



Reinterpreting the Sasi Tradition: Generational Shifts in Meaning Among Maluku's Gen Z

George Netaniel Kuahaty

Department of Culture Studies, Faculty of Cultural Science,
University of Indonesia, Depok 16411, Indonesia

Abstract

This study explores the reinterpretation of Sasi within current generational context, analyzing how younger Maluku inhabitants perceive and engage with the tradition amidst the transformative forces of modernity. Using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews with Gen Z representatives, community leaders, and cultural experts, this research examines how Sasi's ecological, social, and spiritual dimensions resonate with contemporary lifestyles. Findings reveal a generational divergence in meaning: while older custodians emphasize its sacred and communal values, Gen Z often views Sasi as a symbolic relic, disconnected from their urban-centric and technology-driven realities. Leveraging digital media and educational frameworks to integrate Sasi with modern sustainability narratives can bridge generational divides. By aligning traditional values with contemporary ecological and social concerns, Sasi can be transformed into a living tradition, relevant to Gen Z and beyond.

Keywords

Cultural Sustainability, Digital Media, Gen Z, Globalization, Sasi Tradition

INTRODUCTION

The Sasi tradition is a form of typical Maluku cultural heritage that has been going on for centuries and reflects local wisdom in managing natural resources. Historically, Sasi functions to preserve ecosystems by regulating the use of marine products, forests, and certain plants. This tradition is based on the collective values of the Maluku people who view nature as an integral part of their lives. In practice, Sasi involves setting a certain time to produce or utilize resources through customary rules that are mutually adhered to. Punishments for violations of Sasi rules are not only social, such as excommunication, but also include traditional sanctions with a spiritual dimension. This shows that Sasi is not only oriented towards ecological ecology but also involves people's belief in harmony between humans, nature, and divine power (Matatula et al., 2024).

Apart from the ecological aspect, Sasi has a significant social function in strengthening community solidarity. Resource management through Sasi is carried out collectively and involves traditional deliberation for decision-making. This process shows the democratic character of traditional Maluku society, where collective decisions are respected as a result of the context. The Sasi tradition also reflects a community-based management pattern that places collective interests above individual interests. This aspect makes an important contribution to building social cohesion in a heterogeneous society, especially in facing the challenges of modernization (Cook et al., 2020).

In a religious context, Sasi is often associated with local beliefs involving respect for ancestors and belief in spiritual forces that maintain the balance of nature. This tradition underwent significant adaptation after the arrival of Christianity and Islam in Maluku. Religious elements in Sasi, such as prayers and rituals, were then adapted to new religious practices. For example, the opening and closing ceremonies of Sasi, which were originally carried out based on animist beliefs, are now carried out involving Christian or Islamic religious leaders. This adaptation not only strengthens the relevance of the Sasi tradition in everyday life but also shows the flexibility of this tradition in facing social and cultural changes (Oloko et al., 2024).

Thus, Sasi is clear evidence of local wisdom that integrates ecological, social, and spiritual dimensions. This tradition not only helps preserve natural resources but is also an important mechanism for building solidarity and collective identity for the Maluku people. In the midst of the challenges of globalization and modernization, preserving Sasi can be a model for sustainable resource management while maintaining local cultural diversity (Oloko et al., 2024).

However, in the modern era, the meaning of the Sasi tradition has experienced a significant shift, especially among Generation Z. This young generation grew up amidst globalization which presents new values through technology, education, and social media. As a result, their understanding of Sasi tends to be different from previous generations. If for the older generation, Sasi is a symbol of adherence to tradition and spirituality, for Gen Z, this tradition may be seen more as a cultural heritage or even an "ancient ritual" that is less relevant to modern lifestyles. This shift can affect the long-term sustainability of Sasi traditions, especially if there are no efforts to bridge values between generations (Saptenno & Timisela, 2024).

This research explores the meaning because traditions such as Sasi not only have a cultural dimension but also have an impact on ecological and social sustainability. Constant & Taylor (2020) in the context of changing times, maintaining this tradition is not only a matter of preserving customs but also maintaining the harmony of local ecosystems that depend on these customary rules. By understanding how Gen Z interprets Sasi, we can identify ways to make it relevant returning this tradition to their lives, for example, through a culture-based educational approach or the use of digital technology to promote Sasi values to the younger generation.

The shift in the meaning of the Sasi tradition among Generation Z Maluku occurred due to various factors that reflect social, cultural, and technological changes. One of the main causes is the influence of globalization which brings new values that are different from local traditions (Fatharini et al., 2024). Gen Z grew up in a digital era that offers unlimited access to various information, global popular culture, and modern trends. This condition causes them to be more exposed to individualistic values and practical lifestyles, which often conflict with the collective and spiritual nature of the Sasi tradition. As a result, many of them view Sasi as a traditional practice that is no longer relevant in everyday life.

In addition, changes in the way of life of the Maluku people, especially in urban areas, have also influenced their relationship with this tradition. Gen Z who live in big cities may not have direct involvement with natural activities such as gardening or fishing, which are at the core of implementing Sasi. This disconnect creates a gap in experience that makes it difficult for them to understand the deep meaning of Sasi as a form of resource management and harmony with nature. When these traditional values are no longer directly related to their daily lives, the meaning of Sasi is reduced to a mere cultural symbol (Glaser et al., 2022).

On the other hand, the lack of efforts to bring Sasi traditions closer to the younger generation through education or adaptation to modern technology is also an important factor. Without a relevant approach, this tradition is vulnerable to losing its appeal to Gen Z. In fact, Sasi has great potential to be integrated with modern values, such as environmental sustainability and social responsibility, which are the main concerns of this generation. By using digital media to creatively introduce the meaning and practice of Sasi, this tradition can be revitalized so that it remains relevant and attractive to Gen Z while ensuring its sustainability in the future (Oloko et al., 2024).

The phenomenon of shifting meaning of the Sasi tradition among Maluku millennials and Gen Z demands collective responsibility to ensure its sustainability in the future. Traditional leaders and community figures (Rohayati et al., 2022) have a central role as guardians of tradition. They are responsible for transmitting authentic Sasi values to the younger generation through traditional education and direct practice in the community. This role is very important because traditional leaders have moral authority and trust in society, so they can ensure that the spiritual and ecological meaning of Sasi is maintained. Additionally, they need to work with local educational institutions to integrate Sasi values into the formal curriculum, making them an integral part of the cultural identity of the younger generation.

The government also has a big responsibility in supporting the sustainability of Sasi through strategic policies and programs. Local governments can protect this tradition by granting Sasi legal status as an intangible cultural heritage, as well as providing funds for research and promotion of local culture. In addition, the government can facilitate the use of technology to document and publish Sasi traditional values digitally, so that it can reach the younger generation who are familiar with social media. This approach not only introduces these traditions to a wider audience but also provides cultural pride to the younger generation.

The younger generation themselves, especially millennials and Gen Z, also hold the key to the sustainability of the Sasi tradition. As inheritors of cultural heritage, they must actively learn and be involved in Sasi practices. By utilizing their creativity and abilities in the field of technology, the younger generation can promote this tradition through social media, creative content, and digital campaigns that are relevant to modern communication styles. This collaboration between traditional leaders, government, and the younger generation will ensure that Sasi remains relevant and sustainable amidst changing times.

The phenomenon of shifting the meaning of the Sasi tradition among millennials and Gen Z in Maluku reflects the big challenge in maintaining the sustainability of local wisdom in the era of globalization. This tradition, which initially functioned as a form of customary and spiritual management of natural resources, is now facing the threat of losing relevance amidst increasingly pragmatic and individualistic modern lifestyles. Traditional leaders have the primary responsibility to ensure the core values of Sasi remain alive by transmitting them through relevant customary practices to the younger generation (Matitaputty, 2023). Without the active involvement of traditional leaders, the original meaning of Sasi can be distorted, becoming only a cultural symbol without deep understanding.

In addition, local governments need to support the preservation of Sasi traditions through policies and official recognition as intangible cultural heritage. According to a report from UNESCO (2003), protecting local wisdom requires state involvement in the form of legislation and funding. The government can facilitate culture-based education programs

that incorporate Sasi values into the formal curriculum in local schools so that the younger generation not only knows but also appreciates the importance of this tradition. This program can be strengthened with digital technology to reach the younger generation who are more connected to online platforms.

What is no less important is that the younger generation themselves must be active in preserving Sasi. As cultural successors, they can utilize technology to promote Sasi through social media and digital campaigns. According to a study by Kohsaka & Rogel (2021), the younger generation who are empowered with information and technology can become agents of change in preserving local culture. Collaboration between traditional leaders, government, and the younger generation is the key to the sustainability of Sasi traditions amidst ever-developing modernity.

In the context of Generation Z, which is known for its digital characteristics and globalization, there is a shift in the meaning of this tradition (Dunas & Vartanov, 2020). This research aims to analyze how Gen Z in Maluku understands and interprets the Sasi tradition, as well as the factors that influence this shift in meaning. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) for 2021, the number of people aged 15-29 years in Maluku reached 35% of the total population, indicating significant potential for studying their perspectives on local traditions (BPS, 2021).

In this research, a qualitative approach will be used to dig deeper into Gen Z's perceptions of the Sasi tradition. This method is important because it can provide deeper insight into the values they hold and how they interact with these traditions. In addition, this method allows researchers to understand the social and cultural context that influences Gen Z's thoughts and actions. A study by Hofmann & Jaeger-Erben (2020) shows that the younger generation tends to adopt and adapt traditions according to the modern values they adhere to, thereby triggering a shift in meaning.

One of the main focuses of this research is to identify the factors that influence the shift in the meaning of the Sasi tradition. These factors may include the influence of social media, education, and interactions with outside cultures. According to a survey conducted by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2022, around 98% of young people in Indonesia actively use social media, which has the potential to influence the way they view and interact with local traditions (APJII, 2022). This research will also explore how Gen Z integrates Sasi traditions into their daily lives.

The literature review in this research will include various relevant literature regarding the Sasi tradition and Generation Z. The Sasi tradition, which is a sustainable natural resource management system, has been researched in an ecological and social context. Sasi not only functions as a resource management rule but also as a symbol of the cultural identity of the Maluku people. However, in the context of Generation Z, the understanding and practice of Sasi may have undergone changes (Talib et al., 2022).

Generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is known for their ability to use technology and social media. According to research by Soselisa et al. (2024), this generation is often referred to as "digital natives" who grew up with very fast access to information. This has implications for the way they understand traditions and cultural values. In this context, it is important to explore how Gen Z Maluku adopts and modifies the Sasi tradition in their daily lives.

Shifts in meaning can also be influenced by external factors, such as globalization and interactions with other cultures. According to research by Solahudin & Fakhrurroji (2019), the younger generation in Indonesia is increasingly exposed to global culture through social media and the internet, which can influence the way they view and interpret local traditions. Therefore, it is important to understand the broader context in explaining the shift in the meaning of the Sasi tradition among Gen Z.

METHODS

Data collection will be carried out through in-depth interviews with respondents who are members of Gen Z in Maluku. Respondents were selected purposively, namely, those who had knowledge and experience related to the Sasi tradition. Apart from that, participatory observation will also be carried out to see directly how Gen Z interacts with this tradition in everyday life. These observations are important to gain deeper context regarding their practice and understanding of Sasi.

Data obtained from interviews and observations will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This method allows researchers to identify the main themes that emerge from the data and understand how these themes are related to each other. Thematic analysis is an effective method for analyzing qualitative data and can provide deep insight into the phenomenon under study.

In this research, researchers will also consider research ethics. All respondents will be given clear information regarding the purpose of the research and their rights as participants. Written consent will be obtained before conducting interviews, and respondents' identities will be kept confidential to protect their privacy. This is important to ensure that research is conducted ethically and respects individual rights.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One example of the practice of the sasi tradition in Maluku is in Hila village, where the community applies sasi rules to protect agricultural products such as nutmeg and cloves. When sasi is implemented, the community agrees not to take the harvest from trees that are in the sasi period. Violations of these rules can result in social sanctions, such as expulsion from the community or fines. This shows that the sasi tradition not only functions as a mechanism for managing natural resources but also as a tool for upholding social justice among members of society.

In Saparua village, people apply sasi to coconut trees. When Sasi was implemented, coconut harvesting was prohibited to give the tree a chance to bear fruit again. Violations of sasi can result in fines or loss of the right to harvest coconuts in the future, showing how justice is upheld in resource management.

The two good practices above are signs that the Sasi tradition harmonizes with society. However, this is not the case with the Gen Z who were interviewed and observed in this research. There are several practical and casuistic reasons why Gen Z in Maluku tend to no longer apply traditional Sasi values in their lives in this digital era. The following are some Gen Z behaviors that move away from the values of local Sasi wisdom in Maluku:

Lifestyle Changes and Urbanization

Gen Z Maluku who live in urban areas, such as Ambon or even outside Maluku, often no longer have direct involvement with activities that are at the core of the Sasi tradition, such as farming or fishing. A more modern and practical urban lifestyle makes them increasingly distant from traditional practices that depend on nature. A concrete example is the behavior of a teenager in Ambon who prefers to buy fish at the supermarket rather than fishing himself, so he does not feel the importance of traditional rules that protect marine resources.

Exposure to Globalization and Popular Culture

Gen Z grew up in an era of globalization that brought popular culture from outside, such as individualistic lifestyles, digital entertainment, and social media trends. This exposure often contradicts the collective and spiritual nature of the Sasi tradition. As a result, Gen Z is more interested in TikTok or Instagram content that displays modern lifestyles rather than participating in traditional activities that require a commitment of time and energy.

Lack of Cultural Education in the Formal System

It is easy to find many schools in Maluku that have not integrated local values such as Sasi into the education curriculum. As a result, Gen Z does not deeply understand the meaning and importance of Sasi in their lives. As a result, a high school student in Ambon may only know Sasi as a traditional story without understanding its role in preserving the ecosystem.

Lack of Efforts to Revitalize Traditions with Modern Technology

The Sasi tradition is often maintained in a traditional format that is difficult for the digital generation to reach. The lack of digital documentation, such as interactive applications or creative videos explaining Sasi, makes this tradition less attractive to Gen Z. For example, the absence of educational game applications or social media platforms that promote Sasi makes this tradition feel outdated for young people.

Intergenerational Gaps in Interpreting Traditions

Traditional leaders or elders often maintain a conservative approach in explaining Sasi, which is less relevant to Gen Z thinking. The younger generation sees Sasi as “old-fashioned” or impractical compared to modern solutions. There is a story that during a traditional meeting, a young man found it difficult to understand the Sasi rules because the explanation given was not adapted to the modern context or did not link it to global issues such as environmental sustainability.

Maluku today has shifted to an individualistic lifestyle adopted by many Maluku Gen Z which openly contradicts the collectivistic values that are at the core of the Sasi tradition. Sasi emphasized the importance of joint decisions and collective responsibility in managing natural resources. However, Gen Z who grew up in the digital era often focus on personal interests, such as building an identity on social media, rather than participating in community activities. Their parents, who still uphold traditional deliberation and cooperation, often feel estranged from the younger generation who prefer to spend time in the virtual world rather than attend traditional meetings or help with community activities, such as planting trees or cleaning the sea.

Sasi teaches the value of patience and respect for natural cycles, such as waiting for the harvest time determined by custom. However, Gen Z often prefers the instant solutions that modern lifestyles provide. They prefer to buy fast food or imported products rather than use natural products regulated by Sasi traditions. For example, a young person may not appreciate customary prohibitions against harvesting fish in a particular area because it is easier to buy fish from the market. This is in contrast to the habits of their parents, who follow traditional rules to ensure the sustainability of natural resources.

Hopes from parties who care about the Sasi Tradition for Gen Z

Responding to the behavior of Gen Z who no longer apply the traditional values that are highly upheld by the people of Maluku, many parties suggest that special attention be given to them by:

Priority on Urbanization and Digital Entertainment

Gen Z in Maluku who live in big cities like Ambon are more likely to prioritize formal education, modern jobs, or digital entertainment, thus moving away from traditional activities such as gardening or fishing which are an integral part of Sasi. Their parents, who still observe traditions such as following harvest restrictions or guarding certain marine areas, often feel disappointed because their children do not understand or even ignore the values they are fighting for. For example, a young person may be more interested in playing online games or creating content for social media than attending a traditional ceremony marking the opening or closing of Sasi. This shift shows a big challenge in maintaining the sustainability of Sasi's values amidst the Gen Z lifestyle which is increasingly influenced by modernity and technology.

The Role of Cultural Education in Schools

One significant effort to reduce the rate of a shift in Gen Z's behavior from traditional Sasi values is through formal education that integrates local wisdom into the curriculum. Schools in Maluku can teach Sasi values in ways that are relevant to the younger generation, for example through local history lessons, environment-based project activities, or visits to Sasi implementation locations. With an interactive and contextual approach, Gen Z can understand the importance of this tradition not only as a cultural heritage but also as a solution to environmental sustainability. Local governments and educational institutions have primary responsibility for designing and implementing these programs.

Revitalization of Traditions through Digital Media

The younger generation who grew up in the digital era can more easily connect with Sasi's values if they are introduced to them through the media they use every day. Traditional leaders and local governments can work with local content creators to create engaging digital campaigns, such as short videos, infographics, or educational games about Sasi traditions. In addition, social media platforms can be used to revive the meaning of Sasi by presenting inspiring stories or documentation of traditional practices that are relevant to global issues, such as environmental sustainability. The younger generation themselves have a responsibility to use their creativity in promoting this tradition to a wider audience.

Collaboration Between Traditional Leaders, Government and Communities

Traditional leaders have a central role in maintaining the spiritual and social values of Sasi, while the government can provide support through policy, funding, and legal recognition of this tradition. In addition, local communities, including religious leaders and community organizations, need to be involved to create an inclusive and sustainable approach. Collaborative programs such as cultural festivals, traditional training for the younger generation, or Sasi-based environmental restoration activities can strengthen the relevance of this tradition amidst changing times. With the cooperation of all parties, the Sasi tradition can continue to live and provide benefits to the people of Maluku, including the younger generation.

Gen Z has great potential to ensure the continuity of Sasi values in the digital era. By learning, integrating traditional values into modern life, using technology for promotion, and becoming agents of change, they can maintain the relevance of Sasi while creating cultural pride among the younger generation.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that this research can contribute to the understanding of how Gen Z in Maluku interprets the Sasi tradition in a modern context. By using a qualitative approach and phenomenological method, it is hoped that the research results can clearly describe the dynamics of the shift in meaning that occurs. Apart from that, this research also has the potential to become a reference for further research regarding interactions between the younger generation and local cultural traditions.

This shift in values shows the need for a new approach to introducing Sasi to Gen Z. This tradition must be contextualized in modern life through education, digital media, and sustainability narratives that are relevant to their lifestyle. Collaboration between traditional leaders, the younger generation and the government is the key to maintaining the sustainability of Sasi in the digital era.

It is hoped that the results of this research will provide in-depth insight into the shift in the meaning of the Sasi tradition among Gen Z Maluku. Initial findings suggest that many members of Gen Z have a more flexible understanding of Sasi traditions, which are not only seen as rules for managing resources but also as part of their cultural identity. For example, several respondents stated that they felt proud to be able to participate in the practice of Sasi, but also wanted innovation in its implementation to adapt to current developments.

Apart from that, the influence of social media also seems significant in shaping Gen Z's view of the Sasi tradition. Many respondents mentioned that they got information about Sasi through social media platforms, which made them more interested in learning about and getting involved in this tradition. However, there are also concerns that the information circulating on social media is not always accurate, and could change the original meaning of the tradition.

The importance of education also emerged as a factor influencing Gen Z's understanding of Sasi. Respondents who have a higher educational background tend to have a more critical and reflective understanding of this tradition. They can relate Sasi values to global issues such as sustainability and environmental preservation. This shows that education can be an effective tool to strengthen the understanding and preservation of local traditions among the younger generation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and concerns above, this research recommends the following:

1. Learn and Recognize Local Cultural Roots

Gen Z needs to actively learn and understand the deep meaning of the Sasi tradition. This can be done through involvement in traditional communities, attending traditional ceremonies, or discussions with traditional leaders and elders. As a generation that is familiar with technology, they can also use the internet to access information about Sasi history, values, and practices. This awareness will help them appreciate the importance of Sasi as a cultural heritage that contributes to natural sustainability and social harmony.

2. Integrate Sasi Values with Modern Life

To be relevant in the digital era, Sasi's values need to be adapted to modern lifestyles. Gen Z can put Sasi's collective values into practice by supporting sustainability initiatives, such as waste management, environmental conservation campaigns, or collaborating on community projects. By understanding that the Sasi tradition also teaches ecological responsibility, they can use it as a basis for supporting relevant global issues, such as climate change and biodiversity conservation.

3. Use Technology to Promote Traditions

As a digital generation, Gen Z has a great opportunity to promote Sasi traditions through social media and creative content. They can create videos, infographics, or podcasts that explain Sasi's values and practices in a way that appeals to their audience. By creating new narratives that connect Sasi with contemporary issues, such as sustainability or social responsibility, Gen Z can strengthen the relevance of this tradition while inspiring other generations to respect local wisdom.

4. Be an Agent of Change in the Local Community

Gen Z has the opportunity to become agents of change by reviving the Sasi tradition in their community. They can lead nature conservation movements, participate in traditional deliberations, or even become cultural ambassadors in schools, campuses, or workplaces. By taking an active role in implementing Sasi values, they not only maintain traditions but also build a strong cultural identity amidst globalization.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

The idea and design of the study were contributed to by author. George N. Kuahaty conducted the data analysis, literature search, wrote the original draft of the manuscript, and final manuscript.

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