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The role of cultural element “Dalihan Natolu” in Batak community as the resource of conflict resolution

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Abstract

The Batak community in North Sumatra, Indonesia, is characterized by its rich cultural heritage, with “Dalihan Natolu” serving as a fundamental principle governing social relations and conflict resolution. This paper explores the role of Dalihan Natolu in Batak society, particularly within the context of conflicts arising from modernization and development projects such as the Lake Toba tourism area. Despite its historical significance, Dalihan Natolu faces challenges in addressing contemporary conflicts, particularly regarding land disputes between the indigenous Sigapiton community and the Lake Toba Authority Implementing Agency (BPODT). This study also aims to analyze BPODT’s crisis communication strategies in handling conflicts with the Sigapiton community and examine the influence of Dalihan Natolu on these communication dynamics. By delving into these issues, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural traditions intersect with modern challenges, demanding insights into conflict resolution and community cohesion within the Batak society.

Keywords: Batak community, conflict resolution, crisis communication, Dalihan Natolu, indigenous rights



Public Interest Statement

This study delves into the intricate interplay between tradition and modernity within the Batak community of North Sumatra, Indonesia, focusing on the cultural cornerstone of “Dalihan Natolu.” By examining its role in addressing conflicts stemming from development projects like the Lake Toba tourism area, this research sheds light on the challenges faced by traditional principles in contemporary contexts. Specifically, it analyzes crisis communication strategies employed by the Lake Toba Authority Implementing Agency (BPODT) in managing conflicts with the Sigapiton community, highlighting the influence of Dalihan Natolu on these strategies. This study offers valuable insights into cultural resilience and conflict resolution, essential for preserving community cohesion amid evolving societal landscapes.

Introduction

The Batak community, indigenous to the North Sumatra region of Indonesia, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and traditions. At the heart of Batak society lies a complex web of cultural practices, beliefs, and values that have shaped the community’s identity for centuries. Among these cultural elements, “Dalihan Natolu” is a fundamental principle governing social relations, familial ties, and community dynamics (Firmando, 2021; Harahap et al., 2023; Harahap, 2019; Hasibuan & Rahmat, 2020; Lubis et al., 2019; Lumbantobing et al., 2023; Ndonga et al., 2022; Priyono, 2021; Priyono & Siregar, 2021; Resdati, 2022; Sahrul, 2017). In exploring the role of Dalihan Natolu in the Batak community, it becomes evident that this cultural concept serves as a cornerstone for social cohesion, conflict resolution, and collective well-being. Thus, understanding the significance of Dalihan Natolu offers valuable insights into the dynamics of Batak society and how cultural traditions contribute to community resilience and harmony.

Building upon the introductory overview of the Batak community, it becomes imperative to delve deeper into the cultural phenomenon of Dalihan Natolu (Lubis et al., 2019; Lumbantobing et al., 2023). From the Batak Toba subgroup, Dalihan Natolu encompasses a set of traditional norms, customs, and social structures that govern various aspects of Batak life (Hasibuan & Rahmat, 2020; Lumbantobing et al., 2023; Ndonga et al., 2022). The term “Dalihan Natolu” translates to “three circles of life,” representing the interconnectedness of individuals with their immediate family (“boru”), extended family (“marga”), and community (“hula-hula”). Within this framework, relationships are governed by reciprocity, mutual support, and collective responsibility, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity among community members. By exploring the historical roots and cultural significance of Dalihan Natolu, we gain a deeper appreciation for its role as a guiding principle in Batak society and its potential implications for conflict resolution and community cohesion.

While Dalihan Natolu has long served as a foundational principle within the Batak community, contemporary challenges and societal changes have raised questions about its relevance and efficacy, particularly in conflict resolution (Harahap et al., 2023; Jamal et al., 2023). As the Batak community navigates challenges in modernization, globalization, and evolving social dynamics, conflicts inevitably arise from interpersonal disputes, inter-family disagreements, or broader community tensions. One of the challenges faced by the Batak community is the development project of the Lake Toba tourism

area, which covers an area of 500 hectares and has been granted management rights to the Lake Toba Authority Implementing Agency (BPODT) (Presidential Regulation No. 46 of 2016). This area has been designated as a National Strategic Tourism Area named Toba Caldera Resort (TCR), located in Sigapiton village, Ajibata district, Toba regency.

TCR is professionally managed by BPODT, implementing authoritative functions in coordinating and actively coordinating with 8 regencies around Lake Toba. Since 2022, TCR has had a master plan to build internationally standardized tourism facilities such as hotels, plazas, main gates, ravine gates, parking hubs, mosques, churches, fire extinguisher buildings, culture centers, GEO Parks, Amphitheatres, MSME. Centers, Tourism Academies, and glass bridges around the regencies, with a total investment value of 26 trillion rupiahs (<https://www.northsumaterainvest.id/id/investment-project/toba-calderaresort>). Although the development of TCR aims to improve the welfare of the community and create significant investment opportunities for the country, another challenge in the form of conflicts between residents and BPODT cannot be avoided. Arie Prasetyo, as the first director of BPODT, stated that there have been many conflicts throughout the execution of the TCR project, and one of them is poor communication between the government and the community (<https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4679874/bpodt-ungkap-penghambat-danau-toba>).

This conflict originated from the land acquisition status of TCR phase 1 in Sigapiton. The indigenous community of Sigapiton felt aggrieved because their land, covering an area of 120 hectares, was claimed by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry as a protected forest area, which was later handed over to BPODT as the KSPN. This indicates ineffective communication between BPODT, the indigenous community of Sigapiton, and the government regarding the resolution of the Sigapiton land dispute. Each party communicated by prioritizing their ambitions over land ownership. The development of these ambitions led to communication becoming inconsistent, emotional, sentimental, and irrational, resulting in many misunderstandings. As a result, the indigenous community of Sigapiton felt aggrieved over their land.

Understanding how Dalihan Natolu intersects with these contemporary conflicts becomes paramount in exploring its role as a resource for conflict resolution. Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study revolves around elucidating the mechanisms through which Dalihan Natolu operates in resolving conflicts within the Batak community, thereby shedding light on its enduring significance and adaptability in the face of evolving social landscapes. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the communication process of BPODT in handling conflicts with the indigenous community of Sigapiton village in the TCR area of North Sumatra, Indonesia, and also to investigate the elements of Dalihan Natolu in the crisis communication of BPODT in handling land conflicts with the indigenous community of Sigapiton village in that area.

1.1 Sigapiton Location Overview

Sigapiton is one of the villages in the Ajibata district, Toba Regency, North Sumatra province, Indonesia. The majority of Sigapiton's residents are from the Toba Batak ethnic group, with most practicing Christianity. Geographically, Sigapiton village is situated between two towering hills. Its location on the shores of Lake Toba makes it part of the tourism village program initiated by the Ministry of Tourism

of the Republic of Indonesia. The village hosts two churches, one public elementary school, as well as Batak-style houses and accommodations for both local and international tourists. Below is a map showing the location of Sigapiton village.



Figure 1.1 Sigapiton Village Map Location

Geographically and administratively, Sigapiton village is one of the nine villages and one urban village in the Ajibata district of Toba Regency, covering an area of 900 square kilometers. It is situated at an elevation of 915 meters above sea level. The population of Sigapiton village is approximately 568 people. The village is located around 8 kilometers from the Ajibata District Office. It is bordered by Motung to the north, Sirungkungon to the south, Pardamean Sibisa to the east, and Lake Toba to the west.

The residents of Sigapiton village adhere to the customary law of Sigapiton or the traditional community of Bius Raja Naopat Sigapiton, with a customary territory spanning 920 hectares. The ancestors of the Sigapiton customary community settled in the area in 1917, forming the Bius Raja Naopat community, consisting of four recognized royal clans: Manurung, Sirait, Butar-Butar, and Nadapdap. These clans originated from Sibisa Village and were named their settlement Sigapiton, which has historical significance due to its location between two hills. Their livelihood traditionally involves farming and hunting.

The four clans each have their own designated agricultural areas called “golat,” including Golat Panjang, owned by the Nadapdap clan; Golat Butar, owned by the Butar-Butar clan; Golat Sibuntuon, owned by the Manurung clan, and Golat Sosor Baringin owned by the Sirait clan. These ancestral lands have been passed down through generations and are still cultivated by their respective descendants. The primary occupation of the villagers is agriculture, mainly rice cultivation and other crops. The average monthly income is around Rp 1,500,000, and the educational attainment level in Sigapiton village ranges up to high school, with some descendants graduating from university.

Methods

2.1 Research Design

Researchers used a qualitative research approach (Dezin & Lincoln, 2009). Researchers attempted a constructive approach, assuming that BPODT’s crisis communication strategy in handling conflicts with the Sigapiton indigenous community is pluralistic, interactive, and involves an exchange of social experiences interpreted with key informants. Researchers argue that truth is dynamic and can only be found through the examination of informants through interactions with their social situations.

Interactive and flexible strategies in understanding social phenomena from the informants' perspective are considered the informants' viewpoint. Researchers collected sentences or words from informants, books, and other sources. Researchers conducted interviews to gather data, enabling them to delve deeper into informants' interpretations.

BPODT, as the research setting, is the operational implementing body in the field for accelerating the development of Lake Toba as a super-priority strategic tourism area centered on Toba Caldera Resort, part of which is within the administrative area of Sigapiton village, Ajibata sub-district, Toba regency. Therefore, from this area, researchers collected field data related to BPODT's crisis communication strategy in handling conflicts with the Sigapiton indigenous community.

2.2 Object and Subject of the Research

This study examines BPODT's handling of land conflicts with the Sigapiton indigenous community in the TCR area to identify crisis communication strategies for addressing these conflicts. Therefore, the focus area of this research is the TCR, which includes the conflict-ridden land under BPODT authority and the land belonging to the Sigapiton indigenous community. Based on the researcher's frequent visits to the Toba district and initial literature review, it is evident that the acceleration of super-priority tourism development in the Toba district is hindered by conflicts with the local community, leading to delays in achieving planned goals. Considering these factors, the research's focal location is the TCR, which is administratively located in Sigapiton village, Ajibata sub-district, and Toba regency. Informants in this study include BPODT and the Sigapiton indigenous community. The rationale is that BPODT serves as the operational implementing body for accelerating Lake Toba's development on the ground. At the same time, the Sigapiton indigenous community is a stakeholder experiencing the impacts of Lake Toba's development, with their customary land being taken over, resulting in unresolved conflicts. Thus, the research data obtained undergo validity and reliability testing. According to Creswell (2014), validity is based on the certainty of whether the research results accurately reflect the perspectives of the researcher, participants, or general readers. Meanwhile, reliability, according to Leksono (2013), in qualitative research, is considered reliable when the researcher's field conditions correspond to the actual situation. Qualitative research is subjective and reflective because the researcher acts as the instrument. Reliability in qualitative approaches is individual and varies among researchers because each study relies on the researchers themselves.

The researcher made several considerations in selecting informants for this study, as follows:

1. Informants with extensive and in-depth knowledge directly involved in the conflicts.
2. Informants with connections to create legitimacy and a positive image of BPODT to the public.
3. Informants with comprehensive knowledge of the lineage, norms, values, and beliefs of the Sigapiton indigenous community's customary law directly involved in the conflicts.
4. Members of the Sigapiton indigenous community who are affected by evictions and directly involved in the conflicts.

Based on the above criteria, the researcher has selected several informants suitable for the study and field developments. The following are some informants for this study:

1. BPODT Public Relations Officer.
2. Community leaders of the Ompu ondol Butarbutar Sigapiton lineage.
3. Members of the Sigapiton indigenous community.
4. Local government officials of Toba regency.

2.3 Source of the Data

The researcher established criteria to map data sources by determining what categories are relevant for this study. One way to characterize these data sources is by their relationship to the problem or situation. The researcher classified them into two broad categories consisting of primary data sources, namely, the BPODT Public Relations Officer, community leaders of the Sigapiton indigenous community, Sigapiton indigenous community members directly involved in the conflict, and local government officials of Toba regency. Additionally, those considered secondary data sources include the BPODT CEO and the village chief of Sigapiton, members of the Sigapiton indigenous community, and the Chairperson of the Human Rights Studies Center at the State University of Medan, cultural experts, and public relations experts.

2.4 Technique of Collecting the Data

Data collection for this research involved a comprehensive approach, including observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and data triangulation. The researcher conducted on-site observations in the Toba Caldera Resort area of the Ajibata sub-district, a focal point of conflict between BPODT and the Sigapiton indigenous community. Notably, Phase I of this area spans 279 hectares, with 120 hectares being contested as customary land by the Sigapiton community. Despite the development of luxurious Glamping facilities and a caldera stage, the Sigapiton indigenous community continues to reside there, maintaining their ancestral structures and way of life.

The researcher's background as a member of the Batak tribe, with prior residence and schooling in the Toba district, facilitated interactions and interviews with residents. Drawing from Moleong's insights (1997), conducting interviews to gather research insights became feasible. Additionally, the researcher closely observed BPODT's operations on the ground and the daily lives of the Sigapiton indigenous community, including their social dynamics and cultural events. This observation extended to the social fabric surrounding Sigapiton indigenous community lands, revealing underlying cultural values.

Moreover, the researcher engaged in meetings with key informants, including BPODT representatives and Sigapiton community leaders, fostering dialogue and information exchange crucial for constructing nuanced perspectives and effective crisis communication strategies. A structured interview guide was employed to ensure comprehensive data collection, supplemented by situational questions to foster rapport and prevent biases during interactions. Establishing a sense of camaraderie, particularly with the Sigapiton community, was paramount to fostering trust and openness.

In parallel, documentary data—comprising written records, visual materials, and statistical data—provided invaluable insights into past events and community dynamics (Moleong, 1997). This documentary analysis complemented observational and interview methods, enhancing the research's robustness and reliability. Leveraging these diverse data sources, the researcher adeptly addressed the research's core objectives, shedding light on the complexities of the conflict and informing potential avenues for resolution.

2.5 Technique of Analyzing the Data

This research represents the culmination of the researcher's knowledge and experience. As the researcher herself, who is also of Toba Batak descent and still has ancestral land in the Toba district, it was confirmed that there is a solid connection to Toba Batak customs and traditions, making it easy to engage with

informants. The researcher aimed to synchronize selected data sources with the research objectives. Data collection processes prioritized the emic perspective, focusing on how informants perceive and interpret their surroundings—accordingly, the dissertation employed methods such as in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation.

Data analysis techniques in this study primarily involved descriptive methods, specifically employing an interactive approach (Miles et al., 2014). According to Sugiyono (2017), data analysis is the systematic process of organizing data obtained from interviews, field notes, and other materials to facilitate understanding and dissemination to others.

2.6 Trustworthiness of the Data

The data validation was conducted by utilizing external sources beyond informant data for cross-checking purposes or as comparative measures against the collected data. This process involves leveraging diverse perceptions to clarify meanings and verify the repetition of observations and interpretations with the principle that no observation or interpretation is 100% replicable. This technique can clarify meanings by identifying varying perspectives on various land conflict phenomena.

During data collection, the researcher simultaneously tested data credibility using various data collection techniques from different data sources. This includes employing different data collection techniques to obtain data from the same source. Utilizing techniques such as participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation for the same data source aims not to ascertain the truth about certain phenomena but to enhance the researcher’s understanding of the presented information.

The collected data undergoes credibility testing. Information authenticity is examined using different data collection techniques. If information is obtained from documents, it will be cross-checked with other documents. If derived from interviews, it will be corroborated with different informants. In this research, data validity will be assessed through interviews with:

1. CEO of BPODT
2. Village Chief of Sigapiton
3. Sigapiton indigenous community members
4. Chairperson of the Human Rights Studies Center at the State University of Medan.
5. Public Relations Expert
6. Cultural Expert

Results and Discussion

Based on direct observation and interviews conducted by the researcher with the BPODT public relations officer, traditional community leaders of Sigapiton, Sigapiton customary community members, BPODT’s CEO, the head of Sigapiton village, and the local government of Toba regency, the observations and interviews yielded the following characteristics:

3.1 The BPODT Officer

Table 3.1. Characteristics of BPODT PR Officer Informants

No	Name	Age	Nationality	Position	Address
1	Jonang Sitorus	63	Indonesia	PR BPODT	BPODT Office

Jonang serves as the spokesperson or PR for BPODT, maintaining intensive communication with the

indigenous community of Sigapiton in conflict resolution. The interview with Jonang involved an official letter from the Department of Communication Sciences addressed to the CEO of BPODT. The meeting took place on June 3, 2023, at the Toba Caldera Resort.

Jonang elucidated that he follows directives from management and governmental regulations, disseminating information to Sigapiton residents about the government’s plans for tourism development in their village through meetings at the village chief’s office. The community responded positively to this news, hoping that tourism development would provide them with income opportunities. BPODT has widely communicated the benefits of the Lake Toba development project to the Sigapiton indigenous community.

Jonang routinely interacts with Sigapiton residents, visiting local establishments and holding small gatherings in their homes to discuss the positive impacts of tourism development. BPODT maintains transparency, openness, and compliance with regulations in its communication with the Sigapiton community. They utilize various communication channels, including direct meetings, discussions with church leaders, and interactions with local government officials.

BPODT emphasizes mutually beneficial solutions, offering employment opportunities, supporting local businesses, and promoting traditional arts performances. They employ persuasive and inclusive messaging to encourage community involvement in tourism development. BPODT holds special discussion forums with Sigapiton residents and frequently meets with them to swiftly address conflicts. Jonang encounters no difficulty in communicating with Sigapiton residents due to their similar cultural backgrounds. BPODT refrains from involvement in Sigapiton ancestral burial sites but has been informed about the community’s land origins. There have been no requests for traditional Batak rituals related to land ownership from either BPODT or the Sigapiton community.

BPODT lacks a specific written plan for conflict management but adheres to government regulations. Despite conflicts, BPODT maintains good relations with Sigapiton residents without seeking to enhance those relations further. Jonang’s role involves disseminating information to build positive perceptions among Sigapiton residents, the public, and the media regarding conflicts and development plans.

Jonang safeguards BPODT’s reputation by providing explanations to residents, the media, and NGOs, ensuring compliance with the law, and respecting indigenous rights. Jonang deems media coverage of conflicts neutral based on sources and their understanding. BPODT provides a united response to issues, following management directives and considering input from Jonang. They adjust communication strategies and actions based on management directives to prevent conflict escalation.

3.2 Sigapiton Indigenous Community

Table 3.2. Characteristics of Informants from Sigapiton Customary Law Community

No	Name	Age	Nationality	Position	Address
1	Mangatas Butar-butar	60	Indonesia	Key Figures in the Sigapiton Customary Law Community	Sigapiton Village
2	Nurpenni butar	56	Indonesia	Sigapiton Indigenous Community	Sigapiton Village
3	Japintar Nadapdap	80	Indonesia	Sigapiton Indigenous Community	Sigapiton Village

a. Informant 1

The researcher commenced observations on March 10, 2023, at 04:00 WIB in the Toba Caldera Resort area. Following a tour of the region, the researcher proceeded to meet Mangatas, whom they knew through Mangatas's husband. Mangatas, a prominent figure in the Sigapiton customary law community, is known for championing the rights of the Sigapiton indigenous people. Despite some attempts at communication by BPODT, the Sigapiton community remains steadfast in its claim to the land, which holds cultural and ancestral significance.

Mangatas showcased a portion of Sigapiton customary land, measuring 120 hectares, now developed as part of the TCR, including his land and the grave of Oppu Odol Butar-butur, an ancestor. However, there are ongoing disputes regarding land ownership, with the Sigapiton community asserting rights to only 81 hectares out of 914 hectares claimed by BPODT.

During subsequent visits, the researcher conducted interviews with Mangatas and other community members. The Sigapiton community expressed discontent with BPODT's communication methods, feeling that they were not adequately informed or consulted about development plans. Despite BPODT's promises of economic benefits, such as employment opportunities, these have not materialized, leading to distrust among the Sigapiton people.

Furthermore, BPODT's lack of cultural understanding and insensitivity towards Sigapiton's heritage sites, including ancestral graves, has exacerbated tensions. The Sigapiton community demands recognition of their rights to the land and meaningful involvement in decision-making processes regarding its development. However, BPODT's communication has often been coercive, and they have failed to address the community's concerns satisfactorily.

Mangatas Butarbutar plays a crucial role in advocating for the Sigapiton community's rights and has engaged with local authorities and BPODT to address the conflict. However, BPODT's responses have been inadequate, relying on empty promises and legal threats rather than genuine dialogue and resolution.

In conclusion, the conflict between BPODT and the Sigapiton indigenous community persists due to inadequate communication, lack of cultural sensitivity, and failure to address the community's legitimate concerns. Without meaningful engagement and acknowledgment of Sigapiton's rights, the dispute is unlikely to be resolved satisfactorily.

b. Informant 2

The researcher conducted further interviews on April 20, 2023, with Nurpenni Butar-butur, a member of the Sigapiton customary law community who experienced direct impacts from the takeover of their plantation land for the TCR development. One such individual, Nurpenni Butar-butur, residing in Sigapiton village, showed the researcher former coffee, pumpkin, and corn fields bulldozed by BPODT. After observing the area, the researcher interviewed Nurpenni, revealing the following findings:

BPODT communicated with the Sigapiton community by directly asserting that Sigapiton land is state-owned forestry land transferred to BPODT for caldera development. The Sigapiton customary law community rejected the land takeover, emphasizing its ancestral significance and condemning BPODT's arbitrary actions. Despite two socialization attempts by BPODT regarding the benefits of Lake Toba's development, the community remained unclear about the outcomes.

The Sigapiton community demanded a resolution that respects their customary rights, including employment opportunities and acknowledgment of their land rights. They criticized BPODT's coercive

and dishonest communication methods and highlighted the cultural gap hindering effective dialogue. The Sigapiton community stressed the importance of their land for sustenance and education, refusing to abandon it due to its ancestral legacy. They accused BPODT of disregarding their cultural heritage and failing to engage in culturally sensitive conflict resolution.

Furthermore, BPODT's disregard for Sigapiton ancestral graves and denial of the community's existence exacerbated tensions. Despite community requests for collaboration and protection of cultural sites and water sources, BPODT persisted in unilateral actions.

Nurpeni, a victim of land expropriation, supported the community's resistance efforts and advocated for transparent and cooperative conflict resolution by BPODT. However, BPODT's representatives, including Arie Prasetyo and Jimmi Panjaitan, only made empty promises without tangible results, worsening the situation.

Overall, BPODT's handling of the conflict was perceived negatively, lacking effective communication and economic consideration for the affected community. As tensions escalated, BPODT's indifference to Sigapiton's history and heritage further alienated the community, leaving unresolved grievances and limited avenues for dialogue.

c. Informant 3

Researchers conducted further interviews on April 21, 2023, with the Sigapiton customary law community, who felt the direct impact of land takeover for the TCR development by Janpintar Nadapdap. Janpintar, a resident of Sigapiton village, expressed enthusiasm when asked about the history of the Sigapiton customary law community, from the opening of village land by their ancestors to agriculture in the area. However, he showed sadness when questioned about the land conflicts between the Sigapiton customary law community and BPODT. BPODT communicated directly to the community, claiming Sigapiton land as state forest land handed over to BPODT for TCR development. The Sigapiton community rejected the land takeover and protested. BPODT conducted two socialization sessions about tourism development in Lake Toba but did not address the community's concerns about the benefits. The community felt that BPODT withheld information, manipulated situations, and acted without transparency. Communication with BPODT was challenging, with only direct meetings available. The Sigapiton community sought resolution by recognizing Sigapiton as their ancestral land and demanded fair benefits from TCR development. BPODT's approach to conflict resolution was perceived as coercive, ignoring cultural nuances and ancestral heritage. The Sigapiton community valued their land as their livelihood source and resisted leaving despite partial land loss. Some community members, like Mangatas Togi Butar-butur and others, spearheaded resistance. While supportive of Lake Toba's development, they demanded respect for their customs, including protecting ancestral graves and water sources. Janpintar suggested resolving conflicts through listening, openness, and honesty from BPODT, clarifying collaboration benefits. BPODT officials, including Arie Prasetyo and Jimmi Panjaitan, made promises without fulfillment. BPODT's communication did not improve conditions; they claimed Sigapiton land as state-owned, seeking support without explaining direct benefits. The community viewed BPODT's conflict management poorly, feeling the economic strain from lost agricultural land. The conflict escalated without resolution, with BPODT perceived as indifferent to the community's history and rights, resorting to legal threats resulting in community members' imprisonment. Communication difficulties persisted, and there was no dedicated forum for community input to BPODT.

3.3 Toba Local Government

Table 3.3. The characteristics of informants from the Toba Regional Government

No	Name	Age	Nationality	Position	Address
1	Agus Sitorus	50	Indonesia	Regional Secretary of Toba District	Balige

The interview conducted with Agus Sitorus, the Secretary of the Toba district government, sheds light on his involvement in addressing the conflict between BPODT and the Sigapiton customary law community. Agus, being a part of the local government, is well-versed in the communication strategies employed by BPODT regarding Sigapiton’s customary land regulations. The interview underscores the adherence of the regional government to laws recognizing Sigapiton’s land rights, emphasizing compliance with Ministerial Regulation No. 32 of 2014 and Regional Regulation No. 1 of 2020. Moreover, the local government’s stance on the conflict demonstrates respect for legal processes and the demands of the Sigapiton customary law community. Their role extends to safeguarding Sigapiton’s customary land rights through socialization and verification processes, aiming for collaborative land use with the community. The government’s support for BPODT’s development initiatives, particularly the Tourism Special Economic Zone (TCR), reflects a commitment to economic growth while involving local stakeholders. Coordination between BPODT and the local government, alongside various administrative bodies, underscores a concerted effort to expedite conflict resolution through dialogue. Furthermore, the government’s recognition of Sigapiton’s land rights, contingent upon administrative criteria and regulations, signifies a nuanced approach to community empowerment. Efforts such as socialization and collaboration with Sigapiton’s customary law community in rural tourism development highlight a multifaceted strategy for sustainable development. Additionally, the interview reveals the government’s awareness of the economic benefits of the TCR initiative for Sigapiton’s community, albeit acknowledging the challenge posed by their desire for land ownership in TCR development. Overall, the interview underscores the local government’s comprehensive approach to conflict resolution, intertwining legal compliance, community engagement, and economic considerations to navigate the complexities of land rights while fostering sustainable development.

3.4 Discussion

3.4.1 Crisis Communication Strategy of Lake Toba Authority Agency in Handling Land Conflict with Sigapiton Indigenous Community

According to Hofstede (1984) Calif”, ”publisher”:”Sage”, ”publisher-place”:”Beverly Hills, Calif”, ”title”:”Culture’s Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values”, ”author”:{{”family”:”Hofstede”, ”given”:”G.”}}, ”issued”:{”date-parts”:[”1984”]}}, ”schema”:”https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json”} , culture is the “collective programming of the mind” that guides individuals’ interactions with each other and with organizations. Culture consists of a system of meanings adopted by specific groups to interpret and act upon reality (Banks, 2000). Individuals’ reactions to messages are heavily influenced by their beliefs, values, and culture. When humans interact, they do so based on a network of cultural values closely intertwined with tradition (Stohl, 2000)

Based on the researcher’s findings as per observations and interviews, this study primarily focuses on how cultural backgrounds influence crisis perceptions and crisis communication strategies. Cultural elements permeate every aspect of a crisis. As expressed by Sriramesh & Duhé (2009), culture, in fact,

should be seen as a series of public relations and global market practices.

Community interconnectedness is a crucial element for crisis communication management in finding crisis communication strategies in this study, looking at cultural elements because communication strategies are influenced by cultural perceptions and values that help individuals create reality through meanings derived from situations (Eisenberg & Riley, 2000). Cultural values alter individuals' ways of thinking, assessing situations, and communicating (Banks, 2000; Hall, 1976). In the global business environment, cultural understanding is a crucial tool for successful communication and building relationships between organizations and audiences. Thus, understanding culture influences intercultural communication within BPODT in handling land conflict.

Intercultural communication, especially face-to-face interaction for the Sigapiton indigenous community, is a form of polite communication that can encourage behavioral change. The communication required by the community utilizes respect and friendship, a tone that combines respect and friendship and balances silence with speech. The community tends to avoid formal expressions of respect and refrain from giving direct negative responses. This aligns with the researcher's findings that the community struggles to communicate with BPODT due to the lack of a communication forum connecting the community and BPODT. The community can only communicate with BPODT when there is an official or formal invitation from BPODT.

Changes in community behavior due to BPODT communication effects can become points of conflict. This is supported by research conducted by Hong-Xoan & Earl (2020) particularly involving conflict with their superiors. South Korea is Vietnam's largest investor and the Southern Key Economic Zone hosts the majority of 1252 projects and 70,000–80,000 South Koreans working in Vietnam. This paper reports on a mixed methods data set comprising 356 survey responses and nine in-depth interviews of Vietnamese workers at South Korean companies in Binh Duong province. According to workers, the main causes of conflict in workplace interactions with Korean managers are 'differences in working culture' – especially about workplace time use – and 'attitude differences'. The most popular solution from both sides is to apologise. However, workers report frequently remaining silent when they are verbally abused. This research shows that intercultural communication is an ongoing and dynamic interpersonal process that is influenced by social, contextual and individual factors.”,”container-title”:”Journal of Asian and African Studies”,”DOI”:”10.1177/0021909620935423”,”ISSN”:”0021-9096, 1745-2538”,”issue”:”6”,”journalAbbreviation”:”Journal of Asian and African Studies”,”language”:”en”,”page”:”832-847”,”source”:”DOI.org (Crossref about behavioral changes arising from intercultural communication between Vietnamese and South Korean people, which becomes a point of conflict, thus requiring an examination of cultural characteristics in both countries using Hofstede's perspective. In this dissertation, the researcher also applies Hofstede's perspective to examine the cultural characteristics of the Sigapiton indigenous community. In this study, the cultural characteristic to be examined is local culture.

As explained earlier, it has been elucidated that the culture of the Sigapiton indigenous community is one of high collectivism, emphasizing relationships among individuals within the group, emphasizing interdependence, and emphasizing individual goals for the group's welfare. As Hall (1981) pointed out, culture is contextual, meaning that each culture has its specific cultural characteristics, cultural system, and functions within a particular group, learned through experiences, so when cultures differ, communication practices will also differ, and crisis response strategies are also contextual. The same applies to the communication crisis experienced by BPODT.

To understand the communication crisis with the Sigapiton indigenous community, it is necessary to understand the cultural context more deeply. The following are Hofstede's cultural dimension concepts that can unravel the cultural characteristics of the Sigapiton indigenous community, which can then formulate strategies to respond to communication crises between BPODT and the Sigapiton indigenous community.

a. Power Distance

The crisis communication of BPODT demonstrates a high level of power distance. Power distance reflects the degree to which a culture believes in how organizational power and institutional power are distributed among cultural members in a balanced manner and how power holders view decision-making as either challenging or accepting. This power distance in the conflict is felt by the community, which perceives itself as weak when facing BPODT as representatives of the government, assuming that the law will favor BPODT. This aligns with the researcher's findings that not all members of the community are brave enough to defend their ancestral land due to fear of imprisonment or legal consequences, as expressed by Mangatas and Janpitar.

The emergence of this crisis was precipitated by the community's demand to clarify the status of Sigapiton land as indigenous customary land, as during the development process of the Toba Caldera Resort, the community was disturbed by statements that Sigapiton land was forest land already claimed by BPODT. Consequently, in carrying out the development, the community was asked to vacate the Sigapiton land. This led to the anger of the Sigapiton indigenous community, ultimately resulting in larger-scale protests, including public demonstrations by Sigapiton community groups and women expressing their opposition. Consequently, negative perceptions of BPODT's image were widely spread by the media. Subsequently, the community perceived that BPODT was using its power to take over their land by intimidating the people with legal threats. This indicates that the Sigapiton indigenous community exhibits high power distance tendencies.

b. Uncertainty Avoidance

The protests and actions of the Sigapiton indigenous community indicate a high level of uncertainty avoidance. Based on the researcher's findings from observations and interviews with the community, they seek certainty regarding the status of Sigapiton land from BPODT and certainty about the benefits the community will derive from the development of the Toba Caldera Resort.

c. Individualism-Collectivism

The Sigapiton indigenous community has a distinct civilization characterized by a high level of collectivism. They live in groups that prioritize the group's interests and care for each individual within the group. Consistent with the researcher's findings, they speak with one voice when refusing to leave Sigapiton land. When one member of the group is disadvantaged by the takeover of their plantation land by BPODT in the TCR development, other group members join in the protest. Based on this, BPODT needs to consider how to communicate with a community that values collectivism.

d. Masculinity-Femininity

Generally, the Toba Batak community is characterized by masculine culture due to its adherence to a patrilineal kinship system. Masculine culture emphasizes assertiveness, competition, and material success, while feminine culture values quality of life, interdependence, interpersonal relationships, and care for the weak. The high level of action in defending Sigapiton land demonstrates a high level of

masculinity. The Sigapiton indigenous community desires recognition of the fact that Sigapiton land is their ancestral heritage. For the Batak people, inheritance is passed down to sons. As per the researcher's findings, the traditional or opinion leader in the Sigapiton indigenous community is male. With a high level of masculinity, the Sigapiton indigenous community seeks certainty/assertiveness in addressing existing issues.

3.4.2 Crisis Communication Strategies of Dalihan Na Tolu

The Crisis Communication Strategy of Dalihan Na Tolu Based on the Integration of Sigapiton Community Culture in the Conflict Framework and the Concept of Sigapiton Indigenous Community Culture is further deepened with the perspective of Hofstede, revealing that the integrative style is suitable for conflict resolution. This integrative style incorporates compromise to integrate face-to-face negotiation and the need for a solution. It is hoped that both BPODT and the Sigapiton indigenous community involved in the conflict will find the best solution for both parties (win-win solution). The Integrative Style involves active listening, respecting each other's feelings, and providing one's perspective to those assisting in negotiations. With this integrative style, the researcher found that the Dalihan Na Tolu crisis communication strategy is feasible for BPODT in handling conflicts, as the Sigapiton indigenous community still firmly holds onto their cultural values, as stated by Agus, the District Secretary of Toba, that BPODT and the Sigapiton indigenous community need to approach conflict resolution with local wisdom. Thus, Dalihan Na Tolu is a local wisdom that is always present in every aspect of Toba Batak community life to maintain harmonious living conditions.

Dalihan Na Tolu can also be interpreted as "three hearths" and is upheld as a cultural value system that guides orientation, perception, and definition of reality. From this definition, it is known that three elements must be adhered to: (1) *Hula-hula*, which refers to kinships from the wife's family, such as in-laws, sister-in-law, and others. (2) *Kahanggi* or *dongan tubu*, which refers to a group of people of the same lineage in one village, such as a father, older brother, younger brother, and others. (3) *Anak boru*, which refers to sisters from the father's lineage. Each of these elements has its function and role based on inherited customs.

Hula-hula is highly respected in its position and is known as *somba marhula-hula*. Similarly, *anak boru* is always obliged to follow, but those who want to give orders must do so gently, known as *elek marboru* or softly. *Kahanggi* or *dongan tubu* is referred to as *dongan marbada* or comrades in fighting, so one must be clever in dealing with them, known as *manat mardongan tubu*.

With the principle of Dalihan Na Tolu, the Batak community can form harmonious relationships with each other. The position of each element is not fixed and can change at any time due to marriage. Each element must uphold its role and show respect based on its position in Dalihan Na Tolu. This obligation is known as *partuturon*. Despite their respective positions, the presence of the three elements in Dalihan Na Tolu cannot be separated. In any situation, all three have the same obligation to help each other and find solutions to existing problems. Input is adjusted according to the capacity or role of each element and is done through a deliberation process.

The crisis communication strategy of Dalihan Na Tolu, implemented by Na tolu, which BPODT can utilize in handling this conflict, is a strategy that applies the core principles of related philosophy, namely a bond of brotherhood and cooperation to carry out conflict resolution strategies. Through this, BPODT must appoint individuals who are respected and authoritative figures within the community as

trusted Public Relations (PR) officers. These chosen PR officers understand the culture of the Sigapiton indigenous community by considering the philosophy of Dalihan Na Tolu, thus creating a win-win solution to the land conflict. They become the forefront and conduit of BPODT in delivering messages and information directly and intensively to the community. Their task is to convey messages about the benefits of TCR development to the community and also to act as intermediaries between the community and BPODT in conveying messages to BPODT.

This relates to communication theory as articulated by Grunig & Hunt (1984), where crisis communication strategies align with the excellence theory, emphasizing the two-way symmetry model in the form of effective public relations programs. This program involves negotiation, compromise, bargaining, listening, and engaging in dialogue. The organization then understands what the public wants and needs, and the public, in turn, understands the organization's needs and desires. Thus, PR personnel in this context must have the knowledge and capacity to provide solutions when members of the community seek advice based on the values of Dalihan Na Tolu.

To carry out the PR function, adhering to Dalihan Na Tolu values, such as carefully considering to whom the message is addressed and how it is delivered, is crucial. This is important due to the strong kinship or *partuturon* relationships within the Sigapiton indigenous community system. In facing this, PR personnel require assistance from opinion leaders from the Sigapiton indigenous community who can influence the thinking of the community, thereby increasing the likelihood of the community's trust in BPODT's development.

Conclusion

This research emphasizes the complex relationship between culture and various aspects of crisis, highlighting the importance of cultural background in influencing crisis perspectives and communication tactics in times of crisis. This emphasis takes the form of considering how critical cultural norms and community cohesion are in crisis communication management, especially in problems related to residents with certain cultures, such as the Sigapiton village community.

The Sigapiton community's devotion to cultural norms and strong collectivist orientation have a significant impact on the way they communicate and handle emergencies. So even though the government has good intentions to develop the village, the government, in this case BPODT, cannot act clearly without considering the cultural context of the surrounding community. This is proven because of a land conflict related to the construction of the TCR by BPODT. Furthermore, in this research, it was found that power inequality had a significant influence on the dynamics of disputes because the community considered themselves powerless compared to BPODT's authority.

So, this study clarifies the cultural intricacies that influence crisis communication strategies by using Hofstede's cultural dimensions, namely power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individuality vs collectivism, and masculinity vs femininity. Derived from the Dalihan Na Tolu culture, integrative conflict resolution has the potential to encourage dialogue and reach mutually beneficial solutions because the Dalihan Na Tolu principles are the philosophical foundation of the Sigapiton community.

Dalihan Na Tolu's crisis communications approach can provide BPODT with a framework to handle culturally sensitive disputes skillfully. This could also be a starting point for BPODT to improve communication, build trust, and encourage meaningful conversations with the Sigapiton community by appointing respected community members as community relations officers in accordance with the Dalihan Na Tolu concept. All parties can also successfully handle crises, resolve disputes, and foster strong relationships with various groups by embracing cultural awareness and employing appropriate communication tactics, such as applying Dalihan Na Tolu to these conflicts.

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This is part of doctoral dissertation of the first author and under supervision of the co-authors of this article. The doctoral dissertation is submitted to Universitas Sumatera Utara.

Authorship and Level of Contribution

Tetti Nauli Panjaitan conducted the research, analyzed the data, and wrote the draft of the manuscript. Humaizi, Iskandar Zulkarnain, and Syukur Kholil write the draft and revised the article.

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