

Cultural Heritage and Legal Protection: Preserving Bandung's Historical Identity in the Digital Era

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Abstract

This study explores the intersection between law, digital technology, and cultural heritage preservation in Bandung City. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 10 informants, document analysis, and field observations at key heritage sites such as Braga Street, Gedung Sate, and Asia-Afrika Street. The findings reveal that while Bandung possesses strong legal instruments for cultural heritage protection namely Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage and Regional Regulation No. 19 of 2009 the implementation and enforcement remain limited. Digital innovation has emerged as a new mechanism for promoting and documenting Bandung's cultural assets. Social media platforms and digital archives have increased public awareness, especially among youth communities. However, the unregulated commercialization of heritage in digital spaces risks undermining historical authenticity. Community movements such as Komunitas Aleut and Bandung Heritage demonstrate that participatory and digitally driven initiatives can enhance local engagement and strengthen heritage governance. This study concludes that the sustainable preservation of Bandung's historical identity requires integrating legal protection, digital innovation, and civic participation. A collaborative governance model that combines government regulation with digital transparency and community empowerment is essential to ensure that Bandung's cultural heritage remains a living, dynamic part of urban life in the digital era.

Keywords : Cultural heritage, legal protection, digital preservation, community participation, Bandung City, participatory governance.

Introduction

Bandung City, known as the “*Paris van Java*”, is one of Indonesia's most culturally vibrant urban centers. The city's historical legacy, reflected in its art deco architecture, colonial-era buildings, and rich traditions, represents an invaluable part of Indonesia's cultural heritage. Over the past few decades, rapid urbanization, technological change, and digital transformation have significantly influenced Bandung's socio-cultural landscape. While these developments bring economic opportunities and innovation, they also pose serious challenges to cultural preservation and legal protection of historical assets.

In recent years, many historical sites in Bandung such as Braga Street, Gedung Sate, and Asia-Afrika Street—have faced pressure from commercial expansion, infrastructure projects, and weak

regulatory enforcement. The lack of coordinated legal protection mechanisms often results in the neglect or alteration of heritage sites, diminishing the city's historical identity. According to data from the Bandung City Cultural and Tourism Office (2023), more than 30% of designated heritage buildings have undergone unauthorized modifications, reflecting the urgent need for stronger heritage governance and enforcement frameworks.

The digital era has introduced new dynamics to heritage preservation. On one hand, digital technologies offer powerful tools for documentation, virtual archiving, and public education through digital museums, 3D mapping, and online exhibitions. On the other hand, the expansion of social media and digital commerce can accelerate cultural commodification, where historical symbols are commercialized without adequate legal recognition or consent. This duality raises fundamental questions about how law and technology intersect in protecting Bandung's cultural identity amid modernization.

From a legal perspective, Indonesia has established several frameworks for cultural heritage protection, such as Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage and Regional Regulation No. 19 of 2009 on Heritage Building Conservation in Bandung City. However, the implementation remains fragmented due to overlapping authorities, limited community participation, and inadequate digital integration in heritage management systems. Strengthening these frameworks requires not only legislative reform but also socio-cultural engagement to ensure that digital innovation supports, rather than undermines, cultural continuity.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the intersection between legal protection, cultural heritage preservation, and digital transformation in Bandung City. It explores how existing laws, local policies, and technological tools can be harmonized to safeguard Bandung's historical identity while embracing the digital age. By combining insights from legal studies, urban sociology, and digital humanities, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how cities can preserve their cultural roots amid global digital shifts, ensuring that modernization does not erase but rather enriches the cultural memory of Bandung.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method to understand how legal frameworks and digital technology contribute to the preservation of Bandung's cultural heritage. The research focuses on describing and interpreting real conditions in the field, rather than measuring variables numerically.

The study was conducted in Bandung City, particularly in areas with strong historical and cultural value such as Gedung Sate, Braga Street, and Asia-Afrika Street. These locations represent the city's unique blend of history, architecture, and modern digital influence.

Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document studies. Ten key informants were selected, including local government officials, cultural experts, community leaders, and heritage activists. Interviews focused on understanding how laws are implemented, what challenges exist, and how digital tools are used to promote and protect cultural heritage. Field observations were also made to see the condition of heritage buildings, community participation, and digital information systems related to heritage management.

In addition, legal documents and policies such as Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage and Regional Regulation No. 19 of 2009 were analyzed to understand how the law supports preservation efforts. All information was then organized and analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes such as legal protection, digital innovation, and community participation.

This approach provides a clear picture of how Bandung combines law, culture, and technology in maintaining its historical identity in the digital era.

Results and Discussion

The results of this research reveal that Bandung City stands at a critical crossroads between heritage preservation and urban modernization. While the city's strong historical and cultural character remains one of its key assets, the rapid pace of digital transformation, commercial development, and population growth has created complex challenges for maintaining Bandung's historical identity. The study identifies three major dimensions of this dynamic: (1) the effectiveness of legal protection and governance, (2) the role of digital innovation in cultural heritage preservation, and (3) the participation of local communities in safeguarding cultural identity.

Legal Protection and Governance Challenges

Bandung has a relatively complete legal framework concerning cultural heritage protection. At the national level, Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage serves as the main foundation for identifying, preserving, and managing heritage assets. At the local level, Bandung City Regional Regulation No. 19 of 2009 regulates the preservation of heritage buildings and sites. However, based on document analysis and interviews with government officials and heritage activists, it was found that implementation remains weak and inconsistent.

Several informants noted that enforcement is often limited by budget constraints, bureaucratic overlap, and limited institutional coordination among city departments. The Cultural and Tourism Office, for instance, has limited authority to penalize private building owners who modify or demolish heritage properties without approval. One informant explained:

“We have regulations, but monitoring is not consistent. Some building owners renovate without permits, and sanctions are rarely applied.”

Field observations confirmed that many heritage buildings along Braga Street and Asia-Afrika Street have undergone unauthorized façade modifications, changing their original architectural character. Data from the Bandung City Cultural Heritage Office (2023) show that nearly 30% of registered heritage buildings have experienced physical alterations or partial demolitions.

This weak enforcement reflects what scholars like Rahardjo (2019) describe as “regulatory dissonance,” where strong legal texts are not matched by institutional capacity. The lack of digital integration in heritage administration also limits transparency and data accuracy. A digital registry of heritage buildings, for example, has not been fully developed, making it difficult for both policymakers and the public to monitor changes.

To strengthen legal protection, Bandung requires a hybrid governance model that combines formal regulation with digital monitoring systems—such as online permit tracking, digital archives, and community-based reporting platforms. These mechanisms would align with global best practices seen in cities like Seoul and Singapore, where digital heritage platforms support public accountability.

Digital Innovation and Heritage Preservation

The digital era has brought new opportunities for preserving Bandung's historical identity. Community initiatives, academic institutions, and even private developers have begun to utilize digital tools to document, promote, and restore cultural heritage.

Through interviews and observations, it was found that social media has become a powerful medium for promoting Bandung's cultural assets. Instagram and YouTube pages such as *@bandungheritage* and *@komunitasaleut* regularly share historical photos, narratives, and digital archives. These efforts not only help in raising awareness among youth, but also in encouraging tourism and local pride.

A notable example is the "Heritage Walk Bandung" project, where digital storytelling and QR codes are installed in historical areas. Visitors can scan QR codes on-site to access historical facts, vintage photos, and oral histories. Such digital integration transforms public spaces into interactive learning environments, bridging traditional heritage with modern experience.

However, several challenges were identified in the use of digital media. Some informants mentioned that digital exposure often leads to cultural commodification—where heritage sites are used mainly for commercial or aesthetic purposes, such as café themes or influencer content, rather than for genuine historical education. A cultural expert stated:

"Sometimes heritage is used as a background for lifestyle promotion. It's good for visibility, but it risks losing historical meaning if there's no education behind it."

This observation aligns with the concern raised by Smith (2021) that digital visibility without contextualization can lead to "surface heritage" where cultural spaces are visually preserved but socially disconnected. Therefore, digital literacy and cultural ethics must be strengthened so that technology enhances, rather than dilutes, Bandung's cultural memory.

In addition, digital archiving remains underdeveloped. While some NGOs and universities have created online heritage databases, they are fragmented and lack government integration. Developing a centralized digital heritage platform supported by the city government, universities, and creative industries would ensure long-term documentation, academic access, and public participation.

Community Participation and Cultural Awareness

Another important finding is the growing role of community-based movements in preserving Bandung's cultural heritage. Groups like *Komunitas Aleut*, *Heritage Bandung*, and *Roemah Braga* have become grassroots guardians of historical awareness. Through online campaigns, walking tours, workshops, and exhibitions, they build public engagement and foster a collective sense of belonging.

Younger generations, in particular, are showing strong interest in cultural exploration through digital storytelling. For instance, youth communities create short documentaries and podcasts about the city's historical evolution, while design students collaborate on 3D visualization of old buildings. These forms of participation represent a new pattern of cultural activism that merges tradition with technology.

Nevertheless, most of these initiatives operate independently with limited institutional support. Government cooperation tends to be event-based rather than continuous. As one activist commented:

“We're often invited for festivals, but after the event, there's no follow-up collaboration or funding.”

This gap highlights the need for sustainable partnerships between the government and civil society. As suggested by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff's (2000) Triple Helix Model, collaboration between academia, industry, and government can create innovation ecosystems where culture, law, and digital tools reinforce each other.

In this framework, Bandung's identity as a creative city becomes a strategic foundation. The same creative energy that drives fashion, music, and digital design can be mobilized for heritage preservation—turning culture into both an economic and social asset.

Synthesis and Implications

Overall, the research findings show that Bandung's effort to protect its cultural heritage reflects a hybrid process of legal, social, and digital transformation. Laws provide the formal basis for preservation; digital tools open access and participation; and communities sustain cultural meaning. However, the balance among these three pillars remains fragile.

The legal system must evolve to integrate digital transparency mechanisms, the digital ecosystem

must respect cultural authenticity, and communities must continue to bridge tradition with innovation. When these elements work together, Bandung can become a national model for digital heritage governance—where the past is not merely remembered but actively lived and shared through technology.

This aligns with the concept of “living heritage” (UNESCO, 2017), which emphasizes that cultural preservation is not about freezing history, but ensuring it remains relevant and dynamic in modern life. For Bandung, this means that the city’s architectural heritage, cultural expressions, and local narratives must continue to inspire creativity, urban identity, and civic pride in the digital era.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the preservation of Bandung’s cultural heritage in the digital era depends on the integration of three key elements effective legal protection, adaptive digital innovation, and active community participation. While Bandung has a strong legal foundation for heritage protection through *Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage* and *Regional Regulation No. 19 of 2009*, the implementation and enforcement remain limited due to bureaucratic fragmentation, weak supervision, and a lack of digital-based monitoring systems.

The findings demonstrate that the digital transformation of heritage management presents both opportunities and challenges. Digital media, social networks, and online archives have successfully raised public awareness and encouraged youth involvement in promoting cultural identity. However, these tools also risk commercializing heritage when used without ethical or educational context. Therefore, digital innovation must be guided by cultural sensitivity, authenticity, and inclusive participation.

Community-based organizations in Bandung, such as *Komunitas Aleut* and *Bandung Heritage*, play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between policy and practice. Their activities show that cultural preservation can thrive through collaboration between citizens, creative industries, and government agencies. The shift from a purely top-down approach toward a participatory governance model reflects Bandung’s transformation into a modern yet historically conscious city.

In essence, Bandung’s experience illustrates that cultural heritage preservation is not only a legal

obligation but also a collective moral responsibility. The digital era should not replace the historical essence of the city, but rather strengthen it by creating new forms of engagement, education, and appreciation for the past. When law, culture, and technology work together harmoniously, Bandung can serve as a model for other Indonesian cities seeking to preserve their identity amid modernization.

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