



### AYODYAPALA DANCE STUDIO AS AN AGENT OF CULTURAL EVOLUTION: A NEO-EVOLUTIONARY STUDY OF THE PRESERVATION OF SURAKARTA DANCE IN DEPOK CITY

Febrina Putri Lusdinda<sup>1</sup>, Nursilah<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Negeri Jakarta/Jakarta

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Negeri Jakarta/Jakarta

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>[febrinaputri102@gmail.com](mailto:febrinaputri102@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup>[nursilah@unj.ac.id](mailto:nursilah@unj.ac.id)

#### Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the role of the Ayodyapala Dance Studio as an agent of cultural evolution in the preservation of Surakarta Dance in Depok City through the perspective of Marshall D. Sahlins and Elman R. Service's Neoevolutionism theory. Depok City, as a buffer urban area for Jakarta, represents a meeting place between tradition and modernity that triggers the process of cultural adaptation and transformation. Using a descriptive qualitative approach and case study method, this study examines the dynamics of traditional dance preservation amidst the socio-cultural development of urban society. The results of the study indicate that the Ayodyapala Studio not only functions as a forum for dance education and training, but also as an agent of cultural adaptation that maintains traditional values through innovation in form, function, and performance media. This phenomenon reflects the concept of specific evolution and evolutionary potential in the Neoevolutionism theory, where cultural preservation takes place through a continuous process of adaptation without losing its original identity. Thus, the Ayodyapala Studio plays an important role in maintaining the continuity of the Surakarta Dance tradition while confirming its relevance amidst the current of modernization in big cities.*

**Keywords: Neoevolutionism, Ayodyapala Dance Studio, Surakarta Dance, cultural evolution, art preservation, cultural adaptation.**

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The development of human culture is constantly dynamic, in line with social, economic, and technological changes. In the context of globalization and urbanization, there is a shift in values and lifestyles that directly impact the existence of traditional culture. Urbanization, as a social process, drives people from rural areas to cities, bringing traditional values with it into the complex context of modern life (Yulindrasari & Rachmawati, 2021:36). This phenomenon poses challenges for traditional arts, particularly dance, which faces not only changes in societal aesthetic tastes but also the pressures of commercialization and global cultural homogenization (Soedarsono, 2002:21). In this situation, traditional dance has the potential to lose its symbolic meaning and function as a spiritual and social medium, replaced by mere entertainment. As Heryanto (2018:75) emphasizes, the transformation of popular culture in Indonesia demonstrates a shift in orientation from shared values to expressive individualism, often obscuring traditional roots.

Traditional performing arts possess the adaptive capacity to survive amidst changing times. Forms of cultural preservation are now carried out not only through formal institutions such as higher education, but also through more flexible non-formal institutions, such as dance studios. Dance studios play a crucial role as social spaces that combine the functions of education, preservation, and cultural innovation (Nasution, 2022:68). In urban environments, studios serve not only as places for dance practice but also as arenas for dialogue between tradition and modernity. Pramudita (2020:36) emphasizes that art studios play a strategic role as a forum for artist regeneration and preserve traditional values in a form acceptable to today's society. Therefore, dance studios can be considered socio-cultural agents that contribute to the process of cultural adaptation and evolution.

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Surakarta-style dance is one of the most prominent traditional performing arts in Java. It originated in the palace of the Kasunanan Surakarta and is known for its refinement, orderliness, and the philosophical values inherent in each movement (Haryono, 2016:23). Every movement in Surakarta dance reflects the Javanese perspective on harmony, balance, and spiritual awareness (Sriyadi, 2019:48). However, outside the palace, this dance form must adapt to a different social context. When taught in urban areas such as Depok, a buffer zone for the capital, these traditional values are challenged by a society with a fast-paced lifestyle, a strong economic focus, and limited time for learning the art (Putri, 2020:15). Therefore, efforts to preserve Surakarta-style dance outside Surakarta cannot be separated from strategies for adapting to the new socio-cultural context.

Depok, as a developing city, has unique characteristics because it is located between two large regions, Jakarta and Bogor. This geographical position makes Depok a buffer zone with high rates of population growth and urbanization (Firman, 2019:235). This dynamic creates a pluralistic and cosmopolitan social space, where local traditions intersect with global culture. According to Nugroho (2021:292), buffer zones like Depok are hybrid cultural spaces that bring together diverse social values and practices, producing unique new cultural forms. Traditional artistic practices such as Surakarta dance not only serve as a legacy of the past but also become part of the new identity of urban communities seeking a balance between modernity and traditional roots.

The existence of the Ayodyapala Dance Studio in Depok City is a concrete example of cultural preservation efforts in urban areas. This studio is active in the development, performance, and education of traditional Surakarta-style dance for various age groups. In addition to maintaining the purity of classical dance techniques and values, the Ayodyapala Studio also innovates by adapting performance forms to be accepted in a modern environment. Activities include regular training, participation in arts festivals, and cross-cultural collaborations that expand the space for appreciation of traditional dance. This aligns with the view of Kamila and Sabardilla (2022:119) who stated that art studios have a dual function: as a forum for preserving dance forms and as a medium for establishing social identity in contemporary society. In this context, the Ayodyapala Studio can be seen as a cultural agent that bridges the traditional values of Surakarta with the dynamic life of the Depok community.

The Neoevolutionary Theory proposed by Marshall D. Sahlins and Elman R. Service (1960) provides a relevant analytical framework for scientifically understanding this phenomenon. This theory develops the idea that culture undergoes change through an evolutionary process that can be systematically explained based on the principle of adaptation to the environment. Sahlins distinguishes between *general evolution*, which is the broad direction of universal human cultural development, and *specific evolution*, which is adaptive change within a particular culture in response to local conditions (Sahlins & Service, 1960:14–16). White (1959:23) adds that cultural development is largely determined by human efficiency in utilizing energy and resources to sustain life. Changes in art and culture can be seen as part of the adaptive process to the social, economic, and technological pressures faced by society.

The concept of *the law of evolutionary potential* put forward by Service (1962:41) also explains that every cultural system has an internal capacity to innovate and develop its complexity as the environment changes. This means that culture is not static, but rather has the capacity to adapt to remain relevant. In the context of the Ayodyapala Studio, this theory explains how the values of Surakarta dance are adapted without losing their traditional character. The preservation process carried out by this studio reflects a *specific form of evolution*, where traditional elements are adapted



to the needs of urban society, both in the form of performances, teaching methods, and cultural communication strategies. Thus, the studio functions as *an agent of cultural evolution* that maintains the continuity of tradition while creating cultural innovations that are in line with the demands of the times (Kaplan, 1960:52).

Based on this background, this study is designed to answer two main research questions, namely: (1) how the Ayodyapala Dance Studio plays a role as an agent of cultural evolution in preserving Surakarta dance in Depok City; and (2) how the adaptation and innovation processes that occur within the studio can be explained using Sahlins and Service's Neoevolutionism theory. The purpose of this study is to analyze the forms of preservation, transformation, and adaptation carried out by the Ayodyapala Studio in maintaining the existence of Surakarta dance, and to interpret these dynamics from a cultural evolution perspective. This study is expected to contribute to scientific understanding of how local traditions survive amidst modernization in an adaptive and creative manner.

Theoretically, this study extends the application of Neoevolutionism theory to the field of performing arts, particularly traditional dance. This approach provides a scientific framework for understanding cultural change not as a deviation from tradition, but as an evolutionary process containing the values of adaptation and sustainability (Sahlins & Service, 1960, p. 19). Practically, the results of this study are expected to serve as a reference for arts and cultural education institutions in designing preservation strategies that suit the characteristics of urban communities. This is in line with Kleden's (2017, p. 53) view that cultural revitalization must be carried out through innovative mechanisms that actively involve the community, not merely passive conservation of old forms. Therefore, research on the Ayodyapala Studio in Depok is important not only for documenting arts preservation practices, but also for understanding how traditions can evolve into relevant cultural forces today.

## 2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, because the focus of the research is directed at understanding in depth the role and dynamics of the Ayodyapala Dance Studio as an agent of cultural evolution in the preservation of Surakarta dance in Depok City. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore meanings, values, and social processes that cannot be measured numerically, but rather understood through the interpretations and meanings of cultural actors (Creswell, 2018:4). The case study was chosen because it provides an opportunity to examine phenomena holistically in a real-life context (Yin, 2018:15). The Ayodyapala Dance Studio becomes a single unit of analysis that is intensively researched to identify forms of cultural adaptation that reflect the concept of specific evolution as explained in the Neoevolutionism theory of Sahlins and Service (1960).

The case study approach is contextual, meaning that the phenomena studied are not separated from the social, economic, and cultural environment in which they occur (Stake, 1995:11). Therefore, understanding the studio is not only seen from its artistic activities, but also from social interactions, value systems, and adaptation to the urban environment in Depok. This study does not intend to generalize the results to all dance studios in Indonesia, but rather to interpret in depth how one cultural entity adapts and survives in the context of modern society. Thus, the data collected is focused on the description, interpretation, and meaning of the social and cultural realities within the Ayodyapala Dance Studio.

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The research location was determined at the Ayodyapala Dance Studio, located in Depok City, West Java. This location was chosen purposively, based on the consideration that this studio has consistent activities in teaching and performing Surakarta-style dance in an urban area that serves as a buffer for the capital city of Jakarta. Depok itself is an area experiencing rapid development with a heterogeneous and modern character of society (Firman, 2019:236). This condition makes this studio interesting to study because on the one hand, it adheres to traditional values, while on the other hand, it must adapt to an urban society that has a fast and practical lifestyle. This local context is in line with the concept of *specific evolution* in the theory of Sahlins and Service (1960:18), where culture adapts to environmental pressures and social needs without losing its original characteristics.

The research subjects consisted of studio managers, dance instructors, dancers, and local residents who were directly involved or interacted with studio activities. Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, selecting individuals deemed to have a deep understanding of the studio's activities and values (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014:31). Key informants included the founder or leader of the Ayodyapala Dance Studio who understood the history and philosophy of dance development, dance instructors who were the main drivers of the dance form adaptation process, and dancers who experienced the dynamics of learning and performance in an urban environment. Interviews were also conducted with community members or audience members who frequently attended studio activities to gain an external perspective on the meaning and influence of studio activities in the Depok area.

Data were collected through three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Direct observations were made of training activities, performances, and coaching activities at the Ayodyapala Dance Studio to understand the interaction patterns and values that exist within the community. The observations were moderately participatory, where the researcher was involved in the studio activities but maintained an objective distance to obtain natural data (Spradley, 1980:59). Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to freely explore the informants' perspectives while remaining focused on the theme of cultural adaptation and preservation of traditional dance (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009:34). Documentation was conducted by collecting studio archives such as photographs, brochures, activity notes, and performance recordings that illustrate the transformation of the form and function of Surakarta dance in Depok.

This study also applied content analysis to the studio's documentation and social media. This analysis was used to explore how the studio presents its cultural identity and values through published texts, images, and performance videos. Krippendorff (2018:24) explains that content analysis is useful for understanding the symbolic meanings and messages contained in cultural communication. The use of content analysis complements field data and strengthens understanding of how the studio makes symbolic adaptations to modern values, both artistically and communicatively.

Data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman (1994) analysis model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The data reduction stage was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw data in accordance with the research objectives. The data presentation stage was carried out in the form of narrative descriptions to demonstrate the relationship between the role of the studio, the adaptation process, and Neo-evolutionary theory. The conclusion drawing stage was carried out by interpreting the data based on thematic patterns and theories used. The analysis process was carried out simultaneously from data collection to writing the results, so that interpretations were always reflective and contextual (Miles et al., 2014:72).



This study employed source and method triangulation techniques to ensure data validity. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from studio managers, trainers, and dancers to avoid perceptual bias. Method triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation (Patton, 2015:316). Data reliability was tested through member checking, which involved requesting confirmation from informants regarding the researcher's interpretations to ensure they corresponded to the reality on the ground. Conceptual validity was maintained by ensuring that each emerging thematic category was truly based on empirical data, not the researcher's assumptions.

Research ethics were also an important consideration in the implementation of this study. The researcher first requested official permission from the Ayodyapala Dance Studio management to collect data and explained the research objectives to all informants before conducting the interviews. The personal identities of informants were kept confidential to protect the privacy and comfort of research participants (Creswell, 2018:55). All data collected was used solely for academic purposes and will not be disseminated without the consent of the relevant parties. By implementing good research ethics, it is hoped that the data collection process will run smoothly and produce scientifically accountable findings.

Through this methodological design, the research seeks to comprehensively describe the role of the Ayodyapala Dance Studio in maintaining and developing Surakarta dance traditions in urban areas. The qualitative case study approach allows for in-depth interpretation of the dynamics of cultural preservation, while content analysis enriches understanding of the symbolic dimensions and cultural communication that accompany the transformation of dance in the modern era.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Profile of Ayodyapala Dance Studio: History, Social Function, and Current Activities

The Ayodyapala Dance Studio is a non-formal arts institution that plays an active role in the preservation and development of Surakarta-style traditional dance in the urban area of Depok City, West Java. Established in the early 2000s, the studio was formed on the initiative of a group of artists and dance educators who are concerned about the sustainability of classical dance traditions amidst the currents of modernization. The name *Ayodyapala* is taken from the epic story in *the Ramayana*, which symbolically means "guardian of beauty and virtue." This meaning reflects the studio's vision to maintain the aesthetic and ethical values of traditional arts so that they remain alive and passed on to the younger generation. Since its founding, the studio has not only served as a place for dance practice, but also functions as a social and cultural educational space for the people of Depok and the surrounding area.

The emergence of studios like Ayodyapala cannot be separated from the social and cultural changes in the communities surrounding Jakarta, within the historical context of the development of art in urban areas. According to Firman (2019:234), Depok experienced rapid development as a transitional area between urban and semi-rural life, giving rise to the need for spaces for cultural expression. The Ayodyapala Dance Studio grew out of this need, becoming an alternative platform for people who wanted to learn classical dance without having to pursue formal education at arts institutions such as the Indonesian Institute of the Arts. This pattern aligns with Pramudita's (2020:38) findings that dance studios in large cities act as mediators between cultural preservation and the needs of modern society for flexible aesthetic expression. Thus, the history of the Ayodyapala

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Studio demonstrates the collective awareness of artists in responding to the challenges of modernity by maintaining traditional roots while simultaneously creating space for adaptation to the times.

The social function of the Ayodyapala Dance Studio has evolved from a mere training ground to a broader role as a cultural community. The studio serves as a center for learning, preserving, and exchanging cultural values between generations. The dance learning process at Ayodyapala is open and participatory, with dance teachers acting not only as instructors of technique but also as moral guides and guardians of traditional values. Kamila and Sabardilla (2022:120) explain that the art studio functions as an institution for cultural character formation because it embodies the values of discipline, patience, and respect for teachers and fellow artists. At the Ayodyapala Studio, these values are taught through consistent practice and performance activities that emphasize collective collaboration. This process makes the studio not only a place for the reproduction of dance movements but also an arena for cultural-based character education.

The Ayodyapala dance studio serves as a meeting point for various levels of society. Dancers, coaches, parents, and the surrounding community interact through studio activities such as routine rehearsals, workshops, and public performances. These activities create a social network that strengthens cultural solidarity amidst the individualistic nature of city life. According to Nasution (2022:70), the social function of dance studios in urban areas extends beyond preserving the arts to building social cohesion through community interactions across ages and backgrounds. In Ayodyapala, this interaction is evident in the participation of children, adolescents, and adults in joint activities, demonstrating that the studio serves as a medium for social bonding and the transfer of values between generations.

The Ayodyapala Studio also plays a crucial role in preserving local cultural identity in urban areas. As an increasingly modern buffer city, Depok is experiencing a tendency toward cultural homogenization due to the influence of Jakarta. However, the existence of traditional studios like Ayodyapala symbolizes the resilience of local cultural identity. This aligns with Haryono's (2016:25) view that preserving classical dance outside the palace context is a form of cultural resistance to the currents of globalization that have the potential to erode traditional values. Ayodyapala not only teaches the techniques of Surakarta dance forms but also introduces the accompanying philosophy, such as the values of harmony (*wiraga-wirama-wirasa*), etiquette, and the spirituality of movement. Through systematic learning activities, this studio acts as a cultural agent that strengthens cultural awareness among the urban community of Depok.

The Ayodyapala Dance Studio's current activities include regular coaching, classical and creative dance training, and participation in various arts events at both the local and national levels. Each week, the studio holds practice sessions for various levels from beginner to advanced, involving professional trainers with educational backgrounds in Surakarta-style dance. In addition, the studio actively participates in arts festivals in the Greater Jakarta area and holds annual performances that serve as a forum for evaluating and appreciating students' work. This form of activity aligns with the findings of Kamila and Sabardilla (2022:118) that performance activities at the studio are not merely a means of performance, but also part of the social and cultural learning process. Performances serve as a forum for dancers to understand the aesthetic and philosophical meaning of dance while fostering a sense of responsibility for cultural sustainability.

In the past two decades, the Ayodyapala Studio has also begun utilizing digital media as a means of cultural promotion and education. Through platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, the studio documents its practice and performance activities, thereby reaching a wider



audience. This transformation demonstrates the studio's ability to adapt to technological developments without abandoning the traditional values that are at the core of its activities. According to Krippendorff (2018:22), the ability of culture to adapt to new communication media is a form of symbolic evolution that expands the reach and relevance of traditional culture in a modern context. The Ayodyapala Studio's digital activities reflect this adaptation process, where classical traditions are presented through modern media as a form of local culture's *specific evolution* to the urban and digital environment.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the Ayodyapala Dance Studio has three main dimensions in its profile: historical, social, and functional. Historically, this studio emerged as a response to the challenges of modernity and the need for cultural preservation spaces in urban areas. Socially, the studio functions as a community that builds solidarity, instills cultural values, and strengthens local identity. Functionally, the studio's activities reflect the process of cultural adaptation through innovations in performance forms, learning systems, and the use of technology. All of these dimensions illustrate how the studio acts as an agent of cultural evolution, in line with the concept of Neoevolutionism by Sahllins and Service (1960), namely that culture can survive through a continuous process of adaptation to changes in its social environment.

### 3.2 Forms of preserving Surakarta style dance in studios (training, performances, adaptation)

Preserving traditional dance is not only about maintaining the physical form of the movements, but also about the continuity of the values, functions, and meanings contained within. At the Ayodyapala Dance Studio, the preservation of Surakarta-style dance is carried out through three main interconnected channels: dance development and training, performance and staging activities, and the process of adaptation to modern social and technological contexts. These three forms are concrete manifestations of how the studio carries out its function as an agent of cultural evolution in a constantly changing urban environment.

The first form of preservation carried out by the Ayodyapala Dance Studio is dance coaching and training. This process serves as the main foundation for the transmission of knowledge and skills in Surakarta-style dance from the older generation to the younger generation. Training activities at the studio are conducted regularly with an approach that combines the discipline of classical dance techniques with an understanding of the accompanying philosophical values. Each practice session begins with an introduction to the basic concepts of *wiraga*, *wirama*, and *wirasa*, which are fundamental principles in Javanese dance aesthetics (Haryono, 2016:24). Dance teachers not only teach movement patterns and rhythms but also explain the symbolic meaning behind each movement, such as the value of harmony between body, feeling, and mind. This approach demonstrates that Ayodyapala's preservation is holistic not only maintaining the formal form of movement, but also instilling an awareness of cultural values in the dancers.

Training at the Ayodyapala Studio also reflects an open and participatory non-formal education system. The learning process takes place in a family-like atmosphere, with trainers acting as mentors and guides, not simply instructors. According to Kamila and Sabardilla (2022:119), this coaching pattern is common in many traditional studios because it facilitates the natural transfer of cultural values through intensive social interaction. At Ayodyapala, the training system is divided into several levels, from basic to advanced, tailored to the age and abilities of the participants. In addition to regular practice, the studio also holds intensive classes to prepare dancers for performances. This aligns with Pramudita's (2020:38) view that the successful preservation of

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traditional dance depends heavily on the continuity of the educational process and the regeneration of young dancers through non-formal institutions such as studios.

The second form of preservation is through dance performances and performances, which serve as a means of actualizing the results of development and as a medium for transmitting cultural heritage to the public. The Ayodyapala Dance Studio actively holds annual performances, participates in arts festivals, and performs in regional and national cultural events. These performances serve not only as a venue for art appreciation but also as a means of cultural communication that introduces the values of Surakarta dance to the wider community. Soedarsono (2002:42) explains that traditional dance performances have two main functions: ritual and social, with the social function being more prominent in the modern context as a vehicle for value education and strengthening identity. At Ayodyapala, performances are a concrete manifestation of the studio's social role in broadening the public's understanding of Javanese cultural heritage.

Performances also serve as an evaluation tool for dancers and coaches. Each performance is measured not only by the aesthetics of the movements, but also by the dancers' understanding of the character and message contained within the dance. For example, in the *Gambyong Pareanom dance performance*, dancers are taught to understand the meaning of gentleness and modesty as a representation of the ideal image of Javanese women (Sriyadi, 2019:50). Thus, each performance is not only oriented towards entertainment, but also contains educational and symbolic value. Through activities such as this, Sanggar Ayodyapala uses the performance stage as a medium for preserving cultural values as well as a tool for public education about the beauty and wisdom of classical Surakarta dance.

The third crucial form of preservation is adaptation to social change and modern technology. As an arts institution operating in an urban area, the Ayodyapala Dance Studio must adapt its preservation strategy to the fast-paced, efficient, and pragmatic nature of urban society. This adaptation takes several forms, including simplifying teaching methods to accommodate limited practice time, utilizing digital media for documentation and promotion, and innovating choreography that adheres to Surakarta traditions but adapts to the tastes of modern audiences. This reflects the concept of *specific evolution*, as explained by Sahlins and Service (1960:15), that cultural change is adaptive to the environment without eliminating the basic structure of its traditions.

In the media context, Ayodyapala utilizes digital platforms such as Instagram and YouTube to document rehearsals and performances. Digital media is used not only as a promotional tool but also as a means of educating the wider public about traditional dance. According to Krippendorff (2018:21), the use of digital media in traditional arts is a form of *content adaptation* that expands public access and participation in culture. In this way, the Ayodyapala Studio not only preserves dance in a physical space but also presents it in a broader, more relevant virtual space for the younger generation. This adaptation demonstrates the studio's ability to balance preserving traditional values with implementing technological innovation, a concrete manifestation of *the law of evolutionary potential* proposed by Service (1962:44).

These three forms of preservation—training, performances, and adaptation—demonstrate that the Ayodyapala Dance Studio is not only a guardian of cultural heritage, but also an active actor in the process of social transformation. By applying the principle of balance between conservation and innovation, this studio has succeeded in maintaining the continuity of Surakarta-style dance amidst the modernization of Depok City. Within the framework of Neoevolutionism theory, Ayodyapala's



activities can be understood as a form of *culturally specific evolution*, in which traditional values adapt to new conditions without losing their fundamental character. Thus, the preservation carried out is not merely resisting change, but rather directing change so that it remains in favor of the sustainability of local traditions and cultural identity.

### **3.3 Dynamics of adaptation and transformation: changes in function, form, performance media in the urban context of Depok**

Cultural life in urban areas such as Depok displays complex dynamics, where tradition and modernity interact in a constantly changing social space. As a satellite city of Jakarta, Depok experiences rapid economic and population growth, which encourages the formation of a heterogeneous society with a life orientation that tends to be pragmatic and efficient (Firman, 2019:236). In this context, the form and function of traditional arts must adapt to new social realities without losing their core values. This is in line with the view of Sahlins and Service (1960:14) in the theory of Neoevolutionism that cultural change is the result of a process of adaptation to the environment, where each society seeks to utilize its evolutionary potential to survive and thrive. The Ayodyapala Dance Studio is a concrete example of how this adaptation is realized through the transformation of the function, form, and media of Surakarta-style dance performances in the urban environment of Depok.

The first dynamic of adaptation is seen in the changing function of dance at the Ayodyapala Dance Studio. Historically, Surakarta-style dance is rooted in the palace environment and has spiritual, ritual, and symbolic functions related to the Javanese feudal value system (Haryono, 2016:27). Dance is not only entertainment, but also a means of expressing harmony between humans and the universe, as well as a medium of respect for rulers and ancestors. However, in the context of urban Depok society, this function has shifted towards a socio-educational and representative function. Dance is now used as a medium for character development, aesthetic expression, and pride in cultural identity. According to Soedarsono (2002:43), the transformation of the function of performing arts from ritual to entertainment and education is a logical consequence of modernization and changes in social structures. At the Ayodyapala Studio, dance serves as a non-formal educational tool that instills the values of discipline, refinement, and respect for tradition in the younger generation. Thus, this change in function does not mean a loss of meaning, but rather a form of adaptation to new social needs emerging in urban society.

The second aspect of the dynamics of adaptation lies in changes in the form and style of performance. In a competitive and fast-paced urban environment, the Ayodyapala Dance Studio adapts its dance presentation format to be more communicative and engaging for modern audiences. While in the context of the palace, performances are held in a solemn and closed manner, in Depok, performances are structured in a more open, interactive, and concise format. The duration of the performance is often adjusted to accommodate public spaces such as cultural festivals, local government events, and school performances. This adaptation of form reflects what Sahlins (1960:19) calls *specific evolution*, namely small, contextual changes without altering the basic structure of culture. The movement structure, costume, and gamelan accompaniment remain based on Surakarta canons, but are aesthetically adjusted to align with the performance space and time. Pramudita (2020:39) notes that such adaptation is crucial for traditional dance to retain its appeal in the eyes of modern society without losing its essence. Through modifications to the performance form, the Ayodyapala Studio successfully maintains a balance between preserving tradition and the need for actualization in the modern era.

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The transformation of form not only touches on aspects of duration and format, but also choreographic innovation and the incorporation of modern elements. In several performances, instructors at Ayodyapala began introducing movement compositions that combine classical Surakarta techniques with more expressive movement dynamics. This innovation was carried out without abandoning basic values such as serenity, harmony, and beauty of form. Sriyadi (2019:52) emphasized that the strength of Surakarta dance lies in the balance between *wiraga*, *wirama*, and *wirasa* (body, rhythm, and feeling) which can be maintained even when presented in new choreographic forms. Thus, innovation in Ayodyapala can be seen as a form of cultural *evolutionary potential* as explained by Service (1962:42), where tradition has an internal ability to evolve with changing times.

The dynamics of adaptation are also evident in the shift in performance media. While previously performances were only presented live on stage, now the Ayodyapala Dance Studio also utilizes digital media as a new space for creating and preserving culture. Performances are recorded and uploaded to platforms like YouTube and Instagram for wider audience access. According to Krippendorff (2018:21), digital media has transformed the way people communicate and participate in cultural practices, creating a form of "virtual community" that broadens the reach of artistic expression. Ayodyapala's use of social media serves not only as documentation but also as a strategy for cultural education and promotion. By utilizing digital technology, the studio expands the existence of traditional dance into cyberspace, thereby introducing traditional values to a younger generation who are more familiar with technology.

Media transformation has also encouraged the emergence of new collaboration patterns between traditional artists and creative communities. The Ayodyapala Studio frequently collaborates with videographers, photographers, and local arts communities to produce visual works showcasing Surakarta-style dance in a modern format. This collaboration creates a cross-media performance form that fuses traditional aesthetics with contemporary visual technology. According to Heryanto (2018:79), cross-media collaboration is a cultural strategy that expands the vitality of traditional arts amidst dominant popular culture. Thus, digital media becomes a crucial vehicle for cultural evolution, where traditional dance not only survives but also finds new forms of sustainability in the digital public sphere.

The adaptation and transformation that occurred at the Ayodyapala Dance Studio illustrate the dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity. The shift in function from ritual to educational, the adaptation of more communicative performance forms, and the use of digital media demonstrate that Surakarta-style dance is capable of transformation without losing its traditional roots. This aligns with the basic principle of Neoevolutionism, which states that culture develops through adaptive mechanisms that maintain the essence of values while responding to environmental changes (Sahlins & Service, 1960:18). Therefore, the dynamics at Ayodyapala can be understood as evidence that cultural preservation does not have to be synonymous with static conservation, but can instead coexist with creative innovation that strengthens the relevance of traditional culture in the modern era.

### **3.4 Analysis using the lens of neo-evolutionist theory**

Understanding the dynamics of the preservation of Surakarta-style dance at the Ayodyapala Dance Studio can be strengthened through analysis using the lens of Neoevolutionism theory developed by Marshall D. Sahlins and Elman R. Service. This theory offers a framework for thinking



about how culture undergoes progressive change through a process of adaptation to its social and ecological environment. Sahlins and Service (1960:11) distinguish two forms of cultural evolution: specific evolution and general evolution. Specific evolution highlights internal changes that occur within a particular cultural system, while general evolution explains the broader direction of development resulting from intercultural interactions and external environmental influences such as urbanization and globalization. In the context of the Ayodyapala Dance Studio, these two concepts are interrelated and explain how the studio plays a role as an agent of cultural adaptation that maintains the continuity of tradition amidst the modernity of Depok City.

The first form, specific evolution, can be seen through the internal changes that occurred within the Ayodyapala Dance Studio in maintaining the Surakarta-style dance tradition. This evolution includes structural, pedagogical, and aesthetic adaptation processes undertaken by the studio to remain relevant to the social conditions of urban society. In a structural context, the studio adapted by changing its management pattern and membership system to be more open and flexible. While in its early days activities were still exclusive to certain groups, now the studio opens opportunities to the general public, especially the younger generation from various social backgrounds. This adaptation demonstrates a form of cultural selection as explained by Sahlins (1960:17), where cultural elements that are not in accordance with the new social environment will be adapted or abandoned, while functional elements will be maintained.

Internal changes in the pedagogical realm are evident in the more contextual and participatory dance teaching system. Dance teachers serve not only as instructors of movement techniques but also as facilitators, helping dancers understand the philosophical values and symbolic meanings behind each dance. This reflects a form of institutional evolution, where the studio develops a learning model that adapts to the fast and efficient lifestyle of urban society (Pramudita, 2020:39). Aesthetically, the studio accommodates choreographic innovations without abandoning the basic tenets of the Surakarta style. This pattern demonstrates that cultural evolution does not necessarily mean abandoning tradition, but rather finding a balance between preservation and renewal (Soedarsono, 2002:48). Thus, the specific evolution at the Ayodyapala Studio demonstrates a process of internal transformation that enables traditions to survive through creative adaptation to the needs of the times.

General evolution in the context of the Ayodyapala Dance Studio is more broadly related to the influence of the social environment, urbanization, modernity, and globalization on changes in the function and orientation of cultural preservation. According to Service (1962:39), general evolution explains how the socio-cultural development of a society does not occur in a closed space, but rather through interactions with other, more complex cultural systems. In this case, Depok City, as an urban buffer zone for Jakarta, plays a role as a social ecosystem that influences how the Ayodyapala Studio operates and adapts. The process of urbanization presents challenges in the form of changes in people's lifestyles that tend to be consumptive, have minimal free time, and are more exposed to global popular culture (Firman, 2019:240). However, these challenges also open up opportunities for the studio to expand its reach through media innovation and digital-based promotional strategies.

This general evolution is also evident in the changing function of dance from ritual to entertainment, education, and expression of cultural identity. As multicultural urban society develops, the Ayodyapala Studio positions Surakarta-style dance as a symbol of local pride and a means of building cultural awareness amidst global homogenization. Haryono (2016:31) asserts that classical Javanese dance now functions not only as a representation of palace values, but also as a medium for preserving identity beyond the palace walls. In this context, Ayodyapala serves as a bridge between traditional Javanese values and the lifestyle of modern society, demonstrating how

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tradition can “evolve” without losing its cultural legitimacy. This phenomenon reflects the law of potential. evolutionary as explained by Kaplan (1960:46), where each cultural system has the internal ability to adapt to the external environment without having to experience disintegration.

The third aspect of this analysis highlights the role of the studio as a cultural agent, namely an active actor in the process of adaptation, innovation, and transfer of cultural values. Within the framework of Neoevolutionism, cultural agents play a crucial role because they function as the main drivers of directed change, not merely passive recipients of environmental change (Service, 1962:41). The Ayodyapala Dance Studio plays this role through two main strategies: first, maintaining the continuity of tradition by implementing a system of hereditary learning; second, introducing the tradition to the wider public through digital media and open performances. Krippendorff (2018:23) calls this form of adaptation *symbolic mediation*, namely when cultural actors use traditional symbols to bridge old values with new social contexts.

As a cultural agent, the Ayodyapala Studio not only transmits dance as an aesthetic product, but also instills moral and spiritual values inherent in Surakarta traditions, such as harmony (*wirasa*), patience, and respect for teachers. In this regard, the studio functions as a microsystem of cultural evolution, a place where interactions occur between artists, the community, and traditional symbols that are continuously renewed through daily practice. By utilizing digital media, cross-arts collaboration, and socio-cultural networks, the studio plays an active role in expanding the function of tradition into the modern public sphere. This adaptation process demonstrates that cultural evolution is not a linear process, but rather the result of human negotiation and creativity in reinterpreting cultural heritage to remain relevant to the times.

Through analysis based on the theory of Neoevolutionism, it can be concluded that the Ayodyapala Dance Studio is a clear example of a cultural entity undergoing two evolutionary paths simultaneously: a specific evolution that shows internal changes in the learning system and aesthetics, and a general evolution that reflects the external influences of urbanization and globalization. With its active role as a cultural agent, this studio is able to maintain the existence of Surakarta-style dance as an integral part of the identity of the urban community of Depok. This finding confirms the relevance of Sahlins and Service's theory in understanding the dynamics of cultural preservation in the modern era—that culture survives not because of its rigidity, but because of its ability to continuously adapt and evolve creatively.

### **3.5 Socio-Cultural Implications and Obstacles in Preserving Traditional Dance in Urban Spaces**

The presence of the Ayodyapala Dance Studio in Depok City has significant socio-cultural implications for cultural preservation efforts and the formation of urban community identity. As a rapidly developing satellite city of Jakarta, Depok faces strong pressures of modernity, including cultural homogenization due to globalization and urbanization (Firman, 2019:238). In this situation, the existence of traditional arts studios such as Ayodyapala serves as a counterbalance that maintains the sustainability of local values and strengthens the community's cultural awareness. The studio's role is not limited to dance training, but also functions as a center for character formation, a space for social interaction, and a medium for reflecting cultural identity amidst the city's tendency towards individualism.

The first socio-cultural implication is the strengthening of local identity and cultural pride. Through learning activities and performances of Surakarta-style dance, the Ayodyapala Dance



Studio contributes to raising public awareness that tradition is not merely a relic of the past, but an integral part of modern life. Haryono (2016:27) emphasizes that traditional dance functions as a means of strengthening collective identity because it contains social symbols that unite the community. In this context, Ayodyapala plays a crucial role in introducing the noble values of Javanese culture to the younger generation of Depok living in a multicultural environment. Through practice, discussion, and performances, the studio becomes a dialectical space where traditional values are negotiated with modern values without losing their fundamental meaning.

The second implication lies in the role of the dance studio as an agent of cultural socialization and character education. In each training process, dancers are taught not only movement techniques, but also discipline, ethics, respect for teachers, and spiritual values in dance. This educational process demonstrates that art has a moral dimension that is important for shaping the social character of society. According to Kamila and Sabardilla (2022:120), dance studios serve as social institutions that instill cultural values through collective practice and intergenerational interaction. Ayodyapala utilizes dance as a medium to instill the values of harmony, patience, and sensitivity to beauty, all of which support the creation of a cultured and ethical urban society.

The existence of studios also has implications for strengthening social solidarity and community cohesion. The studio's training, performances, and festivals bring together various age groups and social backgrounds in one shared space. This phenomenon aligns with the concept of *cultural revitalization* proposed by Wallace (1956), in which community groups seek to revive traditional cultural values in response to social disorientation caused by modernization. In other words, the Ayodyapala Studio serves as a forum for reconstructing socio-cultural identity, strengthening relationships between residents through artistic activities. In an urban society often characterized by individualism, such spaces hold highly strategic social value.

The process of preserving dance in urban environments also faces a number of structural and cultural obstacles and challenges. The main challenge is the pressure of modernity and the commercialization of art. Globalization and the fast-paced entertainment industry have pushed society to prioritize instant entertainment over the aesthetic and spiritual values inherent in traditional dance. Soedarsono (2002:48) states that traditional performing arts are now under market pressures that demand speed, popularity, and economic profit. In this context, dance studios often face a dilemma between maintaining the purity of tradition and adapting it to market tastes.

One such challenge is evident in the commercialization of traditional dance in events and festivals. While these activities provide a platform for artists to perform, the aesthetic and philosophical values of dance are often sacrificed for the sake of practicality. Dance durations are shortened, movements are simplified, and costumes are adjusted to be more "appealing" to modern audiences. This can lead to a reduction in cultural meaning, as Becker (2004:17) argues that art that loses its social and spiritual context risks becoming merely an aesthetic commodity. This challenge is a serious concern for the Ayodyapala Studio, which strives to maintain a balance between economic needs and cultural responsibility.

A crucial challenge is the shift in interests of the younger generation. In the digital era, children and adolescents spend more time on gadgets and social media than on traditional cultural activities. This phenomenon has slowed the regeneration of traditional dance artists. According to Pramudita (2020:40), one of the biggest obstacles to preserving traditional dance is the lack of interest among the younger generation in art forms considered "old-fashioned" or irrelevant to modern life. The Ayodyapala Studio addresses this with adaptive strategies such as integrating digital technology into the learning process, producing dance videos, and creating educational content on social media. This

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approach aligns with Krippendorff's (2018:25) view that digital media can be an effective bridge to connect traditional values with the lifestyles of the digital native generation.

The studio also faces internal constraints, such as limited funding, practice space, and support from local government policies. Cultural preservation is often viewed as a secondary activity compared to economic development. This aligns with Nasution's (2022:74) findings, which state that many urban art studios survive with limited resources and rely on the artists' idealistic commitment. In this context, the existence of the Ayodyapala Studio represents a form of cultural resilience, where the community continues to strive to preserve traditions despite facing structural limitations.

The socio-cultural implications of the Ayodyapala Dance Studio's activities demonstrate that cultural preservation in urban spaces not only impacts the sustainability of dance but also strengthens the community's social and moral identity. Despite facing pressures from modernity, commercialization, and changing values of the younger generation, the studio remains an adaptive space that connects the past with the present. From a Neoevolutionist perspective, this situation demonstrates that cultural sustainability is not measured by its ability to survive statically, but rather by its ability to transform and adapt to its social environment (Sahlins & Service, 1960:15). Thus, the Ayodyapala Dance Studio is not merely a preserver of tradition, but also an evolutionary actor that continues to negotiate cultural identity amidst the currents of urban modernization.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study found that the Ayodyapala Dance Studio plays a strategic role as an agent of cultural preservation and transformation in the urban area of Depok. Based on the analysis of Sahlins and Service's (1960) Neoevolutionism theory, the preservation of Surakarta-style dance in this studio reflects two forms of cultural evolution: *specific evolution* seen through internal changes in learning structures, membership systems, and choreographic innovations; and *general evolution* seen through adaptation to the influences of urbanization, modernity, and globalization. This adaptation process demonstrates the ability of culture to survive through contextual transformations without losing its basic identity (Service, 1962:43).

This study's primary contribution to theory is providing empirical evidence that the concept of Neoevolutionism is relevant for the study of traditional urban performing arts. These findings broaden the understanding that cultural evolution applies not only to macro-social systems but also to micro-institutions such as art studios, which serve as arenas for negotiation between tradition and modernity (Haryono, 2016; Pramudita, 2020). Practically, this study demonstrates that preserving traditional performing arts in urban spaces can serve as a means of character education, strengthening local identity, and revitalizing cultural values (Kamila & Sabardilla, 2022).

Practical implications of this research include the need for cultural policy support at the buffer city level to ensure adequate facilities, funding, and spaces for public expression for dance studios. Arts education also needs to integrate adaptive approaches that combine tradition and digital technology to reach younger generations. Future research is recommended to examine the dynamics of other dance studios in urban areas in Indonesia to broaden our understanding of patterns of cultural evolution in the context of traditional performing arts.

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