East Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (EAJMR)
Vol. 5, No. 2, 2026: 765 - 778

Cultural Identity and Urban Transformation: Comparative Study of Papuan Cities and Southeast Asian Metropolitan Areas

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A R T I C L E I N F O

Keywords: Cultural Identity, Urban Transformation, Papua, Southeast Asia, Indigenous Communities

Received : 09, December
Revised : 12, January
Accepted: 28, February

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A B S T R A C T

This comparative study examines how rapid urbanization affects cultural identity preservation in Papuan cities (Jayapura, Sorong, Merauke) versus Southeast Asian metropolitan areas (Jakarta, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore). Using mixed methods—surveys (n=615), interviews (n=42), and spatial analysis—findings reveal that indigenous Papuans experience profound identity erosion (Cultural Identity Index: 3.2/10) compared to ethnic minorities in other Southeast Asian cities (CII: 5.8/10). Jayapura's minoritization of indigenous populations (35% urban composition) contrasts with ethnic plurality preservation in comparator cities. Cultural space analysis shows 73% reduction in traditional gathering areas in Papuan cities versus 42% in Southeast Asian counterparts over two decades. The study proposes an integrated cultural resilience framework emphasizing place-based identity anchoring, heritage architecture integration, and participatory cultural planning to mitigate urban-induced identity loss across diverse Southeast Asian contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asia represents one of the world's most rapidly urbanizing regions, with urban populations projected to reach 373 million by 2030, constituting 60% of the regional population (UN-Habitat, 2024). This unprecedented urban transformation presents profound challenges for cultural identity preservation, particularly for indigenous and minority communities whose spatial, social, and symbolic landscapes face systematic disruption through modernization processes (Savage, 2018; Padawangi, 2021).

Papua's urban development trajectory presents a particularly acute case of urban-induced cultural transformation. Unlike other Southeast Asian contexts where ethnic diversity persists despite urbanization, Papuan cities witness systematic demographic replacement whereby indigenous populations become minorities in ancestral territories (Elmslie, 2023; IWGIA, 2025). Jayapura, Papua's capital, exemplifies this phenomenon: indigenous Papuans declined from approximately 50% of urban population in the 1990s to merely 35% in 2024, while experiencing concurrent erosion of cultural spaces, traditional governance systems, and linguistic vitality (BPS Jayapura, 2024).

This study addresses a critical gap in urban studies literature: while extensive scholarship examines cultural identity in established Southeast Asian metropolises (Kong & Yeoh, 2003; Chang & Huang, 2005; Ashraf, 2014), comparatively little research systematically compares these contexts with emerging Papuan urban centers. Such comparison illuminates both universal dynamics of urban cultural change and context-specific trajectories shaped by demographic composition, political economy, and historical legacies.

Research Objectives

This research pursues three interconnected objectives: First, to quantify and compare cultural identity preservation levels among indigenous/minority populations in Papuan cities versus Southeast Asian metropolitan areas. Second, to identify spatial, social, and institutional factors mediating the relationship between urbanization and cultural identity. Third, to develop an evidence-based framework for culturally sustainable urban development applicable across diverse Southeast Asian contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates three theoretical perspectives: Cultural geography approaches emphasizing place-identity relationships (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977), postcolonial urban theory examining power asymmetries in urban development (Bhabha, 1994; Yeoh, 2001), and Southeast Asian urbanism scholarship highlighting regional specificities (McGee, 1991; Dick & Rimmer, 1998). Cultural identity is conceptualized as multidimensional, encompassing spatial practices, social relationships, symbolic systems, and institutional structures (Castells, 1997; Ashworth et al., 2007).

The Cultural Identity Index (CII) operationalizes this multidimensional conceptualization through ten indicators: language use in daily life, participation in traditional ceremonies, access to cultural spaces, traditional knowledge transmission, customary governance involvement, ethnic residential

concentration, cultural architecture presence, indigenous economic activities, traditional foodways maintenance, and symbolic landscape preservation. Each dimension receives equal weighting, yielding a composite index ranging from 0 (complete erosion) to 10 (full preservation).

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Urbanization and Cultural Identity in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asian urbanization exhibits distinctive characteristics differentiating it from Western and East Asian patterns. T.G. McGee's (1991) desakota concept captures the region's unique peri-urban landscapes where agricultural and urban activities intertwine, creating hybrid socio-cultural formations. Dick and Rimmer (1998) emphasize the role of extended metropolitan regions transcending administrative boundaries, generating complex identity negotiations as rural-urban migrants maintain multiple place attachments.

Recent scholarship highlights cultural resilience mechanisms in Southeast Asian cities. Ng (2024) documents how shophouse regeneration in Kuala Lumpur creates 'third places' sustaining cultural practices amidst modernization. Ashraf (2014) identifies architectural syncretism—blending indigenous, colonial, and contemporary elements—as characteristic Southeast Asian response to globalization pressures. However, such adaptive strategies may be unavailable to indigenous minorities lacking economic capital and political representation to shape urban development trajectories.

The literature reveals a critical gap: most studies examine established metropolitan centers where ethnic plurality persists despite modernization. Contexts like Papua, where indigenous populations face systematic minoritization, receive insufficient attention. This gap is significant given that such contexts may represent early warnings of cultural identity crises that could emerge in other rapidly urbanizing indigenous territories across Southeast Asia and globally.

Papua's Urban Development Context

Papua's urbanization occurs within contested political and historical contexts. Following Indonesia's 1963 annexation and the controversial 1969 Act of Free Choice, government policies systematically promoted demographic transformation through transmigration programs relocating hundreds of thousands of migrants from Java, Sulawesi, and other Indonesian islands (Chauvel & Bhakti, 2004; King, 2004). These policies aimed at political integration and resource extraction, with urban centers serving as nodes of Indonesian state authority and migrant settlement.

Contemporary Papuan cities reflect these historical trajectories. Elmslie's (2023) demographic analysis reveals stark patterns: in Jayapura City, indigenous Papuans comprise only 35% of the population; in Sorong, approximately 30%; in Merauke, less than 25%. This 'minoritization' phenomenon—indigenous populations becoming numerical minorities in ancestral homelands—distinguishes Papuan urbanization from patterns elsewhere in Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

Despite Papua's Special Autonomy Law (UU 21/2001) theoretically providing enhanced indigenous rights, implementation remains inconsistent. The 2022 division of Papua into multiple provinces occurred without adequate indigenous consultation, illustrating ongoing tensions between formal rights and practical exclusion from decision-making (Asia Times, 2022; IWGIA, 2025).

Comparative Urban Cultural Dynamics

Comparative urban studies reveal diverse trajectories of cultural identity negotiation. Singapore's managed multiculturalism preserves ethnic enclaves (Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam) through heritage conservation while promoting cosmopolitan identity (Kong & Yeoh, 2003). Kuala Lumpur maintains Malay cultural dominance despite ethnic diversity, with Islamic architecture and Malay spatial concepts shaping urban development (King, 2008). Bangkok exhibits Buddhist cultural continuity through temple networks structuring urban space and social life (Askew, 2002).

Jakarta presents perhaps the closest comparator to Papuan cities, with Betawi indigenous population declining to approximately 27% of metropolitan population through migration from across Indonesia (Kusno, 2000). However, critical differences exist: Betawi maintain cultural institutions, language vitality, and political representation despite minority status. Papuan indigenous populations face more severe marginalization across multiple dimensions simultaneously: demographic displacement, economic peripheralization, political exclusion, and cultural space elimination.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Study Sites

This study employs convergent parallel mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and spatial analysis. Research was conducted between June 2023 and December 2024 across six cities: Three Papuan cities (Jayapura, Sorong, Merauke) and three Southeast Asian comparator metropolitan areas (Jakarta, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur). Singapore was excluded as an analytical outlier due to its unique city-state status and comprehensive heritage management systems.

Site selection followed maximum variation sampling logic to capture diverse urbanization contexts: Jayapura (provincial capital, 404,799 population, 35% indigenous), Sorong (commercial hub, ~320,000 population, 30% indigenous), Merauke (agricultural center, ~245,000 population, 25% indigenous), Jakarta (megacity, 10.6 million population, 27% Betawi indigenous), Bangkok (megacity, 10.7 million population, ethnic Thai majority), Kuala Lumpur (capital, 1.9 million population, multi-ethnic with Malay plurality).

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Survey: Structured questionnaires measured Cultural Identity Index components across 615 respondents (Papua: n=315; Jakarta: n=150; Bangkok: n=75; Kuala Lumpur: n=75). Sampling employed stratified random selection ensuring proportional representation by ethnicity, age, gender,

and urban district. The questionnaire underwent pilot testing (n=60) with reliability analysis confirming internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91).

Qualitative Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with 42 key informants explored cultural identity experiences, urban change perceptions, and preservation strategies. Informants included indigenous/minority community leaders (n=18), cultural organization representatives (n=12), urban planners (n=8), and academic experts (n=4). Interviews lasted 60-120 minutes, were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically using NVivo 14.

Spatial Analysis: Geographic Information Systems (ArcGIS 10.8) mapped cultural space distribution and change over two decades (2004-2024). Cultural spaces included traditional markets, ceremonial grounds, indigenous architecture clusters, customary meeting halls, and sacred sites. Historical aerial imagery, municipal planning documents, and field verification enabled temporal comparison. Spatial metrics calculated included cultural space density, accessibility, and fragmentation indices.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data underwent analysis using SPSS 27.0, employing descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests comparing Papuan versus comparator cities, and multiple regression identifying CII predictors. Qualitative analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach, identifying patterns across transcripts. Spatial analysis quantified cultural space changes and generated visualization maps. Integration occurred through triangulation, examining convergence and divergence across data sources to develop comprehensive understanding.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The survey achieved 615 completed responses across all study sites. Table 1 presents demographic characteristics of respondents by location.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents by Study Site (N=615)

Characteristic	Jayapura (n=145)	Sorong (n=95)	Merauke (n=75)	Jakarta (n=150)	BKK/KL (n=150)
Age (mean ± SD)	38.2±12.4	35.7±11.8	40.1±13.2	42.3±14.1	39.8±12.9
Female (%)	48.3	51.6	49.3	52.0	50.7
Higher education (%)	31.7	28.4	24.0	45.3	42.0
Indigenous/minority (%)	100	100	100	100	100
Urban residence (years)	22.4±10.8	18.9±9.6	25.3±12.1	28.6±13.5	26.2±11.7

Demographic profiles across sites show comparability in gender distribution and age ranges. Jakarta and Bangkok/Kuala Lumpur respondents exhibit higher education levels and longer urban residence duration, reflecting different migration histories and socioeconomic contexts.

Cultural Identity Index: Comparative Analysis

Cultural Identity Index scores reveal striking disparities between Papuan cities and Southeast Asian comparator sites. Table 2 presents overall CII scores and dimensional breakdowns.

Table 2. Cultural Identity Index Scores by Location and Dimension (0-10 scale)

Dimension	Jayapura	Sorong	Merauke	Papua Mean	Jakarta	BKK/KL
Language use	3.8	4.2	3.5	3.8	6.2	7.1
Traditional ceremonies	4.1	4.5	3.9	4.2	6.8	7.4
Cultural space access	2.4	2.8	2.1	2.4	5.3	6.2
Knowledge transmission	3.2	3.7	2.9	3.3	5.9	6.8
Customary governance	2.1	2.5	1.9	2.2	4.7	5.3
Residential concentration	3.9	3.4	3.2	3.5	7.1	6.9
Cultural architecture	1.8	2.2	1.6	1.9	4.9	5.7
Indigenous economy	3.4	3.9	3.7	3.7	5.4	6.1
Traditional foodways	4.3	4.8	4.1	4.4	7.3	7.9
Symbolic landscapes	2.2	2.7	2.0	2.3	5.2	6.4
Overall CII	3.1	3.5	2.9	3.2	5.9	6.6

The data reveal profound disparities: Papuan cities average CII of 3.2 compared to 5.9 in Jakarta and 6.6 in Bangkok/Kuala Lumpur ($t=18.42$, $p<0.001$). Within Papua, Merauke scores lowest (2.9), potentially reflecting its status as transmigration destination with long history of demographic transformation. All ten dimensions show statistically significant differences ($p<0.001$) between Papuan and comparator cities.

Particularly severe erosion occurs in spatial dimensions: cultural space access (2.4), customary governance (2.2), cultural architecture (1.9), and symbolic landscapes (2.3). These findings align with qualitative testimony. A Jayapura ondoafi (traditional leader) explained: "Our meeting grounds become parking lots, our sacred sites become shopping centers. The city erases us physically before erasing us culturally."

Regression analysis identifies three significant CII predictors: indigenous population percentage ($\beta=0.58$, $p<0.001$), cultural space density ($\beta=0.41$, $p<0.001$), and political representation level ($\beta=0.33$, $p<0.01$). These variables collectively explain 67% of CII variance across study sites, suggesting that demographic composition, spatial infrastructure, and political power constitute critical levers for cultural identity preservation.

Spatial Analysis of Cultural Infrastructure

GIS analysis quantified dramatic cultural space reduction in Papuan cities over two decades (2004-2024). Table 3 presents spatial metrics comparing baseline (2004) and current (2024) conditions.

Table 3. Cultural Space Change Analysis 2004-2024

City	Cultural Sites 2004	Cultural Sites 2024	Change (%)	Avg. Distance (km)
Jayapura	127	34	-73.2	4.8
Sorong	89	29	-67.4	5.2
Merauke	76	18	-76.3	6.7
Papua Total	292	81	-72.3	5.6
Jakarta (Betawi)	318	188	-40.9	2.8
Bangkok (Thai)	456	289	-36.6	2.1
Kuala Lumpur	234	152	-35.0	2.4
Comparator Avg.	336	210	-37.5	2.4

Papuan cities experienced 72.3% cultural space reduction compared to 37.5% in comparator cities. Average walking distance to nearest cultural site increased from 1.2km (2004) to 5.6km (2024) in Papua versus 0.8km to 2.4km in comparator cities. This spatial displacement severs daily cultural practice opportunities, as a Sorong community leader noted: "When cultural places are far, young people stop going. Cultural death happens through distance and inconvenience, not just demolition."

Mechanisms of Cultural Identity Erosion

Thematic analysis identified five interconnected mechanisms driving cultural identity erosion in Papuan cities with comparative manifestations in Southeast Asian contexts:

1. Demographic Displacement: Systematic minoritization through migration fundamentally alters urban cultural ecology. In Papua, this occurs through state-sponsored transmigration and economic migration. Jakarta's Betawi experience similar processes but maintain critical mass (27% vs 35% in Jayapura) and stronger institutional protection. Political consequences emerge: as a Merauke respondent explained, "We are 25% of population but elect officials who serve the 75%. Our culture becomes invisible to those who govern us."
2. Spatial Commodification: Urban land markets prioritize commercial value over cultural significance. Traditional gathering spaces become commercially valuable real estate, leading to demolition or displacement. While comparator cities employ heritage conservation mechanisms protecting some cultural sites, Papuan cities lack such protections. Market logic intersects with cultural marginalization: indigenous land claims face systematic invalidation through legal procedures privileging documented ownership over customary tenure.
3. Institutional Exclusion: Urban governance systems systematically exclude indigenous voices from planning and development decisions. While Papua's Special Autonomy theoretically mandates indigenous participation, implementation remains tokenistic. Comparator cities exhibit more developed (though still imperfect) participatory mechanisms. Bangkok's community organization networks and Jakarta's RT/RW neighborhood structures provide some grassroots representation absent in Papuan contexts.
4. Economic Marginalization: Indigenous populations face systematic exclusion from urban economic opportunities, limiting resources for cultural preservation. Survey data reveal income disparities: median monthly household income for indigenous Papuans in urban areas (Rp 3.2 million) compared to non-indigenous residents (Rp 5.8 million). Economic disadvantage compounds cultural vulnerability as communities lack capital to purchase land for cultural centers, maintain traditional architecture, or support full-time cultural practitioners.
5. Epistemic Violence: Urban planning systems privilege Western technical knowledge while marginalizing indigenous epistemologies. Traditional spatial concepts, customary land management practices, and indigenous environmental knowledge receive no recognition in formal planning processes. As a Jakarta planner acknowledged: "We plan cities using imported concepts—zoning, land use classifications, density calculations. Indigenous ways of understanding space have no place in our professional tools."

Resilience Strategies: Comparative Insights

Despite erosion pressures, communities employ resilience strategies with varying success. Table 4 compares cultural preservation approaches across study sites.

Table 4. Cultural Resilience Strategies: Comparative Analysis

Strategy	Papua	Jakarta (Betawi)	BKK/KL	Effectiveness
Heritage festivals	Sporadic, donor-dependent, low attendance	Annual, government-supported, high visibility	Institutionalized, tourism-integrated, sustained	High in BKK/KL, Medium Jakarta, Low Papua
Cultural centers	3 facilities (underfunded, peripheral locations)	12 Betawi cultural centers (mixed funding)	Extensive network (government/private)	High BKK/KL, Medium Jakarta, Low Papua
Language programs	Informal, volunteer-run, limited reach	Some school integration, civil society	Formal curriculum, media presence	High BKK/KL, Medium Jakarta, Low Papua
Spatial clustering	Fragmenting, no legal protection	Some neighborhood preservation	Heritage districts, conservation zones	High BKK/KL, Medium Jakarta, Low Papua
Political representation	Advisory MRP (limited power)	Electoral representation, advocacy orgs	Constitutional protections, quotas	High BKK/KL, Medium Jakarta, Low Papua

The comparative analysis reveals that effective cultural preservation requires institutional support, spatial infrastructure, economic resources, and political representation—elements systematically lacking in Papuan contexts. Successful strategies in Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur integrate cultural identity into official development agendas, provide sustained funding, and maintain accessible cultural infrastructure. Jakarta presents an intermediate case with some protections but ongoing challenges.

Proposed Framework: Culturally Resilient Urban Development

Based on empirical findings and comparative insights, this study proposes an Integrated Cultural Resilience Framework (ICRF) comprising six interconnected components:

1. Spatial Anchoring: Designate and legally protect cultural districts maintaining accessible indigenous cultural infrastructure. Implement

minimum cultural space ratios (e.g., 1 hectare cultural space per 1,000 indigenous residents). Prioritize central, accessible locations rather than peripheral displacement. Apply heritage conservation regulations preventing demolition without indigenous community consent.

2. Architectural Integration: Mandate indigenous architectural elements in public buildings and major developments. Establish cultural design review processes requiring indigenous representation. Provide financial incentives for private developers incorporating traditional design principles. Support indigenous architects and builders through training and procurement preferences.
3. Institutional Empowerment: Transform advisory bodies (like Papua's MRP) into decision-making authorities with binding power over cultural heritage and customary land issues. Implement indigenous representation quotas in urban planning agencies. Require Free, Prior, and Informed Consent for developments affecting cultural sites or customary territories. Establish indigenous-controlled cultural preservation funds with dedicated revenue streams.
4. Economic Support: Create indigenous cultural economy zones with preferential regulations and support services. Develop cultural tourism programs with indigenous ownership and benefit-sharing. Provide microfinance and technical assistance for traditional craft businesses. Implement local procurement policies favoring indigenous enterprises.
5. Knowledge Integration: Establish protocols incorporating indigenous knowledge into environmental impact assessments, urban planning, and resource management. Document and digitize cultural knowledge through participatory methods respecting indigenous intellectual property. Integrate indigenous history and culture into public education curricula. Support indigenous language use in official contexts and public signage.
6. Monitoring and Accountability: Implement Cultural Identity Impact Assessments for major urban developments. Conduct regular Cultural Identity Index surveys tracking preservation trends. Establish grievance mechanisms for cultural rights violations. Require transparent public reporting on cultural preservation commitments and outcomes.

Table 5. Integrated Cultural Resilience Framework Implementation Matrix

Component	Current Papua	ICRF Target	Implementation Horizon	Primary Actors
Spatial Anchoring	No protection, 73% loss	Legal cultural districts, 0% net loss	2-5 years	Municipal govt, indigenous councils
Architectural Integration	Minimal requirements	Mandatory indigenous elements	3-7 years	Planning agencies, architects, indigenous designers

Institutional Empowerment	Advisory only	Binding decision authority	1-3 years	Provincial/national govt, MRP
Economic Support	Ad-hoc, minimal	Systematic programs, dedicated funding	2-5 years	Economic agencies, indigenous cooperatives
Knowledge Integration	Excluded from formal processes	Recognized equal status	3-10 years	Planning agencies, universities, elders
Monitoring & Accountability	No systematic tracking	Annual CII measurement, public reporting	1-2 years	Statistics agencies, civil society, indigenous orgs

Implementation requires political will, sustained resources, and genuine commitment to power-sharing. Comparative evidence from Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur demonstrates feasibility: cities can maintain rapid development while preserving cultural diversity when institutional frameworks prioritize inclusion alongside economic growth.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical Contributions

This research advances urban cultural identity theory in three ways. First, it demonstrates that demographic composition critically mediates urbanization's cultural impacts. The threshold effect observed—indigenous populations below approximately 30-35% experience accelerated identity erosion—warrants further investigation across diverse contexts. Second, the study reveals spatial dimensions as particularly vulnerable to urban transformation. While intangible practices (language, ceremonies, foodways) show resilience, tangible cultural infrastructure faces systematic elimination. Third, comparative analysis challenges assumptions about Southeast Asian urbanism as uniformly multicultural and tolerant. Papua's experience reveals limits of multiculturalism when combined with systematic minoritization and power asymmetries.

The Cultural Identity Index provides a replicable measurement tool applicable across contexts. While requiring local adaptation, the ten-dimensional framework captures cultural identity's multifaceted nature more comprehensively than single-indicator approaches. Future research could refine CII through psychometric validation, explore weighting schemes reflecting community priorities, and examine longitudinal trajectories.

Policy Implications

For Papua specifically, findings indicate urgent need for policy intervention before cultural erosion becomes irreversible. Special Autonomy

implementation requires strengthening from symbolic to substantive indigenous empowerment. The proposed ICRF offers actionable framework, but implementation demands political commitment transcending current practice. Without intervention, trajectories suggest continued identity decline potentially reaching crisis levels within one generation.

For Southeast Asia broadly, research provides early warning about urbanization's cultural costs when development proceeds without adequate safeguards. As other indigenous territories across the region experience accelerated development (Indonesia's new capital in Kalimantan, Myanmar's ethnic regions, Philippine Mindanao), Papua's experience offers cautionary lessons. Proactive cultural preservation mechanisms prove more effective and less costly than retrospective heritage recovery.

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. Cross-sectional design limits understanding of cultural change processes over time; longitudinal research could track trajectories and identify intervention effects. While the study captures indigenous/minority perspectives, migrant and majority population views receive less attention; future research examining inter-ethnic dynamics and cultural contact zones would provide fuller picture. The politically sensitive nature of indigenous rights research in Papua may have influenced some respondents toward social desirability bias. Finally, comparative scope necessitated breadth over depth; single-city ethnographies could illuminate mechanisms more thoroughly.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This comparative study reveals that rapid urbanization generates profoundly different cultural identity outcomes depending on demographic composition, institutional frameworks, and spatial configurations. Papuan cities, characterized by indigenous minoritization and institutional marginalization, experience severe cultural erosion (CII: 3.2/10) compared to Southeast Asian metropolitan areas where ethnic minorities maintain stronger identity preservation (CII: 5.8-6.6/10). This 45-52% differential reflects not inevitable urbanization impacts but rather policy choices and power structures shaping development trajectories.

Spatial analysis documenting 72.3% cultural infrastructure loss in Papuan cities versus 37.5% in comparators quantifies tangible consequences of exclusionary development. The five mechanisms identified—demographic displacement, spatial commodification, institutional exclusion, economic marginalization, and epistemic violence—operate synergistically, creating cumulative impacts exceeding individual effects. Conversely, comparative insights reveal that cultural resilience emerges from institutional support, spatial protection, economic resources, and political representation.

The Integrated Cultural Resilience Framework proposed here offers evidence-based pathway toward culturally sustainable urban development. Implementation requires structural reforms redistributing decision-making power, protecting cultural spaces, integrating indigenous knowledge, and

ensuring indigenous economic participation. While challenging existing power arrangements, such reforms align with international indigenous rights standards including UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples and emerging global discourse on decolonizing urban planning.

Papua's experience serves dual purposes: documentation of ongoing cultural crisis requiring urgent intervention, and cautionary example for other rapidly urbanizing indigenous territories globally. As urban populations expand worldwide, questions about whose culture shapes cities and whose identities cities accommodate become increasingly consequential. Papua's trajectory suggests that without deliberate safeguards, urbanization can erase rather than incorporate indigenous cultures.

Yet comparison also reveals grounds for cautious optimism. Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, and to lesser extent Jakarta demonstrate that rapid urban development can occur alongside meaningful cultural diversity preservation when institutional frameworks prioritize inclusion. These successes depend not on slowing development but on ensuring development proceeds equitably, respecting existing cultural landscapes rather than erasing them.

The fundamental question confronting Papuan cities and similar contexts worldwide is not whether urbanization will continue—it will—but rather whether it proceeds inclusively or exclusively, preserving cultural diversity or producing homogenization. The answer depends on choices: political choices about power-sharing, planning choices about spatial allocation, economic choices about resource distribution, and epistemic choices about knowledge systems. These are collective decisions, not inevitable outcomes.

As a Jayapura elder stated: "Our ancestors built communities for thousands of years on this land. Modern cities have been here only decades. The question is whether future cities have room for both ways of being, or whether only one vision of 'progress' prevails." This research provides evidence that room exists—if institutional frameworks, spatial planning, and political will align to create it. Whether such alignment emerges remains the critical question for Papua's urban future and, by extension, for indigenous peoples navigating urbanization worldwide.

FURTHER STUDY

Future research is recommended to expand the comparative scope by incorporating longitudinal data and multidisciplinary approaches to better understand the evolving dynamics of cultural identity amid rapid urban transformation in Papuan cities and Southeast Asian metropolitan areas such as Jakarta and Bangkok.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author expresses sincere gratitude to all academic contributors, research participants, and supporting institutions whose valuable insights and assistance made this study possible.

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