



# Participatory Communication for Social Change of Banda Neira Intergenerational Collective Memory Learning

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**Abstract.** Participatory communication involves grassroots communities in interactions and decision-making within their communities. This study examines the values of local wisdom that are collectively created and maintained to be passed down from generation to generation, serving as role models for social conversations and movements on social media in Banda Neira, Maluku. Qualitative research, ethnography, including netnography, in this study explores traditional communication practices such as *pela*, oral customs, and community deliberations that can strengthen cultural identity and shape intergenerational learning processes. Several findings indicate that participatory communication at the grassroots level in Banda Neira is based on local values as a social agreement to send and receive messages internally and externally to the community. Communication technology, especially through social media, functions to accelerate the transformation of traditional communities to filter and accept modern life while maintaining the continuity of ancestral values, collective memory, preserving heritage, and strengthening the identity of the Banda Neira community. Future research on the importance of communication technology in marginalized communities is recommended, alongside efforts to preserve local culture through formal and non-formal social learning education.

**Keywords:** Banda Neira, Collective Memory, Indigenous Peoples, Intergenerational Communication, Local Wisdom, Participatory Communication.

## 1 Introduction

One characteristic of Asian societies is that individual life is inseparable from the communal, so that every thought and action must be considered socially due to close family and ethnic ties. Thus, participatory communication is an essential factor in community formation. Communal involvement in individual attitudes and interactions means considering other individuals in the closest social circle to actively monitor or contribute to a process and encourage dialogue in the process of collective decision-making. This process creates a dynamic related to equal power. In communities, actions and communication processes occur from the bottom up in an inclusive manner, and problem-solving efforts are carried out collaboratively. Every problem that arises is always resolved

together. However, it also does not deny the dissemination of top-down information and its feedback as reciprocal communication.

Social identity is part of the ongoing process of communication and interaction. Community values and characteristics are then expressed within and outside the group, especially the cultural values of indigenous communities. Various regions in Indonesia, with their highly diverse communities, develop their own identities and maintain them intergenerationally. On Banda Neira Island, Maluku Province, communication actions and practices are rooted in communal local wisdom and play a strategic role across time in maintaining the continuity of tradition and managing dynamic social change.

This research provides insight into the phenomenon of social change resulting from advances in communication technology and globalization, which have impacted the challenges of social cohesion and sustainability. Meanwhile, in the context of shared values, marginalized communities like Banda Neira possess a collective memory linked to genocide by Western colonial rule in a remote area. This memory has remained constant throughout human history.

Banda Neira is more than just a cluster of islands, but rather a unique historical and cultural site unlike any other in the Indonesian archipelago. Since the pre-colonial era, Banda Neira has been known as a historical center of the spice trade, particularly nutmeg, which attracted European nations competing to dominate the kingdoms in the archipelago. The Dutch colonial period made it a crucial location for the spice trade and its economic prosperity in Europe. Today, Banda Neira is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, protecting the island and its community culture.

This paper poses several research questions, such as: 1) What forms of participatory communication grow from local wisdom in Banda Neira? 2) What is the role of such communication in facing social change? 3) How does the mechanism of collective memory transfer between generations occur? Along with these questions, the overall objective of this paper is to analyze how participatory communication can be a means of collective learning and the transfer of cultural values between generations in the Banda Neira indigenous community. Some specific things include: 1) Describing the forms and practices of participatory communication based on local wisdom. 2) Analyzing the impact of social change on community communication patterns. 3) Identifying intergenerational cultural learning strategies.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Participatory Communication**

Participatory communication is related to development communication, with a focus on the analysis and communication process involving the sender, message development, channel selection, and message reception by the receiver. Communication thus involves all stakeholders in "development support communication," "program support communication," "communication for development," or "physical and non-physical development communication." Communication then becomes a strategic tool to persuade communities to change and improve the development process (Tufté & Mefalopulos,

2019). Participatory communication is the root of freedom in educating individuals and communities independently, free from the intervention and violence of power, and must be a tool of liberation for marginalized communities like Banda Neira, especially those who have memories and trauma of the genocide that destroyed their ancestors. Interactivity in communication becomes a forum for participation to build critical awareness that allows the oppressed to understand their social conditions as agents of change (Freire, 2020; Servaes, 2008).

In a communication event, a dialogic process occurs that involves the community in decision-making for the common good, which is then disseminated reciprocally (Servaes, 2008). The formulation of messages becomes the starting point, allowing common interests within the community, and thereby, the deliberation involving stakeholders becomes the main characteristic of participatory communication (Tufté & Mefalopulos, 2019).

## **2.2 Knowledge and Local Wisdom**

The values created and nurtured together within a community continue to live on in daily life practices. From there, "local wisdom" emerges, encompassing knowledge, values, and practices that develop within a community based on long-term experiences and interactions with its environment (Geertz, 1983). This knowledge is acquired by community members from within and outside the group and then used for generations, passed down from one generation to the next. Basic knowledge in a community becomes lifelong local wisdom, managed in balance with the natural environment. Culture continues to live and accumulate to be passed on to the next generation. However, wisdom itself can be abstract and concrete, as a truth gained from life. Attitudes and practices of life are integrated into the body, soul, and environment. The value of wisdom in local culture places respect for parents and seniority over life experience, upholding moral aspects and striving to avoid material things because they can become extinct (Nakorntap et al., 1996; Mungmachon, 2012).

## **2.3 Collective and Intergenerational Memory**

The earlier definitions from the social sciences or sociology viewed collective memory not only as shared individual memories, but rather as "publicly available symbols maintained by a society" (Olick & Teichler, 2021; Hirst et al., 2018). The communication and social change perspective views the concept of collective memory not simply as a static account of the past, but as a social construction continually negotiated through human interactions, ritual actions, and shared narratives. Halbwachs (2024) asserts that collective memory always operates within social frameworks of memory. Social groups play a role in determining what is remembered, forgotten, and dynamically reinterpreted through contestation. In the context of contemporary society, collective memory plays a strategic role in the formation of community identity, strengthening social legitimacy, and orienting postcolonial collective action (Olick, 2023; Olick & Teichler, 2021; Levy, 2021; Assmann, 2022).

This paper's analysis, from a participatory communication perspective, positions collective memory as a source of symbolic messages that connect experiences with social change agendas. This perspective enables communities to mobilize narratives of the past as cultural and political capital, making collective memory not only retrospective but also prospective. A crucial mechanism occurs in the production of meaning, symbolic resistance, and the sustainability of social movements.

Collective memory—like the smallest social unit, the family—can involve small communities, such as couples, families, or civic associations, or larger communities, including nation-states (Hirst et al., 2018; Gedi & Elam, 1996), linked to past experiences in their history. The Banda Neira community has a strong collective memory related to the history of their community, the occupation of European nations fighting over natural resources, especially nutmeg, which had a major impact on the community from generation to generation.

### **3 Research Method**

This research employed a qualitative approach using ethnographic methods, including observation and online interaction or netnography. The research location was in the traditional village of Banda Neira, Maluku, Indonesia, from November 2024 to February 2025.

Data was collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with traditional elders, youth leaders, and local teachers. Also, participant observation of various on-site and online activities and documentation analysis of photos, videos, community's WhatsApp, and other social media platforms. The 17 participants were selected purposively, considering their roles and prominent figures in the community, past experiences related to the history of Banda Neira, and local environmental and cultural activists who play a role in preserving nature and culture.

Data analysis techniques were conducted using thematic analysis based on analytical dimensions by concepts and theories. Data validated through source triangulation during the interview process to obtain information consistent with the facts. Several themes or dimensions of analysis were used including four dimensions such as participatory communication, local wisdom, social change, and intergenerational collective memory.

## **4 Results and Discussions**

### **4.1 Participatory Communication in Banda Neira Community**

Geographically, Banda Neira Island is among the islands that can be categorized as isolated because it is on the Banda Sea, known as a deep sea and relatively unexplored by traffic, unlike the central and western regions of Indonesia. However, the uniqueness of the community stems from its "isolated" geographical position. The Bandanese people are a blend of various nations or ethnicities that arrived during the early days of human settlement in the Indonesian archipelago. The Bandanese generation believes that their ancestors originated from Arabic or Yemeni, Chinese, African, and Malay

ethnicities. Thus, this demographic mix has given rise to a Bandanese community with a distinct identity, abandoning their original ancestral roots.

Language, as one of the most important elements of communication, has formed the basis for participatory communication within the community. Due to its relatively remote geographical location from Ambon, the Bandanese people are relatively independent in forming and developing their language. Along with the development of the language, the values created and nurtured together have shaped Banda Neira's distinctive identity.

The Banda Neira community maintains a tradition of oral narratives in its internal communication practices. Now, with communication technology, this oral tradition is strengthened through verbal text and audio-video. Just as the media serves as a channel for message delivery and reciprocal interaction, messages are freely composed, created, and delivered. Social deliberation through customary deliberation, for example, while traditionally requiring physical meetings and accompanying cultural events, social media channels have become accelerators for the distribution and absorption of messages. Oral narratives are always present in human interactions within the community and serve as a social learning experience for the Banda Neira community.

One of the values and practices of social cohesion that is the responsibility of every individual in Maluku society in general is the *Pela Gandong* tradition. This traditional practice lives on in the Banda Neira community, as on several other islands in Maluku, and is a key component of their identity and uniqueness. The bonds of brotherhood among families, villages, and sub-districts in the Maluku region transcend religious, geographical, and other boundaries. This tradition is fostered through participatory communication interactions to strengthen ties, resolve conflicts, and maintain harmony within the community. *Pela Gandong*, besides being a form of commitment and a symbol of peace, also serves as a path to achieving harmony and togetherness among the people of Maluku.

The oral tradition in the Banda Neira community and the surrounding small islands remains alive and guides daily life. From an oral tradition, it was modified into a textual tradition in the form of "baku cerita" (telling stories of the past) that serves as the transmission of values and history from generation to generation. Participant such as Ham (64-year-old male, leader) said:

"One story always told in every Banda family is about the arrival of foreigners who were initially welcomed for the nutmeg trade. However, over time, the community fought for their freedom because the European traders seized the community's land and plantation rights. This story of struggle is always told and passed down orally by each family, usually during gatherings in the courtyard of the traditional house." (private interview, 9 Dec 2024).

## 4.2 The Function of Local Wisdom in Maintaining Social Cohesion

Local wisdom is found in various elements of community culture, both tangible and intangible. Both natural and human resources possess local wisdom, enabling

communities to shape values and produce tangible goods. (64-year-old male, leader) said:

Local wisdom grows and is nurtured collectively as a form of social capital that provides solutions to any potential conflict that threatens the existence and well-being of the community. In Banda Neira, as in Maluku generally, local wisdom, such as "adat pela", serves as a strong foundation for maintaining social harmony and strengthening cross-community communication. A traditional leader, such as Din (55 Years old, male, explained:

"The community always cares for each other in daily life. However, if a problem arises, we both sit down together, identify the issue, find alternative solutions, and make a binding joint decision. However, whatever the problem, it always returns to the "Pela" tradition because that is the only binding force. Pela is not only a customary bond, but it is also our way of resolving conflicts." (Private interview, Dec. 10, 2024)

### 4.3 Social Change and Intergenerational Challenges

The geographical isolation has been overcome through communication technology, allowing the Banda community to communicate freely throughout Indonesia and globally via the internet, particularly social media applications. Like the lifestyles of young people on other large islands in Indonesia, the young people of Banda Neira rely on online digital devices in their daily lives. Digital media has become the dominant communication channel for interactions within and outside the community. Geographic isolation has been overcome, and what happens elsewhere is immediately known and responded to by young people, especially within the Banda Neira community.

The challenges of social change stem primarily from the influence of social media and urbanization, which have led to a shift from oral to digital communication. Oral culture has shifted to text messaging in online friendship groups as a new alternative. However, the constraints of the older generation, or digital immigrants, who are often less skilled in using digital devices, prevent them from freely transferring oral cultural competencies containing stories of the struggles of the community that defended Banda Neira to written culture. An alternative is for young people to help their older generation by streaming online videos to tell stories about the history and struggles of the Banda Neira people. Streaming audio and video formats provide an alternative way to preserve the values passed down to the younger generation. An informant, Muh (40 years old, male, elementary school teacher), explained:

"Unlike our generation or those older than us, kids today spend more time playing with their phones. They hardly have time to listen to their parents or grandparents tell stories. That's no longer the case. Many young people often don't know the stories of their ancestors' origins or the struggles of Banda Neira. Their world seems much broader, and they no longer interact physically with other communities on the island." (Private interview, December 9, 2024)

The community maintains sacred values, respect, and social etiquette in its interactions. Instead, technology is used to build identity and strengthen cultural values. Digital documentation is utilized for traditional ceremonies as an effort to preserve collective memory. Furthermore, young people in Banda Neira have taken the initiative

to document ancient stories through digital media, such as podcasts or local documentaries. A Banda Neira content creator, Den (22 years old, male, university graduate), explained:

"We recognize the importance of documentation, especially of historical and cultural aspects, including all the artifacts in the Banda Neira archipelago. Therefore, we create unique content. We explore the stories of our grandparents, record them with our mobile phones, edit them, and upload them to YouTube so that they can be watched continuously. We enjoy working as content creators while still preserving Banda Neira's culture." (Private interview, Dec.11, 2024)

#### 4.4 Intergenerational Collective Memory Learning Mechanisms

Various cultural events have been documented by the younger generation to serve as social learning materials and to strengthen cohesion in building community identity. The people of Banda Neira are gradually gaining greater confidence in their identity. Ham (64-year-old male, traditional leader) said:

The people of Banda Neira need a leader who can serve as a role model, especially if that leader is active at the national level, and who can be a role model for everyone. A leader will increase the Banda people's self-confidence and strengthen their identity. The people of Banda Neira proudly mention their birthplace and cultural identity. Previously, the people of this remote island were often overlooked in their province, frequently bullied, and their role belittled. Now, with communication technology, the community identity can more quickly introduce the Bandanese people to their deeply rooted history of fighting against European colonialism (Private interview, Dec. 11, 2024).

The tradition of storytelling within the nuclear family has nearly disappeared due to generational shifts. Young people no longer listen to their parents or grandparents tell stories about the past and history, specifically within each family. Instead, they learn these stories through online content or storytelling provided by their teachers at school. However, vibrant cultural events continue to serve as a medium for young people to acquire cultural education. The Banda Festival, for example, not only recounts the prowess of Indonesian sailors navigating the oceans but also provides rich cultural learning and a profound communication of identity regarding the history of the Banda Neira people. Furthermore, as a tourist destination, Banda has become a fascinating spot for both its natural beauty and human culture.

The digital impact of Banda Neira's cultural existence has thus reached a global audience, reflecting the long history of Dutch and British colonialism, which fought over Run Island and exchanged it for Manhattan Island in New York. The Dutch and British competed for the natural resources of the Banda Islands' nutmeg plantations (Milton, 2015).

One of the cultural events regularly held by the local government and the Banda community is the traditional "Cuci Negeri" ceremony. This internal community event is open to visitors from around the world but also serves as a moment for self-reflection within the community, particularly for the relay of cultural leadership. More than just a cultural performance, *Cuci Negeri* serves as a reflective moment that connects the

younger generation with the community's history and identity. Sad (42 years old, female, housewife) said:

"In our family, we realize that children must also be educated about our customs and culture. There are many important holidays to celebrate, one of which is Cuci Negeri. So, our family attends these traditional events, and our children have been participating since they were little. This way, they understand that these traditional events are not just ceremonies, but also stories and history about our Bandanese ancestors. Children must be educated from a young age to understand who we are and our culture." (Private interview, Dec. 11, 2024)

The findings of this study complement several findings in previous studies, such as the development of marginalized communities through participatory communication and broader development communication (Khasenov, 2025; Servaes, 2022), thereby transforming the human aspect as the subject of development. Because with participatory communication, all stakeholders obtain clear information for joint decision-making, especially for poverty alleviation in remote communities (Muniruddin et al., 2024). Participatory communication allows local wisdom to become a basis that is taken into account in the decision-making process, as is typical in communal societies. Everything is determined through deliberation, and decision-making is based on moral values embedded in the community. Local values have also taken root in the interests of sustainable natural resource management, conservation, and inclusivity (Fernanda et al., 2025).

Social change is more democratic, dynamic, and supports progress for the well-being of a more open community, while maintaining communal identity. The results of this study align with previous research that deliberative community empowerment, by providing a platform for grassroots voice and expression, and participation, then becomes a source of strength for development (Gibson & Woolcock, 2008). Not only is community identity expressed, but also grassroots commitment to natural resource conservation, leading to the realization of environmental justice (Nishat & Tahir, 2024).

These findings align with Schwarz (2022), who found that collective memory and intergenerational transmission enable broader social movements because technological leaps occur within a single generation, enabling collective change at all levels of society.

The findings of this study indicate that the role of social media in the digital era for local communities also provides a strategic position. In Banda Neira, social media interactions within the indigenous community function not merely as a medium for digital archiving or accelerating the dissemination of historical narratives, but rather as a communicative arena where collective memory is reframed, negotiated, and strategically positioned. Younger cohorts, especially those with traditional leaders, educators, and local content creators, actively produce narratives that reinterpret the community's historical experiences. Young people become champions for identity, cultural advocacy, and social legitimacy after sharing cultural experiences and knowledge with older cohorts. Social media develops as a discursive space where memory is not always consensual, but open to debate, selection, and the emphasis of particular meanings. A process of renewal and adjustment occurs, even transforming collective memory from a cultural heritage into a communicative resource. It is an

intangible capital mobilized for social change and strengthening the community's position.

## 5 Conclusion

The Banda Neira community prioritizes participatory communication rooted in local wisdom, which has proven to be a crucial foundation for maintaining social stability and the continuity of indigenous culture. Local wisdom plays a strategic role in preserving social and historical values. This stakeholder-focused process utilizes technology to not only maintain collective identity but also facilitate adaptation to social change without losing the essence of local culture. Participatory communication based on local wisdom remains vibrant in Banda Neira despite the pressures of modernization.

Strengthening intergenerational communication channels allows indigenous communities to maintain their existence amidst globalizations. Younger generations utilize communication technology to document heritage, oral culture, local wisdom, and shared community values, presenting them on social media platforms. Systematic efforts are needed to bridge the gap between generations, including through education and digital media.

The implications of this research call for a push to integrate local narratives into the basic education curriculum as a formal effort to maintain the sustainability of human cultural development, the natural environment, and the economy. Furthermore, it has implications for fostering democracy through the involvement of indigenous communities in the formulation of cultural policies.

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