The festival also deeply reflects Islamic values, especially in the context of commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husein bin Ali at Karbala. Islamic values such as courage, sacrifice and justice are mirrored in the processions and rituals performed during the festival (Suradi & Surahman, 2020). Imam Husein is regarded as a symbol of resistance against tyranny and injustice, making the festival an occasion to reflect on these values in everyday life. Furthermore, the recitation of prayers and dhikr during the processions underscores strong spiritual and religious values, reminding the community of the importance of religiosity in their lives (Sativa et al., 2023). Although some may argue that certain rituals contain elements that are not entirely in line with Islamic creed, the essence of these is to awaken the community to the significance of spiritual and moral values in daily life (Sapriansa & Prayogi, 2023). Therefore, the Tabot Festival not only serves as an event to preserve

local culture, but also to strengthen Islamic and humanitarian values among the people of Bengkulu.

The festival has a close relationship with the Islamic New Year celebrations, which begin on the 1st of Muharram and last until the 10th of Muharram. It is part of the annual tradition observed by the people of Bengkulu to welcome the Islamic New Year and commemorate the tragic event in Karbala, where Imam Husein bin Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad SAW, was martyred in battle (Chin et al., 2023). The Tabot procession starts with the ritual "Mengambik Tanah" before the 1st of Muharram and concludes with "Tabot Tebuang" on the 10th of Muharram, symbolizing the sweeping away of evil and arrogance. The festival not only serves as a religious commemoration, but has also evolved into a lively cultural festival, attracting tourists and strengthening the local cultural identity (Japarudin & Syaputra, 2023).

The celebration of the Tabot Festival holds deep spiritual and religious significance for the people of Bengkulu. Spiritually, it teaches the values of courage, sacrifice and justice exemplified by Imam Husein in the Karbala incident (Kurniawan & Jamiah, 2023). These values are reflected in the processions and rituals performed, such as the recitation of prayers and dhikr, which remind the community of the importance of religiosity and moral values in daily life.

In this regard, the festival is a vibrant and significant event that embodies both humanitarian and Islamic values, (Siagian et al., 2019). It not only serves as a cultural celebration, but also as a platform for fostering community spirit, solidarity and remembrance of important religious figures and events. One of the most prominent humanitarian values reflected in the festival is the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity among the community members. The processions, such as "*Gam*" and "*Tabot Tebuang*," involve the active participation of people from diverse backgrounds, illustrating a collective effort to ensure the smooth running of the event. This gathering fosters a sense of togetherness and strengthens social bonds among residents, promoting unity in diversity. The Qur'an emphasizes the importance of community and brotherhood in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:10): "*The believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers.*" This verse underscores the essence of unity, which is exemplified in the collaborative spirit seen during the Tabot Festival.

On the other hand, the festival also resonates deeply with Islamic values, particularly through its commemoration of Imam Husein bin Ali's martyrdom at Karbala. Imam Husein is revered as a symbol of courage, sacrifice and resistance

against tyranny, qualities that are essential in Islamic teachings. As articulated in the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), *"The best of people are those who are most beneficial to others."* (Sahih al-Bukhari). This sentiment reflects the underlying philosophy of the festival, as it encourages attendees to embody the values of justice and moral integrity in their daily lives.

Moreover, the recitation of prayers and dhikr during the processions further highlights the strong spiritual and religious values associated with the festival. Such practices serve to remind participants of their faith and the importance of maintaining a connection with Allah. The Qur'an states in Surah Al-Baqarah (2:152), *"So remember Me; I will remember you,"* emphasizing the significance of remembrance in Islamic practice. While some Ulema may argue that certain rituals associated with the Tabot Festival do not align strictly with Islamic creed, it is essential to recognize that they serve a greater purpose. They awaken the community to the significance of spiritual and moral values, fostering a deeper understanding of their faith. This aligns with the concept of cultural preservation, as noted by Juniarti and Aman (2020), who argue that the symbols used, such as the brightly adorned Tabot, represent not only creativity, but also a commitment to preserving cultural heritage (Juniarti & Aman, 2020). As explained by Suradi and Surahman (2020), the festival serves as a reminder of the values of sacrifice and justice that Imam Husein represents. This reflection promotes a culture of resistance against injustice and a commitment to ethical conduct, which are integral to Islamic teachings (Suradi & Surahman, 2020).

Nowadays, the festival is a multifaceted event that embodies both humanitarian values and Islamic principles. Ulema in Indonesia view the festival as an opportunity for community building ; a celebration of cultural heritage ; and a means of spiritual awakening. By embracing the values of solidarity, courage and justice, the festival not only commemorates historical events, but also reinforces the moral fabric of the community, making it a vital aspect of both local culture and Islamic faith. The essence of the festival lies in its ability to unite people, inspire reflection, and promote a shared commitment to humanitarian values rooted in Islamic teachings.

Economic Empowerment of the People through the Tabot Festival

The Tabot Festival in Bengkulu has become one of the main attractions for both domestic and international tourists. Every year, the festival draws thousands of visitors who come to witness the ritual processions and various cultural activities held over ten days. This increase in tourist visits has had a significantly positive impact on the local economy (Pereira et al., 2021). During the festival, the hospitality,

restaurant and transportation sectors experience a marked increase in demand, which in turn boosts the income of local businesses. Additionally, street vendors and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) also benefit economically from selling food, beverages and handicrafts to visitors (Pereira et al., 2021).

The economic impact of the festival on the local community can be understood by examining various aspects of cultural festivals and their broader implications. The Tabot Festival, originally a religious ritual, has evolved into a cultural event that is now a significant part of Bengkulu's heritage, attracting both local and international visitors (Ridwan, 2016). This transformation from a religious to a cultural festival has in all likelihood contributed to its economic impact by attracting more tourists, which in turn boosts local businesses and services. Like the TiKanLu Festival in the Philippines, which has provided economic benefits to local entrepreneurs by enabling them to make a decent living and support their families (Padiwan et al., 2024), the Tabot Festival offers similar opportunities for local vendors and artisans. However, the economic impact of festivals can vary significantly. For instance, the Prambanan Jazz Festival in Central Java, Indonesia did not significantly affect the local economy due to the lack of supportive programs from event organizers (Handyastuti et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of strategic planning and community involvement in maximizing economic benefits.

Additionally, the accurate measurement of economic impact is crucial, as studies have shown that direct expenditure analysis can sometimes overestimate the actual economic benefits by up to three times (Pereira et al., 2021). Therefore, a comprehensive approach that includes both immediate economic impacts and long-term legacies is essential. Festivals can enhance the image of the host community, making it a more appealing destination and fostering social cohesion, which can have lasting economic benefits (Ferreira & Villares, 2023). In summary, while the Tabot Festival provides economic benefits to the local community through increased tourism and business opportunities, the extent of its impact depends on effective planning, accurate measurement, and the creation of supporting programs to ensure sustained economic growth.

The Tabot Festival not only has a direct impact on the tourism sector, but also creates a broad multiplier effect on the creative economy and other sectors. During the festival, various activities such as night markets, craft exhibitions, and cultural performances are held, all of which contribute to increased economic activity in Bengkulu. These activities provide opportunities for creative economy players to market their products and increase their income. Furthermore, the festival also encourages the creation of new jobs, both directly in the event organization, and

indirectly through increased demand for goods and services. The government and local communities work together to ensure that the festival is not only a cultural event, but also a means of improving the economic welfare of the Bengkulu community (Sativa et al., 2023).

The people's market and craft exhibitions held during the festival and other tourism activities play a crucial role in supporting the economy of the Bengkulu community. The market provides a platform for local vendors to sell various products, ranging from traditional food and beverages to handicrafts and souvenirs. Its presence not only boosts the vendors' income, but also introduces local products to tourists coming from various regions (Ferreira & Villares, 2023). On the other hand, the craft exhibition showcases artworks and handicrafts created by local artisans, offering them the opportunity to display and sell their creations, as well as to expand their marketing network. Therefore, the people's market and craft exhibitions significantly contribute to driving the local economy and improving community welfare.

Local Community Participation in Economic Activities During the Festival

Local community participation in economic activities during the Tabot Festival is remarkably high. Residents engage in various aspects of the festival's organization, from preparation to execution. Many open temporary businesses such as food stalls, souvenir kiosks, and traditional game stands to capitalize on the surge in visitors. For instance, a local food vendor, Ibu Siti, reported that her earnings could triple during the festival compared to regular days. "This festival truly helps small traders like us to earn extra income," she remarked (Hidayah, 2023). Additionally, the festival generates temporary employment opportunities, such as tour guides, security personnel, and cleaning staff. Bapak Ahmad, a tour guide, explained that he gained numerous clients eager to learn about the Tabot's history and culture during the festival. "It's a great opportunity for us to share knowledge while earning an income," he said (Padiwan et al., 2024). Active local participation not only boosts income, but also strengthens the sense of community and cooperation. Local youth groups often collaborate to set up traditional game stands and organize entertainment events. "We feel closer to each other and proud to contribute to this festival," said Rudi, a youth community member (Rudi, 2024). Therefore, the festival serves not only as a cultural celebration, but also as an effective means of economic empowerment for the Bengkulu community (Juniarti & Aman, 2020).

The festival's impact on the local economy is multifaceted, reflecting the diverse ways in which the community engages with and benefits from the event. Over its ten-day span, Bengkulu is transformed into a bustling hub, drawing thousands of visitors from both within Indonesia and abroad. This surge in tourism brings a significant boost to local businesses, particularly those in the hospitality, food and retail sectors (Fahimah & Jafar, 2020). Temporary businesses thrive as local entrepreneurs set up food stalls, souvenir kiosks and game stands, significantly increasing their incomes during the event. For example, Ibu Siti, a food vendor, experiences a threefold increase in earnings, demonstrating the festival's economic impact on small traders (Hidayah, 2023). In addition to benefiting vendors, the festival creates numerous temporary job opportunities. Roles such as tour guides, security personnel and cleaning staff are in high demand. Bapak Ahmad, a tour guide, highlights how the festival period is lucrative for him, with many tourists interested in learning about the Tabot tradition. This influx of tourists and the resulting demand for services provide a substantial economic boost to the local workforce (Padiwan et al., 2024). Youth engagement is another critical aspect of the festival. Local youth groups collaborate in setting up traditional game stands and organize entertainment events, fostering a sense of community and cooperation. Rudi, a youth community member, expressed pride in contributing to the festival, underscoring the event's role in fostering community spirit (Juniarti & Aman, 2020).

The economic impact of the Tabot Festival extends beyond immediate financial gains. The influx of tourists stimulates various sectors such as hospitality, transportation and retail, creating a ripple effect that benefits the broader local economy. Hotels, restaurants and transport services experience increased demand, translating into higher revenues and more job opportunities. This multiplier effect underscores the festival's role in driving economic growth and improving the overall economic welfare of the Bengkulu community (Sapriansa & Prayogi, 2023)

The festival's blend of cultural celebration and economic opportunity highlights the dynamic interplay between cultural preservation and economic development. By maintaining traditional practices while embracing modern economic opportunities, the festival ensures the continuity of Bengkulu's rich cultural heritage. The active involvement of the community in organizing and participating in the festival fosters a sense of ownership and pride, ensuring that this cultural legacy is preserved for future generations (Fahimah & Jafar, 2020). Effective collaboration between the government and local communities is also crucial to the festival's success in driving economic empowerment. Organizations such as the Kerukunan Keluarga Tabot (KKT) play a vital role in preserving the festival's authenticity and

promoting it as a cultural and religious tourist attraction. By working together, the government and community ensure that the festival remains a vibrant and significant event, contributing to the social and economic resilience of Bengkulu (Japarudin & Syaputra, 2023).

Moreover, the festival serves as a powerful example of how cultural events can drive economic empowerment and community development. The festival's ability to generate substantial economic benefits while preserving cultural heritage underscores its significance for the Bengkulu community. By providing a platform for local businesses, creating job opportunities, and fostering community spirit, the Tabot Festival not only celebrates Bengkulu's rich cultural traditions, but also contributes to its economic vitality. This synergy between culture and economy ensures that the festival will remain a cherished and sustainable tradition for future generations.

D. Conclusion

The Tabot Festival in Bengkulu City is a profound example of the synergy between culture, religion and economic empowerment. With its deep historical roots and rich cultural and religious values, it serves not only as a commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husein bin Ali, but also as a vibrant cultural event that attracts thousands of visitors each year. This influx of tourists significantly boosts the local economy, creating opportunities for small vendors, artisans and various service sectors.

Indonesian Ulema view the Tabot Festival as a meaningful instance of cultural adaptation, merging Shiite Islamic traditions with local customs in a predominantly Sunni community. This integration embodies the concept of Islamic cultural heritage, which promotes the blending of local heritage with Islamic practices. The festival's active community participation, ranging from organizing rituals to setting up temporary businesses, highlights its role in fostering social cohesion and cooperation. Ulema recognize this involvement as being in alignment with the Islamic values of brotherhood and mutual support, as emphasized in the Qur'an and Hadith. While some Ulema may have concerns about specific rituals, they generally appreciate the festival for enhancing spiritual awareness and moral values. Ultimately, the Tabot Festival exemplifies how cultural heritage and religious practices can coexist, reinforcing unity and shared identity within the community.

Moreover, the economic benefits derived from the festival extend beyond immediate financial gains. It creates multiplier effect, stimulating the creative

economy and generating temporary employment opportunities. This not only enhances the economic welfare of the Bengkulu community, but also strengthens their cultural identity and pride. The Tabot Festival stands as a testament to how local traditions can play a crucial role in cultural preservation and economic development. By maintaining its religious and cultural essence while embracing modern economic opportunities, the festival continues to be a significant symbol of pride and identity for the people of Bengkulu. The collaborative efforts of the government, local communities, and organizations such as the KKT ensure that this vibrant tradition is preserved for future generations, contributing to the social and economic resilience of Bengkulu.

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