

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND ACCULTURATION IN SEPAKU, INDONESIA: THE ROLE OF GEOGRAPHY IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW CAPITAL CITY DEVELOPMENT

NAB'HAN MUSYAFFA¹, YULIUS², TAQYUDDIN¹, NANI DARHENI³, IMELDA YANCE³,
MUHAMMAD RAMDHAN⁴, AJI PUTRA PERDANA⁵, ERIANJONI^{6*}, ARIE YULFA⁷,
APRIZON PUTRA², HADIWIJAYA L. SALIM², IRA DILLENIA² AND HARRY FERDIANSYAH⁵

¹Department of Geography, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, University of Indonesia, 16424 Depok, West Java, Indonesia. ²Research Centre for Conservation of Marine and Inland Water Resources, National Research and Innovation Agency, 16915 Bogor, West Java, Indonesia. ³Research Centre for Language and Literature Preservation, National Research and Innovation Agency, 12710 Jakarta, Indonesia. ⁴Research Centre for Geospatial, National Research and Innovation Agency, 40135 Bandung, Indonesia. ⁵Centre for Topographic and Toponym Mapping, Geospatial Information Agency, 16911 Bogor, West Java, Indonesia. ⁶Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Science, Universitas Negeri Padang, 25171 Padang, South Sumatra, Indonesia. ⁷Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Science, Universitas Negeri Padang, 25171 Padang, South Sumatra, Indonesia.

*Corresponding author: erianjonisosiologi@fis.unp.ac.id

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Abstract: This research aims to elucidate the cultural landscape in Sepaku sub-district in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, addressing the need for comprehensive data on local cultural conditions and boundaries. This research uses a comprehensive approach with primary and secondary data to analyse the cultural landscape in Sepaku, which is under the Penajam Paser Utara Regency. The findings indicate that the cultural landscape is influenced by the acculturation of ethnicities, such as Paser Balik, Bugis, Javanese and Toraja. The toponymy in the sub-district reflects historical and cultural narratives, with influences from Paser Balik, Javanese, Kutai, Indonesian and Bugis languages. In addition, traditional arts, architecture and livelihoods in Sepaku show cultural diversification triggered by migration and accessibility. The varied geographical conditions, with hilly areas in the west and lowlands in the east, also influence the distribution of culture and interaction between communities. As Sepaku has been designated as the core region for the New Capital City of Indonesia, or IKN, this research provides crucial insights into how the ongoing development and urbanisation of the region may affect local cultural dynamics and the preservation of traditional identities.

Keywords: Cultural landscape, acculturation, new capital city, migration, accessibility.

Introduction

Indonesia has immense cultural, ethnic and religious diversity because of its archipelagic geography and diverse topography. These geographical variations have long shaped the social and cultural identities of local communities in Indonesia's vast and varied islands, each with their unique environmental characteristics in naturally segregated communities (Arifin *et al.*, 2020). As a result, distinct cultural identities have flourished, rooted in isolation and self-reliance fostered by the geographical environment (Tumonggor *et al.*, 2013). These conditions have formed imaginary boundaries between different communities, resulting in numerous ethnic

groups and subgroups. The combination of dense forests, mountains, rivers and seas acted as natural separations that encouraged linguistic and cultural divergence nationwide. Over time, this phenomenon has developed into an immense cultural mosaic that defines the country today. In line with Government Regulation No. 17/2021 on the National Cultural Conservation Strategy, these geographical and cultural separations have become a national concern. The government is aiming to preserve Indonesia's rich cultural diversity by fostering inclusion and unity across the archipelago.

Indonesia is home to around 742 languages, accounting for approximately 12% of the world's total languages, and spoken by about 1,331 ethnic groups (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014; Darong & Niman., 2023). These numbers highlight Indonesia's rich cultural legacy and its position as one of the most linguistically diverse countries. However, these imaginary boundaries have thinned due to improved mobility, making geographical distance and natural barriers less significant in defining cultural inclusion (Sabina *et al.*, 2024). As Indonesia undergoes modernisation, improved infrastructure and transportation networks will begin to break down the isolating effects of geography. Communities in islands that were once culturally and linguistically isolated have seen increased contact, trade and migration with the outside world, facilitating greater cultural interaction and integration (Arifin *et al.*, 2023).

A notable example is the introduction of Javanese migrants to other islands through the Pelita Programme (Rachman *et al.*, 2024; Pramestuti *et al.*, 2024). Launched to promote economic growth and national unity, the Pelita Programme became a main driver in reshaping Indonesia's cultural landscape. Initiated in 1969 under then president Soeharto, Pelita's objective was to foster equitable development, including population redistribution through large-scale transmigration from densely populated islands like Java, Bali and Nusa Tenggara, to less populated ones such as Sumatra, Kalimantan and Sulawesi (Khosy, 2020; Amirudin *et al.*, 2022). As a result, this programme has not only alleviated the population pressure in congested islands, but also introduced cultural elements from one region into another, accelerating the blending of Indonesia's cultural diversity. It redefined the cultural and demographic map of the archipelago, as the migrating people brought their traditions, languages and practices into new settlements.

East Kalimantan Province, with its vast natural resources and less-populated lands, became a focal point of the transmigration strategy, receiving waves of mostly Javanese

settlers. In 2015, the Javanese people had grown to 30.24% of East Kalimantan's population, followed by the Bugis and Banjar ethnic groups (Mursalim *et al.*, 2015). The migration has had profound social and cultural implications, with the emergence of more complex and multifaceted communities. As Javanese settlers integrated into the local community, they brought with them not only their language but also their customs and religious practices, which were mixed with the traditions of natives such as the Dayak and Paser.

The impact of migration on local culture can be observed in Sepaku. Historically, the sub-district is a melting pot of various ethnic groups, and it has continued to evolve as more migrants arrive from other islands. Historically, the Bugis people were the initial settlers during the Paser Sultanate (1516-1906) (Sellato, 2015), followed by Toraja migrants in 1969 and Javanese migrants in 1977 under the Pelita programme. Each new wave of migration has contributed to the district's rich cultural tapestry, with new traditions and practices introduced and blended into the existing culture (Situmorang *et al.*, 2023; Putra *et al.*, 2024). Despite this influx, some villages have maintained strong Paser Balik cultural identities. In villages where local culture remains dominant, traditional customs and languages continue to be practised, reflecting a strong sense of preservation and resistance to outside influence. Meanwhile, in other areas, intermarriage and social interactions have led to the fusion of cultural identities, creating a unique hybrid culture.

Sepaku now plays an important role in the development of the Indonesian Capital City (known as Ibu Kota Nusantara or IKN), which is expected to become a symbol of national diversity and unity (Alamsyah *et al.*, 2023). The IKN project is increasingly attracting migrants from various regions in Indonesia, thus accelerating the process of cultural interaction and the formation of a new identity in East Kalimantan.

Given the complex cultural landscape of Sepaku, deeper analysis is required to

understand cultural boundaries and authenticity. The sub-district's cultural diversity presents a unique opportunity to research how migration, development and modernisation can influence cultural change. Investigating the extent to which traditional cultures are retained, adapted or integrated into broader Indonesian identity will provide valuable insights into the resilience of local cultural practices in the face of national development efforts.

This research aims to elucidate the cultural landscape in Sepaku, addressing the need for comprehensive data on local cultural conditions and boundaries. By shedding light on the nuances of cultural interaction and preservation in Sepaku, the research seeks to contribute to broader discussions about identity, inclusion and cultural survival in Indonesia's rapidly changing socio-political landscape, especially with Sepaku being designated as the centre of IKN. This research is also aligned with Indonesia's National Development Goals as outlined in Government Regulation No. 21/2023, ensuring that the process of cultural preservation is integrated into the nation's broader sustainable development framework. The transformation of this region into Indonesia's administrative and political hub will intensify the interplay between local traditions and national modernisation, making the preservation of cultural heritage a critical aspect of the sub-district's development.

Methods

This research employed combined both primary and secondary data to investigate the cultural landscape and language distribution in Sepaku sub-district in Penajam Paser Utara Regency, East Kalimantan Province. The research focused on tangible and intangible cultural elements, based on a combination of cultural frameworks, which only focused on specific elements, including arts (architecture and dance), livelihood and language, with a specific emphasis on Javanese, Paser Balik, Toraja and Bugis ethnicities (Koentjaraningrat (1993); Kevseroglu *et al.* (2021); Liu & Pan (2023); Noviandri *et al.* (2023)). This selective focus would enable a detailed and feasible analysis to be conducted within the constraints of the research, effectively addressing the limitations in funding and time. More details may be seen in the hybrid model conceptual framework in Figure 1.

Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations and documentation. In-depth interviews and observations were utilised to gather data on kinship terms, livelihoods and toponyms. Additionally, observation and documentation were used to capture traditional dances and architectural styles. Primary data collection was carried out twice, from July 8 to 14, 2023, and from February 2 to March

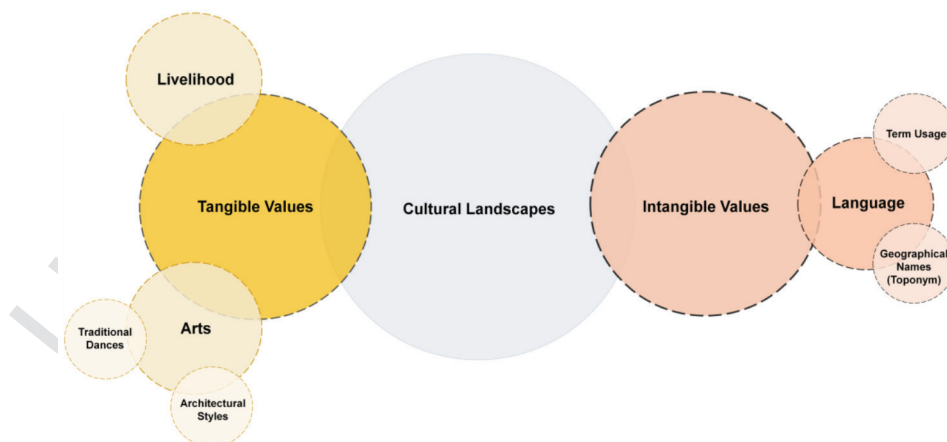


Figure 1: The hybrid model conceptual framework of this study is inspired by cultural landscape frameworks (Koentjaraningrat (1993); Kevseroglu *et al.* (2021); Liu & Pan (2023); Noviandri *et al.* (2023))

23, 2024. Meanwhile, secondary data sources were obtained from various government and institutional records. The types of data collected are summarised in Table 1.

The selection of informants and observation areas was guided by the “Guidelines for Language Mapping Research” from the Language Development and Fostering Agency (2018), as well as language-mapping guidelines by Ayatrohaedi (2003). Informant locations were determined based on administrative boundaries at the village level. Each village had at least one informant, resulting in 15 informants based on the number of villages in Sepaku. Criteria for informant selection included residency of over 20 years, age above 25 years, proficiency in the Indonesian language, besides showing pride in their local dialect, and comprehensive knowledge of local culture and toponyms. Informants were selected using the snowball sampling technique to ensure diversity and representativeness.

Data processing involved several steps, namely interpreting secondary data on toponyms, accessibility, administrative boundaries, language maps and elevation; transcribing and coding interview data into verbatim scripts; and, interpreting observational data. The percentage of differences in kinship terminology was calculated using the dialectometric formula in Equation 1.

$$V = (S*100)/n \quad (1) \quad \text{(Equation 1)}$$

where *V* represents the percentage of word usage differences, *S* the number of word differences and *n* is the total vocabulary used (which in this case were 38 terms in the kinship system).

The results of dialectometric calculation were then classified into five categories, as shown in Table 2, based on Jean Séguy’s dialectometric classification as stated in Lauder (2007). Primary and secondary data were integrated and mapped. Tangible and intangible cultural elements were scored based on modified versions of Munjeri (2004), Vecco (2010), Bortolotto (2007) and Satterfield *et al.* (2013). Mixed cultures with two equivalent elements were scored “1” for each related culture, whereas mixed cultures with one dominant element were scored “2” for the dominant culture. Pure cultures observed were given a score of “3”. These scores were calculated and analysed using Microsoft Excel “max” and “if” functions to determine the predominant culture in each location. More details can be seen in Table 2 for the classification of percentage differences in kinship terminology.

The research also delved into the acculturation processes at each informant’s location using Berry’s acculturation model (Berry, 1992). The resulting cultural landscape and acculturation maps were compared with accessibility data to comprehensively

Table 1: Secondary data used in this research

Data Type	Source	Year
Land use	Regional Development Planning, Research, and	2022
Administrative boundaries	Development Agency of Penajam Paser Utara Regency,	2022
Road networks	East Kalimantan	2022
Livelihood data	Department of Transportation of Penajam Paser Utara Regency, East Kalimantan	2020
Toponym data	Gazetteer of Indonesia and Regional Development Planning Agency of Penajam Paser Utara Regency, East Kalimantan	2020
Elevation data	National DEM of Indonesia (DEMNAS)	2018
Historical language map	Ministry of Education and Culture (KEMENDIKBUD)	1994
Historical context	Translated manuscript of <i>Chronicles of Banjar</i>	1990

Table 2: Secondary data were used in this research

Percentage of Difference	Classification
< 30%	No difference
31 – 40%	Speech difference
41 – 50%	Sub-dialect difference
51 – 70%	Dialect difference
> 70%	Different language
< 30%	No difference
31 – 40%	Speech difference
41 – 50%	Sub-dialect difference

understand the cultural landscape in the Sepaku. The conclusions drawn from this comparison illustrated the cultural patterns (cultural landscape) present in the sub-district.

Results and Discussion

The cultural landscape in Sepaku is shaped by a rich tapestry of ethnic and cultural influences. The sub-district is home to people of various ethnicities, including the Paser Balik, Bugis, Javanese and Toraja, each contributing unique elements to the local cultural fabric. Figure 2 is a map that shows the distribution of language origins in Sepaku.

In this research, toponyms were studied in detail based on specific names and linguistic origins. In summary, the toponyms in Sepaku were influenced by 15 languages, in which the Paser Balik language predominated with 22 toponyms, followed by Javanese with 13, and Kutai, Indonesian and Bugis at seven, five and one, respectively. As Sepaku transitions into the core region of IKN, these cultural dynamics would become even more significant. The region's diverse cultural heritage, as represented by its toponyms, holds a key to understanding how the socio-cultural landscape could interact with the nation's rapidly evolving development goals. The IKN project would not only bring immense infrastructural and economic transformation, but also present unique challenges and opportunities for cultural preservation and integration.

The influx of new communities and workers from various regions of Indonesia and international influences is expected to reshape the demographic composition of Sepaku. The dominance of Paser Balik, Javanese, Bugis, and Kutai influences might be further diversified as new groups settled in the region. However, the preservation of local toponyms and the safeguarding of the region's historical and linguistic heritage would be critical in maintaining Sepaku's unique identity. Furthermore, as IKN was expected to become the administrative and political centre of Indonesia, the importance of fostering a cohesive cultural narrative that embraced both the indigenous heritage and new influences could not be overstated.

These toponyms also carried unique meanings that reflected the selected informants' lifestyles and perspectives. For instance, names like Binuang Village, derived from the Paser language, was related to a type of meranti wood that held a vital socio-cultural role for the Paser Balik people. Similarly, this pattern of naming also showed up in several locations. For example, the "Sepaku" Ward was named after a type of fern. The name of places might be derived from geographical features crucial for local navigation and settlement, like Telemow Village, which means "a protrusion towards the sea". The names of some places might also be derived from local myths and legends like Maridan Ward, which was associated with a sacred banyan tree. Maridan is derived from

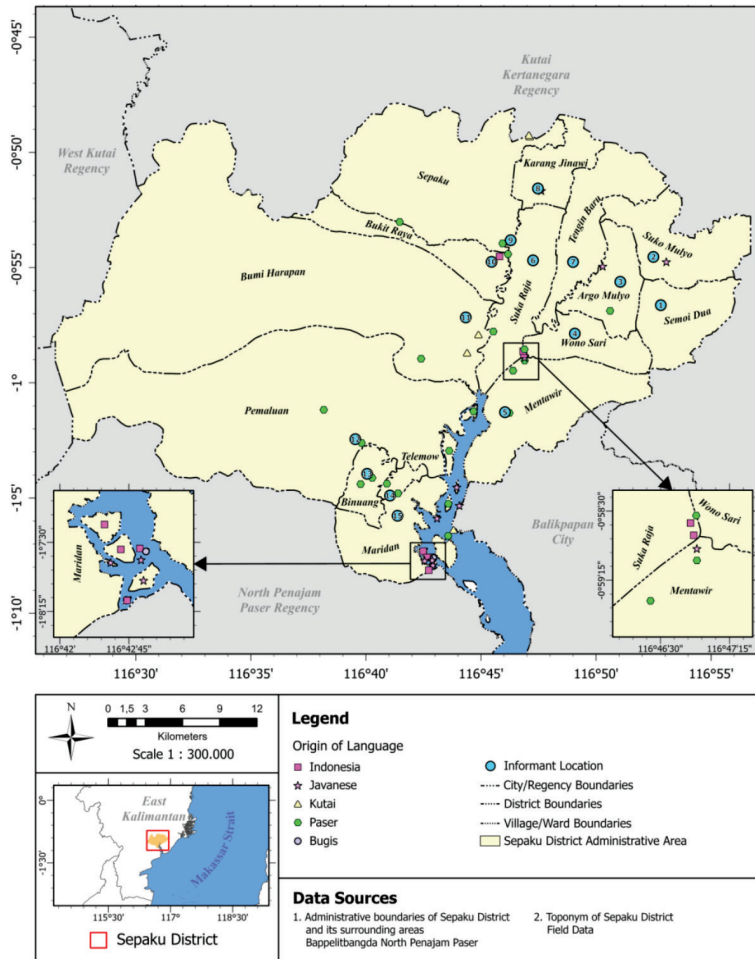


Figure 2: Map of the distribution of language origins from various places in Sepaku

the words *mori*, which means haunted, and *dan*, which means branch. Other notable toponyms, such as Bukit Raya Village (large hill), Bumi Harapan Village (land of hope) and Sukaraja Village (an acronym representing regions from Sulawesi, Kalimantan, Madura and Java) each reflected different facets of the sub-district’s cultural and natural heritage.

In terms of architecture, Sepaku had five popular styles, namely Javanese, Paser Balik, Dayak, Toraja and Bugis houses or structures. Paser Balik houses were notable for their wooden structures and intricate carvings, reflecting their deep connection to their environment and cultural heritage. The Bugis

and Toraja influences were visible in specific areas, specifically south of the sub-district. Meanwhile, buildings and houses reflecting Javanese architecture tended to be more modern. Buildings with Dayak architectural style were not native to the area, but the local government built them in an effort to preserve the Dayak culture in Kalimantan (Figure 3).

Although transmigration was meant to promote national unity, it had diluted the local culture in Sepaku, causing the natives to lose their identity as they adapted the culture and lifestyle of migrants. Therefore, besides local architectural designs, the preservation of traditional dances was also particularly

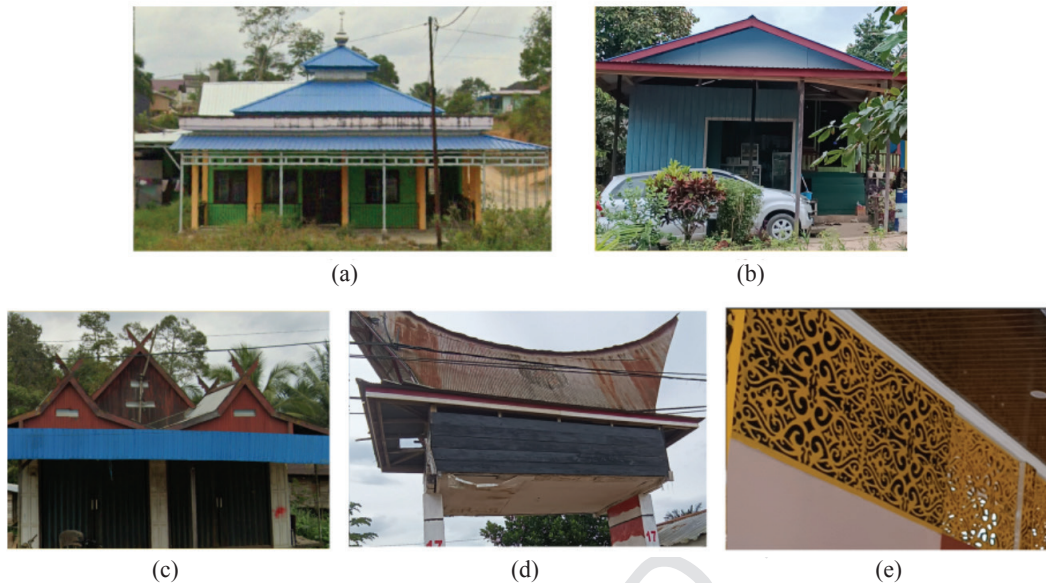


Figure 3: Various architectural designs of houses and structures based on ethnicity may be seen in Sepaku. These include (a) a house with Javanese architectural style, (b) Paser Balik architectural style, (c) Bugis architectural style, (d) Toraja architectural style and (e) Dayak ornaments

noteworthy to unveil the informants' perception of the cultural landscapes surrounding them. The Javanese Kuda Lumping and Paser Balik Ronggeng Balik were the only traditional dances still actively performed in the sub-district (Goma *et al.*, 2024). Kuda Lumping is a performance where dancers mimic horse-riding with the use of handcrafted horse effigies. The performance might incorporate spiritual elements, where performers would conduct invocations and fall into a trance. Although it is now solely performed for entertainment, some of its movements still reflected deep spiritual elements.

Meanwhile, the Ronggeng Balik dance is a lively performance showcasing the cultural vibrancy of the Paser Balik people. Similar to Kuda Lumping, its roots could be traced back to a shamanistic ritual for healing diseases (Umasangaji *et al.*, 2023). The Bugis and Toraja communities in Sepaku did not preserve any traditional dances, but interestingly, they had shown acceptance to Kuda Lumping and Ronggeng Balik, with some communities adopting and performing them as their own. The two dances are illustrated in Figure 4 (Efizudin, 2016; Gupta, 2022).



Figure 4: (a) The Kuda Lumping and (b) Ronggeng Balik traditional dances

The occupations in Sepaku mainly comprised farming and trading. Before the arrival of migrants from other parts of Indonesia, Paser Balik natives were primarily hunter-gatherers. Since the arrival of Javanese and other migrant communities, the employment landscape had diversified, introducing new job roles in the private sector as well as administrative positions within local governance.

However, this occupational shift had created social disparities between the natives and migrants. The natives began to change their jobs because they could not compete with the newcomers. The locals in Paser Balik started working as farm labourers at plantations or agricultural companies, which flourished with the arrival of the Toraja and Javanese migrants, who established large-scale plantations with the government's support. Currently, the people's livelihood in Sepaku is predominantly agricultural, particularly among Javanese and Paser Balik communities. Informants such as AA in Semoi Dua Village and TW in Argo Mulyo Village were engaged in farming, while others, like AD in Suka Raja Village worked as civil servants. This diversity reflected the range of economic activities and the integration of different ethnic groups.

From the appointed informants, based on terms in the kinship system that they used, Javanese and Paser Balik were the predominant languages in Sepaku, whereas Bugis and Toraja languages were spoken to a lesser extent. The Javanese language dominated the eastern side of the sub-district, which used to be a transmigrant settlement called Sepaku-Semoi. For instance, informants in villages such as Suko Mulyo Village and Semoi Dua Village primarily spoke the Javanese language, while those in Binuang Village and Telemow Village used the Paser Balik and Toraja language.

Historical interactions, migrations and external influences had caused cultural shifts in Sepaku. Bilateral relations with the Wajo Kingdom have historically brought Bugis influences into the region, facilitating cultural exchange and integration. Governmental

initiatives during the New Order era had led to significant Javanese migration, promoting Javanese cultural elements. Private sector activities attracted Toraja migrants from Sulawesi, who brought their own unique cultural practices, as seen in informants like JN in Telemow Village. Some among the Bugis and Toraja had also assimilated into the local culture, showing signs integration and accepting local practices as their own. Figure 5 shows the two main phases of people movement to East Kalimantan from Java and Sulawesi. The first began with the establishment of the Sadarungas Kingdom in 1516.

The origins of East Kalimantan's history were still under debate. According to Iqbal (2001), the Sadurungas kingdom, the precursor to the Paser Sultanate, began around 630 with Queen Betong (Betung) as the first ruler. Ras (1990), who translated the *Banjar Chronicles (Hikayat Banjar)*, a historical text that described the rulers of Banjar and Kotawaringin in South Borneo, noted that the history of the Paser Sultanate began when the Dutch East India Company (VOC) attacked Kuin Palace in 1612. Then ruler Sultan Mustainbillah (1595-1642), the fourth sultan of Banjar, was forced to gather his nobles to face the European threat. The strategic marriage between Aji Ratna and Dipati Ngganding (governor) of Kotawaringin earned the recognition of Sultan Mustainbillah. Aji Ratna's sister, Putri Betung, became the first queen of the Sadurungas Kingdom with Sultan Mustainbillah's permission, and her marriage to Abu Mansyur Indra Jaya of the Demak Sultanate in Java had allowed Islam to propagate in Sadurungas.

The Sadurungas kingdom gradually grew into the Paser Sultanate, which was predominantly Islamic. Balikpapan became the hub of Islamic propagation in Kalimantan and its influence could be seen in the kingdom's governance, culture and the economy. The details can be seen in the map of Figure 6.

The Paser Sultanate became a centre of political power, economic growth and cultural development. The Paser Sultanate was also

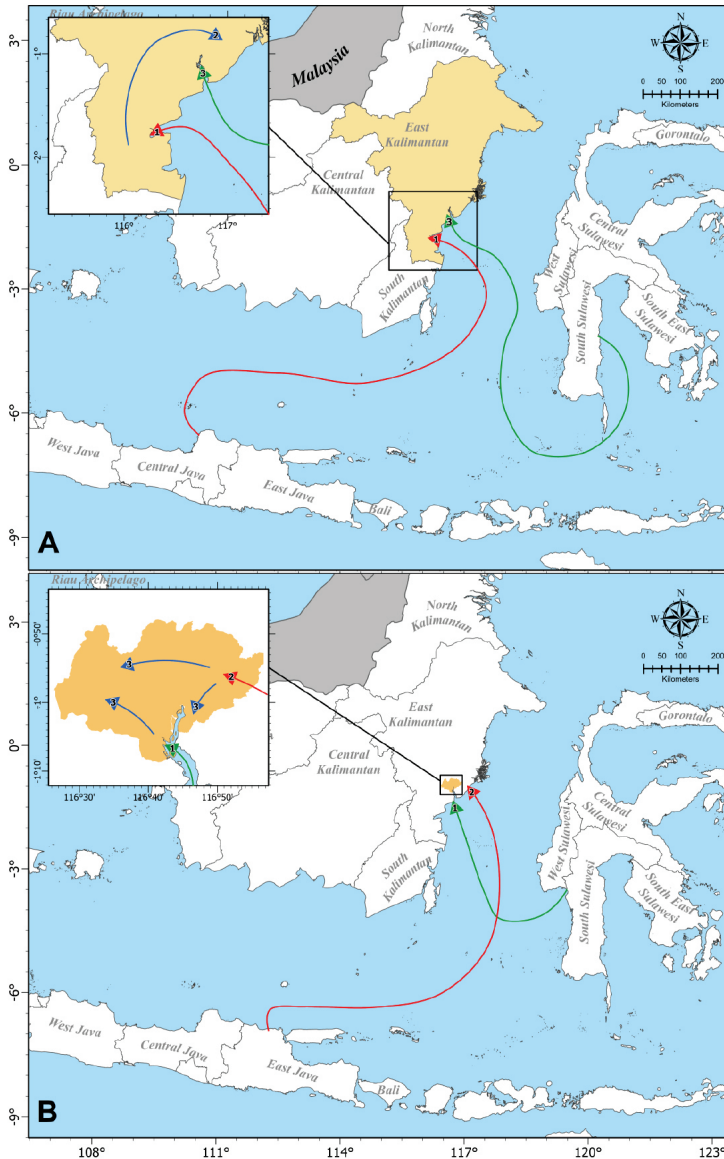


Figure 5: (A) The first phase of the movement, (B) the second phase of movement

known for its hospitality to foreigners, such as the welcoming of Bugis adventurer La Maddukelleng of the Wajo Kingdom in South Sulawesi in the 1720s. La Maddukelleng subsequently married Andin Anjang, daughter of Aji Geger, and became the king of Paser, which facilitated Bugis migration to Teluk Balikpapan.

The population distribution changed over time, starting with the recruitment of Toraja

workers by PT Weyerhaeuser in 1969. This marked the second movement phase with the arrival of the Toraja migrants. The 1977 transmigration programme had brought further demographic changes. Tengin Baru and Suka Raja Villages had the highest acculturation levels. Binuang, Telemow and Maridan also had high acculturation due to their strategic locations. The details are illustrated in the map in Figure 7.

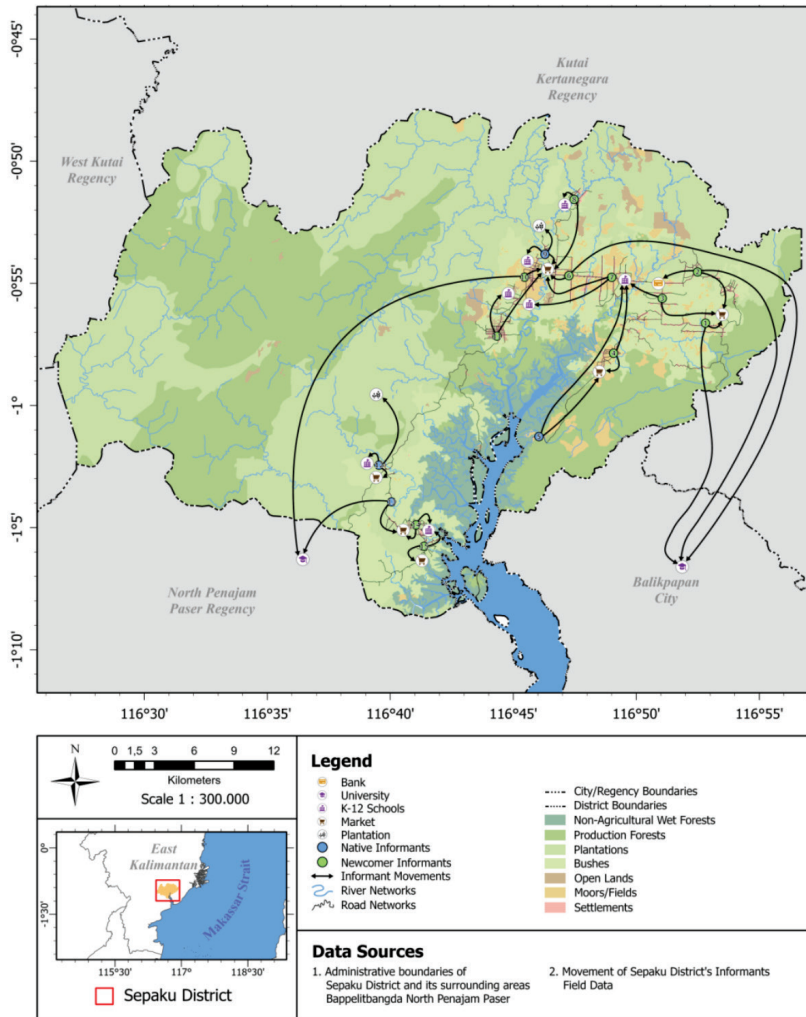


Figure 6: Map of the illustration of selected informant movements

The movement of informants is illustrated on a map to explore acculturation processes. For example, in the case of Informant 1 in Semoi Dua, a farmer assumed low interaction ease pursued a bachelor's degree, broadening their cultural perspective. Informant six, a university graduate and village committee member, had interaction with diverse backgrounds. Informant two, a university graduate and bank teller, maintained a "pure Javanese" perspective. Informant three, a farmer, is exposed to other cultures. Informant 4 sold agricultural products at Wono Sari market, whose clients were mostly

Paser Balik residents. Informant five, a village committee member in Mentawir, retained a "pure Paser Balik" perspective. Informant seven, another village committee member, was more open to other cultures. Informants eight and nine, traders in Suka Raja, were exposed to different cultures through their occupation. Informant 10, who lived near Suka Raja's economic centre, frequently interacted with other residents. Informant 11, often in Suka Raja, had a different cultural perspective. Informant 12, who lived in rural Pemaluan, was isolated from other cultures. Informant 13,

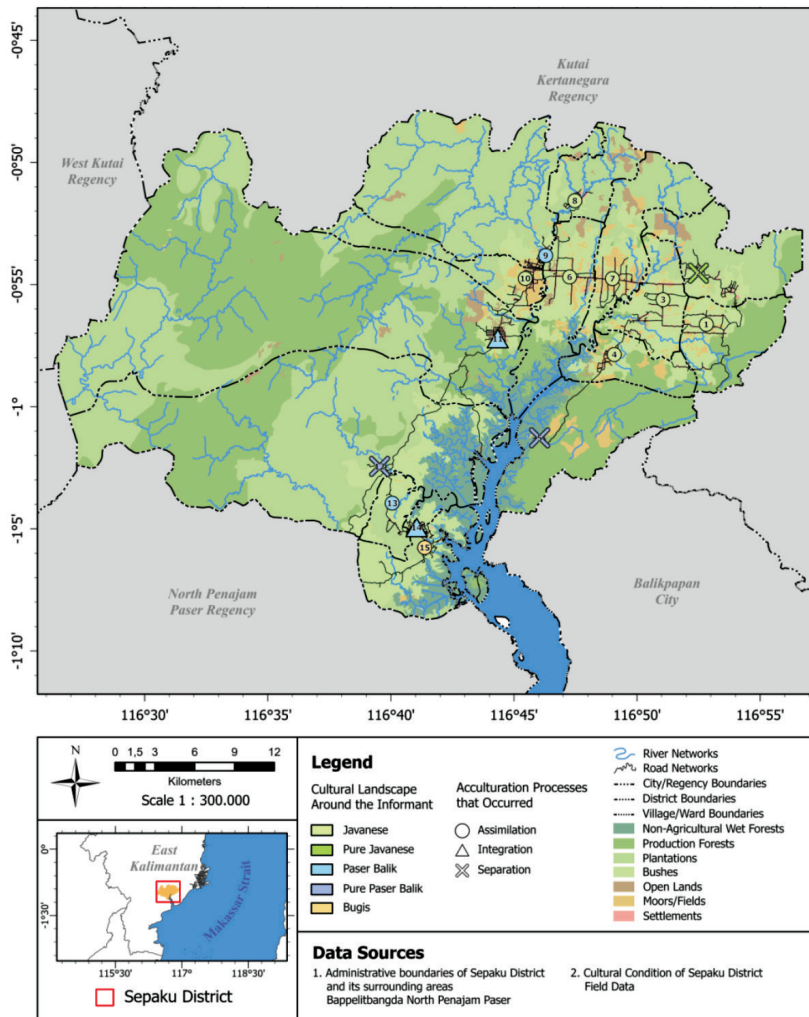


Figure 7: Map of the acculturation process for each informant

a trader and university graduate, had diverse cultural perspective. Informant 14, a descendant of Toraja workers hired by PT Weyerhaeuser, had experienced cultural assimilation. Informant 15, a trader in Maridan, managed to maintain his original culture despite exposure to others. The details can be seen in Table 3.

The research areas in Sepaku had significant topographical diversity, with elevations ranging from 0 to 700 metres above sea level (MASL) and varied landforms. The western part is characterised by hills (over 100 metres), while the southern part consists of swampy lowlands.

This diverse topography has a direct influence on the community's cultural landscape, shaping both social interactions and development patterns. As shown on the elevation map (Figure 8), According to Zuidam (1979); Moore *et al.* (2024), Sepaku could be classified into five elevations, namely lowland, inland lowland, low hills, hills and high hills. The lowlands spanned an area of 577.52 km², which comprised 46.97% of the sub-district's total area. All villages in Sepaku were located either in lowland or inland lowland areas. However, the western part, including Bumi Harapan Village, Bukit Raya

Table 3: Informants' data by village, occupation and cultural perspective

Info	Village	Occupation	Cultural Perspective
1	Semoi Dua	Farmer	Broadened Perspective (Bachelor's)
2	Semoi Dua	Bank Teller	Pure Javanese
3	Semoi Dua	Farmer	Exposed to Paser Balik culture
4	Wono Sari	Trader	Frequent interaction with Paser Balik
5	Mentawir	Village staff	Pure Paser Balik
6	Tengin Baru	Village staff	Open to other cultures
7	Tengin Baru	Village staff	Open to other cultures
8	Suka Raja	Trader	Exposed to different cultures
9	Suka Raja	Trader	Exposed to different cultures
10	Suka Raja	Near the economic centre	Frequent interaction with other residents
11	Suka Raja	Trader	Different cultural perspectives
12	Pemaluan	Isolated worker	Separated from other cultures
13	Pemaluan	Trader/University graduate	Diverse cultural perspective
14	Maridan	Descendants of Toraja Workers	Cultural assimilation (Toraja)
15	Maridan	Trader	Maintains original culture

Village, Sepaku Village and Pemaluan Village, was predominantly hilly, making it challenging for large-scale development. Nearly all of the hills in Penajam Paser Utara Regency were concentrated in these four villages, which limited their accessibility and usability for residential or commercial purposes. Consequently, most development was focused on the eastern lowlands, leaving the western region largely forested or reserved for agriculture. This resulted in significant development disparities between the eastern and western parts of Sepaku, which were exacerbated by concentrated infrastructure development around the Regency capital, Tengin Baru Village.

The topographical variations in Sepaku also influenced the region's hydrological characteristics, affecting water flow patterns, drainage systems and flood susceptibility. The lowlands, which dominated the landscape, were prone to seasonal flooding, especially in the swampy southern parts. In contrast, the hilly regions in the west acted as natural water catchment areas, contributing to the availability of groundwater resources. This hydrological distinction had implications for water resource

management, agricultural activities and urban planning in the IKN development. Implementing sustainable water management strategies would be crucial in mitigating flood risks in lowland settlements while optimising water conservation efforts in the elevated areas.

Recent studies had emphasised the importance of topographical considerations in urban planning for new capital cities, particularly in regions with diverse elevation patterns (Chen *et al.*, 2024; Syaban & Appiah-Opoku, 2024). The success of the Indonesian IKN development would depend on overcoming these geographical challenges and ensuring balanced development across the district (Rachmawati *et al.*, 2024). The hills and forested areas in western Sepaku presented both opportunities for eco-friendly urban development and challenges for infrastructure accessibility (Nicoletti *et al.*, 2023; Omole *et al.*, 2024). Additionally, disparities in road quality among villages and sub-districts compounded the challenges in Western Sepaku. For example, the remote Karang Jinawi Village faced substantial road infrastructure deficits, which had led to limited movement and interaction with surrounding areas. As a

result, Karang Jinawi Village retained its strong Javanese cultural identity compared with other former transmigrant villages, where increased accessibility had led to more acculturation and cultural exchange.

Other factors influencing accessibility and interaction patterns included the number of available road networks or transport routes. Informant 9, who resided in Sepaku Village, reported difficulties in interacting with residents of Bukit Raya Village and Suka Raja Village due to limited access routes. The construction of roads, bridges and improved public transportation systems that connected the

remote hilly areas with the eastern lowlands could play a pivotal role in ensuring that all regions of Sepaku benefit from IKN's expansion. By enhancing accessibility, the cultural interaction between diverse ethnic groups in Sepaku would increase, further contributing to the region's dynamic cultural landscape. The details are shown in the maps of Figure 8 and Figure 9.

Conclusions

This research showed that the cultural landscape of Sepaku sub-district in Penajam Paser Utara Regency, East Kalimantan, could be

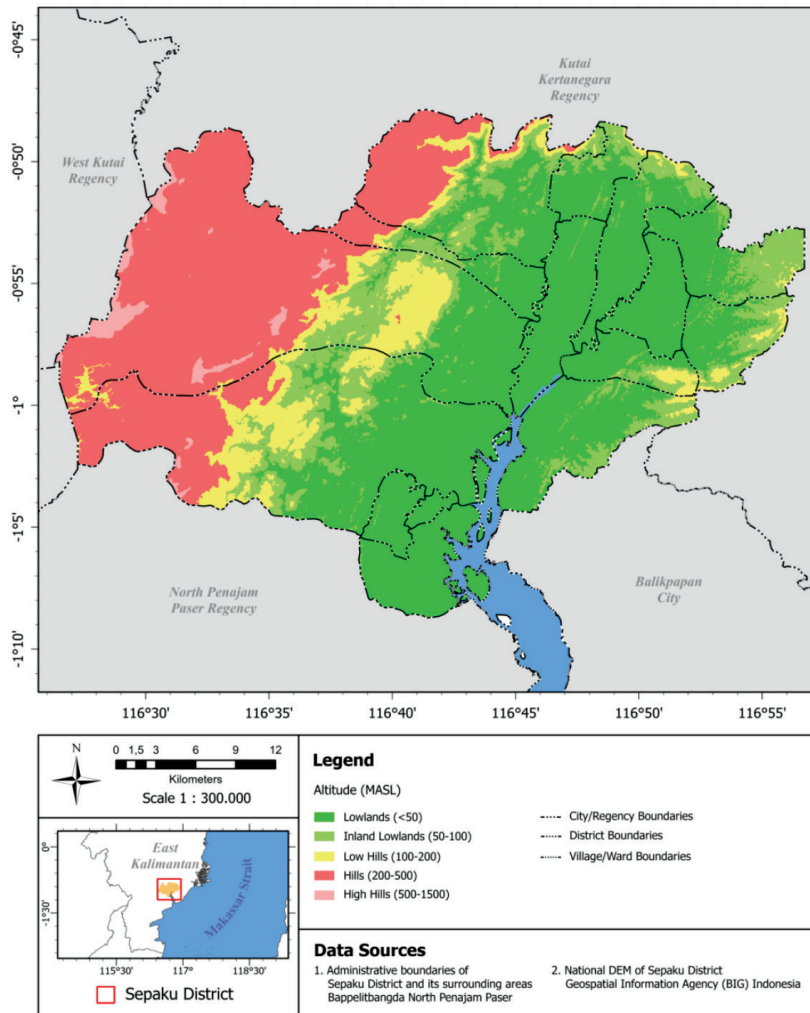


Figure 8: Elevation map of Sepaku

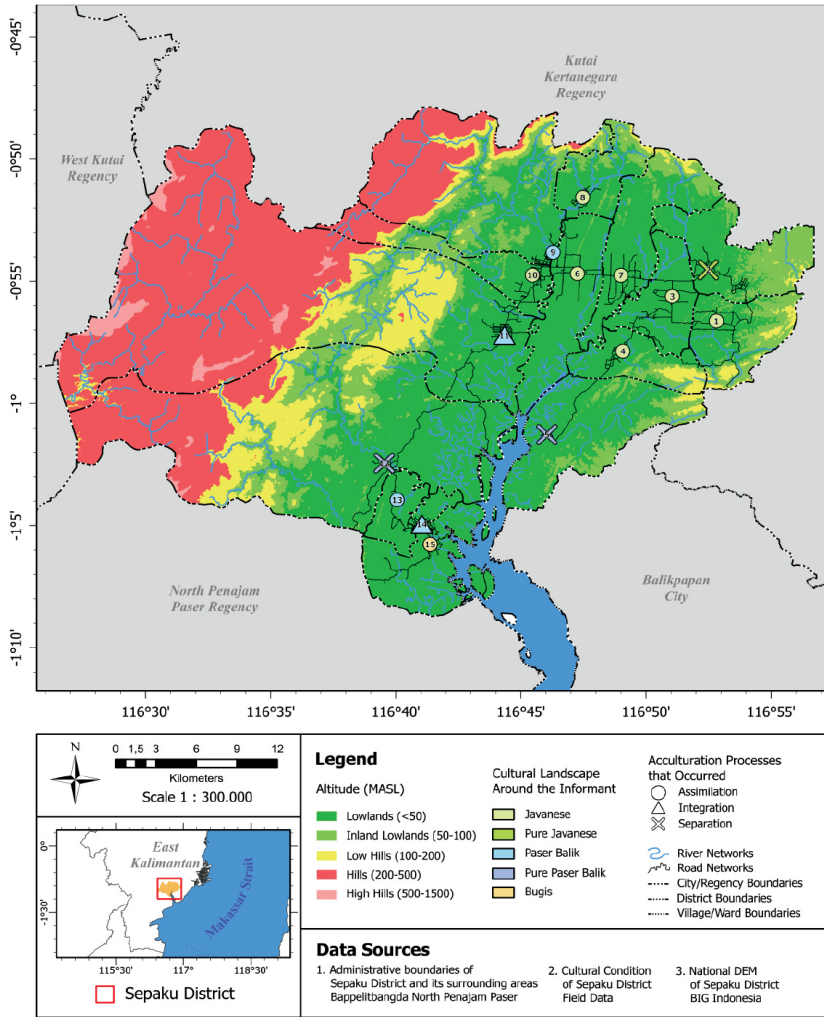


Figure 9: Comparison map of acculturation processes with existing accessibility in Sepaku

characterised as distinct Javanese, Paser Balik and Bugis elements, as perceived by selected informants through language use, livelihood and traditional arts. The cultural shifts in the district were notably influenced by external factors such as historical bilateral relations with the Wajo Kingdom, private sector influences that attracted Toraja migrants and governmental initiatives that introduced Javanese culture through transmigration programmes. A significant aspect of the sub-district’s cultural evolution is the role of accessibility. The disparities in road networks and geographical access had resulted in uneven

cultural interactions between communities, with some villages maintaining stronger ties to their original cultures, while others had experienced acculturation. Addressing these accessibility disparities would be crucial in fostering inclusive and balanced cultural exchanges. With the ongoing development of Indonesia’s IKN, the dynamics of cultural interaction and acculturation could be expected to intensify. As Sepaku transforms into a national hub for governance, the influx of new populations and rapid urbanisation will not only likely increase the diversity of cultural exchanges, but also

challenge the preservation of indigenous cultures the Paser Balik natives. Thus, it becomes even more critical for future policies to consider not only infrastructural development, but also the protection of cultural heritage.

Efforts should focus on promoting cultural education, supporting traditional arts and enhancing infrastructure to ensure that local traditions were not overshadowed by dominant cultures brought on by migration. Additionally, cultural preservation programmes, driven by both the government and community, could play a pivotal role in safeguarding the unique cultural identities in Sepaku while fostering an environment where diverse cultures could coexist and thrive. This balance between modernisation and cultural preservation might be key as Sepaku becomes a focal point for Indonesia's future development.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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