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## Tracing the cultural heritage of Mahakam Ulu: Towards a strategy for cultural advancement

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the potential, challenges, and efforts that can be undertaken to advance the culture of Mahakam Ulu Regency, East Kalimantan. The regency possesses a diverse cultural heritage, particularly from the Dayak community and its various subgroups, which is reflected in cultural advancement objects such as oral traditions, manuscripts, rites, traditional knowledge, local technology, arts, language, folk games, traditional sports, and cultural heritage sites. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach through document analysis, involving an examination of various written sources, including government documents, and academic publications. The findings indicate that strategies to preserve the cultural diversity of Mahakam Ulu must be implemented comprehensively and collaboratively, especially amid the influences of modernization, the lack of cultural practitioner regeneration, and limited human resources and preservation funds. Efforts to advance culture have been carried out through protection, development, utilization, and fostering, integrated into local tourism development.

**Keywords:** Culture; Mahakam Ulu; Strategy for Cultural Advancement

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Kabupaten Mahakam Ulu is a regency in East Kalimantan that shares a border with Malaysia, specifically with the State of Sarawak to the north (Prokopim Mahakam Ulu, 2023). This geographical position presents an opportunity for the formation of new cultural expressions arising from interactions with other cultural groups in the region. It is highly plausible that the Mahakam Ulu community engages in socio-cultural relations with the Sarawak community in Malaysia and with migrants from various ethnic groups in Indonesia. This aligns with Dewantara et al. 's (2024) research, which posits that communities in border regions must remain creatively resilient in preserving their culture, even amidst political barriers between two nations. In response to this context, the government is preparing a Cross-Border Festival to strengthen Mahakam Ulu's position as Indonesia's 'front porch' in the border area (Berita Borneo, 2025).

Simultaneously, the development of the Nusantara Capital City (IKN) under Law No. 3 of 2022 and Law No. 21 of 2023, along with plans for the Trans-Kalimantan highway, positions Mahakam Ulu as a strategic area for regional development (Prokopim Mahakam Ulu, 2023). As a regency directly bordering a neighboring country and traversed by four provinces, Mahakam Ulu holds significant potential to leverage its regional assets. This is further reinforced by Presidential Regulation No. 109 of 2020, which designates Mahakam Ulu as one of the IKN buffer zones to be developed into an Economic Superhub (Prokopim Mahakam Ulu, 2024).

However, Mahakam Ulu faces several challenges in maximizing its regional potential. First, the Human Development Index of Mahakam Ulu Regency occupied the lowest position at 70.35% in 2024 compared to other regencies/cities in East Kalimantan (BPS Mahakam Ulu, 2025). This indicates a low quality of life for the population, particularly in three basic dimensions: longevity and health, knowledge (education), and a decent standard of living (income). If these three basic dimensions are not adequately met, it leads to low work productivity, low community income, and high poverty rates.

Second, public knowledge of Mahakam Ulu's cultural wealth remains limited (Metronews.co, 2023). This is caused by inadequate infrastructure and accommodation services. Furthermore, limitations in tourism promotion and the absence of comprehensive community cooperation to disseminate information about Mahakam Ulu's culture are contributing factors. The lack of systematic documentation and integrated preservation efforts threatens the continuity of oral traditions, performing arts, and local wisdom of indigenous communities.

Third, the rapid currents of globalization and modernization risk causing a shift in values among the younger generation, who tend to be less interested in local cultural heritage than their elders. This is evidenced by a study conducted by Dewi et al. (2024), who found that most adolescent respondents preferred foreign culture over local culture. This aligns with Widiatmaka (2022), who noted that in the disruption era, there is a tendency for negative impacts on the preservation of local wisdom, where many people, especially the younger generation, are beginning to abandon local values and are more influenced by foreign culture and norms. Globalization also influences the loss of a region's authentic culture, erosion of cultural values, decline in nationalism, and decrease in appreciation for regional culture (Hartatik & Pratikno, 2023). This is exacerbated by the older generation, who often worry about the fading of their cultural heritage, while the younger generation views tradition as obsolete and out of sync with modern times. If left unaddressed, this could lead to a decline in cultural values, especially if no concrete steps are taken to reconcile intergenerational perceptual differences (Abdullah et al., 2024).

Summarizing these issues, the central research question that emerges is how to advance the culture of Mahakam Ulu in a way that also improves the quality of life of its community. In principle, the government has already enacted Law Number 5 of 2017 concerning the Advancement of Culture, which serves as a strategic legal framework and is highly beneficial for protecting the nation's cultural diversity. This law outlines four strategic steps: Protection, Development, Utilization, and Fostering. It not only regulates efforts to preserve endangered cultural heritage through systematic steps, such as inventory and salvage, but also actively develops and encourages its utilization for community welfare and international diplomacy.

Several studies have discussed cultural advancements in East Kalimantan. First, the study by [Apriani et al. \(2025\)](#) highlights that the implementation of cultural advancement in East Kalimantan has been carried out well, but sufficiently close cooperation with non-governmental institutions has not yet been established. Second, [Widia \(2019\)](#) explains the various types of culture that urgently need advancement. Third, [Sudiar \(2025\)](#) studied the lack of facilities for introducing Mahakam Ulu culture, indicating a need for supportive annual activities and policies.

Based on these three studies, there has been no detailed discussion regarding the specific cultural objects present in Mahakam Ulu or methods to enhance the strategic efforts for cultural advancement in the Kabupaten Mahakam Ulu. Therefore, this research aims to delineate the cultural heritage of Kabupaten Mahakam Ulu based on the aspects of cultural advancement. Furthermore, this study proposes strategic ideas for cultural advancement efforts and future challenges in preserving the Mahakam Ulu culture.

## 2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach utilizing the document study method. Document study is a process of comprehending data from books, reports, and other sources, which are subsequently interpreted into meaning ([Bowen 2009](#)). This method was chosen to identify and describe the cultural richness of Mahakam Ulu Regency and examine various cultural advancement efforts undertaken by the local government, indigenous communities, and stakeholders. This method aims to provide a detailed and in-depth description of sociocultural phenomena based on available data.

The data sources in this study consist of relevant official and non-official documents, such as regional regulations, cultural master plans, reports from cultural and tourism agencies, previous research findings, and academic articles and scholarly publications. These documents were collected through searches on government institution websites and scholarly databases, such as Google Scholar.

The primary data collection technique was conducted from April to June 2025 by identifying, selecting, and reviewing key documents containing information on the forms of local culture in Mahakam Ulu (such as customs, arts, lamin architecture, and local wisdom practices), the challenges to their preservation, and the strategies and policies implemented for cultural advancement.

Data analysis was performed qualitatively using a content analysis technique, which involves analyzing document content to identify important themes and meanings related to the research object ([Krippendorff, 2019](#)). The analytical process includes information categorization, data interpretation, and descriptive presentation of findings to depict the actual condition of Mahakam Ulu's culture as well as the efforts for its preservation and development. This analytical technique was selected because it enables researchers to analyze textual data systematically, objectively, and measurably. In researching documents related to the Cultural Advancement Law, content analysis allows the researcher to identify key themes, understand the meaning behind the words used, and observe patterns and frequencies of specific concepts.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on document findings and studies related to cultural advancement in Mahakam Ulu, this sub-chapter will elaborate on the existing cultural diversity within the region, eight potential objects of cultural advancement in Mahakam Ulu, the availability of human resources as cultural supporters and necessary facilities, learning processes and strategies for cultural advancement, as well as challenges in safeguarding Mahakam Ulu's cultural heritage.

### 3.1. The Cultural Diversity of the Mahakam Ulu Region

The majority of the population inhabiting Mahakam Ulu Regency are Dayak peoples. The term "Dayak" is used to denote all indigenous peoples of Kalimantan. Several studies indicate that the Dayak originated from the Yunnan region. They migrated to Kalimantan gradually in small groups and at different times, resulting in these migrant groups settling in dispersed locations across the island. These migrants, sharing a common ancestry, subsequently developed distinct cultures in response to the environmental

challenges they encountered. Four dominant Dayak sub-groups in Mahakam Ulu are the Bahau, Aoheng, Kenyah, and Kayan.

Consequently, the culture of the Mahakam Ulu community cannot be considered homogeneous, despite being broadly categorized as Dayak. Numerous Dayak sub-groups possess distinct cultures, observable through differences in language, social organization, and customary practices. The Dayak Cultural Deliberation, conducted by the Dayak Customary Council of the Mahakam Ulu region from November 28th to 30th, 2018, in Amin Ayaaq Long Bagun Hudik, resulted in a classification of the Dayak tribes and sub-tribes present within Mahakam Ulu Regency. [Table 1](#) presents the outcomes of that Dayak Customary Council deliberation.

**Table 1. Tribes and Sub-Tribes in Mahakam Ulu**

No.	Tribes	Sub-Tribes
1	Aoheng	Supi Hauq, Supi Mira, Lakin Kovi, Kovi Maum, Doang Kovi, Dipon
2	Bahau Busang	Hipui, Pagawaa, Telajaan Jaan Pahaq, Panyin, Dipan, Huk
3	Buket	Sipui, Lakin Klavi, Doro Lole,
4	Kenyah	Paren Mano, Paren Batu, Paren Asa, Panyen Tiga, Panyen Kelayan, Ulaq.
5	Siang, murung, Uut Danum, Punan, Bekumpai	Tamanggung, Mangku, Damang, Mantir, Dipon
6	Loang Geliit	Hapoi, Pegueq, Pengain, Meguih
7	Kayan Lung Metun	Sepui Hiyuq, Sepui Tulang, Penggawa, Payin, Damin

**Source:** Study of Potential Distribution, Development, and Utilization of Regional Culture in Mahakam Ulu Regency, 2021

Several Dayak sub-groups recognize social stratification or hierarchical levels. Some of the social strata that remain identifiable are in [Table 2](#).

**Table 2. Tribes and Sub-Tribes in Mahakam Ulu**

No.	Tribes	Social Stratification
1	Aoheng	Aoheng Senean, Aoheng Amue, Aoheng Semukung, Aoheng Temong, Aoheng Mo'ong, Aoheng Bevasang, Aoheng Aseke, Aoheng Auva, Aoheng Pira Toran, Aoheng Huvung, Aoheng Olrlong Ka'l, dan Aoheng Olrlong Cihan
2	Bahau Busang & Bahau Saq	Umaq Suling, Umaq Tuan, Umaq Bengkelau, Umaq Urut, Umaq Sam, Umaq Paloq, Umaq Tepe, Umaq Palaq, Umaq Wak, Umaq Lakuwe, Umaq Mahaak, dan Umaq Luhat
3	Bahau Saq	Hwang Tamhah, Hwang Sirau, Hwang Boh, Hwang Laham, Hwang Telivaq, dan Hwang U
4	Loang Geliit	-
5	Buket	Buket Semukung, Buket Koyan, Buke Taviou, Buket Kehean, dan Buket Tevulu
6	Kayan Lung M	-
7	Kenyah	Lepoq Tukung, Umaq Baka, Lepoq Timai, Lepoq Tau, Lepoq Bakung, dan Lepoq Jala
8	Soputan	Seputan Oung Pike, Seputan Oung Berane, Seputan Nonu Pao, dan Seputan Oung Sang
9	Punan	Punan Kuhi, Punan Avang, Punan Murung, dan Punan Ratah
10	Siang	Siang Murung, Murung Uut Muntui, dan Uut Danum.
11	Bekumpai	-

**Source:** Study of Potential Distribution, Development, and Utilization of Regional Culture in Mahakam Ulu Regency, 2021

In addition to the Dayak peoples, individuals from Javanese, Bugis, and NTT (East Nusa Tenggara) ethnic groups also inhabit Mahakam Ulu as a result of transmigration and voluntary migration

processes. The prolonged and intensive interaction among these diverse ethnic groups can give rise to a new cultural synthesis within Mahakam Ulu. In the era of globalization, this condition is likely to be further reinforced in the future.

### **3.2. The Potential of Cultural Advancement Objects in Mahakam Ulu**

The discussion section is often considered the most critical part of a research article because it is where: 1) the researcher most effectively demonstrates critical thinking about a problem, develops creative solutions based on a logical synthesis of the findings, and formulates a deeper understanding of the research problem under investigation; 2) the underlying significance of the research is presented, its potential implications for other fields of study are noted, and possible improvements that could be made to further develop the research problem are explored; 3) the importance of the research is highlighted, showing how the study can contribute to and/or help fill existing gaps in the field. The discussion section is also the place to articulate how the findings from this study reveal new gaps in the literature that were previously unexposed or inadequately explained; and, 4) the reader is engaged in critical thinking about the issues based on evidence-informed interpretations of the findings.

The content of the discussion section in this article most frequently includes: 1) Explanation of Results: commenting on whether the results aligned with expectations (hypotheses) or not; providing a deeper explanation for any unexpected findings. Unusual or unforeseen patterns or trends that emerge from the research results are explained and their meaning in relation to the research problem is discussed. 2) Reference to Previous Research: comparing current results with findings from other studies or using other research to support claims. This can be done by revisiting key sources already cited in the introduction. 3) Deduction: explaining claims about how the results can be applied more broadly. For example, describing the study's contributions, proposing recommendations that could help improve a situation, or highlighting best practices.

#### **3.2.1. Oral Traditions and Manuscripts**

Oral traditions are narratives passed down through generations within a community, such as oral histories, folktales, chants, pantun (Malay poetic form), folklore, or other oral expressions. Manuscripts are documents and the information they contain that hold cultural and historical value, such as serat, babad, kitab, and other local records. Several oral traditions that have been identified include Belareq: A tale about the heroism of a young man from the Aoheng Dayak tribe named Belareq, or "lightning." Elifung and Kawat: Hereditary stories from the Punan Dayak tribe. Hudoq is a ceremonial dance performed in costumes typically made from banana or betel leaves, commonly practiced by the Bahau Dayak and nearly all Dayak groups in Mahulu. Lepoq Tukung Bulaq is a history of the Kenyah Dayak tribe. Ngomain/ngambak/ngafok is mythical stories frequently recounted across generations among the Punan and Siang Murung Dayak tribes. Temangung Turunan Supi Seputan is a heroic tale of the chiefs (Temang Sengiru; Ibau; Nyulat; Juk) of the Seputan tribe, heroes who defended and protected the Seputan people, leading to their present condition. Heroic figures of the Kayan Dayak tribe include Bukiq, Juk, Dihaq, Munun, Sung Dango, and Buriq.

The potential of these oral traditions and manuscripts is distributed across various villages. Belareq is found in the villages of Long Apari, Long Kerioq, Naha Buan, Naha Silat, Tiong Bu'u, Tiong Ohang, and Long Bagun Ilir. Elifung and Kawat are present only in Muara Ratah village. Hudoq encompasses nearly all villages in Mahakam Ulu Regency, particularly in Batoq Kelo, Datah Naha, Lirung Ubing, Liu Mulang, Long Bagun Ulu, Long Gelawang, Long Hubung, Long Hubung Ulu, Long Hurai, Long Isun, Long Lunuk, Long Lunuk Baru, Long Pahangai I, Long Pahangai II, Long Tuyoq, Lutan, Mamahak Besar, Matalibaq, Memahak Teboq, Memahak Ulu, Naha Aru, Sirau, and Ujoh Bilang. Lepoq Tukung Bulaq exists in the villages of Batu Majang, Datah Bilang Baru, Datah Bilang Ilir, Datah Bilang Ulu, and Rukun Damai. Ngomain/ngambak/ngafok is practiced in Laham, Long Merah, Naha Tifab, Nyaribungan, and Tri Pariq Makmur. Temangung Turunan Supi Seputan is found in Long Penaneh I, Long Penaneh II, and Long Penaneh III. Heroic figures of the Kayan Dayak tribe are associated with the villages of Delang Kerohong, Long Melaham, Long Pakaq Baru, and Long Paka.

### 3.2.2. Potential of Customs and Rites

Customs are practices based on specific values, performed continuously by a community group, and passed down to subsequent generations. Rites are the procedures for conducting ceremonies or activities based on specific values. Ceremonies that are still frequently performed are generally related to the human life cycle: birth, marriage, pregnancy, and death. Regarding birth, commonly performed rites include naming and infant care. Matchmaking and marriage also have their own customary stages and rites. Furthermore, customs and rites related to death are still widely practiced in various villages.

Beyond the life cycle, customs and rites related to agricultural activities are also still observed. There are several stages in farming, from land selection and preparation, to cultivation and harvest. Our holistic approach to collaborative management, which integrates tradition, ritual, and governance, can also provide valuable lessons for social forestry initiatives involving indigenous community groups. By fostering strong community bonds and respecting local customs, social forestry programs can better address the challenges faced by indigenous communities and promote sustainable forest management (Max et al., 2025).

### 3.2.3. Traditional Knowledge

Traditional Knowledge refers to the entire body of ideas and concepts held within a community, which are imbued with local values derived from practical, lived experiences of interacting with the environment. This knowledge is continuously developed and transmitted across generations. Objects of study within traditional knowledge include, but are not limited to, understanding of various plant species, natural medicinal remedies, and local foodways or culinary practices. For example, daun loki (loki leaves) are used by the Saputan Dayak tribe to treat back pain and can also serve as a flavor enhancer in cooking. Itun Megang puteq Sanggar (dried Sanggar banana leaves) are utilized for health purposes by the Bahau Dayak. Kupak kayuq durian (durian tree bark) is employed as a remedy for hemorrhagic fever by the Bakumpai Dayak people. Tung Mekei is recognized by the Kenyah Dayak for the prevention of cancer and tumors, while Ukeh Bejehiaq constitutes a medicinal substance from the Long Gelat Dayak tribe. Furthermore, Urou Seluang (a type of grass) is used by the Kayan people to treat internal infections or diseases.

### 3.2.4. Potential of Traditional Technology

Traditional Technology encompasses the complete set of means to provide the goods or methods necessary for human sustenance and comfort, manifesting as products, proficiencies, and community skills born from practical experience in interacting with the environment. This body of knowledge is continuously developed and transmitted across generations. Examples of traditional technologies with significant potential include the Sape (a traditional lute), Seraung (a conical hat), Gong, Tameng (shield) and Sumpit (blowpipe), boats/ketinting (traditional outboard motor canoes), house construction techniques, and other related practices.

### 3.2.5. Potential of Arts and Language

Art constitutes the artistic expression of individuals, collectives, or communities, based on cultural heritage or new creative innovation, materialized in various activities and/or media. It encompasses performing arts, visual arts, literary arts, film, and media arts, with performing arts including dance, theatre, and music. Language serves as the means of human communication, whether oral, written, or gestural. The artistic potentials identified as objects for cultural advancement are Hudoq, Ba Pakeu, Konya Loki, Leleng, and Sampeq Tingang Matei. The Hudoq tradition is distributed across all villages in Mahakam Ulu Regency. Ba Pakeu is practiced in the villages of Long Melaham, Long Pakaq Baru, and Long Pakaq. Konya Laki is found in Long Apari, Long Bagun Ilir, Long Kerioq, Naha Buan, Naha Silat, Tiong Bu'u, and Tiong Ohang. Leleng exists in Batu Majang, Datah Bilang Baru, Datah Bilang Ilir, Datah Bilang Ulu, and Rukun Damai. Sampeq Tingang Matei is present in Batoq Kelo, Datah Naha, Lirung Ubing, Liu Mulang, Long Bagun Ulu, Long Gelawang, Long Hubung, Long Hubung Ulu, Long Hurai, Long Isun,

Long Lunuk, Long Lunuk Baru, Long Pahangai I, Long Pahangai II, Long Tuyoq, Lutan, Mamahak Besar, Matalibaq, Memahak Teboq, Memahak Ulu, Naha Aru, Sirau, and Ujoh Bilang.

### **3.2.6. Potential of Folk Games**

Folk games are various recreational activities based on specific values, performed by community groups primarily for self-entertainment. The potential of folk games as objects for cultural advancement in Mahulu is considerable, evidenced by the persistence and continued practice of numerous traditional games, especially during rice cultivation periods. Folk games designated as objects for cultural advancement include logoq, butor, gabat, pang pagaq, and the sapi gala game.

### **3.2.7. Potential of Traditional Sports**

Traditional Sports refer to various physical and/or mental activities aimed at personal well-being and enhancing physical endurance, grounded in specific values, practiced continuously by community groups, and transmitted across generations. The potential of traditional sports as objects for cultural advancement in Mahulu is high. While traditionally held during festivals and farming seasons, these sports are now predominantly organized during the 17 August celebrations commemorating Indonesia's Independence Day. Traditional sports with significant potential include sumpit (blowpipe), tarik tambang (tug of war), perahu dayung (rowing), sola kavoq, bekawit, and payoq sing.

### **3.2.8. Potential of Cultural Heritage**

Cultural Heritage refers to tangible cultural inheritance comprising Cultural Heritage Objects, Cultural Heritage Buildings, Cultural Heritage Structures, Cultural Heritage Sites, and Cultural Heritage Areas on land and/or underwater, whose preservation is essential due to their significant historical, scientific, educational, religious, and/or cultural value, as established through a formal designation process. The distribution of potential cultural heritage or suspected heritage objects includes: chainmail armor (jirah/tayaq) in Tiong Bu'u village; Boli in Naha Silat village; dragon-carved jars (tajau) in Long Lunuk village; Juhan in Long Tuyoq village; a betel lime container (Kepuran) in Long Lunuk Baru village; ceramic bowls in Liu Mulang village; the Long Kerioq village cannon in Long Kerioq village; the Long Pahangai village cannon in Long Pahangai I village; the Long Pakaq Baru village cannon in Long Pakaq Baru village; a floral-motif cannon from Data Naha village in Datah Naha village; a traditional Lamin house pillar in Long Apari village; sakuq in Naha Tifab village; Silupit in Naha Buan village; a sacred cave site (liuq keramat) in Sirau village; and the tuka ranang site in Tiong Ohang village.

## **3.3. Cultural Human Resources and Infrastructure**

Efforts to advance culture require the availability of human resources as cultural supporters and infrastructure to promote culture. Mahakam Ulu Regency still firmly holds onto ancestral cultural heritage, indicating the continued existence of supporting human resources. Customs based on the values and norms of the Dayak tribes are still practiced in various villages. The supporting resources for culture remain strong; however, traditional institutions (customary administrators) are no longer held entirely by Dayak people. There are Javanese individuals who serve as administrators of customary institutions. There is a need for traditional institutions capable of playing a role in preserving customs, supported by administrators who have a deep and comprehensive understanding of customary rules. Customs that are still upheld include dangai, ngaping umaaq, tapoq, hudoq/hudoq kawit from Bahau, mangosang, icu onam from the Aoheng tribe, and mecaq undat from Kenya. In the fields of dance and music, many maestros have emerged, such as the war dance (karang kayau), with the sampeq or ketanong as musical instruments.

The distinctive Dayak architecture is still known and used, namely the lamin or longhouse. Initially, longhouse-style dwellings functioned as defense against possible attacks from outside the village during the era of headhunting (kayau/ayau), or against attacks by wild animals. Currently, lamin are still utilized, but their function has shifted to become customary meeting halls because the 'dangerous' conditions that necessitated communal living no longer exist. The number of people skilled in creating carvings and ornaments for the lamin has begun to decline.

Manuscripts are still widely found in Mahakam Ulu Regency, but there are no human resources capable of utilizing them. Experts are needed who can read and explore the meanings contained within the manuscripts. A short-term step that can be taken is digitizing the manuscripts. This is merely to save them from the risk of loss and damage to the original manuscripts before undertaking long-term utilization steps.

Oral traditions are still alive and rooted among their supporters. However, the number of people who understand and narrate oral traditions is beginning to become a challenge in the present and future. Efforts are needed to preserve them through various activities supported by strong institutions.

Rituals in the form of customary ceremonies, related to the human life cycle, agricultural activities, and others, are still quite well maintained by the community. This means cultural supporters still exist, but ritual leaders are starting to diminish. The number of people capable of being prayers/incantation reciters/dayung is decreasing due to a lack of regeneration.

The traditional knowledge possessed by the community still forms the basis for behavior in life, especially knowledge and its utilization related to the natural environment. However, this will fade/disappear when there are very significant environmental changes, such as the arrival of companies (mining or large-scale oil palm plantations). The presence of extractive companies will damage the landscape that serves as the source of community knowledge.

Traditional technology, in the form of houses, huts, boats, farming tools, fishing tools, hunting tools, etc., is still used by most of the community. As long as all these technologies are used, traditional technology will be well preserved. People with the skills to make these tools and technologies will also always exist as long as the community uses them. For example, hunting tools will always be made as long as game animals are still available and hunting activities are still carried out. However, currently, this technology is being competed with by modern technology considered more efficient, effective, and prestigious.

Regional languages in Mahakam Ulu are very diverse, as it consists of various Dayak tribes and sub-tribes. There are four dominant Dayak sub-tribes, each with their own sub-tribes. Their languages or dialects are diverse. The current challenge is that the resources or active users of these languages are relatively decreasing. It is mentioned in the PPKD document that there is a threat of regional language extinction. Efforts are needed with the help of linguistics experts to document the languages in the form of dictionaries or linguistic studies. A special institution related to language is needed to prevent extinction.

Folk games and traditional sports are still known by most of the community. However, some are no longer practiced for various reasons, one of which is the risk of fatal physical injury from certain sports. The potential extinction of these games and sports can be reduced by reviving them, emphasizing the exploration of their values and philosophies.

Cultural heritage sites or suspected cultural heritage objects in Mahakam Ulu are likely still abundant. The PPKD document mentions that the potential for cultural heritage is still significant but is constrained by limited budgets, a shortage of human resources (lack of cultural heritage experts, limited stakeholder knowledge), and the absence of an institution handling cultural heritage. The existing potential cultural heritage includes objects, buildings, structures, and sites.

### 3.4. Learning and Strategies for Cultural Advancement

Cultural Advancement Efforts constitute a series of strategic and sustainable steps taken to protect, develop, utilize, and foster culture as an integral part of national and regional development. Cultural advancement aims to strengthen national identity, enrich diversity, improve community welfare, and make culture the foundation for sustainable and equitable development.

Mahakam Ulu Regency has actually planned cultural advancement efforts as outlined in the Book of Study on the Master Plan and Strategic Direction for Cultural Advancement of Mahakam Ulu Regency ([Buku Kajian Rencana Induk dan Arah Strategi Pemajuan Kebudayaan Kabupaten Mahakam Ulu, 2021](#)). This is done through the integrated development of unique and distinctive regional cultural tourism potentials based on local wisdom to build a globally competitive cultural tourism destination. Activities that have been carried out include the development of the Mahakam River cultural area and lamin-s, and

the development of sports tourism such as river cruising (susur sungai), Batu Dinding, Riam Udang, and Riam Panjang.

Furthermore, the government has also improved connectivity between tourism destinations in the Mahakam Ulu region, built public infrastructure and tourism facilities, and enhanced the quality of health, worship, financial, communication, security, and safety services. These cultural advancement efforts by the Mahakam Ulu government have the potential to open new economic prospects for local communities, such as the establishment of homestays, cultural tourism, and handicrafts (Sudiar et al., 2025).

This potential is also supported by David et al. (2024), which states that the tourism sector of Mahakam Ulu Regency, featuring natural beauty and cultural richness like the Hudoq Dance and Laliq Ataq Ritual, serves as a prime attraction capable of not only drawing tourist visits but also providing economic benefits for the local community.

Briefly on the Hudoq Tradition, this activity essentially contains multi-values encompassing religious, cultural, moral, aesthetic, communal, courtesy, and social aspects. The religious dimension is manifested through expressions of gratitude to the Creator and prayers for protection of agricultural yields from various threats. Cultural and moral aspects are represented in the attitude of respect for leader figures and elders, while also functioning as a bond for community solidarity. Aesthetic and communal values are realized through artistic collaborations in the form of traditional songs, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and teamwork in making masks and preparing ceremonies. Meanwhile, social and courtesy values are reflected in the respect for ancestors and the system of arranging dancers based on age stratification and social roles within the community (Trisnawati et al., 2023).

However, obstacles still exist in cultural advancement related to the creative economy in Mahakam Ulu Regency. Nine main issues causing a slowdown in the creative economy consist of: limited infrastructure; minimal funding and investment; creative economy database; skills and education; access and networking; policy support; Intellectual Property Rights (IPR); economic conditions and market stability; and the role of Regional-Owned Enterprises (Purwadi et al., 2024).

Referring to the richness of Mahakam Ulu's traditions and the efforts previously described, the Mahakam Ulu Regency Government still needs to add several strategies to strengthen cultural advancement efforts. According to (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 5 of 2017 concerning Cultural Advancement), Cultural Advancement involves four steps: protection, development, utilization, and fostering.

First, protection is carried out through efforts to maintain and preserve cultural heritage, both tangible (e.g., cultural heritage sites, traditional artifacts, and historically valuable buildings) and intangible (such as regional languages, oral traditions, performing arts, and local wisdom), to prevent their extinction or erosion of their values by the dynamics of time. Second, development is realized by encouraging innovation and creativity in the fields of arts, customs, and other cultural practices, so that they remain relevant and sustainable amidst contemporary societal development, including through efforts to regenerate cultural actors. Third, utilization is implemented by internalizing cultural values into various development sectors, such as education, tourism, the creative economy, and spatial planning, to enhance the socio-economic value of these cultural assets. Finally, fostering is conducted through empowering cultural communities, artists, cultural experts, and customary institutions in the form of capacity building, mentoring, and facilitating programs and activities that support cultural preservation.

One interesting strategy that can serve as a lesson is the cultural advancement effort in the Trowulan National Cultural Heritage Area (KCBN), Mojokerto, East Java. A study by Basundoro et al. (2024) mentions that KCBN Trowulan has undertaken development (dissemination, study, and enrichment of diversity) and utilization (internalization of cultural values, innovation, increased adaptation to change, cross-cultural communication, and inter-cultural collaboration).

This can also be applied in Mahakam Ulu Regency, where the government should not only focus on building infrastructure but also strive to communicate and implement real collaboration with local cultural actor groups. The existing forms of cooperation are expected to reduce the gap between older and younger generations and give rise to innovations in cultural dissemination that are more in tune with technological and contemporary developments.

In addition to learning from KCBN Trowulan, Mahakam Ulu Regency can also innovate in building a creative city as has been done in Pekalongan, Bandung, Solo, and Ambon (Ulumuddin et al., 2020). These four cities undertake cultural advancement efforts that pay attention to environmental conservation, tourist education, efforts to internationalize products, synergy between traditional and modern artists, and cooperation among various parties, from the government and community to groups focused on preserving local culture. This can be a lesson for the Mahakam Ulu government to develop educational tourism, focus on sustainable environments, strive for collaboration among various parties, and promote Mahakam Ulu's culture at the global level.

Furthermore, cultural advancement efforts also require activities such as documenting cultural elements, teaching arts to children, persuasive communication to the younger generation, promotion of culture and cuisine, and recognition of cultural actors (Wahyudi & Murtono, 2024).

### 3.5. Challenges in Preserving the Cultural Heritage of Mahakam Ulu

Preserving the sustainability of cultural heritage in Mahakam Ulu Regency is not an easy task. Various challenges, both internal and external, threaten the continuity of cultural values that have been passed down through generations by indigenous communities, particularly the Dayak tribe. One of the main challenges is the current of modernization, which is slowly shifting traditional lifestyles. The younger generation is increasingly exposed to global lifestyles that tend to distance them from their local cultural roots, causing their interest in learning, preserving, and continuing traditions to begin to fade.

Furthermore, there is the challenge of customary cultures beginning to shift from being sacred rituals to becoming commercialized public spectacles, for example, the Hudoq Ceremony within the Erau Cultural Festival (Saha Ghafur, 2024). The government has officially designated the Erau Festival as an annual event and provides festival funding from the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBD). Additionally, the government also assists with festival promotion and marketing. However, the status of this festival remains merely a cultural product that has not been developed in depth within a tourism context to generate economic benefits (Aliesa et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, during the process of promoting Mahakam Ulu's culture to become more globally recognized, concerns persist that the process itself diminishes the sacredness of the culture. Development that claims to be culture-based but neglects the preservation of cultural values can be likened to building upon a rotten foundation (Sabon Ola, 2021). Therefore, policies are needed that balance tourism development with the preservation of local traditions, while also aligning with modernity (Saha Ghafur, 2024).

Cultural Advancement Efforts require a holistic strategic approach encompassing aspects of innovation, optimization, and mentoring to realize an Indonesian society with political-economic independence as well as a strong cultural identity. This initiative must be positioned as a long-term investment for the nation's civilizational development. However, the implementation of this policy still faces various substantive obstacles, such as the suboptimal commitment of stakeholders (government and community) in managing cultural heritage, caused by limited conceptual understanding, low levels of appreciation, and inconsistency in regulatory implementation (Zulkifli & AR, 2018).

Collaboration and cooperation between the government and industry players also need to be enhanced so that all available production resources in Indonesia can be utilized effectively (Firmansyah et al., 2024). Strategic steps that can be undertaken include developing programs that link culture with the strengthening of the local economy and sustainable tourism. The Tourism, Youth, and Sports Office (Dinas Pariwisata, Pemuda, dan Olahraga/Disparpora) of Mahakam Ulu needs to embrace tourism awareness groups and develop more production centers similar to the Batoq Tenevang Tourism Center (Hipui, 2024).

## 4. CONCLUSION

Mahakam Ulu Regency in East Kalimantan possesses abundant cultural wealth, primarily from the Dayak community and its various sub-groups. This cultural heritage encompasses oral traditions,

manuscripts, rites, traditional knowledge, local technology, arts, languages, folk games, traditional sports, and cultural heritage sites. However, amid rapid globalization and modernization, local culture faces serious challenges, such as declining interest among the younger generation, the influence of foreign cultures, limitations in the regeneration of cultural practitioners, and a lack of support in terms of human resources and funding.

Efforts to advance culture have been undertaken through protection, development, utilization, and fostering, including integration with the tourism sector. However, more adaptive strategies are required, such as cultural documentation, strengthening of customary institutions, engaging the younger generation, and enhancing promotion based on local wisdom. Furthermore, synergy between the government, community, and creative industry actors is crucial to ensure the sustainability of culture as a pillar of sustainable development and national identity. Through these strategic measures, the culture of Mahakam Ulu can not only survive but also thrive, providing economic and social benefits for the community while enriching Indonesia's cultural treasury amidst the currents of globalization.

This research identified a limitation in its near-exclusive reliance on secondary and administrative data sources, such as local government planning documents (RPJMD, master plan studies) and news articles. Consequently, the study was unable to delve deeply into the perspectives and actual conflicts of interest among cultural practitioners in the field. Furthermore, the research scope remained general and did not focus on one specific Object of Cultural Advancement, such as an oral tradition or a specific customary ceremony (e.g., Hudoq). Subsequent research should concentrate on specific aspects, such as an intergenerational study of traditional art practitioners or an evaluation of existing programs run by the Mahakam Ulu Tourism, Youth, and Sports Office (Disparpora).

### **Ethical Approval**

Not Applicable

### **Informed Consent Statement**

Not Applicable

### **Authors' Contributions**

All authors have made equivalent contributions to the conception and creation of this article. The research concept and direction were established collectively. The review of literature, curation of data, and interpretive analysis were performed jointly by all contributors. The manuscript was drafted, edited, and finalized through a process of collaborative effort and reciprocal oversight. Each author has reviewed and endorsed the final version of the manuscript.

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The Authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

### **Data Availability Statement**

All references used in the analysis are cited within the manuscript. Additional details regarding the literature selection process, analytical framework, or specific sources can be made available by the authors upon reasonable request for academic or research purposes.

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