

## **Fostering harmony: Key factors in promoting interfaith unity within the Dayak Ngaju Community in Palangka Raya**

### ***Membangun kerukunan: Faktor kunci dalam membangun kesatuan antar umat beragama di Komunitas Dayak Ngaju Palangka Raya***

**Isabella Jeniva, Kurniawan Netanyahu✉, & Jeck Thomas Alvin**

Faculty of Social Sciences of Christian Religion, State Christian Institute of Palangka Raya  
Kalimantan Tengah, Indonesia - 73112

e-mail of coresponding author: [Kurniawan.netanyahu@mail.ugm.ac.id](mailto:Kurniawan.netanyahu@mail.ugm.ac.id)

#### **Abstract**

The Palangka Raya City community, initially dominated by the Dayak Ngaju community, now tends to be more diverse. However, this diversity is now disturbed, especially by the issue of religious harmony, where several internal conflicts have occurred between religious communities. Based on this phenomenon, this research examines important elements that can help build unity and relations between religious communities in the Dayak Ngaju community in Palangka Raya. In this research, data collection was carried out through interviews and documentation studies. The study results indicate that six main factors contribute to increasing harmony: local customs and culture, education and counseling, legitimacy and credibility of traditional and religious figures, relations between religious communities and cultures, social and political conditions, and leadership with integrity. These factors complement each other in maintaining a balance between local traditions and the challenges of modernization so that the Dayak Ngaju community can maintain harmony amidst diversity. Collaboration between the government, Damang, and religious figures is the main key to preventing conflict and strengthening social stability. This research contributes to the formulation of national and regional policies related to efforts to increase harmony and mitigate potential conflicts from a socio-cultural perspective.

**Keywords:** Dayak Ngaju community; internal religious community; six factors of harmony

#### **Abstrak**

Masyarakat Kota Palangka Raya yang pada awalnya didominasi oleh masyarakat Dayak Ngaju, kini cenderung lebih beragam. Meskipun demikian, keberagaman tersebut kini terusik terutama oleh isu kerukunan umat beragama, di mana beberapa kali terjadi konflik internal antarumat beragama. Berdasarkan fenomena tersebut, penelitian ini mengkaji unsur-unsur penting yang dapat membantu membangun persatuan dan hubungan antarumat beragama pada masyarakat Dayak Ngaju di Palangka Raya. Dalam penelitian ini, pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara dan studi dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat enam faktor utama yang berkontribusi terhadap peningkatan kerukunan, yaitu adat dan budaya setempat, pendidikan dan penyuluhan, legitimasi dan kredibilitas tokoh adat dan agama, hubungan antarumat beragama dan budaya, kondisi sosial dan politik, serta kepemimpinan yang berintegritas. Faktor-faktor tersebut saling melengkapi dalam menjaga keseimbangan antara adat istiadat setempat dengan tantangan modernisasi sehingga masyarakat Dayak Ngaju dapat menjaga kerukunan di tengah keberagaman. Kerjasama antara pemerintah, Damang, dan tokoh agama menjadi kunci utama untuk mencegah terjadinya konflik dan memperkuat stabilitas sosial. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada perumusan kebijakan nasional dan daerah terkait upaya peningkatan kerukunan dan mitigasi potensi konflik dari perspektif sosial budaya.

**Kata kunci:** Masyarakat Suku Dayak Ngaju; komunitas agama internal; enam faktor kerukunan

## **Introduction**

The Dayak tribe, which inhabits the island of Borneo, consists of many sub-tribes and is spread throughout the island, including the Dayak Ngaju. Most of the Dayak Ngaju community have now embraced religions that are constitutionally recognized (Suswandari et al. 2022). However, the Dayak Ngaju community continue to strive to preserve the cultural values that have long been embedded and become part of their original identity (Usop & Rajiani 2021). The Dayak Ngaju community in the

modern era needs to adapt to socio-cultural changes to maintain the continuity of its cultural values (Selvia & Sunarso 2020). They also face challenges in maintaining culture from various pressures, both from within and outside the city of Palangka Raya.

Since the inauguration of the IKN in East Kalimantan Province, the population of Palangka Raya has increased significantly. Data from the *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS) of Palangka Raya noted that the average population increase in the 2019-2021 period reached more than 100 100,000 people, while in the 2022-2023 period, it increased to more than 300,000 people. The arrival of residents from outside to settle in Palangka Raya City is certainly based on various motives, one of which is economic factors (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Palangka Raya 2023). However, the presence of these immigrants can be a potential challenge because they bring different cultural identities.

The interaction conditions in the Dayak Ngaju community in Palangka Raya City have begun to be disrupted by the emergence of potential conflicts originating from cultural, religious (Latif 2024), and political issues (Friskilia et al. 2024). The two main social issues that trigger socio-religious conflicts are the takeover of cultural sites without legal procedures and the phenomenon of identity politics that often emerges during elections (Hakim et al. 2024, Riwanto et al. 2024). Conflicts due to identity politics have become a common phenomenon in Indonesia, including in Palangka Raya, where this strategy is often used by political actors to gain support (Antlöv & Cederroth 2004, Mietzner 2020, Arrianie et al. 2024). Researchers observed the dynamics of the social life of the Dayak Ngaju community during the 2024 General Election and previous periods, where small conflicts between Dayak communities were rife in Palangka Raya.

Conflict resolution is not sufficient only through mediation and negotiation, but requires comprehensive conflict management involving traditional leaders, religious figures, and cross-sectoral institutions (Jeong 2009, Coe et al. 2013, Iswantoro 2021, Avruch 2022). The approach used needs to be restorative and based on cultural values to prevent the recurrence of conflicts in the future (Gavrielides 2018, Kurniawan et al. 2024). This study aims to identify key factors that support interfaith harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community.

This study focuses on the factors that support the creation of harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community in Palangka Raya. This study proposes that religious and customary leaders play a major role in maintaining social harmony. The results of the study found six main factors in building diversity, namely local traditions and culture, education and socialization, legitimacy and credibility, inter-religious and intercultural relations, socio-political conditions, and leadership and role models. Customary leaders have a central role in maintaining harmony, especially in balancing the social, political, and economic aspects of society. In addition to providing understanding to the community to appreciate differences, customary leaders also play a role in strengthening a culture of mutual respect, building trust without prejudice, and instilling values of tolerance and justice amidst diversity (Nasution et al. 2022). Local government elements also play a role in supporting community harmony through the formation of regional regulations, especially in ensuring that the licensing process for the establishment of houses of worship follows applicable provisions and that the implementation of the three ministerial regulations can be carried out properly at the regional level. In addition, local governments also coordinate with FKUB and the central government, such as the Ministry of Religion, to maintain harmony between religious communities (Abdoeh 2022).

Indonesian society needs to make mutual respect for differences the main foundation for building social harmony and maintaining diversity. The value of tolerance must be instilled effectively by involving the social awareness of all elements of society. In addition, it is important to reduce stereotypes and prejudices, strengthen religious understanding wisely, and establish cooperation between religious communities. These attitudes can be realized through inclusive education, which ultimately creates a peaceful, harmonious, and just environment for all (Dachlan 2023).

Traditions contain local wisdom values that unite people with different beliefs and maintain harmony between religious communities. By encouraging participation and togetherness, cultural traditions trigger cooperation and mutual assistance between residents. This kinship is formed through inclusive, tolerant attitudes and mutual respect for local culture. However, globalization can spread provocative information that triggers conflict. In this condition, cultural traditions become a protective fortress of harmony by instilling the value of acceptance of diversity (Umi & Ichwayudi 2022).

The existence of local wisdom in every region in Indonesia serves to maintain harmony and resolve conflicts. Local wisdom in various tribes in Indonesia contains moral and social values that are passed down from generation to generation, aiming to maintain its existence and strengthen social order and harmony in a pluralistic society. Given the large contribution of local wisdom, its preservation is important so that it is not eroded by modernization. The preservation and integration of these traditional values can be done through the education sector, with the hope of helping the younger generation to internalize, practice, and make it a guideline for life (Ufie et al. 2022). However, it is ironic when we look at the condition of the younger generation of the Dayak Ngaju Tribe, where many young people have forgotten the cultural traditions and even the customary values of the Dayak Ngaju.

Previous studies have discussed various aspects of community harmony, both in terms of analysis, problem focus, and local cultural approaches as an integrative element. Previous studies such as those by Nasution et al. (2022) have studied religious harmony with various limitations. For example, studies that are still general in nature, the dominant role of FKUB as the main actor, and the lack of exploration of local culture as a basis for harmony. In addition, several studies highlight the role of local culture in maintaining social harmony, although it is often considered to be contrary to religious teachings. In contrast to these studies, this study offers a more holistic approach by exploring the synergy between religious and customary authorities in the context of heterogeneous urban communities, especially in Palangka Raya.

This study also highlights the strategic role of religious and customary authorities in formulating policies based on local wisdom to realize sustainable harmony. The results of the study found six main factors that contribute to interfaith harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community in Palangka Raya, namely local customs and culture, education and counseling, legitimacy and credibility, interfaith and intercultural relations, social and political conditions, and leadership and role models. These factors are rooted in the active role of customary leaders and the synergy between them, supported by local government policies that facilitate meetings and dialogues between customary leaders. By optimizing these factors, the potential for social conflict can be minimized, so that harmony amidst the diversity of the Dayak Ngaju community can be maintained more effectively and sustainably.

## **Research Method**

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The qualitative approach is considered the most appropriate because it allows researchers to explore the meaning of harmony from a cultural and religious perspective in the Dayak Ngaju community in Palangka Raya in depth. Then, researchers collected data by conducting observations to observe behavior and situations related to interfaith harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community. This technique helps researchers gain a direct understanding of social interactions and community habits so that the data collected is more authentic and contextual. In addition to observations, researchers also conducted in-depth interviews with 5 (five) key informants, including Damang (traditional leaders), representatives of the Palangka Raya City government, representatives of religious leaders, and representatives of the Dayak Ngaju indigenous community. The researcher also conducted direct interviews with 8 (eight) members of the community from government circles, namely 2 (two) FKUB employee, and 6 (six) Dayak Ngaju members of the community in Palangka Raya City. These interviews were designed to collect diverse views on the concept of harmony from various religious and cultural perspectives.

In data collection, researchers complemented it with documentation methods to dig up information from official documents, archives, and field notes. This documentation technique helps researchers to trace historical data and understand the context of harmony over a longer time. By utilizing document data, researchers can enrich the results of interviews and observations to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being studied. Then, researchers conduct inductive data analysis, namely researchers start with the concrete data collected, then find patterns, themes, and deep meanings from the data. This process involves interpreting and exploring the results of observations and interviews to understand the role of religious and customary authorities in building harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community.

## Results and Discussion

This research aims to identify the main factors that support the realization of interfaith harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community in Palangka Raya. In the analysis, the researcher considered the social and cultural dynamics that continue to develop due to urbanization and modernization. The research's results indicate that six main factors play a role in maintaining harmony: local customs and culture, education and counseling, legitimacy and credibility of traditional and religious figures, interfaith and cultural relations, socio-political conditions, and leadership with integrity. In the results and discussion section, the analysis also focuses on the role of traditional and religious leaders in strengthening these factors to maintain social stability and strengthen cohesion between religious communities.

### Traditions of the Dayak Ngaju in social life

The social system of the Dayak Ngaju tribe in Palangka Raya is known for its cultural values that foster a sense of tolerance and harmony, which can be seen in one of the main values that are upheld, namely *Huma Betang* (Nofandi et al. 2022). The *Huma Betang* philosophy is not only a physical idea, but also a guideline for society in appreciating differences and strengthening social cohesion. The value of togetherness in the Dayak Ngaju culture is the main foundation for establishing harmonious relationships between religious communities. This concept teaches that differences are a gift that strengthens unity in society (Fatchurahman & Solikin 2021, Karliani & Triyani 2021, Wiguna et al. 2024). In addition to the *Huma Betang* philosophy, there is also a cultural practice of reciprocity in helping each other, namely *Handep*. The “*handep*” culture has similarities with the concept of cooperation, which is a characteristic of the diversity of Indonesian society (Jeniva & Tanyid 2025). This practice emphasizes the values of togetherness, mutual assistance, and support between residents. The “*handep*” culture is a strong foundation for the Dayak Ngaju community to remain united in diversity and foster a spirit of solidarity. The practice of the “*handep*” culture is a major force in maintaining and managing harmony between religions and tribes (Djungan 2021).

According to the Dayak Ngaju indigenous community, the existence of the Huma Bentang philosophy and handep culture has helped strengthen social cohesion and become a solution to various social problems brought about by current developments.

“So far, the practice of the Huma Betang philosophy and Handep culture has been the mainstay of our lives as the Dayak Ngaju community, especially in maintaining harmonious relationships with other communities, especially in the midst of changing times.” (Informant HRT).

“The values of togetherness and mutual cooperation in Huma Betang teach us to resolve conflicts through family, deliberation and mutual understanding.” (Informant LSA & Informant SDY).

One of the important roles in maintaining social harmony in Palangka Raya is the implementation of customary law that prioritizes the restoration of social relations rather than criminal or civil punishment or what is currently known as restorative law. The customary law of the Ngaju Dayak Tribe has similarities with restorative law, which focuses on resolving conflicts through restoring relations, not just imposing sanctions. Here is an excerpt from an interview with a Dayak Ngaju cultural expert.

"The essence of Dayak customary law is peace, both with fellow humans and with nature. We do not recognize prison sentences like in state law, because the most important thing for us is how to resolve problems peacefully and repair damaged relations." (Informant TRG).

On the other hand, the customary law of the Ngaju Dayak Tribe functions as a means of social education, where violations of the law are not always responded to with harsh punishments, but through traditional ceremonies or advice. This approach ensures that guilty individuals are not isolated, but are allowed to improve themselves and restore relations with the community without causing hatred. By emphasizing social recovery rather than punishment, customary law becomes an important instrument in creating peace and maintaining harmony amidst the diversity of society.

The phases in the life of the Dayak Ngaju people, including the dynamics of spiritual aspects. The Dayak Ngaju tribe has experienced socio-cultural changes from year to year, one of which is embracing a religion recognized by the Indonesian constitution. When the Dayak Ngaju tribe chooses to embrace Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, and Hinduism, many reasons encourage them to do so. There are other reasons, one of which is to obtain public services that require having an Identity Card (ID/KTP), people must embrace one of the religions recognized by the 1945 Constitution (Butt 2020). Nevertheless, the cultural values of the Dayak Ngaju tribe are not abandoned, and they continue to respect and preserve them. Syncretism is very strong in the life of the Dayak Ngaju Tribe, they are already supporting interfaith harmony by incorporating religious values into their daily lives.

### The role of "*Damang*" and religious leaders

The Dayak Ngaju community in the modern era faces the challenge of adapting to developments while preserving its cultural values. Modernization often triggers social conflict, especially due to the rejection of differences in cultural values. The fast and instant modern lifestyle that ignores the process has caused traditional cultural practices to be increasingly abandoned. As one community member noted, "*Young people today are more influenced by the fast-paced modern lifestyle. They are less interested in learning customs and traditions that require a long process. This is very worrying for us.*" (Informant NVA).

This phenomenon is a significant challenge for the Dayak Ngaju community. However, the customary approach remains essential in solving various social problems, including through customary law. In the culture of the Dayak Ngaju community, customary law has an essential meaning in managing their lives and is a strong anchor for maintaining cultural values amidst modernization. In this modern era, the Dayak Ngaju community figure who is tasked with maintaining the preservation and existence of Customary Law is the Damang.

Damang are respected members of the community and experts in understanding customary values and laws, they also play an important role in preserving the culture of the Ngaju Dayak. In the modern era, the role of Damang has developed beyond being just guardians of customs. They now act as educators who adapt traditional values to contemporary life (Husein 2021). As one interviewee explained,

"Of course. In the modern era like today, the role of Damang is no longer just as a guardian of customs and traditional law. Damang is now seen as a figure who can teach and adapt customary values to modern life. They not only understand customary values and law correctly but are also able to explain the dynamics of the existence of these values amidst the flow of modernity." (Informant RFL).

"Damang uses various ways to ensure that Dayak Ngaju culture is not lost. They often hold traditional meetings, workshops, and seminars that are not only aimed at the Dayak Ngaju community but also the wider community. They explain how traditional values such as cooperation, respect for nature, and togetherness can be applied in everyday life in the modern era." (Informant AYD).



“It is very much felt. Many of us are beginning to realize the importance of preserving culture and traditional values. Damang has succeeded in bringing these values into a more modern context so that they are not only relevant to the older generation but also interesting to the younger generation. They show that traditional values are not something outdated, but can be a solution to many modern problems.” (Informant BLA).

Religious values also play an important role in the lives of the Dayak Ngaju people. These religious values serve as guidelines for fostering unity and harmony among various religious communities. The Dayak Ngaju people have long lived side by side with various community groups, viewing diversity as a strength, not a threat. As two community members stated, *“Since ancient times, the Dayak Ngaju people have lived side by side with various community groups. We believe that diversity is a strength, not a threat.”* (Informant ELA). Another informant also said, *“We always teach the younger generation that differences are not a reason to argue. In fact, by understanding each other, we can live more harmoniously.”* (Informant NBG).

Collaboration between Damang and religious figures is key to maintaining social stability and harmony. Both figures derive their authority from the recognition of the Damang community through customary laws passed down from generation to generation, and religious figures through their charismatic influence and ability to inspire social change with moderate and tolerant ideas (Singgih 2023, Qoumas et al. 2024). Together, they balance customary and religious aspects in society, resolving conflicts through local wisdom and participatory approaches.

“If there is a problem in the family or with the neighbors, we usually ask for help from the Damang or religious figures first. Because they understand the family approach and are wiser. If we go directly to the police, sometimes the matter becomes longer and the relationship between the individuals or groups that have conflict becomes more strained.” (Informant YSU).

The synergy between traditional and religious leaders is clear evidence of how traditional values can bridge the gap between custom, religion, and modernity. By directly involving the community in conflict resolution and cultural preservation, Damang and religious leaders not only strengthen social cohesion but also foster mutual respect between groups. Their efforts reflect Weber’s concept of charismatic authority, where leaders are recognized for their unique ability to inspire change and maintain harmony (Swedberg & Agevall 2005, Lepsius 2016).

Previous research has also shown that local culture, such as the Huma Betang philosophy, plays an important role in creating harmony between religious communities and reducing the potential for social conflict (Umi & Ichwayudi 2022). Through collaboration, Damang and religious leaders have succeeded in mobilizing these values to create solutions that are acceptable to all parties. In this way, the Dayak Ngaju community remains resilient and empowered in facing the challenges of modernization.

The legitimacy of the authority held by Damang in Webber’s view is based on customary law that is passed down from generation to generation, making it possible to enforce the law not only as a norm but also as a moral guideline to maintain social harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community.

“The authority of Damang comes from customary law that is passed down from generation to generation. Damang is seen as a figure who has the authority to enforce customary law, and this authority is recognized by the community because they believe that Damang understands and lives customary values correctly.” (Informant HLM & Informant NBG).

Meanwhile, the legitimacy of the authority held by religious figures comes from charismatic authority, where their influence comes not only from their position in religious institutions but also from the community’s trust in their ability to bring about social change. Damang and religious figures are respected not only because of their position but also because of their influence and inspiration in building tolerance and peace between religious communities. The combination of the customary authority of Damang with the charismatic authority of religious figures is a major factor in creating stability and social cohesion amidst the diversity of the Dayak Ngaju community.

## Multicultural education and counseling

Education also plays an important role in maintaining interfaith harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community in Palangka Raya City. In their daily community life, the Dayak Ngaju community realizes that education can help maintain harmony and peace both between each other and between communities in Palangka Raya City. The Head of the Bureau of Community and People's Welfare explained.

"We are trying to implement multicultural education not only in formal schools but also in various informal educational activities in Palangka Raya City. The hope is that the values of diversity can be embedded in people's lives from an early age." (Informant STN).

This is in line with previous research conducted by Dachlan (2023), which emphasizes that maintaining social harmony is not solely the responsibility of a particular group but a collective duty of the state and society. Active participation from religious leaders, community figures, and the government is crucial in fostering social cohesion and preventing conflicts. From the explanation of the resource person, it became the main basis for the efforts of the Palangka Raya government and religious leaders to help initiate various educational programs that teach the values of Pancasila, pluralism, and tolerance from an early age. Nationally, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of the Republic of Indonesia issued the "Pancasila Student Profile" program to instill the values of diversity and mutual respect in students from various levels of education (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset Dan Teknologi 2022, Kurniawaty et al. 2022). The implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile program can be found in the "*Muatan Lokal*" subject which contains an introduction to local customs and cultural values to help increase the spirit of solidarity, harmony, tolerance, and empathy of students. Through education that emphasizes the importance of harmony, the younger generation in Palangka Raya is formed into individuals who appreciate differences more.

## Social conflict management

Conflict management is an inseparable part of community life. Humans interact every day and have the potential to experience conflict, making it a natural phenomenon. However, conflict can develop into a serious problem if not managed properly (Lederach 1995, 1997). Palangka Raya City is known for its high level of diversity, so its people, including the Dayak Ngaju community, are required to be able to manage conflict.

"The Dayak Ngaju community in Central Kalimantan faces various challenges, especially in the economic aspect. Tight competition makes it difficult for some of them to get jobs with a steady income. Many of them end up surviving with odd jobs, such as becoming construction workers or illegal gold mining, because of the limited job opportunities available." (Informant STN).

In the social aspect, modernization has brought various new lifestyles and ideologies that have the potential to erode the local moral values of the Dayak Ngaju community which are rooted in customs. Meanwhile, in the political aspect, the main challenges and potential triggers of social conflict arise from the practice of identity politics carried out by several regional politicians (Triana & Liska 2020, Ukhra et al. 2021). The impact of identity politics is beginning to be felt in communication between communities in public spaces. Hate sentiments are increasingly heard. The local government is trying to control the mass media and limit public activities that contain elements of resistance. This step reflects the government's strategy to maintain social stability, although its effectiveness in reducing political tensions still needs to be studied further.

Dayak Ngaju community has a unique approach to managing conflict, namely through customary law that prioritizes mediation and dialogue. This conflict management is mostly filled by practitioners from a background of customary leaders and religious leaders.

“Customary law is not only about rules or sanctions but also how we teach the values of life. Through customary law, we learn about honesty, cooperation, and how to respect each other in community life, for us, customary law is a legacy of our ancestors that not only maintains order but also forms the character and morals of the younger generation.” (Informant AND).

According to the researcher’s findings, customary law not only functions as a tool of social control but also as a means of moral education for the community. Conflict resolution so far has not only focused on giving punishment but also on efforts to restore disturbed social relations. The mediation process involving customary leaders is clear evidence of how local values can create harmony amidst differences.

In previous research, it was written that the existence of *huma betang* is not only a guide in the lives of the Dayak people but also has relevance in a broader social order, including in the context of Indonesian nationality (Herman et al. 2023). The philosophy of *Huma Betang* emphasizes the importance of tolerance and togetherness in facing differences. The *Huma Betang* philosophy comes from the depiction of the lives of people who live in traditional houses which are inhabited by many families from various identities, but do not cause these differences to be a threat but rather kinship relationships become stronger and more bonded between them. The *Huma Betang* philosophy also teaches that diversity is a gift that enriches community life. In practice, this value encourages people to respect each other and maintain a balance in relationships between groups, so that conflict can be minimized early on.

The diversity of society in Palangka Raya should not be considered a threat by the Dayak Ngaju community, but rather as a strength. The practice of identity politics has strengthened the potential for conflict between groups in this region. It is necessary to develop a moderate mindset and awareness of the importance of political education for the wider community, as conveyed by the following informant from the FKUB of Palangka Raya City.

“The practice of identity politics, especially those that use religious and ethnic issues, actually strengthens the potential for conflict between groups in this region. We at FKUB see that identity politics is often used as a tool to divide society, especially in the run-up to general elections or regional elections. This is very dangerous because it can trigger social tensions that damage the harmony that has been built so far.” (Informant DJK).

“We believe that it is necessary to build a moderate mindset and awareness of the importance of political education for the wider community. The community needs to understand that differences in religion, ethnicity, or cultural background are not reasons for conflict, but rather wealth that must be protected. Inclusive political education based on Pancasila values can be a solution to reduce the negative impacts of identity politics.” (Informant MDE).

So, why is this an urgency that must be carried out by the Dayak Ngaju community? Because, through the development of a moderate mindset for the community then mined with intensive political education, the Dayak Ngaju community can prioritize harmony, and through political education, the Dayak Ngaju community can be saved from the negative impacts of identity politics. The inclusive attitude of this moderate thinking can be reflected in the Dayak Ngaju community’s efforts to practice interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural cooperation.

In addition, formal education plays an important role in supporting conflict management efforts. National programs such as the “*Profil Pelajar Pancasila*” integrate the values of pluralism and tolerance into the school curriculum. This helps shape a young generation that is more open to differences and able to view conflict as an opportunity to learn and develop. This education also strengthens the authority of customs and religion in carrying out their role as guardians of social harmony. This education can also be strengthened by providing counseling to the community by involving traditional and religious leaders. This counseling is also a strategic step in creating collective awareness of the importance of conflict management. Through this program, the community is invited to understand the importance of tolerance and respecting differences.



Tribal chief and religious leaders act as mediators who help resolve conflicts in a peaceful and just manner. Thus, counseling becomes a bridge between traditional and modern values. The Dayak Ngaju community must be able to improve their ability to adapt and be ready to face social changes due to modernization and globalization. The hope is that urbanization and social diversity are not seen as threats, but as opportunities to enrich community life. On the other hand, this social diversity further enhances the values of Diversity for the Dayak Ngaju community which is also an integral part of the society of the Republic of Indonesia. One of the cultural practices owned by the Dayak Ngaju Tribe community that can enhance harmony together is the handep culture which characterizes the practice of cooperation. If this handep culture continues to be preserved, maintained, and integrated into modern life, it will encourage good conflict management.

Conflict management in the Dayak Ngaju community is supported by the role of customary law oriented towards restorative justice, where customary sanctions not only serve to punish violators but also restore social relations. Purification ceremonies or giving advice are often used as a solution to conflict, such as in the Tumbang Anoi Agreement of 1894, which reflects local wisdom based on peace and reconciliation. However, national law is still respected in the practice of conflict resolution.

"For the Dayak Ngaju Tribe, the most important thing is not just to punish, but how to repair relationships damaged by conflict. Customary law prioritizes peace and reconciliation rather than providing criminal or civil sanctions. Through this approach, we hope that every dispute can be resolved reasonably and maintain harmony in society." (Informant AND).

Mutual respect is a key element in preventing conflict, where each individual is taught to respect others regardless of ethnicity, religion, or culture. This attitude not only strengthens internal community relations but also expands respect for other groups. In addition, informal education plays an important role in maintaining harmony through oral traditions and customary activities. Through stories, advice, and traditional ceremonies, the values of tolerance and togetherness are passed down from generation to generation. This education ensures that local wisdom remains relevant in modern life and is a major factor in the success of the Dayak Ngaju community in maintaining social harmony. With this approach, conflict can be managed effectively and sustainably.

### **Key factors for harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community**

Interfaith harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community in Palangka Raya City is influenced by several main factors, including local customs and culture, education and outreach, legitimacy and credibility of traditional and religious figures, interfaith and cultural relations, socio-political conditions, and leadership with integrity. These factors work together to create a resilient social structure that maintains peace and cohesion amidst diversity.

The first factor, local customs, and culture, is deeply rooted in the Huma Betang philosophy and the practice of Handep. Huma Betang, which embodies the principle of unity in diversity, teaches that differences are gifts that strengthen social unity. Similarly, Handep, which emphasizes cooperation and mutual assistance, fosters solidarity and social harmony. These cultural values provide a strong foundation for resolving conflicts and maintaining social cohesion. As Geertz (1977) explains through his theory of "thick description," culture is a symbolic system that gives meaning to social life, influencing how individuals and groups understand the world and interact with one another (Geertz 1977).

The second factor, namely education and counseling, plays an important role in maintaining harmony. Formal education such as the Pancasila Student Profile and local content in the school curriculum, function as adaptation mechanisms, teaching the Dayak Ngaju community to navigate diversity and social change. Then, the existence of customary meetings and interfaith dialogues also strengthens social integration by fostering solidarity and collective awareness of the importance of living in harmony. Of course, guidance from Damang (customary leaders) and religious figures is needed to ensure the transmission of cultural and religious values to the younger generation, preserve social patterns, and prevent conflict. According to Parsons' Structural Functionalism, these mechanisms function to maintain social balance and stability by adapting, integrating, and preserving cultural values (Treviño & Staubmann 2021).

The third factor is the legitimacy and credibility of Damang and religious figures. The Damang who are traditional leaders obtain their authority from customary laws that are passed down from generation to generation, so they become guardians of moral and social values (Hanke et al. 2020). Their ability to resolve conflicts and uphold cultural values strengthens their legitimacy. On the other hand, religious figures gain credibility through charismatic authority, as Weber noted. Their spiritual and moral guidance fosters trust and harmony among religious communities, creating a balance between traditional and charismatic authority (Weber 1968).

The fourth factor, interreligious and cultural relations, is maintained through inclusive practices and integration of religious and cultural values. In anthropological and social science studies, syncretism is not only limited to religious aspects but also includes the blending of cultural values and social practices. Syncretism arises when different groups interact intensively and try to unite or adapt different traditions to create a new, coherent identity or practice (Stewart 1999, Kisak 2017). This phenomenon of syncretism is seen in the social life of the Dayak Ngaju community which combines traditional spiritual practices with the teachings of the main religion. This phenomenon of syncretism encourages the need for interreligious dialogues and cross-community cultural activities to increase mutual understanding and reduce tensions arising from differences in beliefs. This inclusive approach reinforces the idea that diversity enriches social life, not divides it.

The fifth factor, socio-political conditions, presents both challenges and opportunities for maintaining harmony. Identity politics and economic competition can threaten social cohesion (Nollert 2021), but restorative justice practices rooted in customary law and religious teachings offer solutions for reconciliation. As Weber argues, recognizing customary law as part of the national legal system strengthens its role in conflict resolution (Sugarman 1987). Mediation efforts by Damang and religious leaders can strengthen sustainable peacebuilding and increase social stability.

The sixth factor is the leadership and exemplary behavior of Damang and religious figures as the main force in maintaining social harmony. Their ability to adapt customary values to the modern context while maintaining social order makes them influential mediators. In Weber's perspective, the influence of Damang comes from traditional authority obtained through the inheritance of customary law, while the influence of religious figures comes from charismatic authority that arises from the community's trust in their spiritual and moral capacity (Swedberg & Agevall 2005). The synergy between traditional and charismatic authority creates an effective conflict resolution mechanism and strengthens the social structure in the Dayak Ngaju community.

These key factors are not unique to the Dayak Ngaju community but have the potential to emerge in other Indigenous communities worldwide. For example, the Balinese community relies on the Tri Hita Karana philosophy, which aligns with the Huma Betang principle. Similarly, the Maori community in New Zealand depends on rangatira (tribal leaders) to resolve conflicts based on customary authority, much like the Damang in the Dayak Ngaju community. These parallels demonstrate that the six key factors reflect universal social patterns in Indigenous communities. The model of social harmony based on custom and religion in the Dayak Ngaju community can thus serve as a valuable reference for understanding and addressing similar challenges, such as modernization, religious pluralism, and identity politics, in other Indigenous contexts.

## Conclusion

Interfaith harmony in the Dayak Ngaju community in Palangka Raya is the result of a combination of various complementary factors, including local customs and culture, education and counseling, legitimacy and credibility, interfaith and intercultural relations, socio-political conditions, and leadership with exemplary behavior. The *Huma Betang* philosophy and *handep* culture are fundamental values that emphasize unity, which is further strengthened by multicultural education and the role of damang and religious leaders in managing conflict and fostering social solidarity. Although this philosophy and cultural practice have become a strong foundation for social harmony, this harmony continues to face challenges from social issues and developing political dynamics.

To face the challenges from the side of social and political issues, a strategy is needed that can be carried out to maintain and improve interfaith harmony, namely by requiring cross-sector collaboration between the government, damang, and religious leaders. This cross-sector collaboration can be realized by integrating local wisdom into education and involving community leaders in interfaith dialogue to prevent potential conflict. In addition, from an academic perspective, this study offers novelty with a holistic approach that highlights the interaction between customary values and modern mechanisms in maintaining social cohesion, which distinguishes it from previous studies that only focused on aspects of religious tolerance or customary law separately. This research, which is only limited to interfaith relations in the Dayak Ngaju community in Palangka Raya, can be developed by examining issues of harmony and diversity in a wider society.

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