



Portrait of Ethnic, Cultural and Religious Diversity in the City of Medan

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Abstract

This research aims to describe the portrait of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity in the city of Medan and the social dynamics that occur in it. The method used is a literature study by relying on relevant primary and secondary sources. The data were analyzed qualitatively with a theoretical approach of literature study to understand the relationship between ethnicities, religions, and cultures in Medan. The results of the study show that diversity in the city of Medan is not only a characteristic of the city, but also part of the identity of the Indonesian nation. The people of Medan have created social harmony through mutual respect and tolerance. This diversity is a social capital to realize a peaceful inclusive society. By maintaining these values, the city of Medan has the potential to develop as a proud example of multiculturalism in Indonesia, reflecting the spirit of tolerance that will strengthen the nation's future.

Keywords: *Diversity; Medan City. Multicultural*

Abstrak: Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan potret keberagaman etnis, agama, dan budaya di Kota Medan serta dinamika sosial yang terjadi didalamnya. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi kepustakaan dengan mengandalkan sumber primer dan sekunder yang relevan. Data dianalisis secara kualitatif dengan pendekatan teori studi kepustakaan untuk memahami hubungan antar etnis, agama, dan budaya di Medan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keberagaman di Kota Medan tidak hanya menjadi ciri khas kota, tetapi juga bagian dari identitas bangsa Indonesia. Masyarakat Medan telah menciptakan harmoni sosial melalui sikap saling menghormati dan toleransi. Keberagaman ini menjadi modal sosial untuk mewujudkan masyarakat inklusif yang damai. Dengan menjaga nilai-nilai ini, Kota Medan berpotensi berkembang sebagai contoh multikulturalisme yang membanggakan di Indonesia, mencerminkan semangat toleransi yang akan memperkuat masa depan bangsa.

Kata Kunci: *Keberagaman; Kota Medan. Multikultural*

INTRODUCTION

The city of Medan, the capital of North Sumatra Province, is one of the largest cities in Indonesia known as the center of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Medan has a population consisting of various ethnic groups, such as Malays, Bataks, Javanese, Chinese, and Indians, who coexist

harmoniously. This diversity creates a miniature portrait of Indonesia's unique religious diversity in the city of Medan, where the people practice various religious beliefs with high values of tolerance. Religions such as Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism have a significant influence on the social life of the people of Medan, both in the personal and communal realms (Sari et al., 2024).

The influence of these religions is not only reflected in worship activities, but also in various aspects of life, such as marriage customs, religious holiday celebrations, and local traditions. For example, the celebration of Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, Nyepi, Vesak, as well as religious traditions such as the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and Hindu wedding ceremonies are an inseparable part of the life of the people of Medan. The presence of these various celebrations not only enriches local cultural treasures, but also strengthens social solidarity between religious communities (Wandini et al., 2024).

In addition, moral and ethical values taught by various religions also shape the character of the people of Medan. Values such as tolerance, honesty, patience, and mutual cooperation are important foundations in maintaining harmony in the midst of differences. This diversity has created awareness of the importance of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect, thus making the city of Medan a real example for other cities in Indonesia in terms of maintaining diversity and creating harmony between religious communities.

Furthermore, the influence of customs and culture influenced by these religions is also seen in various physical and social forms, such as the architecture of houses of worship, art, festivals, and local government policies. Mosques, churches, temples, and vihars stand side by side, reflecting the real harmony in the lives of the people of Medan. Cultural and religious festivals are also a special attraction that shows the interaction between traditional traditions and religious teachings. However, even though this diversity brings many positive aspects, there are still challenges that must be faced, especially in maintaining tolerance in the midst of existing differences in beliefs (Setiawan, 2016).

Thus, it is important to understand how the customs and cultures of various religions in the city of Medan interact with each other and contribute to the dynamics of people's lives. This understanding is expected to strengthen the foundations of diversity and tolerance that have been formed, as well as provide insight into facing challenges that may arise in the future. This research will explore a miniature portrait of religious diversity in the city of Medan, focusing on how existing religions influence the social, cultural, and policy life of the city, as well as how local communities maintain harmony in the midst of existing diversity.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a literature study approach to explore the portrait of religion, ethnicity, and culture in the city of Medan. The data sources used consist of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are obtained from books, articles, and official documents that contain direct information related to religious, ethnic, cultural, and religious topics in the city of Medan. Secondary sources include previous research, journals, research reports, and various other literature relevant to the theme of this research.

Data collection is carried out through document studies to analyze various written documents related to this topic, such as government reports, scientific articles, and other reading materials. All the information collected is then analyzed qualitatively by identifying the main themes related to religion, ethnicity, and culture in Medan. The collected data will be classified based on relevant subthemes, then linked to existing social and religious theories to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of inter-ethnic and religious relations in the city of Medan.

Data analysis was carried out using literature study theory, with the aim of understanding the socio-religious dynamics in Medan City as a whole. In the final stage, the researcher will compile the results of the analysis to provide a more comprehensive picture of the religion, ethnicity, and culture in this city. To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, source triangulation is used to compare information obtained from various primary and secondary sources, resulting in an accurate and objective understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ethnic Diversity in Medan City

The city of Medan, as the capital of North Sumatra Province, has long been known as one of the most pluralistic cities in Indonesia. Medan is not only the economic and commercial center of the island of Sumatra, but also a social laboratory where diverse ethnicities, religions, and cultures coexist. The city's social life is a tangible reflection of the national motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," which emphasizes the importance of unity in the midst of diversity. Medan's long history as a port city and migration center makes it home to a multiethnic and multireligious community that has unique social dynamics (Zuhrah & Yumasdaleni, 2021).

Medan is inhabited by various large ethnic groups, such as Malays, Batak (Toba, Karo, Mandailing, Simalungun, Pakpak), Javanese, Minangkabau, Chinese, and Indians. Each ethnicity brings customs, traditions, and languages that enrich the city's culture. The Batak tribe, as one of the dominant ethnicities, has a significant influence in shaping social identity in Medan, especially in aspects of culture, art, and social structure of the

community. On the other hand, the Malay tribe, who are the native inhabitants of the city, introduced a strong Islamic tradition in the life of the community (Bruner, 1961).

The Chinese and Indian communities also make a major contribution to Medan's social and economic dynamics. Both have been present since the colonial era and still play an important role in trade, education, and local culture. The diversity of ethnicities in Medan gives birth to intense social interactions and creates social bonds built on the principle of mutual respect.

Medan is inhabited by various large ethnic groups, including the Malays, Batak (which consists of Toba, Karo, Mandailing, Simalungun, and Pakpak sub-ethnicities), Javanese, Minangkabau, Chinese, and Indians. Each of these ethnic groups brings with them customs, languages, and traditions that enrich the social and cultural life of the city. According to the theory of cultural pluralism, the existence of these various ethnic groups can create social harmony if there is mutual respect and recognition of their respective cultural identities (Novebri & Resdilla Pratiwi, 2022).

The Batak tribe, as one of the dominant ethnic groups in North Sumatra, has a distinctive kinship system with the clan as the main identity. Batak traditions, such as traditional ceremonies and Gondang music, have a significant influence in shaping the social identity of the city of Medan. Meanwhile, the Malay tribe, who are the natives of Medan, provide a strong Islamic color in the social life of the city. Malay traditions, such as the unsalted flour ceremony and the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday, have become an important part of the cultural life of the people of Medan.

The Chinese and Indian communities also play an important role in the city's social and economic dynamics. The Chinese community is known as a driving force in the trade and industrial sectors, while the Indian community, especially Tamils, contributes to the field of trade and cultural arts. Their presence since the colonial period enriched Medan's social life and created a wide social network between ethnicities (Isra' Pasu Mutiara et al., 2024).

Religious Diversity in Medan City

As a multireligious city, Medan is inhabited by people who embrace various religions, such as Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The existence of houses of worship that stand side by side, such as the Medan Grand Mosque, Medan Cathedral Catholic Church, Shri Mariamman Temple, and Gunung Timur Temple, is a real symbol of harmony between religious communities.

In the context of social theory, the concept *of social cohesion* is very relevant in understanding religious diversity in Medan. Social cohesion refers to the extent to which society has strong social ties, despite being made up of various groups with different identities. The celebration of religious holidays,

such as Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, Chinese New Year, Nyepi, and Vesak, which are celebrated together by all levels of society, shows a high level of social cohesion in Medan.

However, challenges in maintaining harmony between religious communities remain. Social conflicts caused by differences in religious views or political interests may arise, as has happened in several other regions in Indonesia. In this case, the approach of interreligious dialogue and multicultural education is an important key in maintaining social stability in Medan (Prasetyo, 2021).

Culture as a Form of Ethnic and Religious Acculturation

Culture in the city of Medan is the result of the acculturation process between various ethnic and religious groups that have coexisted for decades. Medan culinary specialties, such as Medan lontong, Medan soto, and bika ambon, reflect the fusion of flavors from various ethnic groups. According to the theory of acculturation, this process occurs when two or more cultural groups meet and influence each other without losing their original identities.

Performing arts in Medan also show the results of unique cultural acculturation. Traditional Malay dances, Batak gondang, and art performances from the Chinese and Indian communities are often performed in various religious events and traditional celebrations. In addition, the architecture of buildings in Medan reflects diverse cultural influences. The Maimun Palace, which is a relic of the Sultanate of Deli, has an architectural style that combines Malay, Arabic, and European elements, while the Medan Grand Mosque shows the influence of Middle Eastern architecture (Zendrato et al., 2024).

Social Interaction and Harmony of Diversity

Social interaction between ethnic and religious communities in Medan is based on the principle of mutual respect and maintaining harmony. The tradition of visiting each other during religious holidays has become a hereditary habit that strengthens social relations between religious people. For example, during Eid al-Fitr, non-Muslims participate in the celebration by visiting each other and congratulating each other. Likewise, during Christmas and Chinese New Year, the Muslim community shows a similar attitude as a form of respect for fellow citizens (Nazla, 2024).

According to the theory of symbolic interactionism, social interactions that occur in Medan not only shape people's behavior patterns, but also create social symbols that represent harmony and tolerance. These symbols, such as joint celebrations and mutual cooperation in social activities, strengthen the social identity of the people of Medan as an inclusive and multicultural community.

However, challenges in maintaining social harmony remain. The potential for conflict due to differences in political, religious, or ethnic views cannot be ignored. Therefore, the role of the government, community leaders, and educational institutions is very important in maintaining social stability through inclusive policies and education that instills the values of tolerance from an early age (Ardiansyah et al., 2024).

Social Identity of Medan City

The ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity that exists in Medan naturally shapes the social identity of its people. This identity is characterized by an open, tolerant, and respectful attitude to differences. Although the people of Medan come from diverse backgrounds, they have a strong sense of togetherness as a unit of city residents. This social identity is not formed instantly, but through a long process of intense social interaction between ethnic and religious groups.

In the theory of social identity put forward by Tajfel and Turner, social identity is formed through the process of social categorization, identification, and comparison. In Medan, this process takes place dynamically, where each individual identifies himself or herself as part of a particular group, but still respects other different groups. This creates an inclusive social identity, where diversity is not seen as a threat, but as a force that enriches people's social lives (Zendrato et al., 2024).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the description above, it is concluded that the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity in the city of Medan reflects a very valuable social wealth, which is not only a characteristic of this city, but also an integral part of the identity of the Indonesian nation. The city of Medan, with its diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds coexisting, is a clear example of how diversity can be a social force that advances life together. Thus, the diversity in the city of Medan is not only a diversity that must be maintained, but also a social capital that can continue to be developed to create an inclusive society, mutual respect, and together create peace in the life of the nation and state. If this diversity continues to be well maintained, then the city of Medan will continue to develop into a proud center in the discourse of multiculturalism in Indonesia, reflecting the spirit of tolerance that is the foundation for the future of the nation.

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