

**FROM ARTIFACT TO BELONGING: REFRAMING ISLAMIC
ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES AS RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE
EDUCATION IN THE PRIANGAN HIGHLAND, WEST JAVA**

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ABSTRAK

Di tengah agenda global pembangunan berkelanjutan, pemanfaatan warisan budaya sebagai sumber pembelajaran masih menghadapi tantangan, terutama karena warisan Islam kerap diposisikan sebagai artefak statis yang terpisah dari kehidupan sosial dan praktik pendidikan kontemporer. Kondisi ini menyebabkan rendahnya keterlibatan generasi muda serta terbatasnya integrasi nilai-nilai warisan dalam pendidikan berkelanjutan. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan ulang warisan arkeologi Islam dari sekadar objek material menjadi sumber pembelajaran yang membangun rasa keterikatan dalam konteks pendidikan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui studi literatur, observasi lapangan, dan wawancara dengan komunitas lokal di wilayah Priangan, Jawa Barat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa warisan arkeologi Islam tidak hanya merepresentasikan masa lalu, tetapi juga mengandung nilai-nilai kearifan lokal seperti harmoni sosial, etika lingkungan, dan praktik keberagaman moderat yang relevan dengan pendidikan berkelanjutan. Dengan memanfaatkan keterlibatan digital dan peran aktif komunitas, warisan tersebut tidak hanya dilestarikan, tetapi juga direvitalisasi sebagai *living heritage* yang relevan bagi generasi muda. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada pengembangan kerangka konseptual yang menggeser paradigma dari “artefak” menuju “keterikatan,” sehingga mendukung transformasi pendidikan Islam yang lebih inklusif, kontekstual, dan berorientasi pada masa depan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: warisan arkeologi Islam, kearifan lokal, partisipasi komunitas, Priangan, pendidikan berkelanjutan.

ABSTRACT

The use of cultural heritage as a learning resource continues to face significant challenges, particularly as Islamic heritage is often positioned as a static artifact detached from social life and contemporary educational practices. This condition has resulted in low levels of youth engagement and limited integration of heritage values

into sustainable education. This article aims to reframe the Islamic archeological site from merely a material object into a learning resource that fosters a sense of belonging within the education context. This study employs a qualitative approach, with data collected through literature review, field observation, and interviews with local communities in the Priangan Highlands, West Java. The findings reveal that Islamic archeological heritage not only represents the past but also embodies local wisdom values, such as social harmony, environmental ethics, and moderate religious practices, which are highly relevant to sustainable education. By leveraging digital engagement and active community participation, the heritage is not only preserved but also revitalized as a form of living heritage that remains relevant to younger generations. This study contributes to the development of a conceptual framework that shifts the paradigm from “artifact” to “belonging,” thereby supporting the transformation of Islamic education toward a more inclusive, contextual, and sustainability-oriented future.

Keywords: *Islamic heritage, local wisdom, community participation, sustainable education*

INTRODUCTION

Priangan is one of the important regions within Sundanese culture that historically and culturally encompasses the mountainous areas of central and southern West Java, including Bandung, Garut, Tasikmalaya, Ciamis, and their surrounding regions. The term “Priangan” is derived from *parahyangan*, meaning “the abode of the *hyang* (ancestors/deities),” reflecting the cosmological dimension embedded in the Sundanese worldview (Ekadjati, 2009). An alternative interpretation suggests that the term Priangan originates from *prayangan*, which denotes “sincere submission” or “a wholehearted act of surrender” (Zakaria, 2025).

Islamic archeological sites in the Priangan Highlands of West Java have generally been primarily understood as static artifacts—objects of preservation, pilgrimage destination, classification, and historical reconstruction—rather than as dynamic cultural resources embedded in contemporary social life (Latifundia, 2016; Purnamasari, 2009). This conventional perspective often separates material remains, such as mosques, burial complexes, inscriptions, and settlement traces, from the lived experiences and cultural identities of the surrounding communities.

In the context of global discourses on sustainable development and heritage-based education, the repositioning of archeological sites as active agents in

fostering social cohesion, cultural literacy, and place-based learning is becoming increasingly urgent (Rieckmann et al., 2017). Therefore, a conceptual shift from “artifact” toward “belonging” is critical.



Figure 1. Wilayah Priangan di Jawa Barat

Source: Rosidi et al., 2000

Previous studies on Islamic archeology in Indonesia have generally focused on typology, chronology, and the processes of Islamic cultural diffusion as evidenced through material remains (Ambary, 1998; Guillot, 2008). Other scholars have emphasized heritage management and conservation issues, particularly in relation to tourism and policy frameworks (Smith, 2006). More recent studies have highlighted the role of cultural heritage in education, especially through experiential and community-based learning approaches (Waterton & Watson, 2010). However, efforts to integrate Islamic archeological sites into a sustainable educational framework that emphasizes local engagement, a sense of cultural belonging, and long-term sustainability remain insufficient. Such integration has been relatively underexplored in the context of the Priangan Highlands, despite the region’s rich Islamic historical landscape.

This article proposes a new approach by conceptualizing Islamic archeological sites as pedagogical resources capable of fostering a sense of belonging and cultural sustainability. This study’s novelty lies in its attempt to bridge Islamic archeology with sustainable education through a socio-cultural lens that positions community participation and narrative construction as central

elements. In line with this, the study advances several key research questions: (1) How are local communities currently perceived and utilized Islamic archeological sites in the Priangan Highlands? (2) How can these sites be reformulated as resources for sustainable education? (3) What forms of engagement can strengthen the relationship between cultural heritage, identity, and learning processes?

This study employs a qualitative approach grounded in a phenomenological framework and cultural mapping. Data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews with local communities, heritage practitioners, and educators, and document analysis of local archives and relevant policy frameworks. Participatory mapping was also used to identify spatial and cultural linkages between archeological sites and community social practices. Thematic analysis was conducted to uncover patterns of meaning, perceptions, and forms of engagement. Through the integration of these methods, this study aims to formulate a contextual and sustainable model for utilizing Islamic archeological heritage as an educational resource that fosters a sense of cultural belonging while simultaneously supporting the resilience of local communities.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in a phenomenological approach and cultural mapping to understand the relationship between Islamic archeological sites and communities' social practices in the Priangan Highlands. The research sites include several Islamic archeological sites that remain active within the local communities' cultural life. The participants consisted of purposively selected community leaders, site managers, heritage practitioners, and local educators. Participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis of local archives and relevant policy frameworks were conducted for data collection. These procedures follow established qualitative methods (Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, 2014), with adaptations incorporating participatory mapping to identify spatial relationships and cultural meanings. Data analysis was carried out thematically through stages of data reduction, categorization, and interpretation to reveal patterns of perception, utilization, and educational potential within the framework of sustainable education.

DISCUSSION

The concept of “from artifact to belonging” represents a significant shift in archeology and heritage studies, moving from a focus on artifacts as material objects to a broader understanding of social meaning, identity, and the sense of belonging constructed through human interaction with heritage (Pitblado et al., 2025). Within the paradigm of classical archeology, artifacts are positioned as empirical data that can be scientifically analyzed to reconstruct past lifeways, particularly in the framework of processual archeology. This approach emphasizes objectivity, classification, and the functional role of material culture as indicators of social systems (Binford, 1962; Renfrew & Bahn, 2012). Accordingly, artifacts are primarily understood as “evidence,” rather than as entities that remain embedded in contemporary social experience.

However, since the emergence of post-processual approaches in the 1980s, a significant shift has occurred in the understanding of artifacts. Scholars such as Hodder (1986) emphasize that artifacts are not neutral but imbued with symbolic meaning and should be interpreted as “social texts” that reflect relations of power, ideology, and identity (Hodder, 1991). In this context, artifacts function as a medium that connects the past with the present’s subjective experiences.

This perspective is further developed in heritage studies by Laurajane Smith, who critiques the dominance of the AHD (Authorized Heritage Discourse), referring to the institutional tendency to top-down define heritage while marginalizing the role of communities in ascribing meaning to it (Smith, 2006). Accordingly, “belonging” emerges as a key concept that emphasizes the emotional, cultural, and political engagement of communities with their heritage.

Furthermore, the concept of “belonging” is closely related to the construction of collective memory and identity. Nora (1989) explains that certain objects, places, or practices can function as “sites of memory” that enable communities to build attachments to the past through his notion of *lieux de mémoire*. Within this framework, artifacts not only represent history but also serve as media through which identities are negotiated in the present. This perspective resonates with Anderson’s concept of imagined communities, in which cultural symbols, including

artifacts, play a crucial role in shaping a sense of collective belonging that transcends spatial and temporal boundaries (Anderson, 1983).

In recent developments, this approach has been further reinforced within critical heritage studies, which position heritage as a dynamic social process. Harrison (2012) argued that heritage is not merely a collection of objects from the past but a contemporary practice involving the selection, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning by various social actors. Meanwhile, Waterton & Watson (2010) emphasized the importance of community participation in the production of heritage meanings, through which artifacts become part of a lived experience (living heritage) and strengthen a sense of belonging. Thus, “from artifact to belonging” is not merely a terminological shift but reflects an epistemological transformation: from viewing artifacts as static objects to understanding heritage as a relational arena that connects materiality, memory, and identity.

The process of Islamization in the Priangan region gradually unfolded around the sixteenth century through trade networks, the missionary activities of Islamic scholars (ulama), and political expansion from Islamic centers of power along the northern coast of Java. Early influences can be traced through interactions with the Cirebon Sultanate and the Banten Sultanate, both of which played active roles in disseminating Islam into the Priangan Highlands and the Sundanese hinterland (Lubis, 2011). The role of prominent missionary figures, such as Sunan Gunung Jati, was particularly significant in this Islamization process, both through cultural approaches and through networks of political authority. Local communities subsequently adopted Islam in an accommodative manner, integrating Islamic values into pre-existing Sundanese customary structures, thereby producing syncretic yet normatively grounded forms of religiosity. This process was further reinforced during the colonial period, when religious institutions such as pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) rapidly expanded across Priangan, becoming key centers for the transmission of knowledge and the formation of Islamic identity among Sundanese communities (Ekadjati, 2009; Rosidi, 2000).

This discussion analytically elaborates the relationship between Islamic archeological sites in the Priangan Highlands and the construction of social meaning, cultural practices, and their potential as resources for sustainable

education. Theoretically, this study is grounded in a paradigm shift within heritage studies from a materialist approach toward a constructivist perspective that emphasizes meaning, practice, and social engagement (Smith, 2006).

Archeological sites are no longer understood as inert objects but as living heritage that is continuously produced and reproduced through social interaction within this framework. The phenomenological approach employed enables the researcher to capture the subjective experiences of communities in interpreting these sites, while cultural mapping reveals spatial relationships between the sites and everyday social practices.

The objects of this study indicate that Islamic archeological sites in the Priangan region—such as ulama burial complexes, historic mosques, and traces of early Islamic settlements—function not only as historical remains but also as active social and spiritual spaces. Field data demonstrate that local communities continue to regularly engage in pilgrimage (*ziarah*), religious rituals, and social activities in and around these sites. These findings address the study’s first research question—namely, what occurs in the relationship between communities and archeological sites: there exists a living and sustained connection, although it is often unrecognized within formal frameworks of heritage management. This observation aligns with the concept of the “intangible dimensions of heritage,” which emphasizes the importance of practices, values, and collective memory in attributing meaning to sites (Rieckmann et al., 2017).

Table 1. Representation of Islamic Sites in the Priangan Region

Region	Islamic Sites	Brief Description	Status and Conditions
Bandung	Tomb of Dalem Kaum	Tombs of the local elites	Local cultural heritage and limited pilgrimage function
	The Great Mosque of Majalaya	Mosque	Cultural heritage and traces of Islam’s spread in Bandung Regency
Cianjur	Tomb of Raden Aria Wira Tanu Datar (Eyang Dalem Cikundul)	Tomb	Cultural heritage and Islam preachers in Cianjur
	The Sacred Tomb of Mama Gentur	Tomb	A very popular pilgrimage site in Cianjur
Sumedang	The tomb of Pangeran Santri (Pasarean Gede)	Tomb	Pilgrimage sites and spreaders of Islam in Sumedang

Garut	Tomb of the Godog	an important Islamic propagation site	Major religious tourism, managed for pilgrimages and rituals
	Cipari Mosque	Maosque	Cultural heritage, witness to the spread of Islam, and the struggle for independence
Tasikmalaya	Pamijahan (Syekh Abdul Muhyi)	Sufi order site	National religious tourism has a high historical value
	Manonjaya Mosque	Mosque	Cultural heritage; a combination of European and Sundanese/Javanese styles with a triple roof
Ciamis	Karangkamulyan	Galuh Kingdom sites	Cultural heritage, more dominant as historical tourism (pre-Islamic)
	The Tomb of Gunung Sari (Syekh Abdul Wajah)	Tomb	Historical sites and spiritual pilgrimages
	Tomb of Raden Adipati Arya Panji Jayanegara	Tomb	Historical sites

However, this study also identified tensions between local community perspectives and institutional approaches to site management. Many sites are managed in a top-down manner with a primary focus on physical conservation, while their social and educational dimensions receive comparatively limited attention. This condition helps explain why these sites' potential as educational resources has not been fully realized.

Within the framework of heritage dissonance (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1995), differences in the interests and perspectives of policymakers and local communities can produce misalignments in the use of cultural heritage (Imadudin & Nuralia, 2023). In the Priangan context, the limited number of community-based educational programs that engage these sites as spaces for contextual learning reflects this.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that community perceptions of Islamic archeological sites are closely intertwined with their cultural and religious identities. These sites are symbols of the continuity of local Islamic traditions and markers of communal history. From the perspective of the sense of place theory (Seamon & Sowers, 2008), emotional and symbolic attachments to space constitute a crucial factor in shaping a sense of belonging.

This study addresses the question of how such sites can be reframed as educational resources: through the strengthening of local narratives that connect the

past with contemporary communities lived experiences. In other words, rather than relying solely on formal curricular frameworks, site-based education should be grounded in local knowledge and experience.

Islamic archeological sites hold significant potential as interdisciplinary learning media in the context of sustainable education. The data indicates that such sites can be used to teach history, religious values, cultural ecology, and social practices such as *gotong royong* (communal cooperation). This approach aligns with the concept of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), which emphasizes the integration of social, cultural, and environmental dimensions within the learning process (Rieckmann et al., 2017). However, site-based ESD implementation in the Priangan region remains limited. This is largely due to the lack of collaboration among educational institutions, site managers, and local communities.

Participatory mapping practices can serve as an effective tool for identifying and articulating the relationships between archeological sites and community life. Through this process, communities become active subjects in the production of knowledge and not merely objects of research.

These findings support participatory approaches in heritage studies, which emphasize the importance of community involvement across all stages of heritage management (Smith, 2006). From a scholarly perspective, this phenomenon indicates that cultural heritage knowledge production is inherently dialogical and contextual.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that younger generations demonstrate a relatively low level of engagement with Islamic archeological sites. They tend to perceive such sites as “antiquated” and less relevant to contemporary life. Nevertheless, several history-oriented communities have emerged to bridge this gap. These include Komunitas Aleut in Bandung, which actively connects younger audiences with historical sites (Imadudin & Nuralia, 2025); *Napaktilasmu* in Garut, initiated by Muhammadiyah youth; *Komunitas Tasikmalaya Tempo Doeloe* in Tasikmalaya; and *De Brings Tjiandjoer* in Cianjur (Jo, 2016).

The generally low level of public concern for historical sites presents both a challenge and an opportunity for heritage-based education development. These sites

can be revitalized as engaging learning spaces for younger generations by integrating digital technologies, creative narratives, and interactive approaches. This finding contributes to ongoing discussions on digital heritage and cultural education innovation.

From a broader perspective, this study demonstrates that reframing Islamic archeological sites as resources for sustainable education requires a holistic and integrative approach. Physical preservation alone is insufficient; efforts must be made to revitalize the social and cultural meanings of these sites. This includes the development of locally grounded curricula, capacity building for educators and site managers, and the creation of dialogical spaces among diverse stakeholders. Accordingly, such sites should be understood not merely as “open-air museums” but as “living learning spaces” that remain relevant to contemporary society’s needs.

This study contributes to the development of Islamic archeology by incorporating the dimensions of education and sustainability. Islamic archeology has largely focused on historical and material aspects, while its social and pedagogical dimensions have received limited attention. By integrating the concept of belonging, this study offers a new framework for understanding the relationship between people, space, and cultural heritage. This approach is also aligned with contemporary scholarship, which emphasizes the importance of decolonizing knowledge and recognizing local perspectives.

Finally, the findings of this study affirm that Islamic archeological sites in the Priangan Highlands hold considerable potential as resources for sustainable education; however, their use continues to face multiple challenges. A synergistic alignment among policy, practice, and community participation is required to optimize this potential.

Accordingly, the reframing from artifact to belonging is not only a theoretical construct but also a practical strategy for fostering a sustainable future grounded in cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the Islamic archeological sites in the Priangan Highlands function not only as material remains but also as living spaces with social, cultural, and religious meanings for local communities. These sites continue to be used in social practices such as pilgrimage and religious rituals, although they have not yet been fully optimized as educational resources. Reframing these sites as resources for sustainable education can be achieved through strengthening local narratives, participatory approaches, and integration with contextual learning. The relationship between heritage, identity, and education can be further reinforced through inclusive community engagement models.

This study has a relatively narrow geographic scope and includes a small number of participants. Nevertheless, its contribution lies in advancing an integrative approach that bridges Islamic archeology with sustainable community-based education. Future research is recommended to explore digital approaches and expand the study area to enrich more comprehensive implementation models.

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