

CULTURAL PRACTICE AND KNOWLEDGE INFRASTRUCTURE FROM THE PERIPHERY: A CASE STUDY OF THE ACEH DOCUMENTARY FORUM

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Abstract

Community documentary forums are often examined as alternative exhibition spaces or venues for public dialogue, while less attention has been paid to the cultural practices through which they sustain locally grounded knowledge. This article examines how the Aceh Documentary Forum (ADF) organizes curation, screening, discussion, documentation, and programmer regeneration as an interconnected cultural process. Using a qualitative case-study design, the research draws on participant observation of ADF activities in Aceh, in-depth interviews with purposively selected organizers, programmers, filmmakers, speakers, and participants, program documentation, and relevant scholarly literature. The data were analysed thematically through data reduction, theme grouping, and interpretation, with source and technique triangulation used to strengthen credibility. The analysis identifies three interrelated findings. First, curation converts local social concerns into a public cultural agenda. Second, documentary films function as shared interpretive objects through which participants relate audiovisual representations to memory and lived experience. Third, documentation, archiving, recurring discussion, and knowledge transfer among programmers extend the forum beyond a single event. The study argues that ADF does not constitute a complete knowledge infrastructure by itself; rather, its recurring cultural practices gradually infrastructuralize local knowledge. This case contributes to cultural studies by linking documentary exhibition, cultural publics, community memory, and peripheral knowledge production.

Keywords: Aceh Documentary Forum; documentary film; knowledge infrastructure; cultural practice; knowledge production

Abstrak

Forum film dokumenter berbasis komunitas umumnya dikaji sebagai ruang eksibisi alternatif atau arena dialog publik, sedangkan praktik budaya yang membuatnya mampu memelihara pengetahuan berbasis pengalaman lokal masih kurang diperhatikan. Artikel ini menganalisis bagaimana Aceh Documentary Forum (ADF) mengorganisasi kurasi, pemutaran, diskusi, dokumentasi, dan regenerasi programmer sebagai satu proses budaya yang saling terhubung. Dengan desain studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian menggunakan observasi partisipatif terhadap penyelenggaraan ADF di Aceh, wawancara mendalam dengan penyelenggara, programmer, pembuat film, narasumber, dan peserta yang dipilih secara purposif, dokumentasi program, serta studi kepustakaan. Data dianalisis secara tematik melalui reduksi data, pengelompokan tema, dan interpretasi, serta diperkuat dengan triangulasi sumber dan teknik. Analisis menghasilkan tiga temuan yang saling berkaitan. Pertama, kurasi mengubah keresahan sosial lokal menjadi agenda budaya publik. Kedua, film dokumenter berfungsi sebagai objek interpretasi bersama yang menghubungkan representasi audiovisual dengan memori dan pengalaman hidup peserta. Ketiga, dokumentasi, pengarsipan, diskusi berulang, dan transfer pengetahuan antargenerasi programmer memperpanjang kehidupan forum melampaui satu kegiatan. Artikel ini berargumen bahwa ADF bukan infrastruktur pengetahuan

yang telah selesai, melainkan praktik budayanya secara bertahap menginfrastrukturkan pengetahuan lokal. Studi ini menghubungkan eksibisi dokumenter, publik budaya, memori komunitas, dan produksi pengetahuan dari periferi.

Kata kunci: Aceh Documentary Forum; film dokumenter; infrastruktur pengetahuan; praktik budaya; produksi pengetahuan

الملخص

غالبًا ما تُدرس منتديات الأفلام الوثائقية المجتمعية بوصفها فضاءات عرض بديلة أو ساحات للحوار العام، بينما لا تحظى الممارسات الثقافية التي تمكّنها من حفظ المعرفة المستندة إلى الخبرة المحلية بالاهتمام الكافي. تحلل هذه الدراسة كيفية تنظيم منتدى أنشيه للأفلام الوثائقية لعمليات الاختيار البرامجي والعرض والنقاش والتوثيق وتجديد المبرمجين بوصفها عملية ثقافية مترابطة. اعتمد البحث دراسة حالة نوعية، واستند إلى الملاحظة بالمشاركة في أنشطة المنتدى في أنشيه، وإلى مقابلات معمقة مع منظمين ومبرمجين وصناع أفلام ومتحدثين ومشاركين اختيروا قصديًا، إضافة إلى وثائق البرامج والدراسات ذات الصلة. وحُللت البيانات موضوعيًا من خلال اختزال البيانات وتجميع الموضوعات وتفسيرها، مع استخدام تثليث المصادر والتقنيات لتعزيز مصداقية النتائج. وأظهر التحليل ثلاث نتائج مترابطة: تحوّل عملية الاختيار القضايا الاجتماعية المحلية إلى أجندة ثقافية عامة؛ ويعمل الفيلم الوثائقي موضوعًا مشتركًا للتأويل يربط التمثيل السمعي البصري بالذاكرة والخبرة المعيشية؛ كما يمدد التوثيق والأرشيف وتكرار النقاش ونقل المعرفة بين المبرمجين أثر المنتدى إلى ما بعد الحدث الواحد. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن المنتدى ليس بنية معرفية مكتملة، بل إن ممارساته الثقافية المتكررة تسهم تدريجيًا في بناء بنية تحتية للمعرفة المحلية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: منتدى أنشيه للأفلام الوثائقية؛ الفيلم الوثائقي؛ البنية التحتية للمعرفة؛ الممارسة الثقافية؛ إنتاج المعرفة

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1. INTRODUCTION

Digital production and circulation have expanded the capacity of individuals and communities to create documentary films outside dominant industrial structures. In Indonesia, this expansion intersects with a long history of alternative exhibition, film communities, and non-commercial screening practices that have allowed films to circulate beyond the commercial theatre network (Barkin, 2006; Hanan, 2021; van Heeren, 2012). Documentary film is therefore not only an audiovisual representation of reality but also a cultural form through which social experience, collective memory, and competing claims about the past and present are organized (Nichols, 2017). Research on an Acehnese documentary film also demonstrates how visual symbols, rhetorical arrangement, and emotional experience can turn documentary representation into a medium of cultural and religious meaning (Azhari, 2026).

The cultural life of a documentary does not end when production is completed. Meaning is activated through programming, screening, discussion, circulation, and re-use. Film-festival research has shown that

exhibition institutions select, frame, and connect films to audiences rather than merely displaying finished works (de Valck, 2007; Getz, 2010). More recent work also demonstrates that curatorial labour and festival organization can sustain cultural publics, solidarity, education, and encounters among filmmakers and audiences, including through hybrid and digital practices (Olibet, 2024). A comparable Global South case shows that community film festivals are not neutral containers: participation and cultural value are negotiated through local histories and organizational power relations (Póvoa, 2023). These insights shift attention from the film as an isolated text to the social and cultural arrangements through which it becomes publicly meaningful.

Within the research context, community-based film initiatives in Aceh—including Komunitas Film Trieng, Fisuar, Aceh Bergerak, and Aceh Documentary—have contributed to a local documentary ecology. Field accounts indicate that community-organized screenings are important meeting points between documentary works and publics. The issue is therefore not simply whether local films can be produced, but how they are repeatedly placed in circulation, interpreted, contested, documented, and connected to other experiences. This question is particularly relevant to Aceh Documentary Forum (ADF), a recurring program organized by Aceh Documentary that combines curation, thematic framing, screenings, public discussion, and documentation.

ADF positions film as an entry point into conversations about conflict, peace, religion, gender, labour, social inequality, culture, history, environment, and humanitarian concerns. Organizers, programmers, filmmakers, academics, activists, students, and other participants meet in a discursive setting where audiovisual representations are related to personal memory and local knowledge. The forum can therefore be approached as a cultural practice: it organizes symbols and representations, determines which issues become discussable, creates modes of address between films and audiences, and preserves selected traces of those encounters. This understanding is consistent with research showing that public discourse and rhetorical form participate in the production of collective perception and social meaning (Fajri, 2025), while media-framing research demonstrates that lexical and representational choices can organize agency, responsibility, and legitimacy (Mulyadi et al., 2025).

Previous scholarship can be grouped into three broad clusters. First, documentary studies have emphasized representation, testimony, advocacy, and the cultural politics of showing social reality (Nichols, 2017). Second, studies of alternative exhibition and festivals have examined circulation, programming, institution building, audience formation, and the creation of spaces outside mainstream distribution (Barkin, 2006; de Valck, 2007; Olibet, 2024). Third, research on community archives and cultural knowledge infrastructures has shown that knowledge persists through relationships among people, routines, technologies, documentation, reciprocity, and maintenance rather than through isolated information objects (Fenlon et al., 2025; Lee et al., 2023; Punzalan & Marsh, 2022; Rayburn et al., 2024).

Despite these contributions, three gaps remain. Empirically, ADF and the cultural work of documentary exhibition in Aceh have received little focused analysis. Theoretically, studies of publics explain how discourse circulates and gathers strangers around shared attention, but they do not by themselves fully account for how knowledge produced in an event is preserved, reorganized, and transferred over time. Analytically, documentary forums are often separated into stages—curation, screening, discussion, or archiving—rather than examined as an interconnected process. This article addresses these gaps by proposing a process model of local concern → curatorial framing → documentary screening → dialogic interpretation → documentation → regeneration and recirculation.

The term periphery is used here relationally rather than as a neutral geographical label. It refers to unequal relations of visibility, resources, institutional authority, and epistemic recognition between dominant centres of cultural production and locally grounded initiatives. Southern theory cautions against treating communities outside dominant academic and cultural centres merely as sources of data for concepts produced elsewhere (Connell, 2007). Infrastructure studies similarly show that global knowledge systems are unevenly connected and that local practices are shaped by unequal access to technologies, institutions, and recognition (Pawlicka-Deger, 2022). Research on Acehnese cultural texts also shows that local narratives are active sites of ideological formation and negotiation rather than passive repositories of heritage (Achmad, 2023). At the same time, globalization and digital communication reshape how language and culture circulate, opening access while producing new pressures of standardization and technological dependence (Fajri & Zulhelmi, 2023). In this article, the peripheral position of ADF is examined through its effort to authorize local experience as a basis for public interpretation and knowledge production.

The study asks: How do the recurring cultural practices of curation, screening, public discussion, documentation, and programmer regeneration in Aceh Documentary Forum form a cultural public and gradually build a local knowledge infrastructure? The article argues that ADF should not be treated as a completed infrastructure or as representative of Acehnese society as a whole. Rather, its recurring practices infrastructuralize knowledge by connecting actors, representations, memories, routines, and documentary traces across events. This argument contributes to cultural studies by showing how a community documentary forum organizes representation and interpretation while also creating conditions for local knowledge to persist.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Documentary Forums as Cultural Practice and Cultural Publics

A cultural approach to communication treats communication not only as the transmission of information but also as a ritual process through which a shared world is represented and maintained (Carey, 2009). From this perspective, a documentary screening is not simply a delivery channel between producer and viewer. The selection of a film, the framing of a theme, the arrangement of speakers, the invitation to respond, and the repetition of the event are practices that organize cultural attention.

Warner conceptualizes a public as a relation among strangers constituted through the circulation of discourse (Warner, 2002, 2005). Publics emerge because texts and utterances address an indefinite audience and invite further attention and response. Counterpublics develop where subordinated experiences and styles of address circulate against dominant norms of publicity. Applied to a documentary forum, the analytical focus is therefore not only who attends, but how films and discussions create address, response, repeated circulation, and recognition around issues that may be weakly represented in dominant media.

Festival and exhibition studies reinforce this emphasis on mediation. Festivals and alternative screening spaces organize cultural value through programming, spatial arrangement, publicity, discussion, and networking (de Valck, 2007; Getz, 2010). Olibet further demonstrates that curatorial work, care, digital mediation, and organizational labour are central to sustaining film cultures and publics (Olibet, 2024). These studies support the treatment of ADF as a cultural practice, not merely an event container.

2.2 Knowledge Infrastructure, Community Memory, and Maintenance

Knowledge infrastructure refers to the enduring networks of people, institutions, technologies, standards, routines, and material arrangements through which knowledge is produced, circulated,

validated, stored, and reused (Edwards, 2010). Infrastructure is often most visible when it fails; when it functions, its maintenance labour and conventions can recede from view. This perspective directs analysis away from a single discussion outcome toward the relations that allow knowledge to survive after an event.

Recent research emphasizes that community-based cultural infrastructures depend on reciprocity, participation, maintenance, and the distribution of roles. Punzalan and Marsh locate reciprocity within archival relationships rather than treating communities as passive sources of materials (Punzalan & Marsh, 2022). Lee et al. show that community archives are continually shaped through relational origin stories and definitions of community (Lee et al., 2023). Rayburn et al. (2024) identify collaborative, data, and systemic frictions in the growth of a community-driven knowledge infrastructure. Fenlon et al. (2023, 2025) argue that sustainability is mutual: teams, partners, contributors, users, and allies sustain infrastructures, while infrastructures support community memory, communication, cohesion, and advocacy. Recent archival research further emphasizes that community memory depends on local agency, governance, dignity, and the contextual design of access rather than on digitization alone (Jones & Taylor, 2024; Thorpe, 2024).

These studies are relevant to ADF even though it is not a formal archive or database. The forum produces documentary traces—recordings, photographs, publicity materials, curatorial notes, catalogues, and memories of discussion—and links them to recurring social roles. The analytical question is whether and how those traces, routines, and relationships enable knowledge to be revisited and reinterpreted.

2.3 Periphery as an Epistemic Relation

The centre-periphery distinction is frequently reduced to geography, but its stronger analytical value lies in relations of power. Centres possess greater capacity to define legitimate topics, methods, archives, and standards of cultural value. Peripheral initiatives often face uneven resources and visibility, yet they can also produce situated concepts and representations that challenge one-way flows of knowledge (Connell, 2007). Pawlicka-Deger (2022) similarly emphasizes that infrastructures are relational and globally uneven: participation depends on access, connectivity, skills, language, institutional support, and recognition.

In the present study, peripheral knowledge production is operationalized through three questions: whose experience defines the program agenda; who is authorized to interpret documentary representations; and what practices allow local interpretations to remain accessible. This avoids romanticizing locality. Being locally grounded does not automatically make a forum inclusive or sustainable; the analysis must attend to selection, labour, access, and dependence.

Table 1. Operationalization of the analytical framework

Concept	Analytical indicators	Evidence examined
Publics/counterpublics	Address, circulation, shared attention, response, repeated participation, visibility of underrepresented issues	Curatorial themes, film framing, audience discussion, follow-up conversations, publicity
Knowledge infrastructure	Actors, routines, media, documentation, archive, standards, maintenance, access, regeneration	Organizational roles, recordings, catalogues, YouTube uploads, programmer mentoring, recurring events
Periphery	Unequal visibility/resources, local agenda setting, self-representation, epistemic authority, dependence on central institutions	Issue selection, participant interpretations, claims to tell local stories, resource and sustainability conditions
Cultural practice	Organization of representation, meaning, memory, participation, and value	Curation, screening, moderation, discussion, documentation, informal recirculation

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design and Case Boundary

This research uses a qualitative case-study design to examine a contemporary cultural process in its social context (Yin, 2018). The case is bounded as the recurring practices associated with Aceh Documentary Forum rather than Aceh Documentary as an organization in its entirety. The unit of analysis is the relationship among curatorial agenda setting, documentary screening, public discussion, documentation, and regeneration. The field setting was Aceh, with observation conducted by directly following the implementation of ADF activities.

ADF was selected purposively because it integrates multiple practices that are commonly studied separately: programming, exhibition, facilitated dialogue, documentation, and knowledge transfer among organizers. The case is used analytically to explain a mechanism, not statistically to represent all documentary communities or all residents of Aceh.

3.2 Participants, Data, and Research Sources

Participants were selected purposively according to their involvement in organizing ADF or their experience of taking part in the forum. The empirical sections identify at least four named informants: Adli Dzil Ikram (program manager/programmer), Fuadi Mardhatillah (programmer), Aulia Salsabila (programmer/moderator), and Putra Hidayatullah (informant; specific role is not stated in the source article). The source article does not report the total number of participants or interviews, interview duration, or detailed participant profiles; these items require author confirmation before submission.

Table 2. Data sources and their analytical function

Data type	Source and quantity	Period/selection criteria	Analytical function
Participant observation	Participant observation of ADF activities; the findings discuss “Kenangan dan Angan” and “Pekerja Puan” as empirical program examples.	Direct observation during ADF implementation; exact dates and fieldwork period are not reported in the source article.	Identify interaction, moderation, audience response, and relations among stages
In-depth interviews	In-depth interviews with purposively selected organizers, programmers, filmmakers, speakers, and participants; at least four named informants appear in the findings.	Purposive selection based on involvement in organizing the forum or experience attending it; interview dates are not reported in the source article.	Reconstruct intentions, interpretations, learning, and perceptions of continuity
Program documentation	Program archives, publicity materials, photographs, videos, and other documents; discussions were recorded for YouTube and catalogues were being compiled with curatorial notes, discussion summaries, and audiovisual links.	Materials associated with ADF implementation and recurring forum practices.	Trace framing, preservation, circulation, and public accessibility
Literature study	Scholarly literature used to strengthen the interpretation of field findings.	Selected for conceptual relevance to publics, documentary forums, and knowledge infrastructure.	Theoretical interpretation; not treated as primary empirical data.

3.3 Data Collection

Observation was conducted by directly following the implementation of Aceh Documentary Forum to understand curatorial practices, documentary screenings, discussion dynamics, and interactions among participants. In-depth interviews were conducted with organizers, programmers, filmmakers, speakers, and participants selected purposively on the basis of their involvement in organizing the forum or their experience of attending it. Documentation included program archives, publicity materials, photographs, videos, and other documents, while a literature study was used to strengthen the interpretation of field findings.

3.4 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The data were analysed thematically through three stages: data reduction, theme grouping, and interpretation. Observation, interview, and documentation data were first transcribed and then coded to identify patterns related to curatorial practices, the formation of publics, knowledge circulation, and relationships among actors in the forum.

The resulting themes were interpreted to explain how communication mechanisms build a public space while supporting knowledge infrastructure. Interpretation was conducted dialogically between the empirical findings and the perspectives of Publics and Counterpublics and Knowledge Infrastructure, so that the analysis moved beyond description toward the conceptual relationship between communication practices and knowledge production.

Credibility was strengthened through source and technique triangulation by comparing observation, interview, documentation, and information from different groups of informants. The analytical process was repeated throughout the research so that each interpretation was checked again against the overall dataset. This procedure was intended to represent the communication mechanisms developing within Aceh Documentary Forum more fully and consistently.

4. RESULTS

The analysis produced three interrelated themes. They describe a process rather than three independent outcomes: social concerns are transformed into a curatorial agenda; films and discussions create a cultural public in which experience is interpreted; and documentation and regeneration extend selected knowledge beyond the event. The final subsection identifies the conditions and limits of this process.

4.1 Curating Social Concerns as a Cultural Agenda

ADF programming began with the identification of a social issue rather than with a preselected film. Organizers and programmers first discussed matters considered insufficiently represented in ordinary public conversation, then searched for films capable of opening those matters to collective interpretation. Curation therefore operated as cultural agenda setting: it selected a problem, organized a perspective, and anticipated a public.

Adli Dzil Ikram described the starting question as what the organizers wanted to discuss and what had rarely been discussed. The film was selected only after that question had been clarified.

"What do we want to talk about, or what has rarely been discussed? After that, the curator looks for a film that fits the issue."

I1, Adli Dzil Ikram, program manager/programmer

The program “Kenangan dan Angan” illustrates this mechanism. According to I1, the theme grew from reflection on how political conflict affected family relations. A personal and familial experience was translated into a curatorial question and then connected to a documentary work. The curatorial act did not merely classify films; it converted situated experience into an address to a wider public.

Fuadi Mardhatillah similarly explained that the program began with an idea to be discussed and that film selection was negotiated with organizers. His statement that films were not chosen according to taste indicates that relevance to the cultural problem was treated as more important than individual aesthetic preference.

“We do not determine the film because of taste; we choose it because it is relevant to the issue and perspective we want to build.”

I2, Fuadi Mardhatillah, programmer

The “Pekerja Puan” program followed the same pattern. Aulia Salsabila framed women’s labour through local social and economic conditions and selected films that represented exploitation and inequality. Across these examples, curation linked social concern, personal experience, and audiovisual representation. It also exercised power: organizers determined which concerns would become visible, which films would mediate them, and which interpretive frame would introduce the screening.

4.2 Documentary Film as a Shared Interpretive Object

Within ADF, the film was treated as a beginning rather than the final object of consumption. Participants related images, testimony, and narrative situations to their own memories and knowledge. Meaning was therefore produced dialogically among the film, programmer, speaker, moderator, and audience. The film supplied a shared object of attention, while discussion enabled multiple interpretations to enter circulation.

I1 explicitly described the film as an initial trigger and placed greater emphasis on the discussion, dialogue, and memory produced through conversation.

“The film is the initial trigger. What matters more is the discussion, the dialogue, and the memory created from that conversation.”

I1, Adli Dzil Ikram, program manager/programmer

This mode of engagement was visible when participants connected the screened issues to their own lives. I2 observed that post-screening discussion could be more productive than viewing alone because participants generated new insights from their experiences. The forum thus changed the status of the screening room: it became a temporary interpretive space rather than a site of one-directional reception.

“The discussion became more productive than watching the film alone because people connected it with their own experiences.”

I2, Fuadi Mardhatillah, programmer

The process also affected programmers. In reflecting on “Kenangan dan Angan,” I1 concluded that the persistence of conflict trauma was related to the absence of social mechanisms that could maintain intergenerational memory. This interpretation was not simply contained in the screened film; it emerged through the encounter between the program, the discussion, and prior experience. In “Pekerja Puan,” Aulia Salsabila reported that a male participant began to reconsider women’s experiences after the discussion. This example indicates possible perspective change, but the evidence is illustrative rather than a longitudinal measurement of audience impact.

The forum therefore produced a cultural public in Warner's sense: people who did not necessarily know one another became temporarily connected through an addressed issue and a continuing chain of responses. However, the available data do not establish that all attendees participated equally or that every interpretation was retained. The result is best understood as the creation of conditions for public interpretation, not proof of uniform transformation.

4.3 Documentation, Regeneration, and the Infrastructuring of Knowledge

Knowledge circulation did not necessarily end when the moderator closed the event. ADF recorded discussions and made some of them available through YouTube. Organizers also began preparing catalogues containing curatorial notes, discussion summaries, and links to audiovisual documentation. These practices transformed a time-bound encounter into retrievable traces that could be revisited by people who were absent or by participants seeking to reconstruct the discussion.

The forum also transferred practical knowledge through the involvement of new programmers. According to I1, new programmers learned how to read social issues, formulate themes, select films, and facilitate discussion. Curatorial decisions remained open to criticism rather than being treated as final. Regeneration therefore reproduced not only organizational roles but also an interpretive method.

Knowledge circulated informally as well. Putra Hidayatullah described discussions continuing in coffee shops, where participants debated films and linked them to everyday life. Such afterlives blurred the boundary between the formal forum and ordinary social space. Informal recirculation is significant, but it is difficult to document systematically and should not be assumed to persist in every program.

"We write our own story."

I4, Putra Hidayatullah, informant (specific role not stated in source article)

Taken together, curation, screening, discussion, documentation, informal recirculation, and programmer regeneration formed an emerging ecology of knowledge. The data support the claim that these practices gradually infrastructuralized knowledge. They do not support the stronger claim that ADF already possessed a stable, comprehensive, or self-sustaining knowledge infrastructure. Stability remained dependent on recurring labour, continued access to platforms, documentation practices, organizational memory, and the willingness of new actors to assume roles.

4.4 Conditions, Frictions, and Limits

The process was contingent on at least four conditions. First, curatorial relevance depended on organizers' capacity to read social issues and connect them to appropriate films. Second, dialogic production of knowledge depended on facilitation and participant willingness to respond. Third, persistence depended on whether discussions were recorded, described, organized, and made accessible. Fourth, continuity depended on the transfer of practical knowledge to new programmers.

These conditions also reveal potential frictions. Curatorial selection can exclude other issues or perspectives; volunteer and affective labour can be difficult to sustain; digital platforms can preserve recordings while making access dependent on external infrastructures; and informal discussions may leave little durable evidence. Because the original dataset does not report systematic negative cases, these frictions are presented as limits indicated by the mechanism and by infrastructure literature, not as quantified failures of ADF.

The study also cannot infer effects on “Acehnese society” as a whole. The empirical claims concern the programs, actors, and participants included in this case. Broader cultural impact would require audience follow-up, comparative sites, and longitudinal evidence.

Table 3. Theme–evidence matrix

Theme	Subthemes	Primary evidence	Bounded interpretation
Curating social concerns	Issue identification; perspective building; film selection	Interviews with Adli Dzil Ikram, Fuadi Mardhatillah, and Aulia Salsabila; “Kenangan dan Angan”; “Pekerja Puan”; curatorial materials	Curation creates a public cultural agenda but also selects and excludes
Film as shared interpretive object	Common attention; personal memory; dialogic meaning; perspective change	Post-screening discussions; accounts from Adli Dzil Ikram, Fuadi Mardhatillah, and Aulia Salsabila; participant responses	The forum creates conditions for interpretation; effects are not uniform or longitudinally measured
Infrastructuring knowledge	Recording; cataloguing; digital access; informal recirculation; regeneration	YouTube documentation; catalogues in preparation; organizer accounts; Putra Hidayatullah’s account of continued conversation	Recurring relations and traces extend knowledge, but stability depends on maintenance
Conditions and frictions	Curatorial power; facilitation; labour; platform dependence; uneven documentation	Cross-theme comparison and reflexive analysis	ADF is an emerging process, not a complete or automatically sustainable infrastructure

5. DISCUSSION

The findings answer the research question through a six-stage mechanism: local concern → curatorial framing → documentary address → dialogic interpretation → documentation → regeneration and recirculation. Each stage changes the status of knowledge. A social experience becomes a programmatic issue; the issue is represented through film; the film addresses a public; the public interprets the representation; selected interpretations become documentary traces; and practices are transferred to new actors. The mechanism is cyclical because recordings, memories, and trained programmers can inform later programs.

First, the study confirms festival research that treats programming and exhibition as productive cultural labour rather than neutral display. Olibet (2024) shows that festival organizers sustain film culture and publics through curation, care, adaptation, and digital mediation. ADF similarly depends on the labour of choosing issues, matching films, facilitating discussion, and preserving traces. The present case extends this argument by showing that curatorial labour can begin with a locally experienced social concern and convert it into an agenda for public interpretation.

Second, the findings refine the application of Warner’s (2002, 2005) concept of publics. In ADF, a public is not synonymous with an audience count. It is produced when a film and its framing address people around an issue, and when those people respond through discussion and later conversation. The case also indicates the boundary of the concept’s explanatory reach for this research problem: circulation explains how a public forms, but additional concepts are needed to analyse the persistence, maintenance, and retrievability of knowledge after the immediate exchange. This is a limitation of applying the concept to persistence in this case, not a claim that Warner’s theory is generally deficient.

Third, knowledge-infrastructure research helps explain why documentation and regeneration matter. Edwards (2010) emphasizes that knowledge depends on linked social, technical, and organizational arrangements. Rayburn et al. (2024) show that community-driven infrastructures grow through

collaborative, data, and systemic frictions. Fenlon et al. (2023, 2025) demonstrate that community roles and mutual benefit are central to sustainability. ADF displays an early form of this relational pattern: organizers, programmers, participants, platforms, recordings, and catalogues support continuity, but each also creates maintenance demands.

Community-archive scholarship further clarifies the cultural significance of ADF's documentation. Lee et al. (2023) treat community archives as relational and continually shaped rather than fixed containers. Punzalan and Marsh (2022) argue for reciprocal archival relationships in which communities possess authority and responsibilities. Thorpe (2024) similarly emphasizes community control, dignity, and locally grounded stewardship of cultural heritage materials, while Jones and Taylor (2024) show that meaningful archival access depends on contextual and relational design rather than availability alone. ADF's recordings and catalogues can be understood as community memory practices when they preserve local interpretations and remain accountable to the people represented. Their cultural value therefore depends not only on storage but also on description, consent, accessibility, context, and future reuse.

Fourth, the case deepens the meaning of periphery. ADF's importance does not arise merely because it is located outside a national cultural centre. Its peripheral position is relational: local experiences may receive limited visibility in dominant media and knowledge institutions, while the forum attempts to authorize those experiences as sources of interpretation. The phrase "we write our own story" captures an aspiration toward epistemic agency. Connell (2007) and Pawlicka-Deger (2022) caution, however, that local knowledge initiatives remain embedded in unequal networks of resources, language, technology, and recognition. Digital documentation can expand access while simultaneously creating dependence on commercial platforms and uneven technical capacity.

The findings also support a cultural-studies interpretation. ADF works on representation and meaning: it selects documentary texts, frames them through themes, invites situated readings, and preserves some responses as cultural memory. The contribution is therefore not limited to organizational communication. The forum shows how cultural value is produced through the relationship between audiovisual representation, public interpretation, and the material practices that allow interpretation to circulate.

Alternative explanations must be considered. Participants may have continued conversations because of existing social networks rather than the forum alone. Reported perspective changes may reflect short-term event enthusiasm. Documentation may preserve content without ensuring that it is watched, understood, or reused. Programmer regeneration may reproduce established curatorial preferences as well as knowledge. Research on community film-festival participation likewise shows that collaborative ideals can be constrained by organizational disagreement, uneven power, and insufficient attention to local history and socioeconomic context (Póvoa, 2023). These alternatives limit causal claims and suggest that 'infrastructuring' is a more accurate term than 'building' when evidence is cross-sectional and process-oriented.

Transferability is therefore analytical, not statistical. The process model may help examine other community film forums, literary gatherings, oral-history initiatives, or cultural archives, but its operation will depend on local histories, resources, languages, institutional relations, and access conditions. Comparative research should identify which stages are present, which are absent, and where the process breaks down.

6. CONCLUSION

Aceh Documentary Forum forms a cultural public and gradually infrastructuralizes local knowledge through three connected practices. Curation transforms situated social concerns into a public agenda; films and discussion connect audiovisual representation with memory and lived experience; and documentation, informal recirculation, and programmer regeneration extend selected knowledge beyond a single screening. The central contribution is the process model linking curatorial framing, public interpretation, and maintenance.

Conceptually, the study brings publics and knowledge infrastructure into a complementary framework. Publics explains how addressed discourse and response create shared cultural attention, while knowledge infrastructure explains how actors, routines, media, archives, and maintenance can make knowledge persistent and reusable. Practically, community documentary forums should treat documentation, contextual metadata, consent, access, facilitation, and succession planning as central cultural work rather than as administrative additions.

The study is limited by its single-case design and by methodological metadata that are not reported in the source article, including the exact fieldwork period, specific venues, the total number and duration of interviews, and interview dates. The evidence is also concentrated on actors closely involved with the forum, without systematic negative cases or longitudinal audience follow-up. Claims therefore apply to the ADF practices and participants examined, not to Acehnese society as a whole. Future research should compare documentary forums across regions, track how audiences reuse recorded discussions over time, examine excluded or dissenting perspectives, and evaluate how platform dependence and organizational labour affect the sustainability of community knowledge.

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