

LOCAL COMMUNITIES AS ASPIRED PLACES: CONCERNS OF SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AMONG EASTERN INDONESIAN STUDENTS IN JAVA

Paulus Bagus Sugiyono

University of Bielefeld, Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology, Bielefeld, Germany

Background: Owing to persistent inequalities in access to higher education across Indonesia, many students from the eastern regions should leave their respective home villages and go to Java in the western part of the country to pursue higher studies. While existing literature has largely examined the sociopolitical dynamics shaping their experiences of educational mobility within the country, far less attention has been devoted to their future aspirations.

Objective: This study therefore investigates how students from eastern Indonesia envision their participation in the labour market in the country and the motivations underlying their choices.

Subjects and methods: It focuses on students from regions commonly positioned at the political, economic, and social margins of the nation, such as East Nusa Tenggara, North Maluku, Maluku, and Papua, through a seven-month ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Yogyakarta, one of Indonesia's foremost centres of higher education in Java, between July 2025 and January 2026.

Results: The findings suggest that, throughout their educational mobility journeys, these students construct a form of 'collective imagination' around the idea of returning to their home villages, not out of disillusionment, but out of a deep sense of self-care, commitment, and dedication. Their aspirations foreground concerns related to both the social environment and psychological wellbeing by emphasising three key dimensions of human ecology, which are environment, behaviour, and biology. Within their local communities in their home villages, the students perceived to have a balanced set of aspirations, connecting between familiarity of sociocultural ties and characteristics and a willingness to contribute to their home villages later as returning graduates.

Conclusion: This orientation is likely to create more favourable psychological wellbeing and overall mental health. In this regard, their understanding and imaginary of future participation in the nation reflects a preference for pursuing more biocultural gains through working in their home villages, despite various challenges, rather than prioritising merely economic ones.

Keywords: Educational mobility; Future aspirations; Human ecology; Social environment; Psychological wellbeing.

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