Historic Urban Landscape: Its Possibilities and Challenges in Banda Aceh

Era Nopera Rauzi1*, Cut Dewi

1Department of Architecture and Planning, Faculty of Engineering, University of Syiah Kuala, Darussalam, Banda Aceh 23111, Indonesia
*Corresponding Author: era.rauzi@unsyiah.ac.id

Abstract

Cultural landscape view purely comes from local community activities that should be part of urban design planning. It is the tension between our live-in world concepts contained in the city image. Banda Aceh is one of the largest historical city in Indonesia that is rich in historic relics such as buildings, parks and inscriptions since the Dutch colonial period coupled with traditional Acehnese buildings. As time passes, significant changes occur following the development of culture and government policy. In addition, the landscape planning influenced by natural factors such as vulnerable disasters for instance earthquakes and tsunamis that ever hit Banda Aceh thirteen years ago. In this paper, we tried to access the possibilities and challenges to build a historic urban landscape in Banda Aceh city.

Keywords: Cultural landscape; historic urban landscape; landscape

INTRODUCTION

Historic Urban Landscape (HUL)

Over thirty years ago Donald Meinig (1979:1) proposed that ‘Landscape is an attractive, important, and ambiguous term [that] encompasses an ensemble of ordinary features which constitute an extraordinarily rich exhibit of the course and character of any society’ and that ‘Landscape is defined by our vision and interpreted by our minds’ (ibid: 3). In other words, to understand ourselves we need to look searchingly at our landscapes for they are a clue to culture (Lewis 1979), and our ordinary everyday landscapes at that, not just the national icons.

The historic urban landscape approach explained how local context could sense human attachment to landscape and place as identity and symbol of its own culture. Landscape from its beginnings therefore has meant a human –made artefact with associated cultural process values. It is a holistic view of landscape with its morphology resulting from interplay between cultural values, customs and land-use practices (Wylie). The assumption that is often made that ‘cultural landscape’ is only to do with agricultural settings is misplaced: it is concerned with all human places and the process of making them and inhabiting them. Landscape and power aims to absorb these approaches into a more comprehensive model that would ask not just what landscape ‘is’ or ‘means’, but what it does, how it works as cultural practice (Mitchell). The cultural landscape construct proposes that heritage places are not isolated island and that there is an interdependence between people, social structures and the landscape (Taylor).

A common denominator in this is human attachment to landscape and how we find identity in landscape and place. Change over the last twenty-five years has occurred in how the construct of ‘landscape’ is interpreted. Building on Cosgrove’s (1984) reflection that landscape is not simply what we see, but a way of seeing and Meinig’s (1979) averment that we see it with our eye but interpret it with our mind, our understanding of landscapes as complex social settings has expanded (Taylor). UNESCO convened a conference in Vienna in May 2005 following concern of the World Heritage Committee to discuss impacts of modern developments on historic areas and compatibility with the protection of their heritage values. Special focus was given to cities inscribed on the World Heritage List with the Committee having expressed concern at the increasing impact of modern or high rise constructions in historic cities. At a Conference in Vienna in May 2005, UNESCO issued the document, Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture. It proposed the notion of Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) as a tool to reinterpret the values of urban heritage, and indicated the need to identify new approaches and new tools for urban conservation.
According to UNESCO mandate, in 2010, The Historic Urban Landscape approach moves beyond the preservation of the physical environment and focuses on the entire human environment with all of its tangible and intangible qualities. It seeks to increase the sustainability of planning and design interventions by taking into account the existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-economic and environmental factors along with local community values. Moreover, recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape: Final Draft; for consideration for approval at UNESCO General Conference in October 2011. The historic urban landscape is the urban area understood as the result of a historic layering of cultural and natural values and attributes, extending beyond the notion of “historic centre” or “ensemble” to include the broader urban context and its geographical setting. The HUL concept places itself within a wider conservation approach, rather than simply focusing on the conservation of historic buildings, to include the idea of the city as a layering of significances, identities, and values, and to acknowledge the integration of intangible aspects of urban culture (Taylor, 2011, p. 5).

The Historic Urban Landscape approach moves beyond the preservation of the physical environment and focuses on the entire human environment with all of its tangible and intangible qualities. It seeks to increase the sustainability of planning and design interventions by taking into account the existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-economic and environmental factors along with local community values. Therefore, it is complicated to build a city image in urban settings whereas collective identities of various groups are pluralistic and change through time.

The relation between culture and environment is a two-way process: is aggregate and over time, people’s choices create distinctive local cultures that both shape environments and are symbolized within that environment, with the environments created both reinforcing and representing that culture (Carmona, et al., 2010). For instance, the development of city both intangible and tangible aspects are gradually eliminating the identity of the local cultural heritage because of trending of urban imagery that looks futuristic and modern. The aims of this research is to find the possibilities for local tradition to be reflected as symbol of city identity along with its challenges to make it become real.

**Banda Aceh as Historical City in Indonesia**

According to ancient manuscripts and historical records, Banda Aceh was named as Aceh Darussalam Kingdom that was built after the collapse of Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms. The tomb of Sultan Firman Shah who is grandson of Sultan Johan Syah that was discovered in Gampong Pande revealed Banda Aceh is the capital of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. It was built on Friday, the 1st of Ramadan 601 H (April 22, 1205 AD) by Sultan Johan Syah after successfully conquering the Indra Purba Kingdom with its capital Bandar Lamuri. On March 16th, 1874, after the assault on second Aggression of the Dutch in the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam, Van Swieten who was Governor-General in Batavia affirmed it as Kutaraja which was a symbol of Colonialism. Finally, after 89 years Kutaraja passed, according to the Decree of the Minister of Public Administration and Regional Autonomy dated May 9, 1963 No. Dec 52/1 / 43-43, Banda Aceh officially became the name of the capital of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province until now.

Banda Aceh has vary historical heritage sites such as mesjid, cemeteries, royal gardens, whereas Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman is the center of Banda Aceh city. Following Graham et al’s (2000) idea of place and scale in heritage, architectural heritage is located at a local or specific scale of urban landscape, in which personal and public memories and identities tied and attached to its fabric. This may, however also overlap with political, social, economic uses and values of heritage. In the absence of physicality, therefore, people still remember the past; as long as other aspects are present. A place, thus, according Relph (1976), has three main components: physical components, observable activities, and symbols and meanings; while a site is a more tangible aspect of place (Smith, 2006, p.78).

In several hundred years ago, the Mesjid Baiturrahman located within royal complex surrounded by green open space as shows in Figure 1. As time goes by, changes and developments has been happened complying change of power from Hindu/Buddhist Kingdom to Dutch Kingdom and then to be part of Indonesia.

Banda Aceh, to the local government, is Pusaka Jejak Sejarah Islam, an Islamic historic heritage trail, which is clearly mentioned in Rencana Aksi Kota Pusaka/RAKP (the action for historic city planning) below:

“Banda Aceh was a capital city of the first Islamic Kingdom in Southeast Asia…which had a highly civilized society in Asia, even amongst the top five big Kingdoms in the world. The Aceh Kingdom was very famous in the world which left many historical and cultural assets…..Reviewing the long history of Banda Aceh and the result of heritage listing owned by Banda Aceh, the Banda Aceh Government is motivated to participate in the program Penataan dan Penelitian Kota Pusaka/P3KP (Historic City Conservation)

Daly and Rahmayati (2012) argue that the importance of heritage lies in its physical setting, along with social and cultural aspects of recovery. For them, communities need landscape that represents their cultural understanding of long term processes, as well as material places to contain activities contributing to resilience.

**Urban Landscape Development and Identity**

The development of urban landscape may change identity of a place by cover it with local culture or vice versa. In 2005 UNESCO proposed the notion of Historic Urban Landscape (Taylor, 2011, p. 4). The HUL concept places itself within a wider conservation approach, rather than simply focusing on the conservation of historic buildings, to include the idea of the city as a layering of significances, identities, and values, and to acknowledge the integration of intangible aspects of urban culture (Taylor, 2011, p. 5). A ‘‘landscape-based approach, such as the HUL approach, is predicted to be the upcoming heritage management path. It is also considered as, a key indicator for sustainable urban development. ‘‘The ‘historic urban landscapes’ concept connects both tangible and intangible heritage components. It also considers the town or urban area as a process, rather than as an object’’. This link between tangible and intangible elements is the main threshold to the upcoming theories in the conservation movement process (Rodwell, 2010).

As Hayden (1997, p. 9) states, “Urban landscapes are storehouses of social memories, because natural features such as hills or harbors, as well as streets, buildings, and patterns of settlement, frame the lives of many people and often outlast many lifetimes”. For instance, religious buildings have served as shelter, meeting point, etc. in the face of calamity (Sugimoto & Sagayaraj, 2011). In Aceh, the mesjid and meunasah have served as places where communal decision making about recovery was made (Daly & Rahmayati, 2012). In this research, we takes Banda Aceh city as sample, Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman was part of Aceh Darussalam Kingdom’s landscape which nowadays the Kingdom is no longer physically exist. However, times turn Mesjid Raya as symbol and identity of Banda Aceh or known as Aceh Darussalam Kingdom in the past. This phenomena shows how an urban landscape development can keep memories of a place even though just part of it last.

**KEY ISSUES: POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES**

The HUL recommendations define the wider context of the historic area to include five physical elements as follow: (1) The site’s morphology, geomorphology, hydrology and natural features; (2) Its built environment, whether historic or contemporary; (3) Its infrastructures both above and below ground; (4) Its “open spaces” and gardens, its “land use patterns” and “spatial organization”; (5) Perceptions and visual relationships; and all other elements of “urban structure” (Hoda Zeayter, et.al., 2017,p.9). In this research, we tried to access the possibilities and challenges to build a historic urban landscape in Banda Aceh city through fourth point that is related to open spaces, gardens, land use patterns and spatial organization.

The opportunity to develop HUL in Indonesia widely open because of UNESCO mandate, in 2010, during Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s Presidency, following global heritage conservation trends, a new improved legislative apparatus, law No.11 year 2010, was announced by Indonesian Governemnt. What
is defined as heritage in this legal framework, however, still refers to fifty-year old material culture. Yet the category of ‘heritage items’, besides items included in the 1995 heritage law, has been expanded to include the concept of areas and landscapes. In addition, in this law people or community obtain a right to manage and own heritage, since UNESCO and local experts have encouraged the incorporation of communities in managing heritage. The new heritage legislation gives the same mandate of involvement, responsibility, and authority to local governments in managing heritage. This corrected the previous law, seen by Rath (1997) as pushing for unity of culture, while ignoring regional cultures that cannot fit into the central government’s definition of “unity in diversity”. This new law acknowledges different levels of heritage lists ranging from national to provincial and local level (See article 17 of Indonesian Heritage Legislation no.11 year 2010). This shifts the authoritative right to list and designate heritage from a minister and central government to governors, regents, and mayors, who have rights to list and delist heritage which is significant for their level of responsibilities. An expert team of “national heritage experts” with certification, which was recently formed by the announcement of the Minister of Culture and Tourism Decree No. 29/P/2012, helps the central government in listing heritage.

Possibilities

UNESCO in the World Heritage Convention 1972 strongly influenced local government to have its own heritage expert team and developed legal definition of heritage framework. Heritage is material culture and nationally significant (UNESCO, 1972). The reasons to follow UNESCO’s understanding and to join this organization for Indonesia are not only for funding reasons (Winarni & Wahjudin, 2000), but also for international acknowledgement as a country which cares about heritage.

The most important activity of heritage conservation in Banda Aceh was the involvement of Banda Aceh in Program Penataan dan Pelestarian Kota Pusaka/P3KP (the heritage city planning and conservation program) initiated by the Ministry of Public Works and Badan Pelestarian Pusaka Indonesia/BPPI (Indonesia Heritage Trust). This program is also noted as one of the heritage programs in Indonesia that is not initiated by Badan Pelestarian Cagar Budaya/BPCB (the Conservation Board for Cultural Remains). It is an old and influential heritage government board in Indonesia which has a direct inheritance of the legacy of the Dutch heritage institution, and is dominated by archaeologists. We reviewed according to the involvement of Banda Aceh local government as possibilities in developing HUL to restore local tradition and cultural value of Banda Aceh in the future.

Architects and urban planners dominate P3KP, since its aims focused on HUL arrangements and spatial planning, which is included in HUL recommendations of physical elements to define wider context of the historic area. For the Banda Aceh government this program creates an opportunity to promote and announce the heritage assets in Banda Aceh, which had been ignored during conflicts, and to gain significant funding for developing the city through heritage conservation. Heritage, especially public monumental heritage, has for a long time been a concern of state, which is demonstrated in a state driven system (Smith, 2006) like urban planning and architectural heritage designation (Ashworth, 1991). The selection of eligible cities is decided by the central government via a committee. Guidelines for writing a proposal and action plan have been also set by the central government through “Modul Penyusunan Proposal P3KP (Guidelines for formulating P3KP proposal)” and Modul Penyusunan Rencana Aksi Kota Pusaka (Guidelines for formulating P3KP Action Plan).

Banda Aceh government, its conceptualization and mobilization of a ‘proud Islamic past’ is central to this program, which is clearly stated in the proposal P3KP which promotes the Masjid Raya Baiturrahman and Gampong Pande, an old Islamic area which is an original part of Banda Aceh (see Bappeda, 2012). This program is possibility to restore Aceh Darussalam Kingdom’s landscape which is realized through approaches of HUL and revive local and Islamic culture in Banda Aceh city which is known as Serambi Mekkah as well.
Challenges

According to Orbasli (2000), the urban conservation had three interrelated objectives: physical by adapting the townscape, spatial by the efficient use of spaces and the viability of the circulation and traffic, and social that concerns the users, local community, and the urban population. For Banda Aceh city, rapid development especially for Masjid Raya Baiturrahman area started after December 2004 when tsunami devastated almost all the city center. The images show comparison before and after tsunami occurred. As shown below, before December 2004 the area of Masjid Raya surrounding by green open spaces and Taman Sari (garden). However, after thirteen years later it changed by having permanent concrete cover the front yard of Masjid Raya Baiturrahman and permanent buildings and walls in Taman Sari garden. This images illustrate how a place could be developed. As we reviewed by access it with HUL criteria, it comes to be challenges to adapting local scape to identified as if the place contain local value or not. It also shows how in thirteen years, the city image can instantly change otherwise.

Figure 2 Setellite image of transformation landscape of Masjid Baiturrahman in year 2004, 2005 and 2017
Source: Google Earth
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to characteristics mentioned in UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape are broader territorial and landscape context; and layering and intertwining of cultural and natural values over time. What we can see in Banda Aceh city is hardly contain landscape context, cultural and natural values. This statement comes from observation of open spaces, gardens, land use patterns and spatial organization. As shown in Figure 3 that historical sites are the legacy of the Dutch colonial government heritage which proof that HUL area in Banda Aceh city that the pattern is not centralized but in circle. Furthermore, land use patterns and spatial organization transformed to be separated which cutting roads that connecting places with different function such as market, garden and shops. Mostly the buildings still remain in colonial styles in border area.

Figure 3 Historical sites around Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman
Source : Google Earth

Conclusions

This research tried to access the possibilities and challenges based on criteria of UNESCO recommendation to define historic area to build a historic urban landscape in Banda Aceh city. As the results show on one hand possibilities to build HUL in Banda Aceh through local government program of P3KP and project to promote Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman as an old Islamic area by Bappeda. On the other hand, challenges comes from rapid development in last thirteen years which indirectly built up buildings covering green yard surrounding Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman which is one of symbolic area in Banda Aceh city that can reflect glorious times of Aceh Darussalam Kingdom.

REFERENCES


Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 11 Tentang Cagar Budaya (2010).

