

How cultural strategic management supports the sustainability of Selasar Sunaryo Art Space in the Indonesian Artistic Field

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Abstract

This research explores the role of long-term strategic management planning in sustaining the Selasar Sunaryo Art Space in the Indonesian artistic field. It looks at how an arts institution stays afloat for 25+ years despite ongoing funding struggles. Using the approach of qualitative research, the study relies on deep interviews with several key actors, participatory observation, and a literature study. It is based on Henry Mintzberg's concepts of emergent and deliberate strategies concerning planned action and adaptability to change. It also involves Pierre Bourdieu's artistic field theory, understood through the lenses of Michael Grenfell and Hans van Manen, examining the conflict between autonomous and heteronomous forces of the artistic world. The report's most notable conclusion is the need to create institutional structures with flexibility and resilience. The study concludes that long-term sustainability in the artistic field depends on a strategy that is both structured and flexible, balancing artistic ideals with real-world challenges.

Keywords: strategic management; institutional sustainability; artistic field

Introduction

Art spaces are not only where works are exhibited but also are part of the development of cultural discourse, public education, and the development of the arts' ecosystem. In the archipelago of Indonesia, arts spaces have demonstrated rapid growth following three great contemporary arts booms. The first occurred around the years 1985/1986, the second in 1997, and the latest around the years 2007/2008 (Pradipta, 2014). Some of the galleries that emerged and remain active are Selasar Sunaryo Art Space (1998), the National Gallery of Indonesia (1999), Semarang Gallery (2001), Lawangwangi Art Space (2010), Orbital Gallery (2016), MACAN (2017), Grey Art Gallery (2023), and several others.

The boom process of contemporary art cannot go on perpetually in the country's artistic landscape. Each decline after the boom process is usually accompanied by the same symptoms: the closing of most galleries, fewer exhibition events, and the stagnation or end of most artists' careers (Pradipta & Putri, 2021). This is reflected in how few Bandung

artists took part in exhibitions at the time (Gumilar, 2022). Certain artists have been gone from the surface of the Indonesian art field and have ceased producing altogether. Others continue to create and exhibit occasionally, though with significantly reduced intensity (Pradipta & Putri, 2021).

In those conditions, only art spaces with a strong institutional foundation can survive. Strategic management is one of the main pillars of the foundation of the institution, which allows the institution to survive in the long run. Strategic management is an essential element that drives an organization's success, yet many cultural organizations have yet to apply strategic thinking and action within the management function (Varbanova, 2012). Strategic management is the integrative management field that combines analysis, formulation, and implementation in the quest for competitive advantage (Rothaermel, 2020). Strategic management involves a series of processes that institutions use to build—and maintain—a lasting competitive edge. It centers on analyzing long-term priorities like vision, mission, and overarching goals (Dess, 2008). Another challenge with which the art

spaces commonly have to get over in times of crisis is funding. This highlights an urgent need to understand effective strategies for managing art spaces so they can remain resilient within the Indonesian artistic field. This research is focused on the case of Selasar Sunaryo Art Space.

Selasar Sunaryo Art Space is an art institution launched by artist Sunaryo in 1998 in Bandung City, Indonesia. Since its inception, it was envisioned not only as a private gallery, but as an open space with the vision of generating knowledge through art and providing an open exhibition facility in the field of Indonesian arts. As a non-profit institution, the art space runs an array of regular activities involving exhibitions, discussions, residencies, internships, and workshops. Having been in operation for over a quarter of a century now, the institution has gone through the process of leadership change, first from the founding generation comprising Sunaryo to the second generation embodied by Arin Sunaryo. Selasar Sunaryo Art Space is now acclaimed as an independent and responsive art space where it has been contributing significantly to the Indonesian artistic sector. In order to be sustainable in the long term, the institution has tried its various approaches, among them the utilization of strategic management itself, which has been applied continuously over the years.



Fig. 1 Exhibition Room at Selasar Sunaryo Art Space

Source: Researcher Documentation

Strategic management refers to the set of processes that institutions engage in to create and sustain a long-lasting competitive advantage. It involves the analysis of long-term objectives such as vision, mission, and strategic goals (Dess, 2008).

Furthermore, Henry Mintzberg's influential work, "Strategy Safari" (1998), identifies two central forms of strategy. Firstly, there's a "deliberate" strategy meticulously planned and intentionally executed according to a clearly defined work plan. In contrast, "emergent" strategy surfaces organically from repeated patterns of behavior and real-world practice, often without explicit initial planning (Mintzberg, 1998). Planning does not normally go according to plans, which requires the leader to have the flexible creative capacity to constantly generate actions and contingency plans to solve the problems that arise (Martinez, 2023). Using Mintzberg's framework, this essay will explore how the specific Selasar Sunaryo Art Space successfully sustains itself. It aims to uncover a combination of strategic conditions, which are deliberate and emergent at the same time, that are most conducive to sustaining and influencing within the uniquely dynamic Indonesian art field.

In Pierre Bourdieu's framework, the concept of the "field" is understood as a complex system of power relations interconnected by various positions holding different forms of capital. Essentially, the field functions as a structured space in which individuals or institutions occupy distinct positions shaped by underlying power dynamics. This macro-level system significantly influences interactions between agents within the field (Hujatnika, 2015). Bourdieu further distinguishes two primary poles within a given field: the autonomous and heteronomous. The autonomous pole signifies a field governed by its internal logic and self-determined principles, largely independent of external influences. Conversely, the heteronomous pole aligns closely with external principles and forces, thereby shaping its values and priorities through interactions with other fields.

An artistic field is a structured relationship around competition for symbolic capital, most notably prestige. Participants or agents, whose positions are influenced by their habitus, engage continuously in efforts to attain status within these competitive positions (Maneen, 2009). These agents can encompass diverse roles, such as artists, curators, gallery owners, critics, and art collectors. Given this context, exploring how an art institution like Selasar Sunaryo Art Space has maintained institutional

sustainability over 25 years within Indonesia's dynamic art environment becomes particularly valuable. Crucially, this inquiry examines how various long-term strategies, both deliberate (carefully planned) and emergent (developing organically through practical experience), have enabled the institution to maintain its standing.

This research defines the sustainability term specifically as "institutional sustainability". According to the Sustainability Directory (2025), institutional sustainability reflects an organization's capability to persist over time while effectively fulfilling its vision and mission. This involves the ability to continuously evolve in line with its overarching vision and strategic objectives. To maintain focus, the study centers exclusively on Selasar Sunaryo Art Space without making direct comparisons to other institutions. While detailed financial analyses are beyond its scope, this research still considers how the institution has navigated financial challenges while sustaining growth.

The solution plan of this research is to investigate the long-term strategic management approaches adopted by Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, particularly strategies combining deliberate planning and adaptive responsiveness. Here, strategy is conceptualized not merely as a top-down, managerial decision-making process, but also as a dynamic interplay that emerges from everyday practice and gradually gains formal recognition from institutional leadership. This study pays attention to how the gallery implements its vision, designs coherent programs, maintains consistent exhibition standards, and flexibly positions itself within the Indonesian art field.

Ultimately, this research purpose to provide insights into the strategic management practices utilized by Selasar Sunaryo Art Space and their impact on its institutional sustainability in the Indonesian artistic field. These findings will offer meaningful lessons for stakeholders such as gallery managers, museum administrators, and leaders of other Indonesian art institutions, offering viable models for long-term strategic planning to maintain relevance through successive generations.

Preliminary observations and data indicate that the sustained success and relevance of Selasar Sunaryo Art Space over the past quarter-century have

been significantly influenced by a coherent, systematic, and effectively executed strategic plan, supported and guided by institutional leadership. By conducting this case study, the research draws on Mintzberg's strategic framework and Bourdieu's insights into the artistic field, contributing a deeper understanding of how structured yet adaptable strategies can help art institutions remain resilient and competitive amid changing artistic landscapes.

Methods

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, using Selasar Sunaryo Art Space as a focused case study. Within this qualitative framework, the researcher utilized purposive sampling, selecting participants based on specific criteria directly aligned with the objectives of the research. Qualitative research is an approach that places the researcher directly within the context being studied. It relies on interpretive and tangible practices that aim to make the world—and its complexities more visible and understood (Creswell, 2013). This method ensured the informants provided valuable, relevant perspectives central to understanding the institution's strategies. Data collection primarily involved in-depth interviews with twelve key informants, including the founder, the director, curators, various staff members, as well as external figures active within Indonesia's broader artistic community. Importantly, the research preserved natural conditions throughout, avoiding artificial constraints or external interference.

Additionally, participative observation was conducted during a three-month internship at the institution, granting firsthand exposure to the day-to-day realities of institutional management and practice. Following this, the researcher conducted document analysis and literature review to engage with relevant theoretical frameworks concerning strategic management in the context of the artistic field. In particular, Henry Mintzberg's strategic management concepts of deliberate and emergent strategies, and Pierre Bourdieu's theories regarding autonomous and heteronomous poles of the artistic field formed the theoretical backbone of the research.

The analytical stage involved synthesizing data gathered from field observations, theoretical

readings, interview transcripts, and direct experiences. This synthesis was carefully reviewed using qualitative analysis techniques, revealing recurring themes and significant patterns that informed the study's conclusions. To strengthen reliability and validity, triangulation was employed, cross-verifying findings across multiple sources and discussing results collaboratively with other researchers. Collectively, these methodological steps allowed for an in depth exploration of strategic management practices at Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, providing nuanced insights into how these strategies contribute to the institution's sustained presence in the Indonesian artistic field.

Findings and discussion

This chapter explores how the strategic practices adopted by Selasar Sunaryo Art Space have enabled the institution to sustain itself successfully over the long term within Indonesia's dynamic artistic field. By integrating Henry Mintzberg's framework which differentiates between deliberate (carefully planned) and emergent (organically evolving) strategies, and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of fields shaped by both autonomous internal logic and heteronomous external pressures, this analysis reveals how institutional sustainability is socially and contextually embedded.

Cultural Strategies

At Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, deliberate strategies are strongly apparent in its clearly defined vision. Based on data from Selasar Sunaryo Art Space, the institution holds a vision oriented toward inclusive public education through the arts. This vision originated from the founder, Sunaryo, who envisioned an art space that would contribute to and support the development of contemporary art in Indonesia. In interviews, Sunaryo highlighted how his visits to art institutions in countries like Japan, Denmark, and Belgium profoundly shaped his understanding of art spaces as places of active public engagement. This vision translated into deliberate, educationally focused programming consistently evident throughout the institution's history.

One example case was the 2024-2025 retrospective exhibition, Seabad Sadali, held to

commemorate 100 years since the birth of modern Indonesian artist Sadali. This event was strategically designed not merely as an exhibition but as a robust educational experience. The show aimed to reintroduce Sadali's aesthetic and philosophical perspectives to younger generations, thus fostering deeper appreciation for Indonesia's modern art heritage. Exhibition play a vital role across various fields of study, serving as chronological records that trace events, their causes, and their impacts. They help us uncover origins, honor the efforts of those who fought for a cause, and ensure that their legacy can be remembered or utilized long after (Fadiansyah, 2024). Interviews with Heru Hikayat, an in-house curator, reinforced that Selasar actively positions visitors as learners rather than passive observers. Field observations during this exhibition strongly supported his view audiences eagerly interacted with archival materials, attended curatorial tours, and engaged enthusiastically in public discussions. This intentional educational emphasis is not isolated; similar strategies appeared in other major exhibitions like Open Arms (2023), Senang Bersamamu (2025), Tujuh Layar Menyisir Langit (2025), and Lawangkala (2018). Collectively, these examples underline how Selasar's deliberate strategy of educational engagement has continuously reinforced its relevance within Indonesia's vibrant art field.

Beyond public programming, Selasar's deliberate strategic approach extends into its internal management practices. Annual strategic planning is systematically coordinated through the Curatorial Advisory Board (Dewan Pertimbangan Kuratorial or DPK), which includes representatives from each division, in-house curators, the director, and advisory board members. These meetings provide spaces for reflective evaluation of past initiatives and thoughtful deliberation on future curatorial priorities. Additionally, the institution maintains weekly internal coordination sessions called Coffee Morning every Tuesday. Staff from various departments gather during these meetings, addressing logistical issues, tracking ongoing projects, and sharing immediate operational updates. Founder Sunaryo frequently participates, using informal conversations to reiterate and internalize the institution's broader

vision, cultivating a shared sense of purpose among staff members.

Thus, Selasar's deliberate strategy is manifested both in its structured curatorial processes and consistent educational mission. This combination has laid a strong, sustainable foundation for the institution's long-term survival and growth. However, not all successful strategies emerge strictly from careful planning. Emergent strategies, those organically arising from practical necessity, have been equally vital for Selasar's resilience. A prominent example is the institution's response to the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2021. Originally unplanned, Selasar quickly shifted gears to adapt its operations such as: exhibitions went virtual, podcasts were launched, and educational events transitioned online. Moreover, the physical gallery was redesigned to safely accommodate visitors according to health guidelines. This adaptive response can be observed in the significant recovery of visitor numbers:

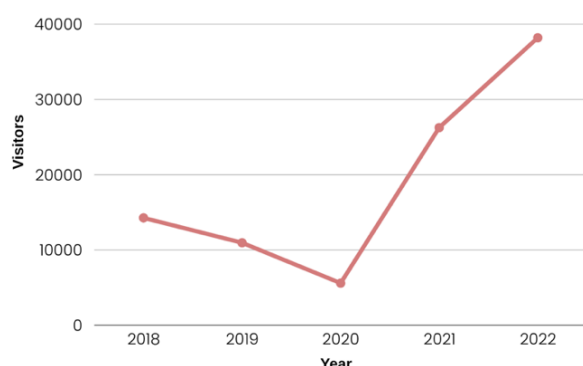


Fig. 2 Visitor Number of Selasar Sunaryo Art Space 2018-2022

Source: Selasar Sunaryo Art Space

In 2020, at the pandemic's peak, visitor numbers sharply declined from 10,955 to just 5,588. Yet, through strategic adaptations like digital outreach and carefully managed gallery visits, attendance swiftly rebounded, reaching 26,257 visitors in 2021 and 38,195 in 2022. Clearly, Selasar's flexibility in responding to real-time challenges reinforced rather than undermined its long-term sustainability.

A second emergent strategy is Selasar's evolving approach to funding. Initially dependent almost entirely on Sunaryo's personal philanthropy, the institution gradually diversified its financial resources to include patronage programs, corporate sponsorships, government grants, and internal revenue sources like Kopi Selasar café and the souvenir shop. Interviews with Risa Rahayu, the Finance Head, revealed how this shift towards broader financial networks had not been a deliberate initial plan but rather an adaptive response to changing financial realities. A notable example includes the Seabad Sadali exhibition, which benefited from corporate sponsorships from companies such as Paragon, Kafh, and Panasonic. Although external funding still does not cover all operational costs, this diversification strategy significantly contributes to Selasar's financial sustainability.

These emergent strategies underscore the institution's capacity for adaptive responsiveness, which complements its structured strategic vision. Together, deliberate planning and emergent practices offer a balanced approach for navigating unpredictable challenges in Indonesia's artistic field. In summary, the case of Selasar Sunaryo Art Space demonstrates that 12able institutional success in the art field involves not only careful long-term planning but also adaptability and openness to emergent strategies. By integrating a consistent educational vision with flexible, responsive execution, Selasar represents a compelling model of reflective sustainability in Indonesia's artistic field.

Artistic Field

In the context of Bourdieu's framework of the artistic field, Selasar Sunaryo Art Space occupies a distinctive position within Indonesia's artistic field, which navigates thoughtfully between the autonomous and heteronomous poles. While the institution fiercely guards its curatorial independence, resisting external interference, it simultaneously maintains vibrant relationships with various partners, including other galleries, educational institutions, corporate sponsors, government agencies, and private donors. By adopting this nuanced position, Selasar remains deeply relevant to the broader Indonesian artistic

community, continually fostering a space for critical reflection and artistic idealism.

Borrowing on Bourdieu's terminology, art spaces like Selasar Sunaryo typically exist in tension between two competing logics: symbolic capital, representing artistic autonomy, and market logic forces reflecting heteronomy. In its formative years, under founder Sunaryo's guidance, the institution leaned significantly toward the autonomous side of this spectrum. Almost entirely funded (99%) by Sunaryo himself, Selasar enjoyed remarkable freedom from commercial pressures, allowing for the pursuit of ambitious, educationally oriented programs. While this arrangement granted the institution significant autonomy and room for creative experimentation, it also inevitably created financial dependency on the founder's resources.

The subsequent leadership of Arin Sunaryo has led to a strategic recalibration toward a more balanced position. Recognizing the vulnerability inherent in relying solely on individual philanthropy, Selasar has proactively developed partnerships with patrons and institutional sponsors. To further mitigate financial risks, revenue-generating initiatives such as Kopi Selasar café and merchandise sales have gradually become essential elements of the institution's sustainability strategy. International collaborations initiated during Sunaryo's era have also expanded, as evidenced by exhibitions like Open Arms, which secured funding from the Netherlands. Notably, in 2024, Selasar received formal recognition from the Indonesian government via the Dana Indonesiana program, positioning itself as a leading model for similar institutions nationwide. Selasar Sunaryo Art Space's deliberate negotiation between the autonomous and heteronomous poles exemplifies a sophisticated sustainability strategy. The institution continues to uphold its symbolic credibility through rigorous, research-driven curatorial practices, fostering critical dialogue and supporting emerging artistic talent. Simultaneously, it pragmatically engages external funding opportunities, enabling greater resilience against financial uncertainties.

While navigating these dual pressures remains a continuous and complex challenge, Selasar Sunaryo Art Space's trajectory demonstrates a compelling

model for balancing artistic integrity with financial pragmatism. Despite ongoing hurdles, the institution's strategic innovations and proven adaptability suggest promising prospects for continued growth and relevance. Selasar thus stands out as a compelling example of how deliberate yet flexible emergence strategies can achieve institutional sustainability and its relevance within the evolving Indonesian artistic field.

The Relationship Between Mintzberg's Strategy and Bourdieu's Artistic Field

Selasar Sunaryo Art Space has capably balanced the autonomous and heteronomous poles within the Indonesian artistic field, enabling it to build long-term institutional sustainability. The institution has effectively sustained its position and relevance within Indonesia's vibrant artistic landscape over the long term. In this context, Selasar's strategic management practices go beyond technical planning or administrative efficiency; instead, they become deeply linked with its social positioning, artistic values, and meaningful relationships within the wider art community.

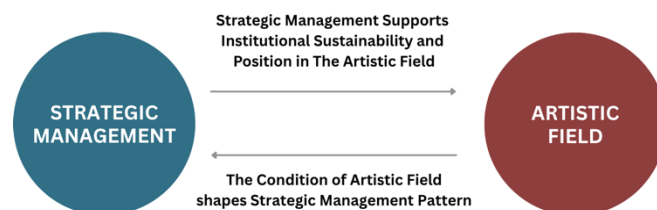


Fig. 3 Diagram of the Relationship Between Strategic Management and the Artistic Field
Source: Researcher, 2025

This diagram highlights the reciprocal relationship between Strategic Management and the Artistic Field. On one hand, strategic management sustains an art institution's sustainability and strengthens its position within the artistic field by facilitating thoughtful long-term planning, adaptive programming, and strategic partnerships. On the other hand, external factors within the artistic field, including audience preferences and funding availability, influence how these strategies evolve and adapt over time. Essentially, institutions like Selasar Sunaryo Art Space sustain their relevance by

consistently aligning internal strategies with the dynamic realities of the external art environment. An example of this case can be seen in the previous sub-chapter.

Mintzberg's framework allows strategy to be viewed not just as a static set of plans, but as a fluid, responsive process capable of adapting to changing contexts. Bourdieu, meanwhile, provides a lens through which these strategies can be understood as socially embedded practices, shaped by competing values and tensions within the artistic field. Together, these perspectives offer a complementary view that helps explain why Selasar Sunaryo Art Space's strategies are relevant, effective, and sustainable, maintaining adaptability internally while simultaneously securing its position in the broader Indonesian artistic field.

Conclusion

Through the application of Henry Mintzberg's strategic framework, it is evident that Selasar integrates deliberate strategies, including its consistent educational vision manifested through carefully curated exhibitions and organized internal management practices, with emergent strategies, exemplified by its rapid adaptation to challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and its progressive diversification of funding sources. In parallel, Pierre Bourdieu's framework insights help contextualize Selasar's unique position within the Indonesian artistic field, a position defined by ongoing tension between autonomy (artistic independence and reflective curatorial practices) and heteronomy (active engagement with external funding partners and institutional stakeholders). By skillfully balancing these poles, Selasar has positioned itself not only to survive but to thrive amid shifting artistic and economic conditions. A further important finding of this study highlights that Selasar's enduring success is not solely attributable to formal strategic processes. Thus, Selasar's blend of internal strategy planning and external flexibility provides a compelling model that may inspire other Indonesian art spaces to adopt similarly sustainable strategic practices.

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