

# **TRADITION AND INNOVATION: ADAPTATION STRATEGIES OF THE MASSEPE BLACKSMITH COMMUNITY IN THE ERA OF MODERNIZATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study originates from the need to examine how tradition and innovation interact within local communities facing the challenges of modernization, focusing on the blacksmith community of Massepe in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, widely recognized as a center of Bugis traditional iron craftsmanship. The choice of this topic is grounded in the urgency of preserving cultural heritage while addressing the adaptive challenges of traditional societies in response to social change and increasingly competitive markets. The proposed hypothesis asserts that tradition does not merely serve as a barrier to innovation but functions as a value foundation that sustains the continuity of the blacksmith profession amid the pressures of modernization. Employing a qualitative approach with ethnographic methods, the research collected data through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation of production and distribution practices within the community. The findings reveal that the Massepe blacksmiths not only preserve traditional practices such as collective labor systems, intergenerational transmission of skills, and the symbolic meanings of their craft but also adopt innovations, including the use of simple modern tools, product diversification aligned with market demands, and the utilization of digital media to expand marketing networks. The integration of traditional values with innovative practices enables the community to endure while reinforcing an adaptive economic and cultural identity. Thus, the study highlights that the sustainability of traditional communities is largely determined by their capacity to harmonize cultural heritage with innovative strategies. In conclusion, this research contributes significantly to the discourse on social reproduction, cultural transformation, and adaptive strategies of traditional communities in the era of modernization.

**Keywords:** Tradition, Innovation, Massepe Blacksmiths, Adaptation, Modernization, Social Reproduction, Cultural Transformation

## **1. Introduction**

Modernization presents significant challenges for traditional communities, including those in Indonesia. Social change, technological advancement, and shifting consumption patterns require local communities to adapt in order to sustain their existence. Such adaptation can be observed among the Phinisi boat builders of South Sulawesi, who preserve their craft while integrating new techniques as a survival strategy (Harisman, Kamaruddin, & Adam, 2023). Similarly, the Talang Mamak community in Riau adapts through cross-actor collaboration while continuing to uphold customary traditions (Lorenzo et al., 2025).

The Massepe blacksmith community in South Sulawesi illustrates another compelling case. Beyond producing functional tools such as machetes, hoes, and farming implements, blacksmithing embodies socio-cultural values rooted in perseverance, collective labor, and local wisdom transmitted across generations. Yet modernization introduces new challenges, including competition with factory-made products, declining interest among younger generations, and market demands for more diverse innovations.

In this context, tradition and innovation should not be seen as contradictory. Tradition provides cultural identity and continuity, while innovation offers strategies to navigate socio-economic change. Previous studies confirm that modernization can revitalize rather than erode tradition. For instance, the indigenous community of Kuta in West Java continues to uphold

customary rules despite behavioral shifts (Ayu et al., 2024). In the arts, digitalization has expanded the reach of traditions, as in wayang performances (Sapphira, 2023). Likewise, many traditional communities in Indonesia now adopt e-commerce and social media to market local wisdom-based products globally (Santoso & Rahmawati, 2024).

Despite these insights, studies on adaptation have largely centered on large-scale crafts or performing arts, leaving traditional blacksmithing communities underexplored. This gap underlines the need to examine how local blacksmiths sustain traditions while adopting innovations to meet modern demands.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates the adaptive strategies of the Massepe blacksmith community in facing modernization, focusing on two aspects: (1) preserving traditional values inherited across generations, and (2) developing innovations in production and marketing. The proposed hypothesis is that tradition and innovation in the Massepe blacksmith community are complementary: tradition provides the cultural foundation, while innovation functions as an adaptive strategy ensuring resilience in the era of modernization.

## 2. Literature Review

The blacksmith community in Massepe, Sidenreng Rappang Regency, known as *panre bessi*, represents a Bugis cultural heritage that continues to endure. Bahri (2024) highlights that the industry's sustainability relies on the use of recycled materials and the community's adaptability to modern production and economic systems. Although traditional tools such as *assaung*, *laliang*, and *lanraseng* are still used, research by Sukardi, Jumadi, and Najamuddin (2015) shows that the blacksmiths are nevertheless able to meet market demands.

Other studies emphasize the significant role of blacksmiths in preserving traditional craft industries. In Sungai Pua, collaboration between artisans and local government has improved welfare and industry sustainability (Andriani, 2022). Technological innovations such as CNC machines and digital design have further enhanced competitiveness without undermining traditional values (Sutrisno, 2023; Wardhani, 2023). Empowerment programs have also proven effective, as seen in Mekarmaju Village, where marketing strategies and cultural tourism development increased local competitiveness (Prasetyo, 2022).

Generational transmission is also crucial. The Pijar Community in Bandung successfully engaged youth through participatory approaches (Sudirman, 2023), while Ibrahim (2023) stressed that the Massepe blacksmith tradition carries not only technical skills but also social and moral education. Overall, the integration of tradition and innovation safeguards cultural identity while enhancing competitiveness. Nevertheless, previous research has given less attention to socio-cultural dimensions and younger generations' perceptions. Therefore, Rogers' (2003) diffusion of innovation theory and Bourdieu's (1990) concept of socio-cultural reproduction are relevant frameworks for examining how the Massepe community balances tradition and innovation.

## 3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods design with a concurrent embedded strategy, in which the quantitative strand serves as the primary approach while qualitative data are

embedded to provide contextual depth. Such a design was selected to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how the Massepe blacksmith community preserves traditional practices while simultaneously engaging with innovation in the context of modernization. The research population consists of all members of the blacksmith community in Massepe Village, Tellu Limpoe Subdistrict, Sidenreng Rappang Regency. For the quantitative strand, respondents were chosen through a stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation across generational groups, gender, and varying levels of involvement in innovation. The inclusion criteria emphasized individuals of productive age who were actively engaged in production activities and officially recognized as members of the community, whereas those who were no longer practicing or had communication barriers were excluded.

From this larger quantitative pool, a purposive sub-sample was selected for the qualitative strand to capture diverse experiences and community roles, including blacksmiths who remained committed to traditional practices, those who had integrated modern technologies, and individuals who acted as intermediaries between tradition and modernization. Data collection for the quantitative strand relied on structured questionnaires designed to measure indicators of traditional practices, innovation, and perceptions of modernization. Meanwhile, qualitative data were obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation, allowing for the exploration of meanings, lived experiences, and adaptive strategies in everyday life.

Data analysis for the quantitative strand was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify patterns, differences, and key factors influencing adaptation. The qualitative strand was examined through thematic analysis involving systematic coding, categorization, and narrative interpretation. At the integration stage, findings from both strands were synthesized, with qualitative insights serving to explain, confirm, or complement the statistical results, thereby generating a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play.

## **4. Results**

### **Quantitative Findings.**

Descriptive analysis shows that 78% of respondents still practice the Massepe blacksmith tradition as cultural heritage and identity, while 65% have adapted by using simple technologies such as grinding machines, welding tools, and electric drills. This reflects adaptive innovation that retains cultural roots (Rahayu, 2023). Regression analysis indicates that internalization of traditional values positively affects business sustainability ( $p < 0.05$ ), and production innovation significantly increases competitiveness ( $p < 0.01$ ). These results align with Saputra and Nugroho (2024), who emphasize tradition and innovation as key pillars of community-based enterprises. High mean scores for sustainability (4.05) and competitiveness (3.92) show that this hybrid strategy effectively balances tradition with market demands, consistent with broader Southeast Asian trends (Wijaya, 2024).

### **Qualitative Findings**

The in-depth interview data reinforce the quantitative results by showing that the Massepe blacksmith community interprets tradition as both an identity marker and a source of social legitimacy. One informant emphasized: “Mappanre bessi is not merely an occupation, but an

ancestral heritage that must be preserved. However, we also require modern tools in order to meet demands more efficiently” (Beddu, 54 years old). This illustrates a collective awareness of balancing ancestral heritage with modernization.

Adaptation patterns manifest through cultural hybridization, where rituals and skill transmission within families are maintained while production increasingly incorporates modern technology. Younger informants highlight new orientations in marketing strategies by using social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and local marketplaces, reflecting a reinterpretation of tradition in line with contemporary needs (Fitriani, 2023).

Furthermore, product diversification has expanded beyond agricultural tools and traditional weaponry to include souvenirs, decorative objects, and modern household equipment, demonstrating the community’s capacity to anticipate market demands while avoiding stagnation.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Respondents’ Perceptions of Tradition and Innovation

| Variable                             | Mean | SD   | %  |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|----|
| Commitment to tradition              | 4.21 | 0.62 | 78 |
| Level of production innovation       | 3.85 | 0.71 | 65 |
| Business sustainability              | 4.05 | 0.58 | 72 |
| Competitiveness in modernization era | 3.92 | 0.66 | 70 |

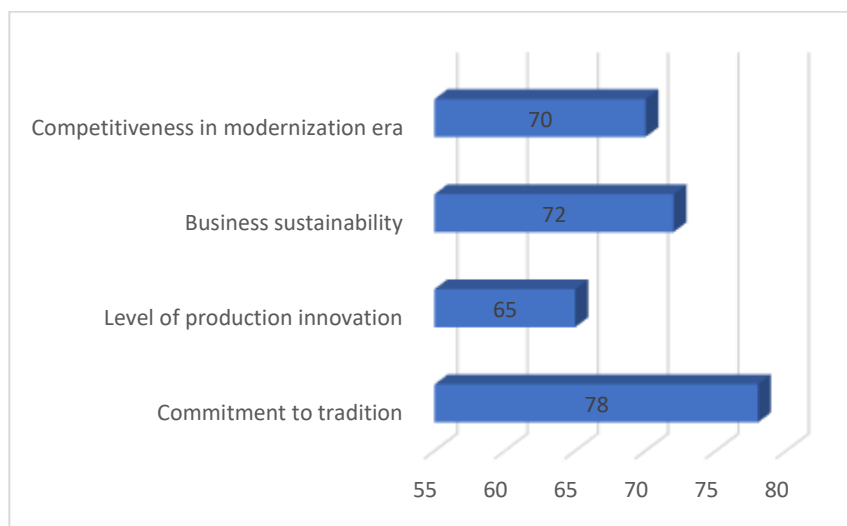


Figure 2. Graph of Respondents’ Perceptions of Tradition and Innovation

### Data Visualization

Descriptive analysis indicates that the Massepe blacksmith community continues to regard tradition as the principal foundation of their daily practices. This is evident in the *commitment to tradition* variable, which achieved a mean score of 4.21 with a standard deviation of 0.62 and a percentage of 78%. These results demonstrate that the majority of

respondents consistently uphold traditional values within both production processes and social interactions. The *production innovation* variable yielded a mean score of 3.85 with a standard deviation of 0.71 and a percentage of 65%. Although this figure is comparatively lower, it nonetheless illustrates the community's ongoing efforts at adaptation, whether through the application of basic technologies, diversification of product types, or the implementation of marketing strategies. Meanwhile, the *business sustainability* variable recorded a mean of 4.05, with a standard deviation of 0.58 and a percentage of 72%. This underscores the vital role of both tradition and innovation in safeguarding the continuity of the blacksmith profession amid the challenges posed by modernization.

As for the *competitiveness in the era of modernization* variable, results show a mean score of 3.92 with a standard deviation of 0.66 and a percentage of 70%. These data suggest that despite competition with industrially manufactured goods, the Masepe blacksmith community continues to maintain distinctive advantages that provide bargaining power in both local and regional markets. Taken as a whole, the quantitative findings reveal a harmonious relationship between the preservation of tradition and the acceptance of innovation. Tradition functions as the primary pillar of sustainability, while innovation acts as a supporting mechanism that enables the community to remain adaptive in the face of societal change.

### Synthesis of Findings

The findings of this study highlight the synergistic interplay between tradition and innovation in sustaining the Masepe blacksmith community. Quantitatively, the internalization of traditional values and production innovation are shown to exert a significant influence on business sustainability. Qualitatively, tradition serves as *cultural capital* that provides social legitimacy, while innovation facilitates competitiveness amid shifting historical and economic contexts. Broadly speaking, the community's adaptive strategies can be categorized as *culture-based resilience*—the capacity to uphold core values while simultaneously integrating relevant new elements. This conclusion resonates with Wijaya (2024), who underscores the necessity of positioning tradition as a source of strength rather than as an impediment in the process of modernization.

Accordingly, this study affirms that the Masepe blacksmith community should not be perceived as static or marginalized, but rather as dynamic and creative cultural actors adept at navigating the challenges of modernity. The implications of these findings point toward the importance of public policy support that can safeguard tradition while also fostering innovation, thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability of the community

### 5. Discussion

This study shows that the Masepe blacksmith community has successfully maintained a balance between tradition and innovation. Loyalty to tradition remains dominant (78%), while innovation in production is also significant (65%). *Mappanre bessi* is regarded as both ancestral heritage and social identity, while the gradual adoption of modern tools is accepted to increase efficiency and meet market demands. This reflects a dual adaptation pattern: preserving traditional values as cultural identity while utilizing technical innovations to enhance competitiveness.

These findings are consistent with previous studies. Navisatun (2024) found that the Purwodeso blacksmith community adopted machinery, training, and group business management. Zulfan Asadi (2024) observed that artisans in Kampar maintained their legacy while gradually integrating modern technology. Meanwhile, Hadinda and Waileruny (2025) highlighted managerial innovation in raw material management as key to efficiency. Overall, this study reinforces the functionalist framework, which views tradition as social glue and innovation as an adaptive mechanism (Durkheim, in Navisatun, 2024).

Practically, the results provide input for policymakers to support technology adoption in traditional communities without neglecting cultural values. However, the study is limited by its small sample size and localized focus, so its findings cannot be widely generalized. Future research should compare different artisan communities in other regions and employ longitudinal approaches to trace the dynamics of tradition and innovation, particularly among the younger generation

## 6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Massepe blacksmith community is able to integrate tradition and innovation as a strategy to face modernization. Quantitative analysis reveals that tradition remains the primary foundation at 78%, while innovation in production processes reaches 65%. Qualitative findings show that tradition is viewed as both an identity and a source of social legitimacy, whereas innovation is employed to enhance efficiency and competitiveness.

These findings provide significant insights into how traditional communities maintain their social and economic sustainability. Practically, this research offers a basis for cultural preservation policies that also promote creative economic development, such as training in appropriate technology, market access, and intellectual property protection, enabling the Massepe blacksmith community to continue thriving without losing their traditional values.

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