

Social Cohesion for Sustainable Urban Development: Evidence From Kediri City

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ABSTRACT

Social cohesion is becoming a key issue in efforts to achieve well-functioning societies at the local and national levels. Many academics and institutions consider social cohesion as a key driver to enable societies to achieve their well-being, reduced inequality and greater prosperity. Social cohesion is formed from harmony and tolerance. Kediri City's Religious Harmony Index (IKUB) increased consistently from 3.97 in 2021 to 4.47 (2022), then 4.55 (2023), and 4.56 in 2024, indicating a very high level of harmony. In addition, Kediri City has also managed to maintain its position as one of the top 10 most tolerant cities in Indonesia for several consecutive years. In terms of the economy, Kediri City's GRDP growth rate is 2.50% (2021), 3.96% (2022), 1.92% (2023), and rising again to 3.43% in 2024. Meanwhile, investment realization in Kediri City shows positive growth with a total of IDR 1.54 trillion in 2024-up from IDR 1.34 trillion in 2023-or exceeding the annual target by 15.36%. This study seeks to examine the extent to which social cohesion determines economic development in Kediri City. To that end, a structured literature review was conducted with reference to the five dimensions of social cohesion proposed by Jane Jenson (1998). The study found that there is a strong relationship between social cohesion and economic growth at the local level. It is important for municipalities to provide a conducive environment that allows them to optimally benefit from local business growth in various sectors, stable investment, as well as more tourism visits.

Keywords: tolerance, Kediri City, social cohesion, rural development, sustainable

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable urban development is not only determined by economic and physical aspects, but also by the quality of social relations of the people who live there. In the global context, the principle of social cohesion has become a major concern in the sustainable development agenda, as affirmed

in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One important goal, SDG 11, emphasizes the creation of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and settlements. The concept implies that social inclusion, tolerance and community harmony are prerequisites for development that does not leave certain groups behind and is able to sustain long-term social stability.

Social cohesion is defined as "the degree of mutual trust, social participation and sense of community among individuals or groups within a community" (OECD, 2011). In the urban context, social cohesion is an important foundation that allows people from different backgrounds - ethnicity, religion, and economic status - to coexist peacefully and support the development process. Cohesive communities tend to have low levels of social conflict, and are better able to adapt and cooperate in the face of challenges such as rapid urbanization, climate change, and economic disruption.

At the national level, Indonesia as a pluralistic country faces great challenges in maintaining social cohesion, especially in fast-growing and heterogeneous urban areas. However, various initiatives such as strengthening the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB), building inclusive public spaces, and the religious moderation village program are concrete steps that support social inclusion and tolerance in urban environments. The city's success in fostering harmony and tolerance is an important indicator for the sustainability of urban development, especially in the context of plural Indonesia.

In the midst of various social and economic challenges faced by cities in Indonesia, Kediri City stands out as one example that successfully combines social tolerance and economic growth together. Based on the Setara Institute's ranking, Kediri is consistently included in the top 10 most tolerant cities in Indonesia, which indicates the strong commitment of the city government and community in fostering harmony between religious, ethnic and cultural groups.

The performance of tolerance and harmony is also reflected in the Kediri Religious Harmony Index (IKUB), which shows a significant increase from year to year. Kediri's IKUB was recorded at 3.97 in 2021, increasing to

4.47 in 2022, then 4.55 in 2023, and 4.56 in 2024. This score is close to the maximum number (5.00), indicating high mutual respect and collaboration between religious communities in Kediri City. The increase in IKUB reflects active policies and a social ecosystem that supports harmonious multicultural life.

Not only in the social aspect, Kediri City also shows an encouraging economic performance. After experiencing an economic contraction of -6.25% in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Kediri was able to rise and chalk up GDP growth of 2.50% in 2021, 3.96% (2022), although it had dropped to 1.92% (2023), but rose again to 3.43% in 2024. These figures show a steady recovery trend and demonstrate the city's resilience in the face of the crisis.

Furthermore, investment realization also reflects the optimism of the business world towards the social and economic climate in Kediri. Investment in 2024 reached IDR 1.54 trillion, up from IDR 1.34 trillion in 2023, and exceeded the annual target by 15.36%. This increase can be seen as a result of social stability and a high sense of security amidst a diverse society-a condition that is attractive to investors.

This combination of strong social cohesion and positive economic growth indicates that Kediri has successfully created an inclusive and competitive urban ecosystem. This phenomenon is in line with sociologist (Putnam, 2000) view that "social capital" (including trust and social networks) can be an important resource that strengthens economic and institutional development.

Based on this description, there are two main issues that deserve further study in the context of sustainable development based on social cohesion, namely how does tolerance and harmony contribute to urban development? This question leads to a causal relationship between social cohesion and development outcomes, both in the form of economic growth, investment, and environmental and social sustainability. Previous research by (Easterly et al., 2006) shows that pluralistic societies with high levels of tolerance tend to have more stable public institutions and more inclusive development.

In addition, what strategies implemented in Kediri can be replicated in other cities? This question is important to explore best practices and local policies that have been successfully implemented in fostering social cohesion. Strategies such as strengthening FKUB, providing space for cross-group social interaction, and moderate and inclusive leadership, are part of a social harmony-based development model that should be raised in national and international forums.

Raising the case of Kediri as an empirical study makes a significant contribution to the discourse on city development based on social cohesion. If so far many studies have focused on physical (infrastructure, transportation, spatial planning) and economic aspects (GRDP, investment, MSMEs), then this research will highlight the role of soft infrastructure such as tolerance values, social relations, and citizen participation as the foundation of development.

Furthermore, this study is also in line with the socially inclusive urban development approach, which is not only concerned with economic growth but also who is involved and who benefits. Kediri can be a concrete example that development based on social harmony is not only ideal, but also proven to be effective in creating stability, growth and attractiveness of cities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a multidimensional concept that reflects the level of solidarity, trust and connectedness among citizens in a community. (OECD, 2011) defines social cohesion as "the ability of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members, minimize inequality, avoid marginalization, and create a cohesive sense of belonging." Social cohesion involves both horizontal (relationships between individuals) and vertical (trust in institutions) dimensions. According to (Bernard, 1999), social cohesion includes four main dimensions: (1) social inclusion, (2) citizen participation, (3) recognition of differences, and (4) social solidarity. In the context of urban development, social cohesion plays an important role in creating social resilience and encouraging active citizen participation in development.

Tolerance and Religious Harmony

Tolerance is an attitude of mutual respect and acceptance of differences in social, cultural and religious life. In the Indonesian context, tolerance is the foundation of diversity and an important element in maintaining social stability. Meanwhile, religious harmony reflects the condition of harmonious relations between religious communities characterized by mutual respect, cooperation, and not interfering with each other's religious practices.

(Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2021) developed the Religious Harmony Index (IKUB) which measures three main dimensions. Namely tolerance, mutual acceptance of religious differences. Equality, a guarantee of fair treatment from the state to all religions. Cooperation, interfaith collaboration in social and development activities. Each dimension is measured through a perception survey and calculated into a score between 1 and 5.

Social Relationships and Cohesion in the Urban Context

In cities that are increasingly dense and heterogeneous, social relationships are an important element in creating an inclusive and harmonious city. According to (Putnam, 2000), social capital is divided into two types: bonding social capital (bonds within homogeneous groups) and bridging social capital (bridges between heterogeneous groups). In the urban context, bridging capital is very important to bridge ethnic, cultural and religious differences. Studies by (Forrest & Kearns, 2001) also show that social cohesion in urban areas is closely related to access to public space, citizen participation in urban governance processes, and perceptions of social justice.

Inclusive and Equitable City Development

Inclusive and equitable cities provide equal space for all levels of society to participate in the development process and enjoy the results. According to (UN-Habitat, 2016), an inclusive city is one that ensures all people have access to basic services, political participation, and legal protection without

discrimination. In addition, (Lefebvre, 1996) Right to the City theory emphasizes the right of every citizen-including the marginalized-to be involved in the planning and use of urban space. A just city not only creates physical space, but also a safe and tolerant social space.

Urban Inclusivity: Theory and Policy

The theory of urban inclusivity emphasizes the importance of a multi-sectoral approach in urban policy: from housing, education, public services, to the representation of vulnerable groups. According to (Turok & Bailey, 2004), inclusive policies need to integrate spatial (access to space), social (identity recognition), and institutional (access to policies) aspects. Inclusive policies also emphasize the importance of bottom-up governance, which involves local communities in urban planning, thus creating greater legitimacy and responsiveness to citizens' needs.

The Role of Social Capital in Regional Economic Development

Social capital is a form of non-material asset that is very important in local economic development. Social capital strengthens trust networks between economic actors, facilitates coordination, and lowers transaction costs. (Fukuyama, 1996) argues that societies with high levels of trust are better able to build efficient and resilient economic institutions. In the context of cities, social capital such as trust between citizens and trust in local government strengthens the entrepreneurial climate and accelerates post-crisis recovery.

Social and Economic Correlation

Various studies have proven a positive correlation between social stability and economic performance. (Easterly et al., 2006) state that social cohesion contributes to public policy effectiveness and economic growth. Countries or regions that have homogenous societies in terms of basic goals and values tend to have more stable economic growth. At the local level, cities that successfully foster social harmony and inclusiveness are proven to attract

investment, increase citizen participation in economic activities, and promote inclusive development.

Social Stability and Investment Climate

Social stability is one of the key considerations for investors in choosing an investment location. Social conflict, discrimination, or intolerance have the potential to increase business risk and reduce investment attractiveness. Conversely, regions with high harmony, a fair legal system, and strong public participation tend to be more economically attractive. (World Bank, 2012) notes that social stability acts as a catalyst for a healthy business climate, especially in developing countries. Investors tend to favor regions that have a positive reputation for safety, openness, and social harmony.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study type, which aims to deeply understand the dynamics of social cohesion and its role in sustainable urban development, taking Kediri City, East Java as the main case. This approach allows researchers to explore the meanings, experiences, and strategies carried out by local actors in building tolerance, religious harmony, and its impact on the economic and social development of the city. In addition, a limited Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method was used to strengthen the theoretical basis and compare the empirical findings in Kediri with good practices from other contexts, both national and global.

The research was conducted in Kediri City, East Java Province, Indonesia. The city was chosen because it is considered to represent a prominent practice of tolerance and harmony in Indonesia, reflected in its ranking as one of the top 10 most tolerant cities by the Setara Institute, as well as the consistent increase in the Religious Harmony Index (IKUB) over the past four years.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: document study, in-depth interviews, and field observations. The data collected was analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis approach, as

described by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) . The analysis process was carried out through the steps of transcription and in-depth reading of interview data and observation notes, data coding to identify key themes, categorization and interpretation of themes relevant to the research questions, and preparation of analytical narratives linking field findings with the established theoretical framework. To ensure the validity and validity of the data, source triangulation techniques were used, namely by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documents to ensure consistency of information and enrich understanding of the context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Kediri City Profile and Social Capital History

Kediri City is one of the oldest cities in Indonesia, this year entering its 146th year. As an old city, Kediri has a long history of building a multicultural civilization, which socially fosters tolerance and acceptance of differences. Kediri is not only known as a center of trade and education, but also as a home for various religious institutions, especially Islamic boarding schools of various Islamic sects. The diversity of religious views that coexist in this city has formed an inclusive pattern of social interaction.

In this context, (Putnam, 2000) argues that social capital-that is, social networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit-is an important foundation in shaping social cohesion. Kediri city has shown that its historical roots and collective experiences form a strong bonding social capital, creating a social space free from sectarian conflict, even in tense national situations such as the 1998 riots.

Forum for Religious Harmony (FKUB): Institutionalizing Tolerance

One of the concrete forms of social cohesion in Kediri City is the formation of the Interfaith Harmony Forum (PAUB) since 1998, which later became the forerunner of the national Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB). FKUB Kediri is not only a communication forum, but also acts as a collaborative forum between religious communities in solving problems and

designing interfaith activities. This is in line with (Habermas, 1984) theory on the importance of deliberative public space, where dialog becomes the main tool in creating social understanding.

FKUB actively organizes interfaith joint prayers at important moments such as Kediri City Anniversary and Indonesian Independence Day, involving all religious adherents. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, these activities were still held simultaneously from their respective places of worship, showing the sustainability of adaptive tolerance practices. The role of FKUB can be linked to the social cohesion theory from (Chan et al., 2006) which states that relational ties (social bonds between individuals and groups) and communal identity (collective identity) are two important pillars in building a cohesive society. FKUB and the interfaith community in Kediri are important means of forming stable relational ties between religious groups.

Tolerance as Social Capital in City Planning and Development

In addition to socio-religious activities, tolerance in Kediri City is manifested in the participatory development planning process. Religious leaders are actively involved in the Development Planning Consultative Forum (Musrenbang). This shows that harmony is not symbolic, but institutionalized in government practice. The Prodamas (Community Empowerment Program) program, which is the mainstay of the Kediri City Government, provides space for the community to plan its own use of neighborhood development funds. Prodamas is often used to improve interfaith worship facilities on the basis of community deliberation. This process reflects the indicators of "trust" and "active participation" in the social cohesion model according to the (OECD, 2011). In the framework of inclusive development, (Sennett, 2012) emphasizes the importance of mutual recognition and inclusive design in city policies. This is evident in the policy of the Kediri City Government, which includes elements of religious harmony in official activities and programs funded by the Regional Budget (APBD).

Local Culture and Local Wisdom as Social Bonding

The people of Kediri have traditionally held Javanese cultural values that emphasize *tepa salira* (tolerance), *gotong royong*, and *ajining dhiri* (self-determination). These values have transformed diversity into a social force, not a source of conflict. As (Narayan & Cassidy, 2001) explain, cultural social capital has a strong influence in determining social cohesion, especially in non-Western societies. In the context of Kediri, this form of social capital is not only limited to social networks but also to value systems that encourage dialog, mutual respect and peaceful resolution of differences. Such local wisdom also plays a role in creating social stability that supports a conducive investment climate. This is in line with a study by (Knack & Keefer, 1997) that found a positive relationship between trust-based social stability and economic growth.

Social Cohesion and its Impact on Local Economic Growth

Empirical findings show that social stability in Kediri City not only impacts intergroup relations but also contributes to post-pandemic economic recovery. BPS data shows that Kediri City's GRDP growth, which had contracted to -6.25% in 2020, has now returned to 3.43% in 2024. Meanwhile, investment realization reached IDR 1.54 trillion or exceeded the target by 15.36%. This reinforces the theory that social cohesion can be an enabler for economic development. Within the framework of the theory of urban inclusivity and equitable development, as proposed by (UN-Habitat, 2020), socially inclusive cities have stronger economic resilience and are adaptive to crises.

City Government's Strategy in Building an Inclusive City

The Kediri City Government has shown a real commitment to building a city that is not only physically and economically developed, but also socially inclusive. Its development strategy relies on the principles of tolerance, active community involvement, and open governance. This section presents the main findings related to the policies and strategic approaches of the Kediri

City Government, as well as its analysis based on social theory and inclusive development.

Tolerance-based policies in Kediri City are not merely ceremonial, but institutionalized in planning documents and the implementation of development programs. The government explicitly integrates the values of harmony and diversity in priority programs, one of which is through Prodamas Plus, which allows the allocation of funds for the improvement of places of worship of all religions based on the results of community meetings. This approach affirms the theory of urban inclusivity as proposed by (UN-Habitat, 2020) , which states that inclusive cities are characterized by public policies that accommodate diversity and strengthen the participation of vulnerable groups, including religious minorities. In Kediri, recognition of plurality is part of the policy design, not just passive tolerance. In addition, the sustainability of interfaith dialogue programs, support for interfaith activities, and mainstreaming of tolerance values in informal education and social activities strengthen social cohesion as the foundation of development. This is relevant to the (OECD, 2011) which places shared values and civic engagement as important indicators of effective social cohesion.

The government of Kediri City also applies participatory principles in urban development planning, involving religious communities and citizens in strategic forums such as the Development Planning Consultation (Musrenbang). Religious leaders are regularly invited to provide input on development priorities, including those related to religious facilities, education and social services. This strategy is in line with (UNDP, 1997) , which emphasizes that participation is one of the nine principles of good urban governance. Kota Kediri places the community as the subject of development, not just the object of program recipients. In other words, the deliberation room becomes a deliberative arena as proposed by (Habermas, 1984), where citizens can express their aspirations and establish consensus across groups. Furthermore, this engagement is also in line with (Sennett, 2012) concept of inclusive planning, which emphasizes the importance of designing urban

planning processes that open up space for groups from different social, cultural and religious backgrounds to be meaningfully involved.

In addition, the Kediri City Government demonstrates good governance practices through responsive, transparent and collaborative governance. Many local government activities are organized in open public spaces such as alun-alun, city parks, and multipurpose buildings that are accessible to all citizens, regardless of religious or ethnic identity. In various events commemorating national and local holidays, interfaith forums and cultural communities are always involved, strengthening a sense of belonging to the city. This inclusive public space management is closely related to the theory of social cohesion in urban contexts (Chan et al., 2006), which emphasizes the importance of social inclusion and access to common spaces in strengthening social ties. A city that provides space for intergroup interaction will minimize social distance and prevent segregation. One concrete example is the policy of Kediri City Government in maintaining neutrality and diversity in licensing houses of worship. The approval mechanism for the establishment of places of worship through interfaith community meetings facilitated by FKUB is a real practice of conflict prevention by design in the context of local pluralism. Furthermore, the government also supports interfaith social activities such as interfaith blood donations, joint hygiene campaigns across communities, and economic training for minority communities. All of this reinforces bridging social capital ((Putnam, 2000), the social networks that connect individuals across groups, which has proven effective in creating social stability and cooperation.

The impact of this inclusive development strategy is not only felt in the social life of the community, but also creates a positive investment climate. Kediri City has proven to be able to maintain social stability and public order, which are important factors in investor consideration. Data shows that investment realization in 2024 reached IDR 1.54 trillion, a significant increase from the previous year and exceeding the annual target. Within the framework of social and economic correlation theory, studies by (Knack & Keefer, 1997) and (Narayan & Cassidy, 2001) show that social cohesion and trust among citizens are positively correlated with regional economic growth.

Kediri City represents a model where social stability built through inclusive and tolerant practices becomes the foundation of sustainable economic development.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that strong social cohesion, realized through tolerance, inter-religious harmony, and the involvement of people from all backgrounds in development, is an important foundation for inclusive and sustainable urban development. Kediri City is a relevant case study because it has a long track record of maintaining social harmony, even in the midst of different beliefs, cultures, and complex local histories.

Through a tolerance-based policy approach, community involvement in Musrenbang, strengthening interfaith forums such as FKUB, and utilizing community empowerment programs such as Prodamas, the Kediri City Government has succeeded in creating an inclusive public space and strengthening the social capital of citizens. This approach is in line with theories of social cohesion, participatory urban governance, and community-based development.

Furthermore, the findings of this study reinforce the view that there is a strong relationship between social cohesion and economic growth at the local level. Kediri shows how social stability underpinned by harmony and solidarity across communities has a direct impact on the creation of a conducive investment climate, increased public confidence, and the development of economic sectors such as trade, tourism, and financial services.

It is therefore important for city governments to provide a conducive environment that allows communities to optimally benefit from local business growth, increased investment, and increased tourist arrivals. A safe, inclusive and harmonious environment will attract investors and businesses, while strengthening the foundation for sustainable and equitable development.

In other words, the success of urban development is not only determined by economic indicators, but also by the strength of social

relations between citizens. The city of Kediri provides valuable lessons on how social cohesion-based development can be a long-term strategy to achieve a peaceful, productive and inclusive city for all.

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