
Survival Strategies of Riverbank Communities: A Structural and Cultural Analysis of Existence and Resistance in West Kalimantan

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Abstract

Riparian communities in West Kalimantan face a persistent dilemma between ecological risks and the need to sustain their living space. This study aims to analyze how riverbank communities construct their existence and resistance amid structural constraints, ecological pressures, and deeply rooted cultural ties. The research employs a qualitative approach, drawing on secondary data and social media discourse. Data were analyzed using content analysis and in-depth interpretive techniques to understand the social practices of riverbank communities. The findings reveal three main preconditions that drive communities to remain and resist relocation policies: (1) river ecology as a space for learning and adaptation; (2) structural constraints that limit mobility and alternative settlement options; and (3) the river as a source of collective identity encompassing memory, emotion, and meaning of life. These findings indicate that survival strategies are not solely based on rational-economic considerations but are also shaped by riparian habitus formed through historical and sociological processes. This study concludes that the existence and resistance of riverbank communities are produced through a dynamic interplay of ecological, structural, and cultural factors that cannot be separated. As a result, top-down relocation policies tend to be ineffective as they overlook the cultural dimensions and lived experiences of the communities. This study recommends the adoption of an emic and holistic approach in policymaking, emphasizing participatory engagement with communities and integrating social, cultural, and ecological dimensions in a comprehensive manner.

Keywords: Community existence, Social resistance, Ecological adaptation, Structural constraints, Riparian habitus

1. INTRODUCTION

Riverbank communities in West Kalimantan are a social group living in both vulnerable and strategic conditions, making this study crucial and urgent. Data from the Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana show that West Kalimantan experiences dozens of flood events annually, with more than 100,000 residents affected in major flood years, particularly in riverbank areas such as Kapuas and Sintang, indicating a persistent and large-scale ecological risk. This vulnerability arises from increasing ecological risks

such as flooding, erosion, and environmental degradation, exacerbated by climate change and development pressures. Furthermore, their position is also strategic because riverbank areas are often the focus of spatial planning and settlement relocation policies (Enslin and Cronjé, 2022). However, these policies are often ineffective and trigger community resistance, as they fail to consider the social and cultural realities underlying community life choices. This situation indicates a gap between policy interventions and community lived experiences, making it crucial to examine in-depth how and why riverbank communities persist. Therefore, this research is crucial for providing a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between ecological risks, structural limitations, and cultural ties in shaping the existence and resistance of riverbank communities.

Several previous studies have examined various aspects of riverbank settlements. Research on informal urban settlements emphasizes structural limitations and access to resources as key factors contributing to community resilience in at-risk areas (Hakim et al., 2025a) . Other studies highlight ecological adaptation, demonstrating how communities develop local knowledge and adaptive practices in the face of environmental uncertainty (Woxvold and Noske, 2011; Siriraksophon, 2022) . Meanwhile, cultural approaches emphasize the importance of place attachment, collective memory, and identity in shaping the decision to remain. However, most of these studies tend to partially separate the structural, ecological, and cultural dimensions. Thus, there is a gap in understanding how these three dimensions dynamically interact to shape community existence and resistance, particularly through conceptual frameworks based on history and sociological dynamics such as riparian habitus.

The concept of riparian habitus in this study is developed from the idea of Pierre Bourdieu, who conceptualizes habitus as a system of dispositions formed through historical processes and repeated social experiences (Bourdieu, 2021). However, this study does not simply adopt the concept directly; rather, it contextualizes it within the ecological landscape of riverine environments. Riparian habitus refers to patterns of thought, practices, and life preferences shaped through long-term interactions between communities and river ecosystems, including ecological rhythms, disaster risks, and policy structures that frame their lives. Thus, this concept emphasizes that the decision to remain in riverbank areas is not merely a rational-economic choice, but the result of the internalization of ecological experiences, structural constraints, and cultural attachments that are dynamically intertwined.

The concept of riparian habitus proposed in this study should be understood as a contextual theoretical extension rather than an entirely new or standalone concept. It builds upon the notion of habitus introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, while advancing it through ecological contextualization. In this sense, riparian habitus is not merely an application of existing theory, but a refinement that incorporates environmental dynamics particularly riverine ecosystems into the formation of dispositions. This study therefore positions riparian habitus as a bridge between sociological theory and socio-ecological

analysis, offering a conceptual contribution that captures how ecological risks, structural constraints, and cultural meanings are simultaneously internalized and reproduced in everyday practices of riverbank communities.

Based on this, this study aims to: First, analyze how riverbank communities in West Kalimantan maintain their existence. Second, explore how to build resilience under conditions of ecological risk and structural limitations. Third, this study seeks to explain the interaction between ecological adaptation, structural limitations, and cultural ties in shaping community decisions to remain in riverbank areas. By using the concept of riparian habitus, this study is expected to provide a more integrative and holistic understanding of community life experiences and survival strategies.

This research argues that the sustainability of riverbank communities cannot be explained solely by economic factors or environmental adaptation. Rather, this phenomenon is the result of a dynamic configuration of structural constraints, ecological learning processes, and deep-rooted cultural meanings, which form a riparian habitus. This habitus not only supports the community's existence but also forms the basis for resistance to external interventions, including relocation policies. Therefore, understanding riverbank communities requires a relational and emic perspective that can capture the interconnectedness of infrastructure, structure, and culture in their daily lives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Riverbank Communities and Socio-Ecological Vulnerability

Riverbank communities are often positioned as vulnerable groups in socio-ecological studies because they are located in dynamic and high-risk areas (Singh et al., 2019; Anokye and Darko, 2025). Changes in river flows, seasonal flooding, and environmental degradation make their living spaces unstable (Neil Adger et al., 2021). However, this vulnerability cannot be understood simply as a natural condition, but rather as a result of broader social processes, including unequal development and resource distribution. A political ecology perspective emphasizes that environmental vulnerability is a product of power relations that marginalize certain groups, so that riverbank communities face not only ecological threats but also structural injustices (Dastgerdi and De Luca, 2025).

In the face of uncertain environmental conditions, riverbank communities develop various forms of ecological adaptation based on local knowledge (Rout et al., 2024). The cultural ecology approach in anthropology explains that humans actively interact with their environment through adaptive practices passed down from generation to generation (Bhuyan and Deka, 2024). Knowledge of flood patterns, water resource utilization, and stilt house building techniques are forms of adaptation that enable communities to survive (Varma et al., 2025). Thus, adaptation is not only technical, but also reflects the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment that continues to evolve historically.

Structural Limitations and Limited Choices

The existence of riverbank communities is also inseparable from structural limitations that limit their life choices (Kura et al., 2023). Within the framework of structuration theory, individual actions are understood as the result of interactions between agents and structures that influence each other (Kura et al., 2023). Limited access to formal employment, education, and adequate housing often leaves riverbank communities with no alternative but to remain in risky areas (Daumal et al., 2025). Cultural dimensions play an important role in explaining community attachment to river spaces (Daumal et al., 2025).

The concept of sense of place in anthropology and social geography emphasizes that space is not only understood physically, but also as a meaningful space shaped by collective experiences, memories, and identities (Silva et al., 2018; Adams, Taljaard and Van Niekerk, 2023; Perez Lopez, Carrasco and Mariscal Madrigal, 2024) . Rivers for riverbank communities are not just economic resources, but also a part of social life, a cultural symbol, and an identity passed down across generations. These emotional and symbolic ties explain why relocation is often resisted, as it would mean severing historical and cultural ties to their living space (Adams, Taljaard, and Van Niekerk, 2023; Perez Lopez, Carrasco, and Mariscal Madrigal, 2024) . Thus, the decision to stay is not simply a free choice, but a result of structural and cultural conditions that shape and constrain the space for possible action.

Community Resistance and Criticism of Relocation Policies

The resistance of riverbank communities to relocation policies can be understood through resistance theory in political anthropology (Clairine et al., 2025). This resistance is not always overt but can also manifest in everyday actions, such as subtle rejection, negotiation, or survival strategies (Sachs-Cobbe, 2023). Top-down relocation policies often ignore the social and cultural context, thus being viewed as a threat to the community's sustainability (Koning, Chu, and Brietzke, 2024). Therefore, resistance is not only a form of rejection but also an effort to maintain their living space, identity, and social sustainability.

To integrate structural, ecological, and cultural dimensions, the concept of habitus can be used as a comprehensive analytical framework (Koning, Chu, and Brietzke, 2024; Julianti, Safitri, and Seprina, 2025). Habitus refers to a system of dispositions formed through historical experience and guides the way individuals and groups think and act (Fazito, 2019; Arif and Anwar, 2023) . In the context of riverbank communities, riparian habitus can be understood as a lifestyle formed from long-term interactions with the river environment, structural conditions, and deep-rooted cultural values (Schnell, 2015; Malik, 2019) . This habitus explains how practices of survival, adaptation, and resistance emerge simultaneously as part of the community's daily life (Zhao, 2025) . Thus, this approach allows for a more holistic understanding of the dynamics of existence and resistance in riverbank communities.

Rather than standing independently, these strands of literature reveal a significant conceptual intersection. Studies on socio-ecological vulnerability emphasize exposure to environmental risks, while political ecology highlights how such vulnerability is structurally produced through unequal power relations (Neil Adger et al., 2021; Dastgerdi and De Luca, 2025). At the same time, cultural ecology and sense of place perspectives challenge purely structural explanations by demonstrating that communities are not passive victims but active agents who construct meaning, attachment, and adaptive strategies within their environments (Silva et al., 2018; Adams, Taljaard and Van Niekerk, 2023; Perez Lopez, Carrasco and Mariscal Madrigal, 2024). However, these approaches often remain analytically fragmented: structural studies tend to overlook cultural meanings, while cultural approaches may understate material constraints. This fragmentation becomes particularly evident in the analysis of relocation policies, where resistance is frequently interpreted either as irrational attachment or as a reaction to structural exclusion, but rarely as a product of their interaction (Koning, Chu, and Brietzke, 2024; Julianti, Safitri, and Seprina, 2025). Therefore, this study positions itself at the intersection of these debates by integrating ecological vulnerability, structural limitations, and cultural attachment into a unified framework through the concept of riparian habitus, offering a more relational and dynamic explanation of why riverbank communities persist and resist relocation.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research focuses on analyzing the existence and resistance of riverbank communities by positioning the river as an ecological, structural, and cultural space (Fernando et al., 2023). The study examines how communities in the rural area of the Kapuas Hulu River, West Kalimantan, interpret and sustain their lives within a dynamic and high-risk environment. The river is conceptualized not only as physical infrastructure, but also as (1) an ecological space for learning and adaptation, (2) a structural domain shaped by socio-economic constraints, and (3) a cultural space that constructs identity through memory, emotion, and collective meaning. Accordingly, this study investigates how these three dimensions interact in shaping community resistance to relocation policies perceived as misaligned with lived realities. This study employs a qualitative research design with an interpretive approach to gain an in-depth understanding of social reality (Hakim et al., 2025). The research relies on secondary data as the primary source, including scientific publications, policy reports, official documents, and credible online news related to riverbank communities. In addition, social media data are incorporated to capture public discourse and everyday narratives that reflect community perceptions and experiences. The selected platforms include Facebook and YouTube, considering their widespread use in Indonesia for sharing local issues and community-based discussions.

Data from social media were collected using purposive sampling with clearly defined criteria. Inclusion criteria consist of: (1) content explicitly discussing riverbank communities or river-based living; (2) narratives containing experiences, opinions, or

representations related to environmental conditions, settlement patterns, or relocation policies; and (3) content published within the last five years to ensure contextual relevance. Exclusion criteria include duplicated content, irrelevant posts, advertisements, and content lacking substantive narrative elements. This selection process ensures that the data reflect meaningful social discourse rather than fragmented or incidental information. Data collection was conducted in three stages. First, a systematic literature review was carried out to map theoretical frameworks and identify key concepts related to socio-ecological vulnerability, structural constraints, and cultural attachment. Second, secondary documents such as reports, policy texts, and news articles were collected to construct the empirical context of riverbank communities. Third, social media discourse data were gathered to capture expressions, narratives, and symbolic representations of everyday life along riverbanks.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis combined with in-depth interpretive analysis (Hakim et al., 2024). The process began with data familiarization through repeated reading of documents, news texts, and social media content to identify meaningful patterns. This was followed by open coding, in which initial codes were inductively assigned to relevant units of data such as sentences or narratives reflecting ecological conditions, structural constraints, and cultural meanings. Subsequently, axial coding was applied to group similar codes into three main analytical categories: ecological (e.g., flood experiences and environmental adaptation), structural (e.g., economic dependence and policy limitations), and cultural (e.g., place attachment, identity, and collective memory). Finally, selective coding and interpretation were conducted to examine relationships between these categories and to construct an integrative explanation through the concept of riparian habitus, linking empirical findings with theoretical insights. The analysis was carried out iteratively and supported by data triangulation across multiple sources to ensure consistency and analytical rigor.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, this study employs data triangulation by comparing multiple sources, including academic literature, policy documents, news reports, and social media discourse. This triangulation strategy allows for cross-verification of patterns and reduces potential bias from single-source data. It is important to note that this study does not use primary interview data; therefore, all interpretations are grounded in documented and publicly available sources. Through these analytical procedures, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how riverbank communities construct resilience and articulate resistance within the interplay of ecological pressures, structural constraints, and cultural meanings.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ecology as a Space for Adaptation of River Communities

For riverbank communities, river ecology not only represents natural conditions but also serves as a living space that shapes their daily experiences and social adaptation practices. Continuous interaction with river dynamics, such as changes in water

discharge, flood patterns, and seasonal cycles, encourages communities to develop contextual and sustainable ecological knowledge. In this context, rivers are understood as learning spaces that enable communities to develop survival strategies through empirical experiences passed down from generation to generation. Figure 1 illustrates how rivers are present in the daily lives of communities, not only as resources but also as spaces that shape the perspectives, behaviors, and adaptation patterns of riverbank communities.



Figure 4. 1. Rivers as a Community's Everyday Experience

Figure 4.1. demonstrates that rivers are not merely positioned as ecological backdrops, but as an integral part of the daily life experiences of riverbank communities. The visualizations in Photos 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate how domestic, economic, and social activities take place in close proximity to the river. Rivers exist as spaces of interaction that continuously shape people's lifestyles, from housing patterns to daily activities. Thus, the relationship between humans and rivers is not merely instrumental but also existential, with community life inherently connected to the river's ecological dynamics.

Based on the visual data and empirical narratives, there are three main trends in the adaptation practices of riverbank communities. First, the emergence of local ecological knowledge that enables communities to understand patterns of river changes contextually, such as tidal seasons and current behavior. Second, material adaptation reflected in dwellings such as stilt houses and floating houses, which demonstrate the community's technical ability to respond flexibly to environmental conditions. Third, the formation of social life patterns integrated with the river, where daily activities—such as work, interaction, and fulfilling life's needs—cannot be separated from the presence of the river as the primary living space.

Beyond these observable practices, the formation of ecological adaptation among riverbank communities is shaped by dynamic social processes involving multiple actors and power relations. Local households act as primary agents who accumulate and transmit ecological knowledge through everyday practices, while community elders and informal leaders play a role in preserving and legitimizing this knowledge across generations. At the same time, external actors such as government institutions and development agencies introduce policies and interventions that often reshape community practices, sometimes creating tensions between local knowledge systems and formal regulations. These interactions reveal that adaptation is not a neutral process, but one embedded in negotiations of authority, access to resources, and differing interests. For instance, while some community members prioritize maintaining traditional river-based livelihoods, others may seek alternative economic opportunities, leading to internal variations in adaptation strategies. Thus, river ecology as a space of adaptation is also a contested social arena, where knowledge, power, and interests intersect in shaping how communities respond to environmental change.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be explained through a cultural ecology perspective that views the relationship between humans and the environment as a dynamic reciprocal process (Zhao, 2025) . Adaptation carried out by riverbank communities is not simply a response to natural pressures, but is the result of a historical collective learning process (Sun, 2012) . Within this framework, practices such as the construction of floating houses and mastery of knowledge of river currents reflect the formation of a local knowledge system that is internalized in everyday life (Wang and Xiang, 2025) . Furthermore, when linked to the concept of habitus, these adaptation patterns can be understood as dispositions formed through long experiences interacting

with the river environment, resulting in practices that appear natural but are actually the result of deep social construction.

Structural Constraints: Less Than Free Choices

Structural constraints are a crucial dimension in understanding the decision of riverbank communities to remain in risky areas. This decision is not entirely based on free choice, but rather is shaped by socio-economic conditions that limit the community's mobility. Rivers, in this context, serve not only as ecological spaces but also as a primary source of livelihood that is difficult to replace. Dependence on river resources, limited access to formal employment, and the lack of suitable housing alternatives make relocation a challenging choice. Therefore, to understand the river's position within the structure of community life, Table 1 presents the various functions of rivers as a source of life for riverbank communities.

Table 4. 1. Functions of Rivers as a Source of Community Life

Coding	Description	Source
Rivers as a Source of Life	River transportation is the lifeblood of river communities. River transportation is two-way, transporting goods and people.	https://www.antaranews.com/berita/4681805/hidup-dan-menghidupi-sungai-kapuas
Rivers as the Foundation of Society	For a long time, the people of the Kapuas River basin in Pontianak have depended on the river for their daily needs.	https://www.suarakalbar.co.id/2024/05/jadi-tumpuan-masyarakat-sungai-kapuas-di-kalbar-rutin-dibersihkan/
The Kapuas River Becomes a Battlefield for Chinese-Indonesian 'Water Wars'	The Kapuas River is not only used by the Malay people, but also by the Chinese people in the Kapuas River basin in Pontianak.	https://www.rri.co.id/wisata/268864/sungai-kapuas-jadi-medan-perang-air-warga-tionghoa
River Water as a Source of Life	Rivers have long been used as a water source for various purposes. Water is used for household purposes, economic purposes, transportation, and even tourism.	https://mmc.kalteng.go.id/berita/read/3888/sisi-alur-sungai-kapuas
The Wonders of the Kapuas River in West Kalimantan	For local communities, the Kapuas River is not only a source of livelihood through fishing and agriculture, but also a major transportation route. The river plays a vital role in the ecological, social, and economic life of the surrounding community.	https://blog.bersame.com/news/the-wonders-of-the-kapuas-river-in-barat-kalimantan-216

Pontianak Restores Water Transportation as Its "Lifeblood"	Properly manage the Kapuas River to make it a major face and a leading tourism potential for Pontianak. With proper management, the Kapuas River can become a source of pride and a major tourist attraction for Pontianak.	https://kalbar.antaranews.com/berita/336700/pontianak-balikkan-transportasi-air-sebagai-urat-nadi
The river has enabled youth towards education and empowerment.	The Kapuas River flows in West Kalimantan and is a source of livelihood for the villagers who live along its banks.	https://www.smart-tbk.com/dari-tepi-sungai-hingga-menggapai-mimpi-jalan-sebuah-pemuda-menuju-pendidikan-dan-pemberdayaan/
Economic Benefits of Increasing Water Flow	River cleaning activities not only aim to smooth the flow of water, but also provide economic benefits for the community.	https://pontianakpost.jawapos.com/metropolis/1465114094/tingkatkan-aliran-air-dan-manfaat-ekonomi-warga-bwsk-i-pontianak-bersihkan-sungai-jalan-sepakat-2
The Kapuas River Water Taxis Still Surviving, the Lifeblood of Pontianak's Economy	Beneath its calm waters, the lives of people who depend on the river for their livelihoods are interwoven. One such person is the canoe miners, also known as water taxis.	https://pontianakpost.jawapos.com/metropolis/1465172927/ojek-air-sungai-kapuas-yang-masih-bertahan-urat-nadi-ekonomi-warga-pontianak

Source: *Online News Compilation (2025)*.

Table 4.1. shows that rivers have a multidimensional function in the lives of riverbank communities, not only as an economic resource but also as social infrastructure that supports mobility, interaction, and the sustainability of community life. Rivers serve as primary transportation routes, water sources for domestic needs, economic production spaces such as fisheries and water transportation services, and even as tourism spaces with economic and cultural value. These data emphasize that rivers are not merely physical environments, but also the primary foundation of a community's life system that is integrated socially, economically, and culturally.

Based on this data, three main trends reflect the community's structural attachment to rivers. First, a high economic dependence on river resources as the primary basis of livelihood, such as fishing, water transportation, and other economic activities. Second, limited access to alternative employment and resources outside the river basin, which limits the community's social mobility options. Third, the integration of rivers into the broader social fabric, where rivers not only serve as an economic resource but also support social networks, education, and daily community activities. These three trends demonstrate that the existence of rivers cannot be separated from the overall structure of community life.

Theoretically, this phenomenon can be understood through a structural and agency perspective that positions individual actions as the result of existing structural constraints (Malek and Samuri, 2025) . Dependence on the river reflects a form of structural attachment that limits people's rational choices, so that the decision to stay is not merely a preference, but also a form of adaptation to limitations (Malek and Samuri, 2025) . Within the capability framework, this condition indicates the limited substantive freedom of the community in determining safer and more sustainable life choices (Martina Ue, 2025) . Furthermore, discourse analysis of media data shows that the river is represented as the "lifeline," which strengthens the social legitimacy of continuing to live along the riverbanks. (Abedini, Abedin and Zowghi, 2021) . Thus, rivers are not only a material reality, but are also socially constructed as irreplaceable spaces, so that relocation policies often clash with the structural realities and social meanings that live within the community.

Rivers as Identity: Memory, Emotion, and the Meaning of Life

The cultural dimension is a crucial aspect in understanding the attachment of riverbank communities to their living spaces. Rivers are positioned not only as natural resources but also as symbolic spaces that shape identity, collective memory, and the community's perspective on life. The relationship between humans and rivers is profound and historical, reflected in daily practices, traditions, and values passed down across generations. Therefore, to understand how rivers are constructed as part of a community's social identity, Table 2 presents various public discourses that represent the community's cultural relationship with rivers.

Table 4.2. Public Discourse on the Identity of Riverbank Communities

Coding	Description	Source
When Coastal Communities Live Side by Side with Rivers	Because they live on the banks of the river for days, they naturally adapt to being able to swim, so they feel safer when they have to live side by side with the river.	https://pontianakpost.jawapos.com/features/1462737095/ketika-masyarakat-tepian-hidup-berdampingan-dengan-sungai
Reflections on Modernization on the Culture of Riverside Communities	The Kapuas River is closely linked to the daily lives of its riverside communities. Traditions of interaction with the river persist in their daily lives.	https://mimbaruntan.com/refleksi-modernisasi-terhadap-kultur-masyarakat-tepi-sungai/
Restoring the River as the Face of Pontianak	The Kapuas Riverbanks in Pontianak are a hub for community interaction, often hosting various activities that unite the community.	https://www.kompas.id/baca/nusantara/2018/01/03/mengembalikan-sungai-sebagai-wajah-pontianak
Hope for life and sustaining the Kapuas River	For a long time, residents living in nine sub-districts in Kubu Raya Regency have relied on water transportation	https://megapolitan.antarane.ws.com/berita/365181/harapan-

	connectivity in the form of river transportation to purchase various daily necessities.	kehidupan-dan-menghidupi-sungai-kapuas
History of the Kapuas River and Interesting Facts	This river is not only the main transportation route for the community, but also functions as a source of life.	https://kumparan.com/sejarah-dan-sosial/sejarah-sungai-kapuas-dan-fakta-menariknya-24Ppu8CVFUR/full
Lanting, the Stage of Life in Kapuas	Remnants of river culture can still be found in lanting or wooden houses on rafts floating on the Kapuas River, West Kalimantan.	https://www.kompas.id/baca/utama/2019/07/08/lanting-panggung-kehidupan-di-kapuas
Getting to Know the Kapuas River, the Longest River in Indonesia	The Kapuas River plays a vital role in the lives of the people living along its course. Therefore, the community is highly dependent on this river.	https://www.detik.com/edu/detikpedia/d-7201357/mengenal-sungai-kapuas-yang-jadi-sungai-terpanjang-di-indonesia
Caring for the Kapuas River, the BSI University Modeling Community, Pontianak Campus, Contributes to the Clean-Up Action	In addition to cleaning up trash, they also received education about the negative impacts of plastic waste on river ecosystems. This encouraged them to be more mindful about using plastic in their daily lives.	https://news.bsi.ac.id/2025/01/10/peduli-sungai-kapuas-komunitas-modeling-universitas-bsi-kampus-pontianak-berkontribusi-dalam-aksi-clean-up/

Source: Online News

Table 4.2. shows that rivers have a strong cultural significance in the lives of riverbank communities, not only as a physical space but also as a social and symbolic space. Rivers serve as venues for social interactions, cultural practices, and daily activities that shape community identity. Narratives from various sources demonstrate that community life is inseparable from rivers, both in the form of traditions, customs, and the way they build social relationships. Thus, rivers function as spaces that integrate the social, cultural, and emotional dimensions of riverbank community life.

Based on this data, there are three main trends in the formation of the cultural identity of river communities. First, the internalization of rivers in daily life practices, such as swimming, bathing, and other domestic activities, which fosters physical and emotional closeness to the environment. Second, the formation of social values such as mutual cooperation, solidarity, and adaptability that develop from collective interactions in the river space. Third, the continuity of traditions and collective memory passed down from generation to generation, including in the form of floating houses and other cultural practices that reflect community identity. These three trends demonstrate that rivers are not only a place to live, but also a part of the community's identity and identity.

This phenomenon can be explained through the concepts of habitus and sense of place, where repeated life experiences in a particular space shape the dispositions, ways of thinking, and social identities of individuals and groups (Hillier and Rooksby, 2017). Rivers, in this context, are not only external environments, but have been internalized as part of the cognitive and cultural structures of society (Campelo et al., 2014; Peng and Hassink, 2025). Discourse analysis of public narratives also shows that rivers are represented as “living spaces” and “collective identities,” which strengthen the social legitimacy of the sustainability of life on riverbanks (Pinto-Dror and Shoshana, 2025). Therefore, resistance to relocation can be understood not only as a response to structural pressures but also as a form of defense of cultural identity. This is in line with various studies showing that policies that ignore the cultural dimension tend to fail, because they are unable to replace the symbolic meaning and emotional bonds inherent in the lives of riverbank communities.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the existence and resistance of riverbank communities in West Kalimantan are the result of a dynamic relationship between interrelated and inseparable ecological, structural, and cultural dimensions. Rivers serve not only as a space for ecological adaptation and a source of livelihood, but also as a foundation for social identity that shapes the way communities think, feel, and act. In the face of structural limitations and environmental risks, the decision to remain on riverbanks is not simply a rational choice, but rather the result of a riparian habitus formed through historical experience and long-term interactions with the riverine environment. The study's primary contribution lies in developing an integrative perspective that combines ecological, structural, and cultural approaches to understanding the phenomenon of riverbank communities, while also offering the concept of riparian habitus as a more holistic analytical framework. However, this study has limitations, particularly in the use of secondary data and social media discourse that do not fully reflect the direct experiences of the community in depth. Therefore, further research is recommended to incorporate primary data through field observations and in-depth interviews to enrich the analysis and strengthen the validity of the findings.

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