



Local Cultural Identity and Social Cohesion among Youth in Multicultural Communities: An Integrative Review

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

18 August 2026

Received in revised form

19 October 2026

Accepted 19 October 2026

Available online 20 October 2026

Keywords:

cultural identity, social cohesion, youth, local culture, multicultural communities.

Kata Kunci:

identitas budaya, kohesi sosial, generasi muda, budaya lokal, komunitas multikultural.

ABSTRACT

Young people in multicultural communities negotiate cultural identity amid migration, globalization, and digital communication, yet the conditions under which local cultural identity strengthens rather than fragments social cohesion remain insufficiently theorized. This integrative review synthesized 38 sources on local cultural identity, social cohesion, intercultural interaction, and youth participation: 13 published between 2016 and 2026 and 25 foundational works from 1973 to 2015, of which six address Indonesia. Sources were selected purposively, without a formal screening log or quality appraisal, and analyzed through thematic synthesis. Four interrelated themes emerged: belonging, recognition, intercultural interaction, and participatory cultural practice. Comparison across sources suggests that local cultural identity supports cohesion when it provides continuity and attachment, is publicly recognized, and is enacted through cooperative activities with shared goals, and that it becomes exclusionary when cultural boundaries are treated as fixed. Indonesian cases from Maluku and Bali illustrate both outcomes, and diversity differs across regions. Young people act as cultural mediators, although digital visibility can simplify culture and intensify disputes over authenticity and ownership. The review proposes a conceptual, heuristic model linking recognition, belonging, participation, interaction, and mutual understanding under safeguards of inclusion and equal dignity. Evidence for the links is uneven, and the model requires empirical validation in varied multicultural settings. Recommendations for schools, communities, and local governments follow from the findings.

ABSTRAK

Generasi muda dalam komunitas multikultural menegosiasikan identitas budaya di tengah migrasi, globalisasi, dan komunikasi digital, tetapi kondisi yang membuat identitas budaya lokal memperkuat, bukan memecah, kohesi sosial belum banyak dikaji secara teoretis. Tinjauan integratif ini mensintesis 38 sumber tentang identitas budaya lokal, kohesi sosial, interaksi antarbudaya, dan partisipasi generasi muda: 13 terbit pada 2016–2026 dan 25 karya fundamental dari 1973–2015, dengan enam sumber membahas Indonesia. Sumber dipilih secara purposif, tanpa catatan penyaringan formal atau penilaian kualitas, dan dianalisis melalui sintesis tematik. Empat tema yang saling terkait muncul: rasa memiliki, pengakuan, interaksi antarbudaya, dan praktik budaya partisipatif. Perbandingan antarsumber menunjukkan bahwa identitas budaya lokal mendukung kohesi ketika memberikan kesinambungan dan keterikatan, diakui secara publik, dan diwujudkan melalui kegiatan kooperatif bertujuan bersama, serta menjadi eksklusif ketika batas budaya dipahami sebagai garis kaku. Kasus Indonesia dari Maluku dan Bali menggambarkan kedua kemungkinan itu, dan keragaman berbeda antardaerah. Generasi muda berperan sebagai penengah budaya, meskipun visibilitas digital dapat menyederhanakan budaya dan memperuncing perselisihan tentang keaslian dan kepemilikan. Kajian ini mengusulkan model heuristik konseptual yang menghubungkan pengakuan, rasa memiliki, partisipasi, interaksi, dan saling pengertian dengan pengaman berupa inklusi dan kesetaraan martabat. Bukti untuk tiap tautan belum merata, dan model ini memerlukan validasi empiris pada berbagai konteks multikultural. Rekomendasi bagi sekolah, komunitas, dan pemerintah daerah diturunkan dari temuan.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Cultural identity is a significant component of social life because it shapes how people understand belonging, history, language, values, and relationships with others. Identity is not a fixed inheritance but a process of becoming that is continually reshaped by history, culture, and power (Hall, 1990; Phinney, 1990). For young people in multicultural communities, this process unfolds through family relationships, education, peer interaction, media, migration, and participation in community life (Berry, 2017). Contemporary societies are also marked by the multidimensional diversification that Vertovec (2007, 2019) describes as super-diversity, in which people differ not only in ethnicity but also in language, migration trajectory, religion, and social status. Understanding how young people anchor themselves in local culture within such settings is therefore a central question for the social sciences.

Local cultural identity can contribute positively to social cohesion. Belonging is a fundamental human need, and people who feel attached to a community are more likely to invest in relationships and shared responsibilities (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Social cohesion is commonly understood as a condition marked by trust, a sense of belonging, and willingness to participate in collective life (Chan et al., 2006), and recent reviews identify its essential dimensions as social relations, identification with the community, and orientation toward the common good (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). Knowledge of local history, language, arts, and traditions can strengthen the second and third of these dimensions. Cultural recognition further supports dignity by communicating that different identities are valued (Honneth, 1995; Taylor, 1994).

However, cultural identity has an ambivalent relationship with cohesion. Social identity theory explains that group membership generates solidarity within the group while encouraging differentiation from outsiders (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Empirical work on diversity likewise suggests that heterogeneity can initially reduce social solidarity, although societies can gradually build more encompassing identities that sustain trust across groups (Putnam, 2007). Social cohesion therefore cannot be equated with cultural uniformity. A cohesive multicultural community is one in which differences coexist within a framework of recognition, participation, trust, and shared civic responsibility.

Globalization and digital communication have intensified this issue. Young people can access cultural expressions from across the world while remaining connected to local communities, and participatory media allow local traditions to be documented, remixed, and shared (Burgess & Green, 2018; Jenkins et al., 2016). At the same time, platform algorithms shape what becomes visible (Bucher, 2018), and digital environments can encourage simplified representations of culture or conflicts over authenticity and ownership.

Three terms are used throughout this review. Local cultural identity refers to young people's attachment to the language, history, arts, customs, and values of a place-based community, understood as a process of becoming and not a fixed inheritance (Hall, 1990). Multicultural communities are communities in which people of different ethnic, linguistic, or religious backgrounds live together, often under the wider diversification described as super-

diversity (Vertovec, 2007). Youth refers to young people in general; where a source states an age range it is reported, and for the Indonesian context Law No. 40 of 2009 defines youth as people aged 16 to 30 years (Republik Indonesia, 2009).

Despite the breadth of relevant scholarship, several gaps remain, and existing work explains parts of the relationship between local identity and cohesion but not the whole. Reviews of social cohesion specify its dimensions (Chan et al., 2006; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017) but say little about how cultural identity enters them. Work on super-diversity describes the complexity of contemporary societies (Vertovec, 2007, 2019) without specifying how diverse young people come to share community life. Contact theory identifies the conditions under which interaction reduces prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) but not how people come to enter such interaction, and theories of recognition explain why respect for identity matters (Honneth, 1995; Taylor, 1994) without tracing its path to participation and cohesion among youth. Studies of participatory and digital culture document youth practices (Jenkins et al., 2016) but rarely connect them to cohesion. Finally, Indonesia, where ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity is exceptionally high (Suryadinata et al., 2003) and unevenly distributed (Ananta et al., 2015), is needed as a setting in which to test whether these ideas hold.

This review makes three contributions. First, it integrates these strands into one conceptual sequence linking recognition, belonging, participation, interaction, and mutual understanding. Second, it specifies four conditions under which local cultural identity strengthens or weakens cohesion and states the evidence available for each link of the sequence. Third, it reads the model against Indonesian cases from Maluku and Bali, which show that the same cultural resource can support inclusion or exclusion depending on how boundaries and recognition are handled. The model is conceptual and heuristic: it is offered for empirical testing and not as a validated theory. Accordingly, the review addresses three questions:

1. How does local cultural identity contribute to belonging among young people in multicultural communities?
2. Under what conditions can cultural identity strengthen or weaken social cohesion?
3. What roles can youth, education, and community institutions play in developing inclusive cultural participation?

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed an integrative literature review. This design was selected because the topic spans several disciplines, including sociology, psychology, education, cultural studies, and media studies, and requires the synthesis of conceptual and empirical work rather than the pooling of statistical effects. The review was interpretive rather than statistical. It aimed to identify patterns and theoretical relationships that could guide empirical research and community practice. The review followed the stages of an integrative review (problem identification, literature search, data evaluation, data analysis, and presentation; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005) and is not a systematic review.

Literature Selection

Sources were selected purposively from scholarship on cultural identity, social cohesion, intercultural dialogue and competence, youth participation, cultural sustainability, and digital culture. Priority was given to literature published between 2016 and 2026, supplemented by foundational conceptual work where the core theoretical arguments originated. Searches were conducted on Google Scholar, Scopus, Garuda, using English and Indonesian search terms cultural identity, social cohesion, intercultural competence, youth participation, cultural sustainability, digital storytelling; identitas budaya, kohesi sosial, kearifan lokal, pemuda. Only sources in English or Indonesian were considered. Sources were included when they (a) addressed at least one of the four themes examined in this review, (b) appeared as peer-reviewed articles, academic books, or reports of recognized international or national organizations, and (c) concerned young people, education, or culturally diverse settings, either directly or through clear implications. Commentary without scholarly grounding was excluded.

The final corpus comprised 38 sources, all of which are cited in the Results and Discussion: 13 published between 2016 and 2026 and 25 foundational works published between 1973 and 2015. By type, it included theoretical and philosophical works (for example, Taylor, 1994; Honneth, 1995; Fraser, 2000), one meta-analysis (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), literature reviews (for example, Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017; Soini & Birkeland, 2014), empirical or case-based studies (for example, Putnam, 2007; Mohareb et al., 2022; Malawat, 2026), and policy or statistical documents (for example, UNESCO, 2003; Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2015). Six sources address Indonesia (Hefner, 2001; Suryadinata et al., 2003; Tamatea, 2011; Ananta et al., 2015; BPS, 2015; Malawat, 2026). Four further references on method and definitions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Republik Indonesia, 2009; Thomas & Harden, 2008; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005) are not part of the corpus. Table 1 labels the type of each source.

Analytical Procedure

The synthesis followed thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), adapted to a corpus of mostly conceptual and mixed-method sources, and drew on the logic of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It proceeded in four steps. First, the selected sources were read and annotated to extract key concepts, arguments, mechanisms, evidence type, and context. Second, annotated passages were coded by concept (for example, attachment, misrecognition, equal-status contact, and ownership), and codes that recurred across disciplines were grouped into four categories: belonging and identity, recognition and inclusion, intercultural interaction, and participatory cultural practice. The categories were then checked against the three dimensions of cohesion (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017) to confirm that together they covered social relations, identification, and orientation toward the common good. Third, sources were compared within and across categories using a comparison matrix that recorded, for each claim, the sources that support it, the sources that qualify or contradict it, and the context of each (country, population, and method). Points of agreement, disagreement, and contextual difference are reported in Table 2. Fourth, each category was examined for conditions that could strengthen or weaken cohesion, and the categories were integrated into a conceptual model whose links were assigned an evidence status (Table 3). Particular attention was given to youth because young people occupy a central position between cultural transmission and cultural change.

Because the synthesis is interpretive, the themes reflect the authors' judgment and position, as authors based in Indonesia reading a largely international literature. To limit interpretive bias, the review retained and reported divergent positions instead of smoothing them, traced each claim to named sources, labeled the type and status of evidence (Tables 1 to 3), and stated which claims are conditional on context. Because the review is theoretical and the selection purposive, its conclusions describe plausible relationships and not causal effects, and the corpus should not be regarded as exhaustive.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis identified four themes that connect local cultural identity with social cohesion: belonging, recognition, intercultural interaction, and participatory cultural practice. Table 1 summarizes, for each theme, the key finding, the representative sources and their type, the status of the evidence, and the social implication. The sections that follow discuss each theme, examine the role of digital media, compare the sources, and read the themes against Indonesian cases before articulating the conditions and the model that integrate them. Most of the evidence is theoretical, review-based, or case-based, and little of it concerns Indonesian youth directly, so the findings describe plausible relationships and conditions and not demonstrated effects.

Table 1. Thematic synthesis, source types, and evidence status of the reviewed literature

Theme	Key finding	Representative sources (type)	Evidence status	Social implication
Belonging	Local culture provides continuity, place, and attachment, but rigid membership rules can exclude.	Baumeister & Leary (1995; psychological review); Hall (1990; theoretical essay); Berry (2017; theory chapter); Soini & Birkeland (2014; literature review)	Theoretical and review-based; general, not Indonesian	Cultural learning can support participation if it recognizes layered identities.
Recognition	Respect for different identities supports inclusion; misrecognition produces distance and disengagement.	Taylor (1994), Honneth (1995), Fraser (2000; philosophical); Banks (2017; conceptual article)	Normative and theoretical; no direct test with youth	Institutions should avoid stereotyping and ensure equal participation.
Interaction	Cooperative, equal-status activities with shared goals create dialogue and require intercultural competence.	Pettigrew & Tropp (2006; meta-analysis); Putnam (2007; survey-based analysis, United States); Deardorff (2006; consensus study of intercultural competence)	Strongest link: meta-analysis, with prejudice as outcome	Youth programs should emphasize collaboration over symbolic celebration.
Participation	Youth can document and reinterpret culture through contemporary media, gaining ownership and relevance.	Checkoway (2011; conceptual); Jenkins et al. (2016; conceptual book); Cruz & Miranda (2022; reflective essay on a project in Portugal); Mohareb et al. (2022; workshop-based case, Beirut)	Conceptual and case-based; context-specific	Heritage should be treated as living and participatory, with ethical safeguards online.
Indonesian cases	Diversity is unevenly distributed across regions; local tradition has supported reconciliation in Maluku and has been tied to boundary-hardening discourse in Bali.	Ananta et al. (2015; census-based study); BPS (2015; official statistics); Malawat (2026; qualitative discourse analysis); Tamatea (2011; online discourse analysis)	Indonesian; demographic and qualitative; two regional cases	Avoid treating diversity as uniform, and build reflexivity into cultural programs.

Note. Evidence status refers to the evidence in the reviewed corpus, which contains no study measuring cohesion outcomes among Indonesian youth.

Belonging and Local Cultural Identity

The first theme was belonging. Local cultural identity can give young people a sense of continuity and place. Stories of community history, local languages, traditional arts, food, ceremonies, and shared memories help them understand where they come from and how they are connected to others. This matters socially because attachment motivates participation and responsibility toward the community (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). Scholarship on cultural sustainability similarly places heritage, vitality, diversity, and locality among the core storylines through which culture contributes to community life (Soini & Birkeland, 2014).

Yet belonging becomes problematic when it rests on rigid definitions of who is a legitimate member. Communities are rarely culturally homogeneous. Migration, intermarriage, social mobility, and digital interaction create multiple forms of identity, and a young person may simultaneously identify with a village, an ethnic tradition, a national identity, a religious community, and a global youth culture (Hall, 1990; Phinney, 1990; Vertovec, 2007). Acculturation research suggests that individuals adapt best when they can maintain a connection with their heritage culture while also engaging with the wider society (Berry, 2017). Inclusive cultural education should therefore recognize layered identities rather than requiring a single cultural position.

Recognition and Inclusion

The second theme was recognition. Social cohesion depends not only on individuals feeling that they belong but also on feeling that their identity is respected. Taylor (1994) argues that misrecognition can harm people by confining them to a distorted image of themselves, and Honneth (1995) locates the conditions for self-realization in relations of care, legal respect, and social esteem. Fraser (2000) adds an institutional perspective: misrecognition matters most when it becomes embedded in social arrangements that deny some groups equal standing in participation. Recognition is therefore especially important for minority groups and culturally diverse communities.

Educational research points in the same direction. Banks (2017) contends that students who are not recognized as cultural members of their schools and societies may struggle to develop a shared civic attachment, and that transformative civic education must value students' cultural identities while building common civic commitments. Likewise, the Council of Europe (2018) treats valuing cultural diversity and respect for others as core competences for democratic culture. When cultural practices are ignored or stereotyped, young people may experience social distance and disengagement; when institutions acknowledge diversity in meaningful ways, participation can become more equitable.

Intercultural Interaction and Competence

The third theme concerned intercultural interaction. Cultural knowledge becomes socially productive when it creates opportunities for dialogue. A large meta-analysis of intergroup contact shows that contact typically reduces prejudice, with stronger effects when groups have equal status, pursue common goals, cooperate, and enjoy institutional support (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). School projects, community festivals, oral-history activities, youth exchanges, collaborative arts, and local research can provide such conditions. The objective should not be to eliminate difference but to create shared experiences through which

differences become understandable rather than threatening. This resonates with Putnam's (2007) argument that the long-term response to diversity is the construction of new, more encompassing forms of solidarity.

Interaction also requires skills. Intercultural competence combines attitudes such as respect, openness, and curiosity with knowledge and skills such as listening, observing, and interpreting (Deardorff, 2006). Young people need opportunities to ask questions, interpret cultural practices in context, and manage disagreement. Intercultural competence is thus related to social cohesion because it supports communication across social boundaries. Educational institutions can contribute by moving beyond symbolic multicultural celebrations toward activities that require collaboration and reflection (Council of Europe, 2018).

Participatory Cultural Practice and Youth Agency

The fourth theme was participatory cultural practice. Youth participation is more than attendance; it involves meaningful roles in decisions and activities that affect community life, with benefits for both young people and their communities (Checkoway, 2011). Young people should therefore not be positioned merely as recipients of cultural heritage. They can document oral histories, produce digital archives, create podcasts, develop short films, reinterpret traditional art, and communicate local culture to wider audiences. Such activities can strengthen ownership and relevance, and they reflect the logic of participatory culture, in which people create and share content and learn from one another (Jenkins et al., 2016).

Digital storytelling illustrates the potential. Facilitated workshops in which participants compose personal narratives with images and voice can build community and intergenerational understanding (Lambert, 2013). Cruz and Miranda (2022) show that storytelling practices can serve as tools of media literacy and intercultural dialogue, enabling younger generations to re-read cultural archives and voice alternative narratives. In Beirut, participatory workshops helped young people engage with the city's contested heritage through digital platforms (Mohareb et al., 2022). These examples suggest that participation converts cultural identity from an inherited attribute into a shared activity.

Digital Media: Opportunities and Risks

Digital technology creates both opportunities and risks. On the positive side, platforms can make local cultural knowledge visible beyond the immediate community, allow young people to create multilingual content, and connect local narratives with global audiences (Burgess & Green, 2018). Digital storytelling can also support intergenerational dialogue when young people work with older community members to document memories (Cruz & Miranda, 2022; Lambert, 2013).

However, digital visibility can produce simplification. Complex cultural practices may be reduced to attractive images or short videos, and algorithmic systems may privilege content that generates engagement over content that represents culture accurately (Bucher, 2018). Cultural production can also generate disputes over authenticity, ownership, and commercialization, echoing long-standing critiques of staged authenticity in tourism (MacCannell, 1973) and of the commodification of identity (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). Digital cultural projects therefore require ethical guidelines, community participation, and media and information literacy that enable young people to evaluate and produce content critically (UNESCO, 2021b).

Comparing the Sources: Agreement, Disagreement, and Context

Comparison across sources shows broad agreement on three points. First, identity is processual and layered and not fixed (Hall, 1990; Phinney, 1990; Berry, 2017; Smith, 2006). Second, recognition and meaningful participation matter for belonging (Taylor, 1994; Honneth, 1995; Banks, 2017; Checkoway, 2011). Third, cohesion cannot be equated with uniformity (Putnam, 2007; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017; Council of Europe, 2018). The sources diverge, however, on four questions (Table 2).

The first disagreement concerns diversity and trust. Putnam (2007) reports that diversity can reduce solidarity in the short run, whereas Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) find that intergroup contact typically reduces prejudice. The findings are not strictly contradictory, because they concern different outcomes (solidarity and trust versus prejudice) and different designs (a community survey in the United States versus a meta-analysis across many settings). Reconciling them points to the conditions of contact, which is why interaction appears as a distinct stage of the model. The second disagreement concerns recognition. Taylor (1994) and Honneth (1995) treat recognition of identity as a basis for self-realization, whereas Fraser (2000) warns that an identity-centered view can reify group identities and divert attention from unequal participation. The model therefore pairs recognition with equal dignity and participatory parity. The third concerns boundaries: social identity theory expects in-group solidarity to go with differentiation from outsiders (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), while acculturation research suggests that maintaining heritage ties alongside engagement with wider society supports adaptation (Berry, 2017). The difference is partly one of scope, since Berry's work concerns acculturating groups and Tajfel and Turner's account is general. The fourth concerns digital media, which Jenkins et al. (2016) and Burgess and Green (2018) present mainly as an opportunity for creative participation, and which Bucher (2018), MacCannell (1973), and Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) treat as a source of algorithmic distortion and commodification. These positions are complementary, because the opportunity appears to depend on governance and community ownership.

Context also limits generalization. Much of the evidence comes from North American, European, and Middle Eastern settings (for example, Putnam, 2007; Council of Europe, 2018; Mohareb et al., 2022), while the Indonesian evidence in the corpus consists of a small number of qualitative and demographic works. Post-conflict heritage work in Beirut and Maluku differs from the tourism-driven identity politics of Bali, and both differ from settings in which one group is numerically dominant. The claims below are therefore stated as conditional and not as universal.

Table 2. Agreement, disagreement, and context across sources

Question	Position A	Position B	Reconciliation or contextual note
Diversity and trust	Diversity can reduce solidarity in the short run (Putnam, 2007; United States community survey).	Contact typically reduces prejudice, especially under equal status and shared goals (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; meta-analysis).	Different outcomes and designs; the conditions of contact explain the difference, so interaction is a distinct stage.
Recognition	Recognition of identity enables self-realization (Taylor, 1994; Honneth, 1995).	An identity-centered view can reify groups and leave unequal participation intact (Fraser, 2000).	Pair recognition with equal dignity and participatory parity.
Boundaries	In-group solidarity goes with out-group differentiation (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).	Maintaining heritage ties while engaging wider society supports adaptation (Berry, 2017).	Scope differs: general theory versus acculturating groups; openness of boundaries is the key condition.

Question	Position A	Position B	Reconciliation or contextual note
Digital media	Participatory media enable creative cultural participation (Jenkins et al., 2016; Burgess & Green, 2018).	Algorithms and commodification can distort culture (Bucher, 2018; MacCannell, 1973; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009).	Complementary: benefits depend on governance, ethics, and community ownership.

Conditions that Strengthen or Weaken Cohesion

Taken together, the literature suggests that local culture contributes to social cohesion through a process of shared meaning. Cultural identity becomes a social resource when community members can recognize themselves and others within a broader narrative of mutual belonging. This differs from cultural preservation that treats traditions as static objects. A living culture is continuously interpreted by new generations, and heritage is better understood as a social process of meaning-making than as a fixed inventory of objects (Smith, 2006). Four conditions distinguish cases in which identity strengthens cohesion from those in which it weakens it.

The first condition is the openness of cultural boundaries. When group identity is defined through rigid contrasts with outsiders, in-group solidarity can harden into exclusion (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). When identity is understood as layered and evolving, it can accommodate newcomers and hybrid identities (Hall, 1990). The second condition is equal recognition, since symbolic attention to culture without parity of participation leaves structural inequalities intact (Fraser, 2000). The third condition is the quality of interaction: contact that is cooperative, equal in status, and oriented toward shared goals is far more likely to build trust than superficial encounters (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The fourth is cultural reflexivity, meaning the habit of asking whose version of culture is represented, who has authority to speak, and which practices have been marginalized. Such questions do not weaken cultural identity; they make cultural participation more democratic and historically informed (Smith, 2006).

Language, Intergenerational Dialogue, and Shared Spaces

Several enabling factors deserve particular attention. Language is one of them. Local languages often carry cultural meanings that cannot be fully translated into dominant languages, and intergenerational transmission is central to their survival (Fishman, 1991). Language use can therefore support identity and belonging. At the same time, multilingual competence strengthens communication across groups, so community programs should avoid framing local-language maintenance and wider communication as competing goals.

Intergenerational collaboration is a second enabling factor. Older community members contribute memories, stories, language knowledge, and practical skills, while young people contribute digital production skills, contemporary communication styles, and new interpretations. The interaction can benefit both generations by creating reciprocal recognition rather than a one-way transfer of tradition. Youth are particularly important in this process because their role is not simply to preserve culture exactly as it was, but to negotiate what should be retained, adapted, and communicated.

Shared public spaces form a third factor. Libraries, schools, cultural centers, parks, and community halls provide physical settings where cultural groups can interact, and the everyday relations that occur there correspond to the social-relations dimension of cohesion

(Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). Digital projects are most effective when connected to these social spaces rather than replacing them.

Indonesian Cases: Strengthening, Exclusion, and Regional Variation

Indonesian diversity should not be treated as uniform. An analysis of the 2010 census distinguished 633 ethnic groups, of which Javanese accounted for about 40% of the population and every other group for less than 5% (Ananta et al., 2015; BPS, 2015). BPS reports an ethnic fractionalization index of 0.81 and an ethnic polarization index of 0.50, which describes a highly heterogeneous society that is not strongly divided into two blocs (BPS, 2015). National figures nevertheless conceal local settings in which a group may be a majority in one district and a minority in another, and religion, language, and migration history differ across regions (Suryadinata et al., 2003). Pluralism and citizenship have long been negotiated within these differences (Hefner, 2001).

Maluku illustrates how a local tradition can support cohesion. After the communal conflict of 1999 to 2002, the Pela Gandong bond between villages was revitalized to rebuild relations between Muslim and Christian communities (Malawat, 2026). The case fits the model: an institution of recognized mutual obligation offers belonging and structured interaction. Malawat (2026) also argues, however, that the institutionalization of Pela Gandong by elites can produce a hegemonic narrative that prioritizes stability while obscuring economic inequality, segregation, and collective trauma, risking what the author calls a negative peace. Organic practices, such as Christian youth taking part in the hadroh tradition, are presented as a participatory counter-discourse that fosters positive peace. The case thus illustrates both the role of youth participation and the need for reflexivity, but it rests on a single qualitative, theory-driven analysis.

Bali illustrates how cultural strengthening can slide toward exclusion. Ajeg Bali, a discourse of strengthening Balinese identity, was analyzed by Tamatea (2011) through online material as combining local politics of decentralization with a culture of fear and the othering of outsiders, in response to the growing mobility of people, ideas, and capital. The case shows how boundaries drawn defensively can turn attachment into exclusion. It does not show that Balinese cultural identity is exclusionary as such, since the study examines a discourse and not the experiences of young people.

The two cases differ in context. Maluku is a post-conflict setting in which culture was mobilized for reconciliation, whereas Bali is a tourism-dependent setting shaped by migration in which culture was mobilized for protection. Both are consistent with the four conditions discussed above, namely open boundaries, equal recognition, quality of interaction, and reflexivity, but neither tests the model, and no reviewed Indonesian source measures cohesion outcomes among youth. Settings such as Java, where one group is numerically dominant, are not examined in the corpus and require separate study.

A Heuristic Model of Inclusive Cultural Cohesion

Integrating the four themes, this review proposes a conceptual, heuristic model of inclusive cultural cohesion with five linked processes: recognition creates conditions for belonging; belonging supports participation; participation creates occasions for interaction; interaction, under suitable conditions, strengthens mutual understanding; and mutual understanding reinforces recognition (Figure 1). The model is neither a strictly linear process nor a closed cycle. The order shows logical dependence and not a timeline, and the only reciprocal link is the feedback from mutual understanding to recognition. Entry points differ: a

newcomer may first take part in a shared activity and feel belonging only later, as contact theory suggests, and several processes may run in parallel. The model also contains a safeguard, since all processes must operate under inclusion, equal dignity, and cultural reflexivity; without these, cultural identity can reproduce exclusion (Fraser, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The order of the model (recognition first) differs from the order of the themes in the Results (belonging first) because the themes were derived inductively from the literature, whereas the model orders the same processes by logical dependence.

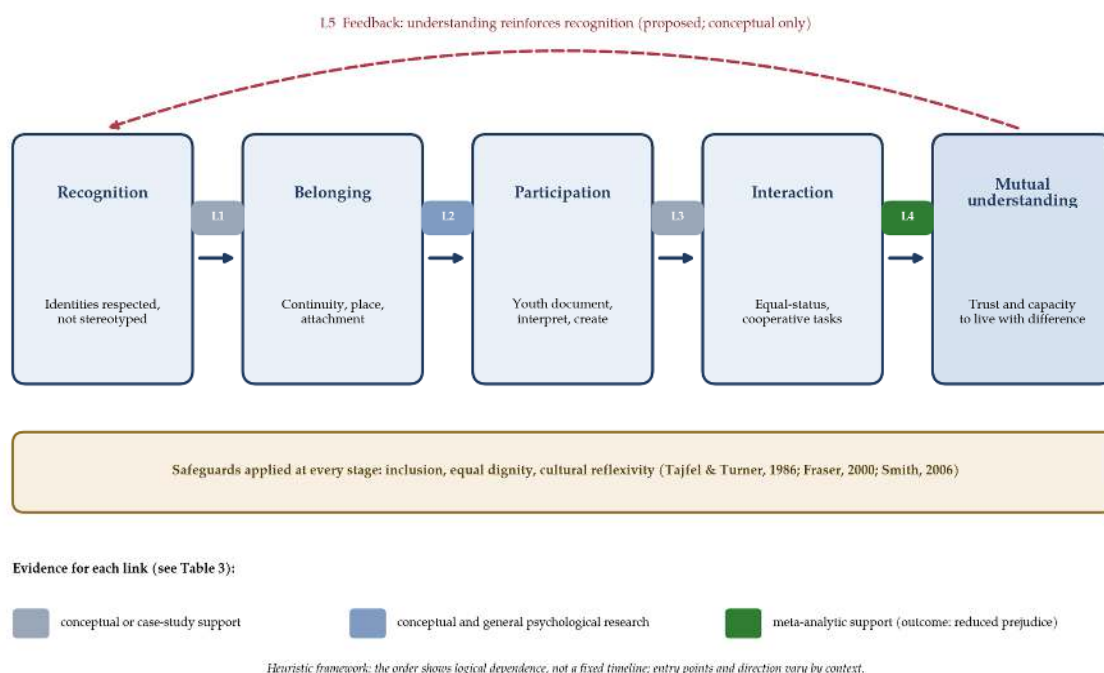


Figure 1. Heuristic model of inclusive cultural cohesion among youth in multicultural communities. Source: authors' synthesis. Link labels L1 to L5 refer to Table 3, and the shading of each label shows the strength of the evidence. The model is conceptual and has not been empirically tested.

Table 3 states the evidence for each link and the qualifying views. The links differ markedly in support. The link from interaction to mutual understanding rests on the strongest evidence, a meta-analysis, although its outcome is reduced prejudice and not cohesion as such (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). The other links rest mainly on conceptual work, general psychological research, or case studies, and the feedback link is the weakest. None of the links has been tested among Indonesian youth.

Table 3. Links in the model, supporting evidence, and qualifying views

Link	Supporting sources	Evidence type and strength	Qualifying view
L1 Recognition → belonging	Taylor (1994); Honneth (1995); Banks (2017)	Conceptual; no direct test with youth	Recognition without parity of participation leaves inequality intact (Fraser, 2000).
L2 Belonging → participation	Baumeister & Leary (1995); Schiefer & van der Noll (2017)	Conceptual and general psychological research	Rigid belonging can exclude (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).
L3 Participation → interaction	Checkoway (2011); Jenkins et al. (2016); Cruz & Miranda (2022); Mohareb et al. (2022)	Conceptual and case-based	Participation can be symbolic or commodified (MacCannell, 1973; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009).

Link	Supporting sources	Evidence type and strength	Qualifying view
L4 Interaction → mutual understanding	Pettigrew & Tropp (2006); Deardorff (2006); Council of Europe (2018)	Meta-analytic for prejudice; strongest, but outcome is not cohesion	Superficial contact does not build trust; diversity can reduce solidarity in the short run (Putnam, 2007).
L5 Mutual understanding → recognition (feedback)	Putnam (2007); Council of Europe (2018)	Conceptual; weakest	Assumes reciprocity that has not been tested.
Safeguards	Tajfel & Turner (1986); Fraser (2000); Smith (2006)	Conceptual	Operationalizing reflexivity in practice is untested.

The model is consistent with the three dimensions of social cohesion identified in the literature: belonging corresponds to identification with the community, interaction to social relations, and participation to orientation toward the common good (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017). Its proposed contribution is to specify a sequence, safeguards, and evidence status through which local culture may be linked to these dimensions among youth, which, to the authors' knowledge, the cohesion literature reviewed here does not do directly. Whether this adds explanatory value beyond existing frameworks can be judged only after empirical testing.

Implications for Education, Communities, and Local Government

The recommendations below are inferences from the synthesis and not findings of the reviewed studies, and Table 4 shows the finding from which each follows. They are conditional on context and need testing in specific communities.

Schools and universities can serve as bridges between cultural knowledge and academic learning. Because equal-status cooperation and recognition appear to build understanding more reliably than symbolic celebration (Banks, 2017; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), students can conduct oral-history interviews, map local cultural resources, analyze language practices, or develop community-based digital projects. Such approaches can strengthen research and media skills while contributing to cultural sustainability, and they are consistent with calls for education that builds solidarity and a shared sense of humanity while respecting cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2021a). To avoid symbolic performance, activities should include critical reflection on the meanings behind cultural practices, on whose version of culture is represented, and on how practices change.

Local governments have an important role in creating enabling conditions. Cultural programs should provide equitable access and avoid concentrating resources in already visible groups, because recognition without parity leaves inequality intact (Fraser, 2000). Youth should be involved in planning and evaluation (Checkoway, 2011). Public cultural institutions can support archives, training, community exhibitions, and digital documentation while respecting community ownership, a principle that echoes the emphasis of the UNESCO Convention on the participation of communities and groups in safeguarding intangible heritage (UNESCO, 2003). The Maluku case adds a caution: cultural institutions promoted from above can prioritize stability over the resolution of inequality (Malawat, 2026), so programs should include channels through which marginalized groups and young people can contest dominant narratives.

Communities and cultural organizations can make boundaries more open by avoiding membership tests, creating intergenerational roles for young people, and using shared public spaces. The Bali case indicates the risk of defensive boundary-drawing (Tamatea, 2011), and the Indonesian context offers rich opportunities because local communities possess diverse

linguistic, historical, artistic, and ecological traditions (Suryadinata et al., 2003; Ananta et al., 2015). The challenge is to avoid reducing local culture to tourism or ceremonial performance (MacCannell, 1973). Culture can instead become a resource for education, youth participation, intergenerational learning, and community development (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). Because cultural identity can also support local creative industries and community-based tourism, commercialization needs safeguards: if cultural resources are presented only as commodities, community ownership and authenticity may be weakened (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009). Youth programs should therefore combine cultural entrepreneurship with ethical discussion about ownership, representation, and community benefit, and cultural policy should support both preservation and participation so that continuity and change are treated as complementary processes. Because regions differ, programs should be designed with each community and not transplanted from one setting to another.

Table 4. From findings to recommendations

Actor	Finding that supports the recommendation	Recommendation	Evidence status
Schools and universities	Equal-status cooperation and recognition build understanding; symbolic celebration is insufficient (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Banks, 2017).	Collaborative, assessed projects (oral history, local mapping, digital documentation) with critical reflection on whose culture is represented.	Meta-analytic for contact; otherwise conceptual
Communities and cultural organizations	Rigid boundaries exclude, and intergenerational work and shared spaces support interaction (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Tamatea, 2011; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2017).	Open, intergenerational activities in shared spaces, without membership tests, with defined roles for youth.	Conceptual and one Indonesian case
Local governments	Recognition without parity leaves inequality intact; elite-led culture can obscure inequality; commercialization threatens ownership (Fraser, 2000; Malawat, 2026; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009).	Equitable funding across groups, youth involvement in planning and evaluation, and ethical guidelines and community ownership for digital documentation.	Conceptual and one Indonesian case
Digital programs	Visibility can simplify culture and algorithms favor engagement (Bucher, 2018; MacCannell, 1973).	Media and information literacy and community review of digital cultural content (UNESCO, 2021b).	Conceptual

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged, and each bears on how the synthesis should be read. First, the review is interpretive and based on purposively selected sources, so the corpus is not exhaustive. Purposive selection may over-represent sources that are well known, written in English, or aligned with the authors' framing, and it cannot be replicated exactly because no formal screening log was kept. Second, no formal quality appraisal was applied, so studies of very different rigor, from a meta-analysis to a reflective essay, were weighed by judgment; labeling the type of each source (Table 1) mitigates this but does not replace appraisal. Third, the corpus is diverse in context and uneven in coverage. Twenty-five of the 38 sources predate 2016, only six address Indonesia, and most evidence comes from North American, European, and Middle Eastern settings, so the synthesis may carry assumptions of those settings and may under-represent Indonesian and other Global South perspectives. Fourth, the proposed model is conceptual and heuristic. Its links rest on uneven evidence, none of which concerns the cohesion of Indonesian youth, and it requires empirical validation across different multicultural settings, including regions of Indonesia with different demographic and historical conditions.

Future research should investigate whether youth-led cultural projects produce measurable changes in trust, intergroup attitudes, and participation, and should test each link of the model, in particular the feedback from mutual understanding to recognition. Comparative studies across communities, including contrasting Indonesian regions, and mixed-methods designs that combine surveys with interviews or participatory observation, would help identify which forms of cultural engagement most effectively strengthen cohesion without suppressing cultural difference.

4. CONCLUSION

This review addressed three questions. In answer to the first, how local cultural identity contributes to belonging, the reviewed literature suggests that local culture gives young people continuity, place, and attachment, which motivate participation, provided that identity is understood as layered and not fixed. In answer to the second, the conditions under which identity strengthens or weakens cohesion are the openness of cultural boundaries, equal recognition, the quality of interaction, and cultural reflexivity; Indonesian cases from Maluku and Bali are consistent with these conditions but do not test them. In answer to the third, youth, education, and community institutions can develop inclusive cultural participation through cooperative, intergenerational, and reflexive activities, supported by equitable public programs and ethical use of digital media.

The conceptual contribution is a heuristic model in which recognition fosters belonging, belonging supports participation, participation generates interaction, and interaction builds mutual understanding under safeguards of inclusion and equal dignity, with feedback from understanding to recognition. The model is conceptual, its links rest on uneven evidence, and it requires empirical validation across different multicultural settings before it can be treated as an explanation of cohesion. Social cohesion is strengthened not when cultural differences disappear, but when people develop the capacity to live with difference while participating in shared community life.

The practical recommendations follow from the findings summarized in Table 4. Schools and universities should provide collaborative, reflective cultural projects; communities should keep cultural boundaries open and give young people real roles; and local governments should fund culture equitably, involve youth in planning, and protect community ownership, including in digital documentation. These recommendations are inferences to be adapted to each region and tested in practice. Future empirical research should examine how digital storytelling, local-language education, and youth-led cultural projects affect trust and social cohesion in specific multicultural communities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors acknowledge the scholars and public institutions whose research on culture, youth, and social cohesion informed this review. No external funding was received.

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