

Pekalongan, The World's City of Batik, Embraces Plurality Through Cultural Events with Religious Background

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ABSTRACT

This journal investigates Pekalongan's city branding through the Giant Lopis tradition and the Ritual & Culture Carnival. As the world's batik hub, Pekalongan's cultural richness and diverse communities, epitomized as the Batik City, are integral to its identity. The Giant Lopis tradition, featuring colossal rice cakes, symbolizes unity among diverse ethnic and religious groups, fostering harmony. Conversely, the Ritual & Culture Carnival by Klenteng Po An Thian Pekalongan highlights Chinese cultural expressions, enhancing the city's cultural tapestry. Using qualitative methods such as ethnographic observations and content analysis, this research explores how these traditions contribute to Pekalongan's branding as a plural city. Additionally, various cultural backgrounds, including Chinese and Islamic, contribute to the diversity of Batik motifs. Findings underscore their positive impact, fostering resident pride, intercultural bonds, and attracting domestic visitors. This study offers valuable insights for policymakers and marketers aiming to leverage cultural heritage for inclusive city promotion.

Keywords: City Branding; Pekalongan; Cultural Traditions; Religion

INTRODUCTION

Pekalongan as a "World's City of Batik", is a city in Central Java, Indonesia that consists of various races and religions. This affects the tradition and culture in Pekalongan which becomes a city agenda that is held every year. Giant Lopis Tradition and Ritual & Culture Carnival become two of many traditions in Pekalongan,

In Pekalongan, the art of batik is intricately intertwined with the region's religious diversity, creating a harmonious blend of cultural and spiritual influences. Known as the "Batik City," Pekalongan is renowned for its exquisite batik designs that embody both cultural heritage and religious symbolism. Islamic patterns, featuring geometric shapes and floral motifs, are prominently displayed in Pekalongan batik, conveying spiritual concepts and reinforcing cultural identity among the Muslim community.

Additionally, Pekalongan's batik industry integrates influences from diverse communities, including the Chinese. Batik designs may incorporate symbols and motifs that resonate with Chinese beliefs. This cultural fusion is exemplified through motifs like the bright colors and imagery of phoenix birds, dragons, and other Chinese mythological creatures.

This dynamic interplay between batik and various religious backgrounds underscores Pekalongan's role as a city where cultural heritage serves as a unifying force, promoting mutual respect among different religious groups.

It emphasizes Pekalongan's distinctive identity as a pluralistic community celebrated for its artistic traditions, where batik not only preserves cultural narratives but also celebrates the rich tapestry of beliefs and practices that characterize its vibrant cultural landscape.

In human life, particularly in Indonesia, religion and culture are inseparable. The acceptance of religion by society can be categorized into three forms: full acceptance, partial acceptance based on needs, or complete rejection (Aziza, 2016). Generally, when a religion enters a community, it can never be found in its original form. There is always a transformation of cultural symbols, resulting in new meanings (Kahmad, 2011).

Religion is defined as a system that governs faith and worship of the Almighty God, as well as the norms governing human interaction and their environment (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2016). From a social science perspective, religion is related to shared beliefs and rituals held by a community (Marzali, 2016).

Culture, on the other hand, encompasses knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, customs, and more, which are expressed through human creativity and potential (Khoirudin, 2015). Culture is defined as the collective knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religions, time, roles, relationships, space, concepts of the universe, material objects, and possessions acquired by a large group of people from generation to generation, shaping their way of life and habits (Sumarto, 2017)

When a religion enters a community, it undergoes a process of selection to align with or differ from the local culture. The religion that enters is influenced by the culture of its origin (Aziza, 2016). In Weber's Protestant Ethic, Max Weber explains that religion is the spirit that cannot be separated from the socio-cultural life of a society (Aziza, 2016). The relationship between religion and culture is distinct yet inseparable (Khoirudin, 2015)

Religion and culture are also integral to the city of Pekalongan, known as the City of Batik, rich in traditions and multiculturalism due to its location in the northern coastal area and proximity to the port, facilitating interactions among Javanese, Chinese, Arab, and Indian communities, resulting in a unique culture of acculturation (Paramitha, 2022). As a religiously diverse country, Pekalongan, especially, has a range of traditions and cultural practices with religious backgrounds (Mahmudah, 2020)

One religious' tradition in Pekalongan is the Giant Lopis Ceremony, held on the 8th of Syawal or one week after Eid al-Fitr (Resmanti, Amini, Abiyyi, Syarief, & Wirajaya, 2021). This tradition, known as Syawalan, is not unique to Pekalongan but is also observed in other regions such as Demak, Jepara, Kaliwungi, and others, although with slight variations (Mahmudah, 2020). Initially, the Giant Lopis tradition served as a means of fostering social ties, where the Krapyak community prepared or brought giant lopis (rice cake wrapped in banana leaves) as gifts during visits to relatives and neighbors (Resmanti, Amini, Abiyyi, Syarief, & Wirajaya, 2021). Lopis was chosen as the food to serve guests due to its long shelf life (Rosidin, 2016)

Another religiously influenced tradition in Pekalongan is the Ritual & Culture Carnival, organized by the Tridharma (Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist) community of the Po An Thian Temple. This carnival represents the acculturation of Pekalongan's diverse culture and serves as a space for expressing artistic, cultural, and religious rituals involving people from various religions, ethnicities, and backgrounds (Tim Komunikasi Publik Pemerintah Kota Pekalongan, 2020). The carnival showcases the Hua religion (Chinese community's religion) and involves a procession carrying a palanquin containing statues of gods and goddesses. It carries different names in Chinese, such as ying wang, kang wang, zou wang, pao wang, you jing, xunjing, but they all signify unity, inspection, and harmony with nature (Cangianto & Dominggus, 2013). The carnival, known as Gotong Toapekong or Kirab, exemplifies the collaboration and participation of both Chinese and non-Chinese communities, including the committee, organizers, and spectators. It is also considered a "selamatan" (a thanksgiving gathering) in Javanese tradition, which serves as a shared expression of gratitude (Cangianto A. , 2020).

The Po An Thian Temple, as a place of worship for the Hua religion, now known as Tri Dharma (Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist), has become a cultural heritage site. It was established in 1882 and legally recognized since 1917 (Gan, 2007). Located in the Chinatown area of Pekalongan, the temple has become an integral part of the city's civilization (W, 2016). Every year, the Po An Thian Temple holds the Ritual & Culture Carnival as part of the Chinese New Year celebrations on the 14th day. Since 2008, they have organized the Grand Ritual & Culture Carnival every five years to celebrate the birth of the primary deity in the temple, the God of Agriculture and Healing. The carnival's numerous traditions contribute to its uniqueness, making it an annual and tourism-oriented event supported by the Pekalongan local government.

Pekalongan has been branded as the "World's City of Batik" due to its extensive batik production, and it

was the starting point for UNESCO's recognition of batik as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Susanti, 2018). The Giant Lopis Ceremony and Ritual & Culture Carnival are events that contribute to the regional tourism marketing efforts, enhancing the city's appeal and serving as a testament to Pekalongan's religious diversity, harmony, safety, and comfort in religious activities.

The elaboration above forms the basis for conducting this research, which aims to find answers to questions regarding cultural traditions associated with their religious backgrounds in relation to the city branding of Pekalongan as follows: (1) How is the implementation of the Giant Lopis Tradition in Pekalongan? (2) How is the implementation of the Ritual & Culture Carnival in Pekalongan? (3) How does the harmonious communication among communities and religious groups through the Giant Lopis Tradition and the Ritual & Culture Carnival in Pekalongan support city branding as a diverse city?.

The Theory of Cultural Identity was first introduced by Mary Jane Collier and Milt Thomas in the 1980s (Ali & Mujiyanto, 2017). This theory explains the relationship between intercultural competence and cultural identity, examining how individuals use communicative processes to create and negotiate their cultural group identities and relationships within specific contexts (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The social scientific approach describes cultural identity as a process of social categorization, partially based on individual choice and partially on the relationship between the individual and the group to which they belong. It can be concluded that cultural identity has inseparable individual and social meanings (Yang, Zhao, & Liu, 2021). This theory has six assumptions: (1) individuals have multiple identities when negotiating; (2) intercultural communication occurs where assumptions differ across cultural identities; (3) intercultural communication competence involves managing meanings and willingness to adhere to rules and positive outcomes; (4) intercultural communication competence involves negotiating mutual understanding of rules and positive outcomes; (5) intercultural communication competence includes recognizing cultural identities; and (6) cultural identity has multiple functions and scopes (Collier & Thomas, 1988).

The Communication Accommodation Theory was first introduced by Howard Giles and his colleagues. It emphasizes the importance of understanding speech convergence and divergence to increase or decrease communication distance between members of different groups (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Convergence is a strategy where a communicator adapts their communication style to become more similar to the other person, while divergence is a communication strategy that emphasizes differences between the communicator and the other person (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2015). These strategies are used to gain approval from the interlocutor, either by seeking linguistic similarities or by highlighting distinctive traits and thus emphasizing group membership, ultimately aiming for clearer and smoother communication (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009).

The research on Pekalongan's city branding through the Giant Lopis tradition and the Ritual & Culture Carnival is closely related to both the Theory of Cultural Identity and the Communication Accommodation Theory. These theories help explain how cultural events foster unity and intercultural bonds in Pekalongan. The Theory of Cultural Identity highlights how these traditions reflect and negotiate the diverse cultural identities within the community, while the Communication Accommodation Theory sheds light on how individuals adapt their communication styles during these events to either converge (finding common ground) or diverge (emphasizing unique cultural traits). This adaptive communication helps reduce cultural barriers and enhances mutual understanding, ultimately supporting the city's image as a pluralistic and harmonious community. By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the research demonstrates how cultural heritage and communication strategies play crucial roles in effective city branding and promoting inclusivity.

The relationship between culture and communication is inseparable. Culture shapes communication processes and vice versa; communication is integral to the creation and preservation of culture (Sambas, 2016). Culture influences social systems such as relationships, families, groups, organizations, and societies, and communication plays a crucial role in maintaining these cultural aspects, particularly through language (Ruben & Stewart, 2006). In societal interactions, effective communication serves as a tool for positive interaction, heavily influenced by cultural processes and language dynamics (Sambas, 2016). Communication also facilitates cultural learning processes within societies, including internalization (individual's lifespan learning), socialization (learning cultural norms within social systems), and enculturation (adjusting one's thoughts and attitudes to cultural norms, rules, and regulations) (Koentjaraningrat, *Pengantar Ilmu Antropologi*, 2015)

Religion, as part of culture, communicates ideas, knowledge, feelings, thoughts, hopes, and information to people, reflecting societal values and influencing communication patterns over time Samovar et al., 2015; (Ottuh & Jemegbe, 2020). Max Weber describes religion as the spirit of socio-cultural life, guiding social actions based

on religious teachings and beliefs (Aziza, 2016). Research by Ameli and Moalei (2012) highlights religion's significant influence on communication competence across different sects, illustrating how religious beliefs impact intercultural interactions and individual faith positions (Nadeem, Mohammed, & Dalib, 2017).

METHODS

This research uses qualitative methods to elaborate on the city of Pekalongan which becomes a plural city. Qualitative research is intended as a type of research that aims to explain, examine, and determine the causality of variables. Qualitative research also builds knowledge through understanding and discovery (Danim, 2002). Ethnography is used in this research, which involves studying a specific cultural group primarily through prolonged field observation and the researcher's presence (Cresswell, 2015). Harris suggests that ethnography is a qualitative design in which researchers describe and interpret the same patterns of values, behaviors, beliefs, and language within a cultural group (Cresswell, 2015). Ethnographic research aims to portray and explain the life stories of individuals, where within the framework of explaining cultural phenomena, these individuals become an integral part (Danim, 2002). The primary goal of ethnographic research is to provide a deep and detailed description of the research subject. The research topic is unique and distinctive, making it difficult to replicate the results of the study in the same setting (Bandur A., 2014). Observation is used as the data collection technique as primary data. Observation is a data collection technique that involves attentively observing phenomena in the field using the researcher's five senses, often aided by instruments or devices, and recording them (Cresswell, 2015). Ethnographic research and observation that has been done within the year by observing and becoming participatory researcher in the community. Another data collection technique that used to support this research is interviews, which are conversations between two or more people, where questions are asked by the researcher to the subject or group of subjects to be answered (Danim, 2002). The interview approach used is a general guided interview, where the interviewer creates a framework and outline of the main points to be discussed without needing to ask them in sequence, with the interview guide only providing an outline of the interview process and content to ensure everything is covered (Moleong, 2019). Here are some key informants for data collection in this study:

(1) Head of the Cultural Division of the Pekalongan City Tourism and Culture Office, Ms. Safrita Eka Lestari, S.H.; (2) Head of the Tourism Division of the Pekalongan City Tourism and Culture Office, Mr. Retno Purnomo, S.STP., M.Si.; (3) Elder of Musholla Darunna'im Krapyak Gang 8 Pekalongan, Ustad M. Khoirus Sabbaq, S.Pd.I ; (4) Deputy Chairman of the Chinese New Year Celebration Committee at Klenteng Po An Thian Pekalongan, Mr. David William Wibowo.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Giant Lopis Tradition as a Branding Asset:

Like other parts of the world, the Islamic community in Pekalongan joyously observes Eid Al-Fitr, marking the conclusion of the holy month of Ramadan. The renowned tradition of The Giant Lopis finds its roots in the inspired initiative of Kyai Abdullah Sirodj, the grandson of Bahu Rekso. 1855, Kyai Abdullah Sirodj commenced the tradition of Shawwal fasting, starting from the 2nd day of Shawwal and concluding on the 7th day of the same month. The centerpiece of this festivity is Lopis cake, cherished for its ability to stay fresh and delightful for 3-4 days, making it the perfect choice to serve guests during the celebration. In early times, the size of Lopis Cake is about 30 cm with a diameter of 5 cm. Over time, to serve many guests that come, Lopis Cake was made bigger and bigger every year, until the community decided to make the giant version together to efficient the resources and share with the communities. In 2023, the Giant Lopis has grown to the size of 223 cm in length, 250 cm in circumference, and a weight of 1830 kg.

The tradition's rich historical significance and deep community involvement have enhanced its allure as a distinctive cultural practice. Before the inaugural cut, the Mayor of Pekalongan City recited Islamic prayers and Salawat (prayers for Prophet Mohammed PBUH). Following the mayor's ceremonial cut, the committee distributed portions of the Giant Lopis. A spirited crowd eagerly vied for these lopis cakes, driven by their belief that partaking in them could bestow blessings, good fortune, and even improved health upon themselves and their families.



Figure 1. Lopis Cake was being shared to the People
(Source: Personal Documentation, 2023)

This annual tradition is one of many traditions in Pekalongan that has been waiting for. Every Shawwal, the families and relatives that work out of Pekalongan city, came home to meet their families, and joined this event. There were many people that waited for The Giant Lopis tradition to be over, and then they went back to their work city.

The Giant Lopis Tradition carries a strong sense of togetherness and family bonding. In this tradition, a lopis cake made from glutinous rice symbolizes the sticky texture that represents how families and communities should stick together through thick and thin, especially when celebrating happiness.

Ritual & Culture Carnival's Impact on Tourism:

The Ritual & Culture Carnival that has been held by Klenteng Po An Thian Pekalongan, has become annual event every the fourteenth day of Chinese New Year. Beside that, Klenteng Po An Thian Pekalongan held the Great Ritual & Culture Carnival once every five year to celebrate the birthday of Yan Di Shennong Emperor. Yan Di Shennong Emperor is the ancient emperor who invented of agriculture and medicine (Yiqi, 2012). In Klenteng Po An Thian Pekalongan, Yan Di Shennong become the main god, beside the host of the temple is Zhe Hai Zhen Ren (Gan, 2007). The birthday of Yan Di Shennong is celebrated annually on 26th day of 4th month of lunar calendar.

This once every five years event become the biggest carnival that ever been held in Pekalongan city, because Klenteng Po An Thian Pekalongan invited other Chinese Temples and Viharas to join this carnival, bring their god statue and sedan chairs (or could be called as *Kio* or *Tandu*). In 2023, the Klenteng Po An Thian Pekalongan celebrated the birthday of Yan Di Shennong for an entire week, with the pinnacle of the festivities being a vibrant carnival. The festivities commenced with prayers on June 12th, 2023, followed by the opening of the "Pintoe Dalem Street Fair 2023," featuring a showcase of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), on June 15th, 2023. The culmination of the celebration took place on June 18th, 2023, with the carnival as its highlight of the event.

In this carnival, eight palanquins/sedan chairs from Klenteng Po An Thian Pekalongan, accompanied by an additional 30 sedan chairs carrying temple and vihara guests, form a total of 38 sedan chairs, each housing deific statues. The carnival was further enriched by the melodious accompaniment of Rampak music (ensemble of *Gendang*, *Angklung*, and *Calung*), supported by the Pekalongan City Mayor's Office, as well as the captivating contributions of the SUPM Nusantara Batang marching band, the divine cosplay by Sanggar Seni Tri Dharma Mekar Teratai Semarang, and the mesmerizing chinese lion and dragon dances presented by Sasana Naga Mas Pekalongan.



Figure 2. The sedan chair of Yan Di Shennong Emperor (right) of Po An Tian Pekalongan and sedan chair of Zhe Hai Zhen Ren (left) from Tek Hay Kiong, Tegal
(Source: Po An Tian Documentation, 2023)

To bolster this carnival, a minimum of 1,500 attendees graced Pekalongan city, engaging in various economic transactions encompassing establishments such as hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, and the Batik market. This event notably catalyzed a discernible upswing in the city's economic vitality, with a pronounced positive influence on the micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) operating therein.

Ritual and Culture Carnival originally began as a practice among officials and dignitaries in ancient China, who would ride in palanquins or sedan chairs to inspect their regions or for transportation. This tradition has persisted to this day, where palanquins or sedan chairs now carry the statues of Gods and Goddesses for inspections along their routes. Furthermore, the cultural elements incorporated into this procession serve as a symbol of sharing joy across races, religions, and cultures, as the community believes that happiness should be shared as widely as possible.

Cultural Events and Community Unity:

The integration of the Giant Lopis tradition and the Ritual & Culture Carnival has played a pivotal role in enhancing community cohesion and promoting pluralism. Observations during the events revealed that people from diverse backgrounds come together to actively participate in these events. The Giant Lopis Tradition has seen not only Muslims and Javanese attendees, but also individuals of Arabic and Chinese backgrounds who join the event, either to partake in the festivities or to witness them firsthand. On the other hand, the Ritual and Culture Carnival attracts a diverse audience and participants, encompassing not only those of Chinese descent but also Javanese, Arabic, and various other ethnicities and religious affiliations.

For years, this collaboration among both attendees and participants of the event has encompassed multiple ethnicities and religions, affirming the idea that these cultural events play a vital role in fostering stronger connections among Pekalongan's residents.

The government of Pekalongan city has demonstrated its support for both events through various means, including event coverage, security provided by the police and armed forces, and direct involvement from the mayor's office. The support extends beyond the logistical aspects, encompassing moral and other forms of assistance that the government has generously offered to both events.

Cultural Traditions as Identity Shapers:

The Giant Lopis Tradition and the Ritual & Culture Parade in Pekalongan are not just cultural celebrations but also pivotal platforms promoting tolerance and harmony among religious communities. During these festivities, people from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds participate together, transcending their differences and fostering a strong sense of brotherhood among them. This exemplifies how cultural activities can effectively strengthen relationships among individuals and different communities.

Participation in cultural events like the Giant Lopis Tradition and the Ritual & Culture Parade not only shapes the city's diverse and cultural image but also showcases Pekalongan as a place that values and nurtures religious and cultural diversity. This helps change perceptions of the city from just a tourist destination to a symbol of harmony and peaceful coexistence among religious groups.

Through these cultural traditions, the people of Pekalongan learn to respect and embrace their differences, creating an inclusive and tolerant environment for all residents. This establishes a solid foundation for cooperation and unity, essential for a competitive and diverse city. However, leveraging these cultural traditions fully for city branding requires robust support from stakeholders, including government backing, media coverage, and sponsorship, although comprehensive real-data indexes are yet to be fully implemented. Pekalongan has significant potential to achieve city branding as a diverse city due to its long-standing diversity in religious and ethnic backgrounds. Yet, the city government needs to maximize this potential and foster community ownership to amplify these aspects as added value for the city. Both significant events organized by two different communities in the city of Pekalongan serve as proof that the people of Pekalongan can coexist and celebrate each other's traditions with tolerance and comfort. With the Giant Lopis tradition and the Ritual & Culture Carnival, Pekalongan has demonstrated that the government is actively supporting diversity and harmony, contributing to the city's identity as a multicultural and culturally rich hub.

These traditions have helped reflect how Pekalongan thrives in its everyday life, offering a narrative that can be utilized to promote tourism, both locally and internationally. In addition to Pekalongan's existing reputation as the World's Batik City, these events showcase its vibrant cultural identity.

These events have had a significant impact on people's behavior over the years. According to Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism Theory first perspective, individuals' actions are shaped by the meanings they attribute to society and various events. (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009)

Tourism and Economic Boost:

The benefits of both events serve as a powerful tool for city branding. The rise in the number of visitors drawn to Pekalongan city due to these events not only results in increased revenue during the events but also stimulates various small industries, including street vendors, restaurants, hotels, souvenir and batik center, and shopping centers, batik thereby contributing significantly to Pekalongan's economic growth. This underscores the potential of cultural events as catalysts for economic development, especially in cities with distinctive cultural practices.

This presents an opportunity for Pekalongan city to elevate its tourist destinations and attractions, ultimately leading to increased footfall and revenue. This is also an opportunity for business actors to enhance their enterprises by participating in these events or launching promotions related to them.

Challenges and Future Strategies:

Pekalongan city faces several challenges that need to be addressed. While branding events in Pekalongan have yielded positive results, it is crucial to tackle these challenges to ensure long-term success. One of the primary challenges is the state of the city's infrastructure, especially considering the frequent occurrence of tidal floods. Pekalongan must swiftly address this issue to remain appealing to visitors. Notably, areas in front of Klenteng Po An Thian Pekalongan and the Keputran district, where the Giant Lopis Tradition takes place, often experience significant waterlogging due to tidal floods.

Moreover, when organizing the Giant Lopis Tradition, various accompanying events can be scheduled alongside the main event, which culminates in the giant lopis cutting ceremony. Additionally, the location for the Giant Lopis Tradition is in a residential area with narrow streets. This can potentially be mitigated by relocating the event to a more spacious venue, such as Jetayu Square, which also serves as Pekalongan's point of origin and is in front of the Batik Museum. This move has the potential to boost visitor numbers significantly. The promotion at this event is also considered lacking and in need of improvement to reach not only the residents who are already aware of it but also to attract new visitors who are unaware of the event.

In the organization of the Ritual and Culture Carnival, it might be possible to incorporate more local cultural elements to enhance its unique appeal. This carnival is also considered a major cultural event for the city of Pekalongan. Therefore, in its scale, the event is already substantial enough to be a city attraction on its own.

Continued collaboration between local government, cultural organizations, and the community will be crucial in devising strategies that maintain the integrity of these traditions while evolving to meet the demands of a dynamic global environment.

CONCLUSION

With a strong historical background in Islam and the practice of fasting, the Syawalan tradition, held annually to welcome guests seven days after Eid, marks the beginning of the Giant Lopis tradition. Initially, the lopis was as small as a banana tree trunk, but it has grown significantly in size over the years. This tradition symbolizes warm family ties in welcoming Eid al-Fitr and guests.

The Ritual & Culture Carnival organized by Klenteng Po An Thian Pekalongan has deep roots in Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, reflecting the religious beliefs of the Chinese community. The parade, held annually during the Chinese New Year, has become a regular event featuring cultural adaptations and integrations. It invites various community elements to participate.

Supported by the Pekalongan City Government, Pekalongan aims to project an image of cultural and religious diversity. Although it has not yet achieved place brand equity due to the absence of real-data indexes from value-drivers, the city engages in extensive publicity and provides both moral and material support for these two cultural events. Becoming a UNESCO Creative City, Pekalongan strives to cultivate an image of cultural pluralism and inclusivity. The harmony among different communities is well-maintained due to the cultural exchanges that have occurred over generations, fostering a sense of mutual ownership among community members.

Future studies should explore cultures with more diverse religious backgrounds and employ various methodologies, including quantitative or mixed-method approaches. This will provide a broader understanding and offer richer insights into how different religious and cultural practices contribute to city branding and social harmony.

Additionally, researchers should investigate city branding from multiple perspectives beyond cultural aspects. By considering factors such as economic development, infrastructure, and social policies, studies can produce more comprehensive and holistic insights into the elements that contribute to effective city branding.

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