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## Sasando as a Symbol of Cultural Identity of the Rote Island Community and the Challenges of Preserving

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**Abstract:** This research examines Sasando as a symbol of cultural identity and pride among the people of Rote Island, exploring its philosophical values, social functions, and the challenges of its preservation amid modernisation. The present study employed a qualitative case study approach, with data collected through participatory observation and in-depth interviews with Sasando players, craftsmen, and cultural figures. The research findings reveal three key aspects: (1) the value of cultural identity reflected in the use of natural materials (bamboo and palm) and its role in traditional rituals as a marker of local wisdom, (2) social function as a medium of community unification in collaborative events, (3) a means of intergenerational value transmission, and preservation challenges in the form of declining interest from the younger generation, lack of integration in formal education, and limited promotion. The research also identified opportunities through cultural festivals and tourism-based economic potential. The research conclusions emphasize that Sasando is not merely a musical instrument, but rather a symbol of collective identity that represents the history, social values, and cultural resilience of the Rote people. The following policy recommendations are put forth: first, the integration of a Sasando-based curriculum; second, the strengthening of youth training programs; and third, multi-stakeholder collaboration for sustainable promotion strategies. This research makes a theoretical contribution to the discussion of the relationship between traditional musical instruments, identity construction, and cultural preservation strategies in the midst of globalization.

**Keywords:** Sasando, Cultural Identity, Rote Island, Social Function, Cultural Preservation



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## 1. Introduction

Traditional music plays a significant role in preserving the cultural identity of societies, providing insights into the values and history of a community. In Indonesia, regional musical instruments such as the *Sasando* from Rote Island in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province embody local pride and represent cultural richness. *Sasando* serves as both a musical instrument and a medium for conveying the cultural values, historical narratives, and local wisdom inherent to the Rote community. With the progression of globalization and modernization, a musical instrument such as the *Sasando* encounters significant challenges in preservation, notably diminishing interest among younger generations and competition from mainstream culture. This study outlines *Sasando* as a cultural symbol and source of pride among the residents of Rote Island, analyzing its intrinsic values, social roles, and the challenges it faces in preservation.

Rote Island, located at the southernmost tip of Indonesia, is the origin of the *Sasando*, a distinctive string instrument that is played by plucking. The *Sasando* is characterized by its design, featuring a bamboo tube encased in *lontar* leaves, with strings made from natural materials. The physical form and performance technique possess philosophical significance, illustrating a harmonious integration of artistry and cultural belief. Casminih et al. (2024) contend that *Sasando* originated from the integration of local Rote culture with external influences, particularly those from the Portuguese in the 16th century. This indicates that *Sasando* reflects a complex historical background, paralleling the cultural dynamics of the Rote community. The construction of the *Sasando* exemplifies both physical craftsmanship and the profound cultural interactions that have occurred over centuries.

The cultural values represented by the *Sasando* are closely linked to the lifestyles of the Rote community. The *Sasando* is frequently utilized in traditional ceremonies, weddings, and religious rituals, functioning as an essential connection between humans, ancestors, and the cosmos. Hendrik (2022) indicates that each note produced by the *Sasando*'s strings is thought to have mystical properties, affecting the emotions and spiritual experiences of listeners. The auditory elements highlight *Sasando*'s essential role in the belief systems and traditions of the Rote people. The instrument enhances cultural events and fosters spiritual connectivity, embedding music within the communal psyche.

The *Sasando* serves multiple social functions that foster unity and cultural education among the residents of Rote, in addition to its spiritual significance. *Sasando* serves as a unifying force in traditional community gatherings, enhancing solidarity among group members. Djoko (2017) emphasizes its ability to communicate social messages, encompassing insights on life, leadership, and family harmony. The lyrics

accompanying *Sasando* performances convey noble principles to younger generations, thereby reinforcing its role as a cultural learning instrument within traditional community. *Sasando* promotes cohesion through music while preserving the transmission of vital cultural values.

The rapid advancement of technology and global cultural changes present significant threats to the survival of *Sasando*. A significant number of younger residents in Rote Island favor modern music and digital instruments, which are perceived as more contemporary and appealing. Inyo and Yefta (2023) report a significant decline in Rote teenagers' interest in learning *Sasando* over the past decade. The decline is further intensified by the decreasing number of skilled craftsmen who can assemble *Sasando* using traditional techniques and materials. The ongoing neglect in these areas could result in *Sasando* losing its players and creators, thereby jeopardizing its existence.

A significant challenge in the preservation of the *Sasando* is the insufficient support from both governmental and private entities in promoting and documenting the instrument. Although recognized as an Intangible Cultural Heritage by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013, preservation efforts have been insufficient. Agustina and Agnes (2020) argue that the lack of *Sasando* training programs in NTT schools jeopardizes its sustainability. Introducing traditional music education at an early stage may enhance the visibility of *Sasando* among young learners. The promotion of *Sasando*, both nationally and internationally, is insufficient when compared to other Indonesian instruments such as angklung and gamelan, indicating a need for enhanced promotional initiatives.

In contrast, local initiatives have actively led the preservation of *Sasando* with notable determination. Cultural organizations on Rote Island, including *Sanggar Sasando* (*Sasando* workshop), conduct workshops and performances aimed at engaging younger generations. Recently, 15 young *Sasando* players completed their training, as reported by Relin et al. (2023), indicating progress in securing the instrument's future. The emergence of social media platforms such as YouTube and Instagram offers innovative opportunities for the promotion of *Sasando* through compelling content, indicating potential for sustainability. The collective initiatives suggest a favorable path for the preservation of *Sasando*, securing its heritage in the context of contemporary changes.

The economic potential of *Sasando* is largely unexploited, notwithstanding its cultural importance and the necessity for preservation. The *Sasando*, as a distinctive musical instrument, has the potential to serve as a cultural commodity that draws both domestic and international tourists. Rolfi et al. (2024) indicate that *Sasando*-

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centered cultural tourism on Rote Island can increase local income and improve global recognition of the instrument. Traditional music festivals, exemplified by the “Rote *Sasando* Festival,” seek to leverage this potential; however, they necessitate increased support from stakeholders to thrive. The integration of this economic perspective with cultural initiatives could significantly enhance the welfare of Rote communities.

*Sasando* serves as a compelling subject for ethnomusicological research, providing various avenues for scholarly investigation. Apris (2023) has conducted a thorough analysis of *Sasando*'s musical structure and its connections to Rote culture, thereby enhancing scholarly discourse and establishing foundational theories for its contemporary evolution. Collaboration between traditional and contemporary musicians can foster creative innovations, maintaining the relevance of *Sasando* in the digital age while preserving its traditional essence. Consequently, ethnomusicological research strengthens the cultural significance of *Sasando* by integrating scholarly analysis with artistic creativity.

Innovation must be navigated with caution to protect *Sasando*'s original values from the risks associated with excessive commercialization. Muhammad et al. (2023) warn that the mass production of synthetic materials may enhance economic efficiency while undermining the authenticity of the *Sasando*. As a result, all development initiatives must involve traditional custodians to maintain cultural integrity. Ensuring that technological, economic, and cultural developments honor traditional knowledge safeguards *Sasando* from commodification, preserving its sacredness and local significance.

Families play a crucial role in transmitting *Sasando* knowledge, ensuring the continuity of cultural traditions through intergenerational teaching. On Rote Island, the oral transmission of *Sasando* skills from parents to children is crucial yet increasingly confronted by modern influences. Augusta (2022) notes that merely 30% of families in Rote actively instruct their children in *Sasando*, underscoring the necessity for a renewed emphasis on cultural transmission. Programs that engage families, such as intergenerational *Sasando* competitions, have the potential to stimulate interest and rejuvenate familial teaching traditions.

Technological interventions can facilitate the documentation of *Sasando* knowledge, thereby ensuring cultural continuity as traditional expertise diminishes. The creation of digital archives that include tutorial videos, audio recordings, and e-books establishes a sustainable repository of knowledge. Yohanes (2014) supports the use of augmented reality (AR) to improve interactivity in *Sasando* learning for younger generations, effectively integrating tradition with technology. Digitizing *Sasando* learning materials allows for the adaptation of cultural transmission to contemporary

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mediums, while maintaining the integrity of educational content.

Government actions in East Nusa Tenggara should prioritize the protection of intellectual property rights associated with *Sasando* to avert cultural appropriation by other nations. Assertions regarding traditional Indonesian instruments such as *angklung* and *reog* highlight a pressing requirement for comprehensive legal safeguards. Jefri (2021) advocates for the recognition of *Sasando* as a UNESCO world cultural heritage, highlighting its international significance and enhancing Rote pride. Securing intellectual property rights preserves *Sasando* as a unique cultural symbol, protecting its authenticity.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for the preservation of *Sasando*, offering a comprehensive approach that integrates diverse areas of expertise. Musicians, anthropologists, ecologists, and policymakers can tackle the shortages of raw materials affecting *Sasando* production, particularly those disruptions caused by climate change that impact the availability of bamboo and palm leaves. Yayo (2017) emphasizes the essential requirement for conservation initiatives, promoting cooperative approaches to ensure the future of *Sasando*. Interdisciplinary partnerships enable stakeholders to develop sustainable resource management practices vital for *Sasando* production.

This study examines the role of *Sasando* in representing cultural identity and pride among the residents of Rote Island by exploring its values, social functions, and the challenges of preservation in the modern era. It aims to propose innovative strategies to sustain and nurture *Sasando* amid globalization pressures, offering insights for policymakers, scholars, and the broader public. Promoting *Sasando* as a resilient cultural heritage ensures its transmission to future generations.

To support this goal, mass media plays a crucial role in raising public awareness and appreciation of *Sasando*. Television programs, newspaper features, and digital content have helped highlight the instrument's uniqueness and cultural depth, as seen in national documentaries that showcase its artistic and historical significance. As Maria et al. (2020) suggest, traditional instruments can evolve while preserving their essence, as long as changes remain aligned with cultural values. Encouraging the integration of *Sasando* into contemporary life not only maintains its relevance but also strengthens the cultural identity of the Rote people.

This research adopts a holistic approach by combining philosophical, social, and cultural analyses of *Sasando* within the broader context of modernization. Beyond academic contribution, it plays a vital role in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and supporting evidence-based policies. Ultimately, this study positions *Sasando* as a

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symbol of local wisdom that remains relevant and meaningful in the era of global cultural convergence.

## 2. Literature Review

### A. The Cultural and Social Importance of *Sasando*

The *Sasando*, a musical instrument derived from Rote Island in East Nusa Tenggara, represents an important aspect of the cultural heritage and identity of the local community. Originating from a profound tradition, it serves as both an artistic manifestation and a spiritual emblem for its community. Margareta et al. (2020) highlight its dual function as both a musical instrument and a cultural symbol, facilitating community cohesion throughout Rote. The construction of the *Sasando* utilizes natural materials such as bamboo, wood, and *lontar* leaves, demonstrating the community's proficiency in resource utilization. The unique resonator, crafted from *lontar* leaves, produces a distinctive sound that differentiates it from traditional stringed instruments. The *Sasando* exemplifies the craftsmanship and artistic vitality found in Rote Island.

The *Sasando* embodies significant cultural value, deeply rooted in the myths and legends of Rote. Jefri (2020) credit the creation of this instrument to a young individual named Sangguana, who was motivated by a dream to design it. This narrative highlights *Sasando*'s significance in terms of spirituality and historical heritage. The *Sasando* is often featured in ceremonies such as weddings and harvest festivals, underscoring its significant role in various life cycle events. These traditions enhance communal bonds and ensure cultural continuity, demonstrating the *Sasando*'s integral role within the social structure of Rote. *Sasando* functions as a spiritual and cultural symbol, reinforcing traditions and promoting social cohesion through its melodies.

The *Sasando* facilitates the transmission of cultural values across generations within social interactions. Janri et al. (2016) emphasize the significance of *Sasando* as a conduit for intergenerational dialogue, facilitating the exchange of historical narratives and identity through song lyrics. Central to family and communal gatherings, its performances enhance cohesion by fostering collective memories and cultural ethos. Desrika and Sri (2021) highlight the essential function of art within cultural systems, as demonstrated by the *Sasando* in fostering community engagement and facilitating cultural exchange. *Sasando*'s presence in traditional contexts highlights the essential role of art in enhancing social interactions and preserving cultural continuity.

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Existing literature has extensively documented the cultural, historical, and symbolic significance of the *Sasando* within the Rote Island community. Studies by Margareta et al. (2020), Jefri (2020), and Janri et al. (2016) emphasize the instrument's role as both an artistic and spiritual symbol, its integration into social rituals, and its function in fostering intergenerational dialogue. These works highlight the *Sasando*'s importance in preserving local identity, strengthening community cohesion, and sustaining cultural heritage through traditional practices and oral transmission.

However, there remains a critical gap in examining the challenges of preserving the *Sasando* in the face of modern societal transformations. While existing studies celebrate its traditional value, they often overlook how globalization, shifting cultural norms, and the declining number of young practitioners threaten the continuity of this heritage. Issues such as the lack of regeneration among *Sasando* players, limited adaptation to contemporary musical platforms, and diminishing relevance in the daily lives of younger generations have not been thoroughly addressed.

Thus, further research is needed to explore how these external pressures impact the sustainability of *Sasando* and to develop adaptive strategies that ensure its survival in the modern era. Bridging this gap is essential to formulating more comprehensive preservation efforts that are responsive to the changing cultural landscape, while still rooted in the values and identity of the Rote people.

### **B. Challenges and Innovations in Preserving *Sasando***

The *Sasando*, while significant, encounters various challenges in the context of modernization. Boike and Oktavianus (2023) note a decrease in youth interest in traditional instrument learning, attributed to globalization and economic pressures. Contemporary instruments such as guitars and keyboards are preferred due to their commercial viability, resulting in diminished engagement with the *Sasando*. The limited availability of essential raw materials, such as *lontar* leaves, hinders preservation efforts. The factors present risks to the sustainability of *Sasando*'s traditional craftsmanship in a globalized context.

Preservation strategies have developed to address these challenges, emphasizing innovative and sustainable methods. Yudha and Frengky (2020) emphasize initiatives that utilize environmentally sustainable practices to illustrate the cultural significance of *Sasando*. Events such as the "*Sasando* Week" facilitate the promotion of *Sasando* artists, contributing to cultural preservation and economic engagement. Critiques regarding inadequate sustainable funding indicate that numerous initiatives may not endure over time. Sustainable financial models are crucial for maintaining ongoing preservation efforts that support *Sasando*'s cultural legacy.

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Digital media provides significant opportunities for the dissemination of *Sasando*'s culture. Jlida Haba (2021) asserts that platforms such as YouTube and Instagram enable global exposure, thereby dismantling conventional geographical barriers. Artists such as Yosef Ndoen utilize these platforms to disseminate compositions, thereby increasing international visibility. However, insufficient digital infrastructure in remote regions of Rote constrains the efficacy of these strategies. Enhanced internet access is essential for effectively leveraging digital media in the preservation of culture.

Although *Sasando* is acknowledged as an Intangible Cultural Heritage, challenges related to intellectual property rights persist. National recognition enhances its cultural and historical importance; however, Katharina et al. (2024) emphasize the lack of adequate legal safeguards against piracy. This legal gap facilitates unauthorized commercial exploitation, compromising the rights of craftspeople and the authenticity of the *Sasando* as a cultural artifact. There is an urgent need for robust legal frameworks to safeguard intellectual property associated with *Sasando*.

*Sasando* has undergone innovative adaptations that facilitate its integration into contemporary musical contexts. Katharina et al. (2024) propose the conversion of the *Sasando* into an electric version as a strategy for contemporary preservation. Craftsmen are incorporating electric pickups to enhance suitability for contemporary music genres, thereby appealing to a younger demographic. Traditionalists raise concerns about alterations to *Sasando*'s original form; however, this approach represents an adaptive methodology aimed at preserving cultural relevance. It is crucial to balance innovation with heritage preservation to ensure the continued viability of *Sasando* in evolving musical contexts.

The economic prospects aligning with *Sasando* offer opportunities for local communities. Bire (2022) highlights the interest of tourists in *Sasando* as souvenirs, suggesting opportunities for economic diversification. Local marketing constraints, however, restrict this potential, highlighting the need for entrepreneurship training to enhance market reach. Artisans can utilize craftsmanship as a cultural and economic resource, expanding their customer base and improving sustainability. Consequently, the integration of entrepreneurship and cultural pride can stimulate economic opportunities in Rote's community.

The educational dimensions of *Sasando* extend beyond its cultural and economic functions, fostering intellectual development and values. Rahim et al. (2022) propose the incorporation of *Sasando* studies into the curricula of schools in NTT, promoting the development of musical skills as well as values such as patience and cultural appreciation. This is consistent with theories of multicultural education that highlight

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inclusive practices based on cultural heritage. Incorporating *Sasando* into educational settings enhances academic environments, promotes cultural literacy, and fosters values among students.

Documenting *Sasando* techniques presents significant challenges owing to the dependence on oral traditions. Yohanes et al. (2020) critique the lack of written documentation regarding crafting and playing skills, which renders traditional knowledge susceptible to extinction. Documentation initiatives play a vital role in the preservation of traditional craftsmanship techniques, engaging scholars and cultural organizations in the development of repositories for indigenous knowledge. Collaborative documentation efforts preserve *Sasando*'s cultural legacy for future generations, ensuring the instrument and its traditional skills persist.

*Sasando*, in comparison to other Indonesian musical instruments, exhibits distinct stylistic features and technical requirements. Sila (2012) observes that the typical solo performance style is distinct from ensemble-based instruments such as Javanese *Gamelan* or Sundanese *Angklung*, necessitating a higher level of individual skill. The unique dynamics of the *Sasando* contribute to Indonesia's musical diversity, highlighting individual artistry in conjunction with collective traditions. The uniqueness exemplifies the diverse cultural expressions present in Indonesia's musical landscape.

Migration trends present challenges to *Sasando*'s cultural practice, as traditional players move to urban centers such as Kupang or Jakarta in search of employment opportunities. This diminishes the presence of *Sasando* and reduces the number of cultural practitioners in Rote. Knowledge repatriation programs provide solutions via workshops conducted by diaspora *Sasando* musicians, facilitating the reconnection of urban talents with their cultural heritage. These initiatives promote cultural continuity in originating regions, connecting modern urban experiences with traditional island practices.

The increasing involvement of women in *Sasando* preservation contests traditional gender norms and enhances cultural engagement. Elda et al. (2023) emphasize the growing interest among women in learning *Sasando*, promoting gender-inclusive cultural representation. Initiatives such as "*Sasando Perempuan Rote*" (Rote Women's *Sasando*) illustrate the instrument's function in promoting empowerment and gender inclusivity. Embracing female participation, *Sasando* enhances cultural expression and empowers various societal groups, thereby enriching traditional practices.

International collaborations enhance the global cultural prominence of *Sasando*, fostering cultural appreciation and economic opportunities. Takuro (2016) examines

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the performances of Indonesian musicians in conjunction with global artists, highlighting the promotion of *Sasando* at international festivals. Organizations such as *Sasando* Electro leverage these platforms to enhance the global visibility of *Sasando* and to stimulate tourism and investment. Exposure facilitates international cultural exchange, integrating local traditions with global musical narratives. *Sasando*'s international presence enhances its cultural significance and economic potential.

Excessive commercialization may diminish the cultural significance of *Sasando*, reducing it to mere aesthetic appeal. Jefri (2024) cautions that commercial contexts may overlook the cultural significance of *Sasando*, emphasizing the need for ethical guidelines in its commercial use. It is essential to balance economic interests with cultural sensitivity to maintain the authenticity of *Sasando*. Through critical evaluation of commercialization, stakeholders maintain the instrument's status as a cultural entity rather than a purely commercial one.

Local community initiatives play a crucial role in addressing the challenges posed by globalization, significantly aiding in the preservation of *Sasando*'s culture. Ali et al. (2020) emphasize the initiatives undertaken by *Sasando* groups to provide training and performances aimed at preserving traditions. Cultural NGOs offer essential resources that enable artisans to create high-quality instruments. Community-driven approaches promote sustainable practices, safeguarding the continuity of cultural traditions in a globalized context. The collaboration between grassroots initiatives and external support structures enhances the cultural prominence of *Sasando*.

The philosophical values of *Sasando* align with modern environmental principles, advocating for harmony between humans and nature. Afrianus et al. (2020) propose that the utilization of natural materials in *Sasando* reflects principles of sustainability, thereby influencing international eco-art movements. These philosophies promote environmentally sustainable practices, inspired by the traditional craftsmanship of *Sasando*. In essence, *Sasando* serves as a symbol of cultural and ecological sustainability, enhancing artistic expressions through conservation awareness.

*Sasando* serves as a significant representation of cultural identity on Rote Island, reflecting heritage, tradition, and adaptability. Efforts to preserve *Sasando* necessitate coordinated collaboration among local communities, government entities, and academic institutions to enhance its cultural significance. The integration of innovative methods with adherence to traditional foundations guarantees that *Sasando* continues to be a source of pride for Rote residents. Stakeholders actively maintain its cultural and musical legacy, thereby fostering a vibrant and resilient cultural future.

### 3. Method

This study utilizes a qualitative approach to explore the *Sasando* as a symbol of cultural identity within the Rote Island community. A qualitative approach was selected to investigate profound perspectives from research subjects, thereby deepening the understanding of cultural nuances. Eko (2015) emphasizes the significance of interdisciplinary approaches that combine diverse academic perspectives to analyze the complex cultural representation of *Sasando*. Integrating various disciplines allows researchers to obtain a thorough understanding of the impact of *Sasando* on the cultural landscape of Rote Island. The qualitative framework offers a comprehensive examination of *Sasando*'s influence on the formation of community identity.

#### A. Data Collection Techniques

The research employs various data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis, to obtain comprehensive data (Teguh et al., 2023). Interviews were conducted with ten key informants chosen through purposive sampling, including traditional *Sasando* players, craftsmen, cultural leaders, and activists. This selection emphasizes individuals possessing significant expertise and active engagement in the preservation of *Sasando*, thereby guaranteeing a comprehensive understanding. Participatory observation entailed involvement in local activities featuring *Sasando*, including traditional ceremonies and artistic performances, as noted by Ichsan & Arhamudin (2020). The document studies examined historical archives, audiovisual recordings, policy documents concerning cultural preservation, and social media content associated with *Sasando*. Triangulation improves data validity by ensuring consistency across various sources and methodologies, thereby facilitating a comprehensive analysis.

#### B. Data Analysis and Thematic Exploration

The data collected are subjected to thematic analysis to reveal the cultural significance of *Sasando* (Mojtaba et al., 2013). The process commences with the transcription of interviews and the systematic organization of field notes. Researchers identify patterns related to cultural values, social functions, and preservation challenges through open coding. The codes are subsequently refined into primary themes through axial coding, facilitating the establishment of connections among the various aspects of *Sasando*'s role in Rote community. Triangulation method enhances the validity of these themes through cross-referencing findings from various sources, while member checking ensures accurate representations of informants' perspectives (Eko, 2016). This thematic approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the *Sasando*'s historical and social context within the community.

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### C. Ethical Considerations and Narrative Articulation

The study prioritizes ethical standards by ensuring the confidentiality of informants and obtaining their consent to participate (Andarusni et al., 2020). Critical reflection on the researcher's positionality as an outsider minimizes biases during field analysis. Data interpretation includes direct quotes from informants and analytical narratives organized by core themes, offering a thorough representation of findings. The study's brief duration limits continuous observation of *Sasando* usage throughout the year. However, it includes diverse informants from various villages, indicating that generalizations should be made with caution. Despite these limitations, the research provides significant contributions to cultural preservation methodologies by integrating ethnographic methods with document analysis, enabling a nuanced exploration of *Sasando* as a cultural artifact.

This study's methodological framework provides a distinctive approach to cultural preservation research, utilizing ethnographic techniques in conjunction with document analysis to explore the symbolic and practical dimensions of *Sasando*. This combination enables a deep understanding of *Sasando*'s role in shaping the identity and cultural cohesion of the Rote Island community in the face of contemporary challenges. The study, through careful consideration of ethical practices and interdisciplinary analysis, elucidates *Sasando*'s multifaceted role and establishes a precedent for future research in cultural preservation.

## 4. Results

### A. The *Sasando* as a Symbol of Cultural Identity

The interview findings indicate that the *Sasando* serves as a medium for spiritual communication within the Rote community. Research conducted by Moch (2022) on the Sundanese kacapi indicates that traditional musical instruments function as a link to the transcendental realm. Informants indicated that specific notes on the *Sasando* are exclusively performed during particular rituals, including harvest and death ceremonies. This finding aligns with the study by Godefridus and Anis (2023) regarding the sacred function of the Asmat tribe's drum. The residents of Rote hold the belief that performing the *Sasando* with disingenuous intentions may disrupt spiritual equilibrium.

A local historian presented the *Sasando* as historical evidence of the Rote civilization, which has existed since the 7th century. Research by Wahyu et al. (2023) on gongs in Southeast Asia indicates that traditional musical instruments frequently function as indicators of cultural development. This finding suggests that the *Sasando* played a role in inter-kingdom diplomacy and significant royal ceremonies historically.

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Preserved ancient *Sasando* instruments serve as significant material evidence of the evolution of traditional musical art in the Indonesian archipelago.

*Sasando* craftsmen indicate that the philosophical significance embedded in each element of this musical instrument illustrates how the construction of traditional musical instruments frequently reflects the cosmology of community (Gabriella et al., 2021). The circular form of the *Sasando* represents the life cycle, and its 28 traditional strings signify the lunar cycle. Respondents indicated that the utilization of natural materials, including bamboo and *lontar* leaves, embodies the philosophy of harmony with nature. A woman involved in the creation of the *Sasando* indicated that the contributions of women in preserving this tradition are not prominently recognized.

Research conducted by Mukhlis et al. (2023) indicates consistent patterns of marginalization related to gender in traditional music across diverse cultures. Respondents indicated that women are tasked with instructing children in the fundamentals of *Sasando*, despite their infrequent public performances. The musical knowledge of women is frequently neglected in scholarly discourse. The preservation of *Sasando* significantly depends on women's contributions to the transmission of knowledge across generations. Young musicians articulate the difficulty of maintaining the traditional values of *Sasando* in contemporary times. Despite the evolution of its physical form into an electric *Sasando*, it is crucial to uphold traditional techniques and repertoire. Innovation creates new opportunities for the *Sasando*'s presence on the global stage while preserving its cultural identity.

A community arts leader articulated the role of the *Sasando* as a unifying element for the urban community of Rote. Research by Joshua and Linda (2022) indicates that taiko drums serve a comparable social function within the Japanese-American community. Respondents described the *Sasando* group as a platform for migrants from Rote in the urban environment. The *Sasando* serves as a pivotal element of cultural identity in the face of urbanization and modernization that threaten local traditions.

A traditional arts educator discussed the challenges in engaging the younger generation, who tend to favor contemporary music. Initiatives such as "*Sasando* Goes to School," launched by the local government, are beginning to yield positive outcomes in promoting cultural heritage appreciation among youth. This will establish an integration of musicological, anthropological, and digital technology methodologies for documentation and preservation. A comprehensive approach will ensure that *Sasando* continues to serve as a vital symbol of cultural identity in the future.

Research findings indicate that the preservation of *Sasando* necessitates a comprehensive strategy that engages multiple stakeholders. The incorporation of

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*Sasando* into the formal education curriculum, similar to the successful integration of traditional gamelan music in Java, represents a sustainable solution (Khafiizh & Khabib, 2016). The advancement of techniques and repertoire, along with collaboration among government, academics, artists, and the community, is essential for establishing sustainable preservation strategies, ensuring that *Sasando* remains a cultural asset of Rote Island that continues to flourish.

### **B. The Social Function of *Sasando***

The harvest ceremony in Olafulihaa Village demonstrates that the *Sasando* serves as the focal point of the ritual, situated at the center of the participant circle. The traditional leaders indicated that the *Sasando* notes are thought to invoke ancestral spirits for the purpose of blessing the harvest. Research on ritual drums (Kanzul et al., 2022) identified a comparable pattern in which musical instruments function as a medium for transcendental communication. The community's preparation of special offerings prior to the performance of the *Sasando* illustrates its sacred significance. The *Sasando*'s ritual function acts as an indicator of the collective identity within the Rote community.

A source indicated that the special melody "Ofalangga" conveys marriage advice that requires attentive listening. A study on Minangkabau Randai wedding music (Sri, 2014) observes a comparable function of moral education conveyed through lyrics and movements. The children in attendance demonstrated focused attention during the explanation of the song's meaning. This illustrates the function of the *Sasando* in conveying noble values through generations.

The traditional *Sasando* art studio serves as a tool for character education among adolescents. A trainer articulated that each song conveys a moral message regarding honesty, diligence, and respect for parents. Research by Ekawati and Krismalita (2024) on the Filipino kulintang indicates a comparable approach to moral education via traditional music. Workshop participants are invited to analyze the meaning of the lyrics following the song's playback. This method effectively internalizes cultural values and preserves playing techniques. A gathering of residents in a remote village prompted the spontaneous performance of *Sasando* to alleviate the silence and enhance the atmosphere. An interview with the neighborhood chief indicated that *Sasando* consistently plays a role in resolving customary disputes, evidenced by the reduction of tension upon the emergence of its sounds. The community subsequently gathered in a circle and engaged in more candid discourse. This demonstrates the *Sasando*'s role as a cohesive social force.



The Rote expatriate community in Kupang demonstrates that *Sasando* serves as a unifying identity. A community leader stated that regular meetings consistently conclude with a group performance of the *Sasando*. Thomas (2015) conducts a study on diaspora music, highlighting the role of traditional musical instruments in preserving group identity. Initially passive members exhibited enthusiasm upon the performance of the *Sasando*. This activity effectively promoted a sense of unity among migrants from various villages. *Sasando* is taught at the youth training center as a method for character development. Participants are observed to be motivated to compose new songs that convey contemporary moral messages.

A facilitator highlighted the significance of integrating traditional values with modern challenges. The participants demonstrated clear enthusiasm while discussing the relevance of traditional lyrics to contemporary life. During the annual cultural festival, the *Sasando* served as a diplomatic instrument among villages that had previously experienced conflict. An interview with the committee disclosed a strategy of intentionally assembling conflicting groups on a single platform.

Picture1. *Sasando* training for the younger generation (Source: Rolfi Natonis, 2024)



This study identifies three interconnected primary social functions of the *Sasando*. The study by Dadang (2016) indicates that traditional instruments typically serve multiple functions rather than a singular role. Participatory observation illustrates the adaptability of the *Sasando* across diverse social contexts. In-depth interviews elucidate the multifaceted meanings embedded within it. The findings enhance the comprehension of traditional musical instruments' role in contemporary community.

### C. Challenges in Preserving Sasando

Cultural globalization presents a significant risk to the survival of *Sasando* as a traditional musical instrument. The younger generation exhibits a preference for modern musical instruments deemed contemporary and practical. The significant impact of foreign pop culture via digital media is increasingly marginalizing the status of the *Sasando*.

Internal challenges stem from the insufficient regeneration of skilled *Sasando* players and makers. Research by Sri Rustiyanti et al. (2021) identified comparable issues regarding the crisis of traditional music regeneration. The lengthy and intricate learning process of the *Sasando* poses a significant challenge for the younger generation. Numerous elderly *Sasando* experts exhibit hesitance in transmitting their knowledge owing to insufficient appreciation.

The government's inadequate policy is apparent due to the absence of substantial support for the preservation of *Sasando*. The budget allocation for *Sasando* development remains significantly lower than that for contemporary performing arts. Current preservation programs often lack substantive long-term strategies, functioning primarily in a ceremonial capacity. Economic factors constitute the primary barriers to the production and preservation of the *Sasando*. Rolfi (2016) examines the marketing of *Sasando*, highlighting comparable challenges in the sustainability of traditional musical instruments. The increasing expense of *Sasando* raw materials has led numerous craftsmen to change their occupations. The absence of economic incentives for professional *Sasando* players diminishes interest among the younger generation.

The alteration in the lifestyle of rural communities poses a risk to the preservation of the *Sasando*; widespread migration has resulted in numerous young individuals from Rote departing their native towns. The communal values underpinning *Sasando* preservation are diminishing in contemporary community, indicating that alterations in rural social structures directly influence the extinction of local musical traditions. The absence of systematic documentation regarding *Sasando* intensifies the risk, underscoring the necessity of documentation.

Formal education that fails to sufficiently accommodate *Sasando* learning presents a significant challenge. Research by Alma (2017) indicates that multicultural music education faces comparable challenges worldwide. Educational curricula prioritize Western music over indigenous traditions. Proficient *Sasando* music teachers are scarce in educational institutions.

The absence of scholarly research on *Sasando* impedes data-driven preservation initiatives. The body of literature concerning the *Sasando* remains considerably less

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extensive than that of other traditional musical instruments. Interdisciplinary approaches integrating musicology, anthropology, and technology remain infrequently pursued. Addressing the challenges of preserving the *Sasando* necessitates solutions that engage the government, academics, artists, and local communities concurrently. Effective preservation of the traditional *Sasando* musical instrument is best achieved through multidimensional strategies.

#### **D. Necessary Preservation Efforts**

An art studio has been established by the local community as an informal learning center for *Sasando*. The article by I Nyoman Mariyana (2021) discusses the effectiveness of the community model in preserving gamelan traditions in Bali. Numerous studios have effectively incorporated *Sasando* learning into youth activities within churches and schools, illustrating that community-based approaches offer greater sustainability compared to government programs. Nonetheless, insufficient funding and inadequate facilities frequently serve as primary barriers to the advancement of these art centers.

Schools in NTT have begun incorporating *Sasando* into their regional arts' extracurricular programs. Cultural arts educators receive specialized training to instruct students in the fundamentals of playing the *Sasando*. Research indicates that incorporating traditional musical instruments into school curricula significantly enhances the interest of younger generations (Abdul, 2018). The primary limitation is the restricted access to tools and educational resources within educational institutions.

The electric *Sasando* represents a contemporary adaptation strategy that maintains its traditional roots. The Electric *Sasando* facilitates the performance of the *Sasando* across diverse contemporary music genres. It is essential to maintain a balance to ensure that innovation does not undermine the fundamental values of the *Sasando*.

Digital media utilization for documenting and learning *Sasando* has yielded favorable outcomes. YouTube tutorial videos on the *Sasando* have facilitated self-directed learning among the younger generation. The mobile application concerning *Sasando*, created by the local community, demonstrates that digital archives play a crucial role in preserving traditional knowledge and preventing its extinction. The challenge lies in preserving content accuracy in the context of an overwhelming influx of digital information.

The annual cultural festival serves as an effective mechanism for promoting *Sasando* to a broad audience. Events such as "Sasando Week" effectively engage both

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tourists and the media. Nurlia Djafar (2022) identified that cultural festivals serve as a revenue source for traditional artists. Strict selection mechanisms are essential for preserving the quality and authenticity of performances. Training for *Sasando* craftsmen is essential for enhancing product quality and ensuring standardization. Collaborative initiatives with product designers can enhance *Sasando*, indicating that superior production quality may facilitate access to new markets. The challenge lies in achieving a balance between artistic value and commercial viability.

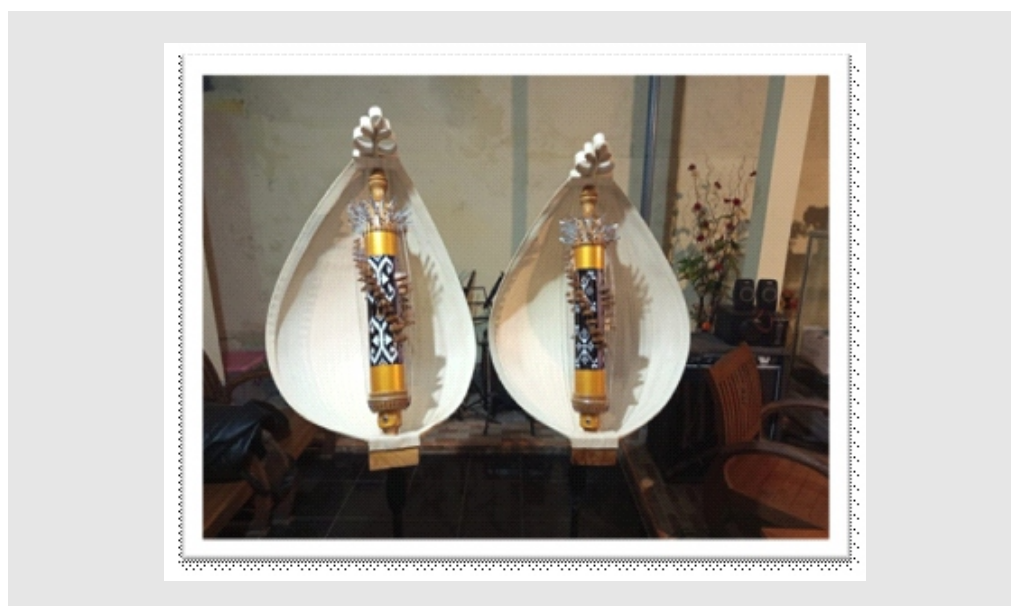
Legal protection policies are necessary to prevent cultural claims and unethical commercial exploitation. Mohammad Ryan Hernandi (2022). The intellectual property rights of traditional music establish a relevant legal framework. Regulations must be established to safeguard the motifs and specific techniques involved in the production of the *Sasando*. The significance of legal safeguards for traditional arts in the contemporary global context. The implementation necessitates collaboration between central and regional governments. The incorporation of *Sasando* within the creative sector has the potential to increase its economic significance. Collaboration with contemporary musicians can yield innovative works that utilize the *Sasando*. A creative approach broadens the audience for the traditional *Sasando* musical instrument. Success hinges on achieving a balance between innovation and the preservation of traditional values.

Further comprehensive academic research is required on multiple facets of the *Sasando*. An interdisciplinary approach integrating ethnomusicology, anthropology, and technology should be developed, as it may demonstrate that musical instruments supported by robust academic literature are more easily preserved. Universities in NTT have the potential to serve as comprehensive research centers for *Sasando*. A comprehensive and sustainable strategy is essential for the preservation of the *Sasando*. Collaboration among government, academia, artists, communities, and the creative industry is essential.

## 5. Discussion

This study's results indicate that the *Sasando* functions not only as a musical instrument but also as a representation of cultural identity within the Rote community. This finding is consistent with Julista's (2017) research on traditional musical instruments as indicators of ethnic identity; however, this study further investigates the spiritual dimension, which has not been extensively explored. The *Sasando*'s distinct role as a medium for transcendental communication sets it apart from other traditional instruments, which mainly function for entertainment purposes.

Picture 2. Sasando Traditional Musical Instrument (Source: Rolfi Natonis, 2024)



The Rote community perceives the *Sasando* as a sacred entity, transcending its materiality, thereby enhancing the discourse on the relationship between humans and cultural artifacts. This finding enhances material culture theory by illustrating the capacity of inanimate objects to embody spiritual agency. The social function of the *Sasando* as a unifier demonstrates that its melodies can mitigate social tensions more effectively than verbal mediation, a phenomenon that has been infrequently addressed in existing literature. The adaptability of the *Sasando* across diverse social contexts, ranging from rituals to informal gatherings, underscores music as a social practice.

This finding provides a novel insight into the function of musical instruments within the governance of traditional communities. This study highlights the challenge of regenerating *Sasando* players, indicating that the younger generation prefers instant digital content over the lengthy process of learning the *Sasando*, a factor not previously anticipated in earlier research. Digital media offer a solution through online tutorials and virtual archives. This dynamic informs the discourse on the ambivalent effects of technology on cultural preservation, augmenting studies on traditional musical instruments.

The development of the electric *Sasando* has generated advantages and disadvantages that illustrate the conflict between tradition and modernity. The findings indicate that resistance originates not only from the older generation but also from the younger generation, which seeks to maintain cultural purity. This polarization reflects the context of authenticity within cultural studies, yet it is framed within a distinct and understandable local context. The electric *Sasando* exemplifies effective

cultural adaptation strategies in the digital age while maintaining its original identity.

The influence of oral tradition and the absence of documentation are further exacerbated by restricted access to technology in remote regions and insufficient incentives for local scholars. This scenario contrasts with traditional Javanese musical instruments, which are extensively documented, underscoring the disparity in the preservation of national culture. This finding underscores the necessity of a decentralized method for documenting Indonesia's cultural heritage.

The absence of product standardization and cohesive marketing strategies diminishes the commercial potential of *Sasando* in relation to other traditional crafts. The findings enhance the discourse on the creative economy by emphasizing the necessity of a cluster-based approach for traditional *Sasando* musical instrument artisans. The *Sasando* experience serves as a significant case study regarding the incorporation of local culture within the national creative economy.

The limited role of formal education in preserving *Sasando* underscores the curriculum's strong focus on Western music and the shortage of trained teachers, resulting in a younger generation that is disconnected from its cultural heritage. This situation illustrates the inadequacy of the national education system in executing multicultural education, a significant concern related to cultural nationalism. The *Sasando* experience provides significant insights into the incorporation of local cultural heritage within the national education framework.

Cultural festivals serve as an effective preservation strategy, exceeding expectations. In addition to their promotional role, these festivals stimulate natural regeneration by fostering competition across generations and regions. The visibility of this dynamic is diminished in other cultural festivals in Indonesia, rendering *Sasando* a distinctive case. This finding enhances event tourism theory by illustrating the role of festivals as a vehicle for cultural transmission, rather than solely serving as tourist attractions.

The findings regarding alterations in raw materials as a result of the ecological crisis broaden the discourse by introducing more profound cultural implications. The limited availability of specific bamboo and *lontar* leaves presents a production challenge and jeopardizes the authenticity of the sound and the philosophical principles associated with the *Sasando*. This situation connects cultural preservation with ecological challenges, a perspective that remains uncommon in ethnomusicology research. The experience of preserving *Sasando* exemplifies the interconnection inherent in cultural diversity.

This research proposes an interdisciplinary collaboration that extends beyond mere recommendations to present a concrete model. This approach enhances cultural

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research methodology by illustrating how technical collaboration can deepen anthropological understanding, thus broadening the discussion on the significance of *Sasando* philosophy in relation to contemporary environmental issues. The principle of harmony between humans and nature in *Sasando* transcends traditional values and can function as a conceptual framework for sustainable development. This viewpoint connects local knowledge with the global agenda.

This research confirms prior findings and presents new perspectives through a holistic approach that integrates the analysis of cultural values, social functions, and preservation challenges, thus contributing to the theory of cultural preservation in the context of globalization.

## 6. Conclusion

*Sasando* is a traditional musical instrument originating from Rote Island, functioning both as a musical device and a representation of cultural identity and pride for the local community. This musical instrument is constructed from natural materials, including bamboo and *lontar* leaves, which embody the local wisdom and life philosophy of the Rote people. The spiritual values inherent in the *Sasando* render it a medium for communication with ancestors and the universe. The *Sasando* functions as an entertainment device and an integral component of the community's belief system and traditions. This illustrates the significance of the *Sasando* in influencing the collective identity of the Rote community.

The *Sasando* serves a significant social function within the Rote community, particularly as a unifying element and a means of conveying intergenerational values. The *Sasando* is utilized in traditional events, including weddings, harvest ceremonies, and death rituals, to enhance social solidarity.

Preservation efforts for the *Sasando* engage local communities and governmental bodies, encompassing art studios and cultural events like the *Sasando* Week. Introducing these activities is essential for familiarizing the younger generation and tourists with the *Sasando* and incorporating this musical instrument into the school curriculum in East Nusa Tenggara. Innovations such as the electric *Sasando* necessitate increased support through enhanced funding and sustainable policy frameworks.

Digital media and technology serve as significant instruments in facilitating the preservation of the *Sasando*. Platforms such as YouTube and Instagram facilitate the global promotion of this musical instrument, while mobile applications and augmented reality (AR) are created to enhance interactive learning. To preserve the authenticity of *Sasando*'s cultural values, it is essential to address challenges,

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including inadequate internet infrastructure and the accuracy of digital content.

Preserving *Sasando* necessitates collaboration among multiple stakeholders, including government entities, academic institutions, and local communities. The incorporation of *Sasando* within the creative sector can augment its economic significance, and safeguarding intellectual property rights is essential to avert unethical exploitation. Interdisciplinary research is essential to explore the various aspects associated with *Sasando*.

The contribution of women to the preservation of *Sasando* is frequently underestimated, despite their significant role in the transmission of traditional knowledge. Women's empowerment initiatives, exemplified by "Sasando Perempuan Rote," illustrate that this musical instrument can function as a tool for education and the promotion of gender equality. The migration of Rote residents to urban centers diminishes the availability of cultural practitioners; thus, it is essential to enhance training programs for migrants.

The *Sasando* has the potential to serve as a cultural tourism attraction, thereby enhancing the economic development of the Rote community. The advancement of *Sasando*-centered tourism, including performances and workshops, has the potential to draw both domestic and international visitors. Commercialization should be conducted with caution to preserve its intrinsic values. Policy recommendations encompass curriculum integration, training for youth, and conservation of raw materials to ensure the sustainability and relevance of *Sasando* as a symbol of the cultural identity of the Rote community.

The *Sasando* serves as a symbol of cultural identity, reflecting the history, social values, and resilience of the Rote community in the face of changing circumstances. Preserving it necessitates innovative collaborative efforts that also honor its traditions. The *Sasando* can persist as a cultural emblem of Rote Island and enhance the diversity of traditional Indonesian music. The *Sasando* illustrates that cultural heritage serves not only as a remnant of history but also as a catalyst for future inspiration.

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