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IT'S NOT JUST A FESTIVAL, IT'S A MOVEMENT: SYNCHRONIZE FESTIVAL AND COMMUNITY-DRIVEN CULTURAL PRACTICES

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Abstrak

Festival musik menjadi ruang penting bagi ekspresi budaya dan keterlibatan komunitas dalam lanskap budaya perkotaan Indonesia. Namun, kajian mengenai festival musik masih banyak menitikberatkan pada pariwisata, place branding, dan dampak ekonomi, sementara perannya dalam gerakan budaya, keberlanjutan, dan praktik budaya berbasis komunitas belum banyak dikaji. Penelitian ini menganalisis perkembangan Synchronize Festival selama satu dekade dan mengeksplorasi transformasinya dari acara musik menjadi gerakan budaya yang lebih luas. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif melalui observasi partisipatif, analisis dokumen, dan kajian media yang dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Synchronize Festival membangun ekosistem budaya melalui kolaborasi musisi, seniman, kolektif, dan audiens. Inisiatif S.i.S.a memperkuat praktik keberlanjutan melalui pengelolaan sampah, stasiun isi ulang air, energi terbarukan, dan mobilitas berkelanjutan. Diskusi publik, pembelajaran kolektif, dan pengarsipan budaya turut mendorong produksi pengetahuan dan kolektivitas komunitas. Temuan ini menegaskan transformasi Synchronize Festival menjadi gerakan budaya berbasis komunitas yang mendorong kolaborasi, kepedulian lingkungan, dan partisipasi kolektif.

Kata Kunci: Festival musik, gerakan budaya, keberlanjutan, kolektif, industri kreatif

Abstract

Music festivals have become important spaces for cultural expression and community engagement within Indonesia's urban cultural landscape. However, existing studies have largely focused on tourism, place branding, and economic impacts, while their roles in cultural movements, sustainability, and community-based practices remain underexplored. This study examines the development of Synchronize Festival over its first decade and explores its transformation from a music event into a broader cultural movement. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through participant observation, document analysis, and media review, followed by thematic analysis. The findings indicate that Synchronize Festival fosters a cultural ecosystem by connecting musicians, artists, collectives, and audiences through collaborative programs. Its S.i.S.a initiative advances environmental sustainability through waste management, water refill stations, renewable energy, and sustainable mobility. Public discussions, collective learning, and cultural archiving further support knowledge production and community collectivism. The findings demonstrate that Synchronize Festival has evolved into a community-driven cultural movement that promotes cultural collaboration, environmental engagement, and collective participation.

Keywords: *Collective, creative industries, cultural movements, music festivals, sustainability*

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, cultural festivals have become increasingly significant in shaping the cultural life of cities. Festivals are no longer understood merely as entertainment events but as platforms through which cities communicate identity, stimulate cultural participation, and activate public spaces. Scholars describe this phenomenon as the festivalization of cities, referring to the increasing use of festivals and cultural events in shaping urban cultural experiences and development strategies (Richards & Palmer, 2012; Quinn, 2005). Within this perspective, festivals function as temporary cultural infrastructures that bring together artists, communities, and audiences in shared spaces of interaction. They also create opportunities for grassroots cultural communities to connect urban cultural networks through collaborative events (Bennett et al., 2016).

The rise of festival culture is closely related to transformations in contemporary urban economies. As cities compete to attract tourism, investment, and creative industries, cultural events are frequently used as instruments of place-making and urban regeneration (Evans, 2003; Smith, 2012). Festivals enable cities to project distinctive cultural narratives and strengthen their symbolic visibility. Richards (2017) argues that events have become central to urban cultural strategies because they can stimulate economic activity, enhance cultural participation, and distinguish cities from other destinations. Beyond these functions, festivals provide spaces where cultural practices are performed, circulated, and negotiated through collective participation (Quinn, 2005; Bennett et al., 2016).

These dynamics are particularly relevant in Indonesia, where cultural festivals, music events, film festivals, and literary gatherings have become important platforms for artists and communities to engage wider audiences. Their expansion reflects the development of the creative economy and the growing role of cultural communities in shaping urban cultural life (Flew & Cunningham, 2010; Gibson & Connell, 2016). As a culturally diverse country, Indonesia hosts festivals across different regions, highlighting their importance as spaces for cultural expression, community engagement, and creative collaboration (Sasmita & Edlina, 2024). Research on Indonesian cultural practices also demonstrates the importance of examining how artistic activities communicate meanings and social values. Putri et al. (2020), for example, show that Randai Kuantan integrates storytelling, dance, music, acting, and comedy while communicating local cultural values, including solidarity and social responsibility. Although traditional folk performance differs from contemporary urban festivals in form and context, this study highlights how cultural expression can bring together artistic practices and shared meanings. Such a perspective is relevant to understanding festivals not only as events presenting cultural products but also as settings in which cultural meanings are communicated and negotiated.

Within this landscape, Synchronize Festival has emerged as one of Indonesia's distinctive music festivals. Rather than focusing primarily on

international performers or specific genres, it celebrates Indonesian music across generations and musical traditions. Its development is closely connected to Jakarta's independent cultural scene, particularly through the collaboration between the independent music label Demajors and the art collective ruangrupa. Demajors has supported independent musicians and alternative music, while ruangrupa is known for collective artistic practices connecting art, urban space, and community engagement. Their collaboration reflects the intersection of music, contemporary art, and community-based cultural practices that characterizes Synchronize Festival (Tempo, 2025; ruangrupa, 2025).

Over time, Synchronize Festival has grown into one of the largest festivals dedicated to Indonesian music. During its first decade, it attracted more than 700,000 visitors and involved over 5,000 musicians (Buana, 2025; CXO Media, 2025). Beyond its scale and musical diversity, the festival has developed into a meeting point for musicians, audiences, independent labels, and creative communities. Its tenth edition in 2025, themed Saling-Silang, emphasized collaboration through cross-generational performances, interdisciplinary projects, and curated programs. Festival director David Karto described Saling-Silang as a living practice reflecting collaborative relationships among musicians, artists, and communities (detikpop, 2025; Kumparan, 2025). The edition also featured collaborations among musicians from different generations (Tempo, 2025).

Research on event management and marketing in Indonesia offers additional context for understanding the roles and limitations of event-based activities. Susanti and Sari (2022), in their study of event marketing for Batik Bono Pelalawan, examine how events are used to promote a local cultural product and identify limited event frequency and availability as constraints on promotional efforts. Similarly, Fahrizal and Yozani (2023), studying marketing communication at Living World Pekanbaru, find that events can attract visitors, although their effects on visitor traffic are not consistent over time. These studies focus primarily on promotion and audience attraction rather than festivals as community-driven cultural movements. Nevertheless, they underline the importance of looking beyond the existence of an event to examine its broader functions, continuity, and outcomes. Combined with research on cultural performance and symbolic meaning (Putri et al., 2020), they point to the value of investigating cultural events through communication, participation, and the practices they enable.

Despite the growing presence of music festivals in Indonesia's urban cultural landscape, academic research has largely focused on tourism, urban regeneration, and place branding (Richards & Palmer, 2012; Quinn, 2005; Smith, 2012). Less attention has been given to how music festivals facilitate cultural communication, environmental initiatives, and grassroots collaboration, particularly in Southeast Asia. Although festival studies recognize the capacity of festivals to connect cultural actors and encourage participation (Bennett et al., 2016), further research is needed to

understand how these relationships extend beyond musical performances into environmental responsibility, collective learning, and community-based cultural practices. The present study addresses this gap by examining Synchronize Festival not simply as an event for attracting audiences, but as a cultural platform in which artistic collaboration, environmental initiatives, and community practices intersect.

This study examines Synchronize Festival through the intersecting perspectives of cultural communication, community engagement, and environmental communication. Cultural communication helps explain how cultural practices and narratives circulate through interactions among artists, collectives, and audiences. Communication involves not only the transmission of information but also the construction of shared meanings through interaction and dialogue (Craig, 1999; Fiske, 2010). Community engagement directs attention to participation and collaboration among cultural actors, while environmental communication illuminates how sustainability initiatives communicate environmental concerns and encourage responsible practices among festival participants and organizers. Together, these perspectives provide a basis for examining the festival as a cultural platform extending beyond entertainment.

The analysis is organized around three interconnected themes identified through thematic analysis: (1) the festival as a cultural ecosystem, (2) the green movement of Synchronize Fest, and (3) community-driven practices and collectivism. The first examines how the festival connects musicians, independent labels, artists, and cultural collectives through collaboration and cultural production. The second explores the environmental initiatives developed through S.i.S.a and their integration into festival practices. The third investigates how public discussions, collective learning, and cultural archiving support knowledge exchange and community participation. Cultural networks facilitate collaboration among musicians, artists, and collectives, while S.i.S.a integrates environmental responsibility into festival operations. Public discussions, collective learning, and archiving extend these efforts by supporting knowledge exchange and cultural participation. Interactions among these practices connect artistic production, environmental engagement, and community-based cultural activity within Synchronize Festival.

Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: (1) How has Synchronize Festival developed beyond a music event into a broader community-driven cultural movement during its first decade? (2) How do its cultural ecosystem, environmental initiatives, and community-driven practices contribute to cultural collaboration, collective learning, and participation within Indonesia's contemporary urban cultural landscape? The study aims to examine the festival's cultural networks, analyze how environmental initiatives are incorporated into its practices, and explore how collective learning and cultural archiving sustain community-based engagement. By connecting these dimensions, this article contributes to festival studies and communication scholarship by examining

how a music festival can facilitate cultural communication, environmental engagement, and community-driven cultural practices beyond musical performance.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine the development of Synchronize Festival and its evolution from a music event into a broader cultural movement. A case study is appropriate for exploring complex cultural phenomena within their real-life contexts, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined (Yin & Campbell, 2018). Synchronize Festival was selected because it brings together musical performances, visual art, cultural collectives, environmental initiatives, and community-based practices. These characteristics make it a relevant case for examining how a music festival can function beyond entertainment and become a platform for cultural collaboration and collective engagement. The study covers the festival's first decade, distinguishing between its historical development and the practices observed during the 2025 edition.

Participant observation was conducted during the tenth-anniversary edition of Synchronize Festival in 2025. The researcher attended the event and observed musical performances, interdisciplinary cultural programs, environmental initiatives, and community-oriented activities within the festival setting. Particular attention was given to how these activities were organized and how cultural and environmental concerns were incorporated into the event. Observation was limited to the 2025 edition, while information about the festival's development over its first decade was obtained through document analysis and media review.

Participant observation was conducted exclusively during the 2025 edition of Synchronize Festival. The researcher attended the event as a visitor and observed musical performances, art exhibitions, environmental programs, public discussions, and community-based initiatives. Field observations were documented through field notes, photographs, and reflective records. Particular attention was given to ruru25: Poros Lumbung, the rurukids creative space, environmental initiatives under the S.i.S.a movement, and public discussion forums such as JalinTalks Special Live. These activities were examined in terms of their program formats, cultural content, opportunities for interaction, and relationship to the festival's broader cultural orientation. Observation provided situated insights into how these initiatives were presented and enacted in 2025, although it could not establish whether similar practices occurred in the same form during earlier editions. The use of observation to understand cultural practices within their settings is consistent with ethnographic approaches discussed by Van Maanen (1988) and Spradley (1980).

To reconstruct the festival's historical development, document analysis examined official festival materials, program descriptions, sustainability reports, media releases, and archival materials associated with Synchronize

Festival and its collaborating organizations. Following Bowen (2009), documents were treated as sources of information that could be systematically examined to identify relevant patterns and contextual developments. The analysis focused on changes in programming, the involvement of cultural collectives, the introduction and presentation of environmental initiatives, and the festival's stated cultural objectives. Media reports and digital content complemented the documentary materials by providing accounts of activities and developments across different editions. Together, these sources formed the principal basis for examining the festival's trajectory before 2025, while direct observation provided evidence of its contemporary practices.

The analysis distinguished between organizers' stated objectives, documented activities, and evidence of outcomes. This distinction was important because official publications often communicate intended goals, while media coverage may emphasize particular achievements or aspects of an event. Neither the announcement of an initiative nor its implementation was automatically interpreted as evidence of lasting impact. For example, the presence of an environmental program could demonstrate that sustainability had been incorporated into festival activities, but it could not independently establish long-term changes in audience behaviour or environmental performance. Similarly, the inclusion of community-based programs indicated opportunities for participation but did not, by itself, demonstrate sustained collaboration or collective learning. This distinction informed the interpretation of evidence throughout the study.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke (2006). The process began with repeated readings of field notes, documents, and media materials to develop familiarity with the data. Relevant passages and observations were then coded according to their content and relationship to the research questions. Related codes were compared and grouped into broader categories, which were subsequently reviewed and refined through an iterative process. During this process, the researcher examined recurring patterns across sources while considering differences between retrospective accounts and directly observed practices. The resulting themes were interpreted in relation to the study's central concern: how Synchronize Festival connects artistic collaboration, environmental engagement, and community-based cultural practices.

Three interconnected themes emerged: (1) the festival as a cultural ecosystem, (2) the green movement of Synchronize Fest, and (3) community-driven practices and collectivism. The first examines relationships among musicians, artists, independent labels, and cultural collectives. The second explores environmental initiatives and their integration into festival activities. The third focuses on community participation, collective learning, and cultural archiving. These themes emerged through engagement with the collected data rather than being imposed as predetermined measures of success. Considered together, they provide an analytical structure for understanding Synchronize Festival as a

cultural platform while recognizing the limits of the available evidence in establishing its longer-term effects.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Festival as a cultural ecosystem

One of the defining characteristics of Synchronize Festival is its capacity to bring together diverse actors within Indonesia's popular music ecosystem. Rather than presenting performances from a single genre or generation, the festival connects established musicians, contemporary independent bands, independent labels, art collectives, and audiences within a shared cultural environment. Media reports document its scale and diversity, while observations of the 2025 edition reveal how musical performances coexist with exhibitions, workshops, and community-oriented programs (CNN Indonesia, 2022; Tempo, 2025). These characteristics suggest that the festival's significance extends beyond the presentation of music to the relationships and opportunities for interaction it creates among cultural actors.

This interpretation resonates with Bennett et al. (2016), who situate festivals within broader transformations in cultural production and participation. Quinn (2025) further argues that urban cultural festivals can be understood as social infrastructure because their significance lies not only in the event itself but also in the networks, relationships, and cultural practices that sustain it. In the case of Synchronize Festival, the convergence of musicians, independent labels, artists, and audiences creates opportunities for cultural exchange across networks that may otherwise operate separately. However, the presence of these actors should be understood as evidence of opportunities for interaction rather than proof that lasting collaborations or institutional relationships necessarily emerge from every encounter.

Understanding the festival as a cultural ecosystem also draws attention to the relationships among its different participants and activities. A festival ecosystem is not simply a collection of performances or cultural products presented at the same venue. It also involves the organizational arrangements, partnerships, and shared spaces through which different cultural actors become visible to one another. From this perspective, Synchronize Festival's combination of music, visual art, workshops, and community programs is significant because it places different forms of cultural production within a common environment. These arrangements create conditions for encounters across artistic disciplines and generations, although the extent to which such encounters lead to sustained collaboration cannot be determined from the available evidence alone. Synchronize Festival's interdisciplinary character was particularly evident in its 2025 edition through ruru25: Poros Lumbung, developed in collaboration with ruangrupa, a Jakarta-based art collective. Exhibitions, film screenings, workshops, and community gatherings formed part of the program, which highlighted ruangrupa's artistic practice. Participating collectives included Serrum, Grafis Huru Hara, Hysteria, Jatiwangi Art Factory, Komunitas KAHE, and Indonesia Art

Movement in Jayapura (ruangrupa, 2025). By bringing community-based visual art into a festival primarily associated with music, ruru25: Poros Lumbung created opportunities for different artistic practices to intersect within a shared cultural environment.

Ruangrupa's concept of lumbung emphasizes collective resource sharing and relationship-building among cultural practitioners. Synchronize Festival provided a setting where artistic practices, organizational networks, and cultural knowledge could intersect. Participation by multiple collectives demonstrates how interdisciplinary programming was put into practice, while the program's curatorial orientation reflects an intention to encourage collaboration. Whether these encounters resulted in sustained partnerships beyond the festival requires further evidence.

Beyond conventional stage performances, ruru25: Poros Lumbung incorporated exhibitions, film screenings, workshops, and community gatherings that offered different modes of audience engagement. Visitors could encounter artworks, participate in activities, or explore cultural practices that required forms of attention beyond watching musical performances. Such diversity broadened opportunities for participation and suggests that cultural engagement can take multiple forms within a single festival. However, observations from the 2025 edition do not establish how individual visitors moved between activities or interpreted their experiences. Another example was rurukids, a creative space for children and families that offered activities such as drawing, crafting, and experimenting with recycled materials. As shown in Figure 1, children's artworks were displayed within the festival environment. The program provided an opportunity for younger visitors to engage in creative activities alongside the festival's musical and artistic offerings. Its format suggests an educational and participatory orientation, although the available observations do not establish its effects on children's learning or environmental awareness beyond the activities themselves.



Figure 1. Children's artworks displayed at rurukids, Synchronize Festival 2025. (Souce: photo by the author).

Including rurukids broadens the understanding of participation beyond attendance at musical performances. Displays of children's artworks make creative activity visible within the festival environment, while drawing and crafting allow visitors to engage directly with artistic processes. Working with recycled materials also connects creative expression with environmental concerns addressed elsewhere in the festival. Such activities illustrate how cultural and environmental programming can intersect within a single space. Nevertheless, their

presence does not establish whether children developed lasting environmental awareness or achieved measurable learning outcomes.

Synchronize Festival's combination of artistic production and community-oriented activities reflects a broader approach to festival programming. Brownett and Evans (2020) argue that community arts festivals can contribute to placemaking by opening familiar spaces to collective cultural activities and creating opportunities for connections across different groups. Similarly, Stevens and Shin (2014) demonstrate how festival spaces can facilitate informal encounters and engagement with local identity. Applied to Synchronize Festival, these perspectives help explain how performances, exhibitions, and participatory activities create conditions for cultural interaction. Available evidence supports interpreting the festival as a meeting point within a broader cultural ecosystem, although claims about lasting cultural or economic impacts would require longitudinal research beyond the observed edition and existing media reports.

Synchronize Festival's cultural ecosystem is characterized by opportunities for encounters among different cultural practices and participants. Music intersects with visual art, collective artistic work, and family-oriented creative activities, each retaining its own purpose and form. Such diversity positions the festival as a platform for cultural collaboration. However, the presence of collaborative programming should be distinguished from its longer-term outcomes. Observations from the 2025 edition confirm that interdisciplinary activities formed part of the festival, but determining whether these activities strengthened cultural networks over time would require interviews with participating collectives and follow-up research beyond the event.

The green movement of Synchronize Festival

Environmental responsibility constitutes another dimension of Synchronize Festival's development. Since 2019, the festival has implemented S.i.S.a (System Integration for Sustainability Act), an initiative intended to reduce the environmental impacts associated with large-scale music events and encourage more responsible practices among participants. According to festival director David Karto, waste generated during a three-day festival can reach approximately 11 tons, providing an important rationale for developing more systematic waste-management practices (Kartitiani, 2024). This statement reflects the organizers' understanding of the environmental challenge; the effectiveness of individual interventions must be assessed separately through implementation records and outcome data.

S.i.S.a encompasses several initiatives, including the Bring Your Own Tumbler campaign, water refill stations, waste separation and processing, and sustainable mobility programs such as Bike to Synchronize Fest. The festival also promotes public transportation through initiatives such as Nebeng Gratis (Synchronize Festival, 2025; Kartitiani, 2024). These programs translate the general objective of sustainability into

practical interventions within the festival environment. Refill stations provide an alternative to purchasing bottled water, while reusable tumblers and mobility campaigns encourage participants to consider the environmental consequences of their consumption and travel choices.

Environmental responsibility at Synchronize Festival is reflected in several operational practices, extending beyond communication campaigns. Refill stations and reusable tumblers address consumption and single-use plastic waste, while waste separation and processing focus on managing discarded materials. Cycling and public transportation initiatives address visitor mobility and its contribution to the festival's environmental footprint. Each component of S.i.S.a responds to a different operational challenge, making comprehensive measurement necessary to assess its overall environmental contribution.

Reported waste data offer a concrete indicator of progress in one area. According to Synchronize Festival and its waste-management partner, plastic bottle waste declined from 2,339 kilograms in 2022, when attendance reached 74,629, to 1,092 kilograms in 2023, despite an increase in attendance to 78,197 (Synchronize Festival, 2025). The reduction is consistent with the intended outcomes of the Bring Your Own Tumbler campaign and refill-station initiative. However, the available data do not isolate the effects of individual interventions or account for other possible changes in waste generation and collection. Consequently, the decline cannot be attributed exclusively to these programs.

Assessing environmental performance at large-scale events also requires consideration of attendance and waste-management practices. Visitor numbers provide context for interpreting waste quantities because attendance can influence the volume of materials generated. The reported decline in plastic bottle waste despite higher attendance is therefore noteworthy, but the figures alone do not establish the festival's overall environmental performance. A more comprehensive assessment would require consistent data on waste categories, collection methods, recycling and processing rates, and the measurement boundaries used to calculate reported quantities. Current figures demonstrate a reduction in one reported waste category rather than a comprehensive decrease in the festival's total environmental impact.



Figure 2. Water refill station at Synchronize Festival 2025, part of the S.i.S.a sustainability initiative encouraging visitors to reduce single-use plastic.
(Source: merahputih.com/Andrew Francois).

Figure 2 shows the water refill station. Free drinking water adds a social dimension to S.i.S.a. Saleh Husein (Ale), one of the initiative's initiators, has

explained that providing water without charge is intended to remind visitors that access to clean water is a basic right. Refill stations put this principle into practice by allowing visitors to obtain drinking water without purchasing bottled products. Their presence therefore links waste reduction with a broader concern about access to essential resources. However, observations of the facilities alone cannot establish whether visitors recognized or responded to the social message behind their provision. Interviews or participant feedback would be needed to understand how audiences interpreted the initiative.

S.i.S.a also addresses waste management through collaboration with environmental communities and civil society organizations. Reported practices include waste separation, composting organic materials with maggot larvae, and collecting cigarette butts for potential recycling into other products (Kartitiani, 2024). Collaboration with Greenpeace Indonesia has further supported environmental communication and infrastructure. According to Greenpeace Indonesia (2025), three sets of solar panels were installed to supply approximately 3,300 watts of electricity to the festival's relaxation area. Alongside waste-management activities, the installation demonstrates how environmental considerations have been incorporated into festival infrastructure. However, the available information does not establish the quantity of waste successfully processed or the amount of electricity generated and consumed. Evaluating operational performance would require more detailed records of material processing, energy production, and resource use.

Sustainable mobility extends S.i.S.a beyond the festival grounds. Bike to Synchronize Fest encourages visitors to cycle by providing dedicated parking and access arrangements, while Nebeng Gratis, implemented with TransJakarta, offers free public transportation from several locations. Media reports record more than 1,200 users of the free transport service in one edition (Kartitiani, 2024). This figure indicates uptake of an alternative transport option, but it does not establish how much festival-related travel emissions were reduced. Assessing that outcome would require information about users' previous or alternative transport choices, travel distances, vehicle occupancy, and the proportion of total attendees using the service.

Environmental communication offers a useful perspective for examining how S.i.S.a connects sustainability messages with practical arrangements. Refill stations, waste-separation facilities, solar panels, and alternative transport options make environmental concerns visible through the organization of the festival itself. Derrett (2003) and Getz (2010) provide broader perspectives on incorporating social and cultural objectives into festival practices, while Quinn (2025) conceptualizes festivals as social infrastructure connecting organizational arrangements with opportunities for public participation. At Synchronize Festival, environmental responsibility is evident in both operational measures and audience-facing initiatives. However, implementing a program and communicating its objectives

do not necessarily produce lasting behavioural change. Establishing whether visitors adopt more sustainable practices beyond the event would require follow-up research.

Evaluating S.i.S.a therefore requires a distinction between implementation, operational outputs, and longer-term environmental outcomes. The documented facilities and programs show that sustainability has become part of festival operations, while reported waste quantities and transport-use figures provide indicators of specific outputs. Neither type of evidence independently establishes the initiative's overall environmental effectiveness. Waste reductions may reflect several contributing factors, and participation in alternative transport schemes does not automatically demonstrate lower emissions. S.i.S.a can consequently be understood as an organized effort to integrate environmental responsibility into the festival experience, supported by documented initiatives and some reported results. Its broader effects on audience behaviour and the festival's total environmental footprint remain questions for systematic evaluation.

Community-driven practices and collectivism

Beyond bringing together musical performers and creative communities, Synchronize Festival provides a setting in which cultural actors can exchange knowledge, discuss shared concerns, and contribute to broader conversations about cultural production. Its community-driven character can be understood through the involvement of artists, collectives, and cultural organizations in shaping programs and introducing perspectives that extend beyond musical entertainment. Community-driven practice, in this context, refers not simply to the presence of different communities at a festival, but to the opportunities they have to contribute their knowledge, experiences, and cultural practices to a shared environment (Goldbard, 2006). Collectivism, meanwhile, concerns the relationships and shared practices through which these contributions can intersect. Although related, the two concepts are not interchangeable. Community-driven practice emphasizes participation in shaping cultural activity, while collectivism highlights the importance of cooperation, shared resources, and knowledge exchange in sustaining it.

One example was JalinTalks Special Live, held on 4 October 2025 under the title Festival Seni dan Upaya yang Berkelanjutan. The session brought together Ade Darmawan and Ajeng Nurul Aini from ruangrupa, Aldila Karina from Demajors and Synchronize Festival, and historian Himar Farid as moderator. Their discussion addressed the role of festivals beyond entertainment, particularly their potential to support public education and circulate knowledge about cultural practices and sustainability. As documented in Figure 3, the session formed part of the festival's public program, bringing cultural practitioners and audiences into a shared setting for discussion. Its inclusion demonstrates that Synchronize Festival made space for conversations about the conditions and responsibilities of cultural production alongside its musical performances.



Figure 3. Discussion session of JalinTalks Special Live at Synchronize Festival 2025.
(Source: photo by the author)

The significance of this forum lies in the kind of participation it made possible. Rather than positioning audiences solely as consumers of performances, a discussion program invites them to encounter the ideas, experiences, and concerns that inform cultural work. Fiske (2010) understands communication as an active process of producing and negotiating meaning, while Craig (1999) situates communication as a field of practice through which people make sense of social life. These perspectives help explain the relevance of public discussion within a festival environment. Conversations among cultural practitioners can bring different interpretations into contact and make questions of sustainability and cultural responsibility available for public consideration. Nevertheless, the presence of a discussion does not establish that audiences adopted its ideas or changed their subsequent practices. Without interviews, audience evaluations, or follow-up evidence, its contribution is best understood as creating an opportunity for dialogue and knowledge exchange.

A related orientation can be seen in ruangrupa's approach to collective artistic practice and its involvement in Gudskul, a collective learning platform established in 2018. Gudskul emphasizes collective intelligence and learning among cultural practitioners, challenging the assumption that knowledge must flow primarily from a teacher to a student. Instead, learning can develop through exchanges among participants who bring different experiences, skills, and perspectives to a shared process. This approach offers a useful way to interpret the relationship between Synchronize Festival and wider networks of cultural practice. Through the participation of ruangrupa and the inclusion of its perspectives in festival programming, ideas associated with collective learning entered a public cultural setting. The connection, however, should not be taken as evidence that festival audiences participated in Gudskul's longer-term learning processes. Its relevance lies in the encounter between the festival and an approach to cultural work that values shared knowledge and collaboration.

Questions about how cultural knowledge is preserved and represented also emerged in the JalinTalks discussion, particularly through Demajors' role in documenting Indonesian independent music. For more than two decades, the independent label has accumulated music releases that form a record of developments within the country's music scene. Such collections can help preserve

works that might otherwise receive limited attention in dominant accounts of popular music. Their significance extends beyond the preservation of recordings, since decisions about what is collected, catalogued, and made accessible also influence which artists and musical practices remain visible in cultural history. Documentation therefore raises questions about who has the authority to represent a music scene and whose contributions are recognized in its historical narrative. From a community-driven perspective, efforts by independent labels and cultural practitioners to preserve their own materials can broaden the range of voices involved in documenting music history. In this case, the available evidence establishes that these issues were discussed at the festival, but it does not demonstrate that Synchronize Festival itself established a new archive or that Demajors' collection has produced particular outcomes for researchers, musicians, or audiences. Assessing those contributions would require closer examination of the collection, its accessibility, and how it is used.

Public discussion, collective learning, and the preservation of cultural materials illustrate different dimensions of community-driven practice. Discussion creates opportunities for cultural actors to articulate and exchange ideas, collective learning emphasizes the development of knowledge through relationships, and documentation helps retain materials through which cultural histories can be examined and interpreted. Their common element is not simply that multiple actors are present, but that cultural work can involve sharing knowledge, negotiating meaning, and maintaining resources beyond an individual performance. Goldbard (2006) emphasizes the role of community-based cultural practice in collective expression, while Quinn (2005) examines how festivals create temporary public settings in which artistic expression, community experiences, and cultural identities intersect. These perspectives help situate Synchronize Festival within a broader understanding of festivals as meeting points for cultural relationships and activity.

However, a temporary gathering does not automatically produce lasting collaboration or collective commitment. The evidence from Synchronize Festival's 2025 edition demonstrates that its program accommodated public dialogue and brought together actors associated with different areas of cultural practice. Documents and media reports provide a broader view of the festival's development, but the extent to which these encounters lead to sustained relationships, shared projects, or changes in cultural practice remains an open question. Accordingly, the festival's community-driven character is most clearly reflected in the opportunities it creates for participation and exchange, while collectivism can be understood as an orientation toward shared knowledge and cultural resources. Whether these opportunities develop into durable forms of collective action requires further investigation beyond the festival itself.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how Synchronize Festival has evolved beyond a music festival into a community-driven cultural practices. Across its first decade, the festival has connected musicians, artists, collectives, and audiences through a range of cultural activities that extend beyond musical performances. Environmental initiatives, public discussions, exhibitions, and collective learning programs illustrate how cultural events can foster participation, collaboration, and shared engagement within urban cultural life. What distinguishes Synchronize Festival is not simply its scale or diversity of performers, but its ability to bring together different cultural actors within a sustained network of collaboration. Community-based exhibitions, sustainability campaigns, cultural archiving initiatives, and discussion forums create opportunities for knowledge exchange and collective action. Seen from this perspective, the phrase "It's Not Just a Festival, It's a Movement" reflects an ongoing process through which cultural communities cultivate relationships, shared values, and long-term commitments.

Findings from this study suggest that social change rarely emerges from isolated interventions. Meaningful transformation develops through continuous cultural practices that invite participation and collective responsibility. Music and festivals therefore become important cultural mediums through which social values are negotiated, experienced, and sustained over time. For festival organizers and cultural policymakers, this highlights the importance of supporting festivals as spaces for cultural collaboration, environmental engagement, and community participation. Further research may explore how similar community-driven festivals across Southeast Asia contribute to cultural innovation and the development of urban cultural ecosystems.

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