Contesting Historic Urban Space: Dispute Over Heritage Conservation of Colonial Alun-Alun in Serang, Indonesia

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Abstract. Urban preservation program in many cities has been challenged by particular interests and heterogeneous perspectives towards the idea of building a modern city. The dispute often rises over uncertain controversial spatial planning to erect any new large structure on historic urban space. In the case of colonial alun-alun of Serang, the issue occurred when the city ex-mayor designed to build a new Masjid Agung (Great Mosque) on the remaining empty spaces of alun-alun, amidst the pros and cons amongst urban activists, religious groups, and community. Contrary to all expectations, due to the political regime changes, the new government deals with the former idea by collaborating together with university team by justifying in academic attitude to assess the feasibility of the alun-alun to bear such project. The results instead indicated the un-feasibility of it, primarily due to its registered later status as cagar budaya (cultural heritage). It certainly triggered more disputes following the unsatisfactory comments, heated debates and rebuttals during the open presentation session with the government and public citizens of Serang city. This article hence is the proceeding of authors’ experiences after conducting the feasibility study for 2 (two) months, by discussing and encouraging extensive views about the dynamics of power relations involving academics, bureaucrats, and urban citizens in contesting the historic urban space as urban heritage beyond the ‘scientific’ study. Therefore, besides putting efforts on mere analysis the importance of alun-alun of Serang and its heritage values, this article also inclines to underline the intentions of local strategies in utilizing preservation issues as tools throughout political decisions for succeeding multiple aims. The research method then investigates the prescribed regulations, law, urban policies and its implementations in regards with the spatial planning and preservation actions in the level of city. The result of this research is also expected to exemplify the conservation process of colonial alun-alun as an architectural element, urban space, and cultural heritage in local cities of Indonesia.

1. Introduction

The city of Serang in Banten Province has a slogan known as the ‘Kota Serang Madani’, refers to the name origin of Madinah (or Arabic as mudunun, a city) to be an example of prominent civilized Islamic city throughout history. The enthusiasm for this slogan is probably identified with the character and nuances of the Islamic image and perception in the city, given the long history of the city development, large populations and the role of muslim communities as majority who have been forming their spaces until today’s contemporary times. The mosque building primarily becomes a concrete physical evidence which is considered representing the characteristic of the ‘Madani City’.
Besides, the rising populations following the need for extending volume and number of prayer spaces, where until now, Serang does not yet have a so-called modern grandeur mosque anew in its city centre. The municipal government of Serang in 2018 was planning the construction of a new mosque which can become the central mosque for Serang. The construction of the Great Mosque of Serang City refers to the spirit of building the order of Islamic city space in the direction of its vision and identity. Serang as the capital city of Banten Province is ought to have a represented worship building facility with adequate infrastructure.

![Figure 1. The bird-eye view images of the masterplan of Grand Mosque of Serang](source: Dinas Pekerjaan Umum dan Penataan Ruang Kota Serang, 2018)

However, obstacles and the on-going dynamic debates emerge since the early phase of appointing the site plan. The problem was raised a lot especially when the ex-mayor of Serang city, Haerul Jaman, chose the site exactly on the empty space of alun-alun, which is alleged to contain numerous values of historical, cultural, social and environmental. The square of alun-alun also functions a public open space that is important element in community’s urban spaces. It have played an important role with its relationship to the city development since the precolonial sultanate, colonial administrative, until the postcolonial period in Indonesia. It was one of the results of early modern urban space development carried out by the Dutch colonies since the late 19th century. On the other hand, several people who agreed to implement the project have presented thoughts that the situated alun-alun in the city centre reflects importance of displaying the very first impression of city image, and the construction of mosque was assumed to strengthen the identity on city centre following the slogan of ‘Kota Serang Madani’. [1]

The dispute often rises over uncertain controversial spatial planning to erect any new large structure on historic urban space. This also indicates that urban preservation program in many cities has been challenged by particular interests and heterogeneous perspectives on how a modern city should be built. Looking at the dynamic views above, it is a need to properly have a justifiable action together with the form of a feasibility study as a scientific consideration to assist the stakeholders (Municipal Government of Serang City and Bappeda; Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Daerah) in creating fair and responsible and feasibly decide spatial policies in regards with plan to build the mosque. The data findings and analysis of information are performed in a multidisciplinary approach, involving quantitative and qualitative aspects in studying alun-alun as site for construction of new Masjid Agung.

2. Methods

This article is the proceeding of authors’ experiences after conducting the feasibility study for about 2 (two) months, which will discuss and encourage extensive views about the dynamics of power relations involving academics, bureaucrats, and urban citizens in contesting the historic urban space as urban heritage beyond the ‘scientific’ study. Therefore, besides only putting efforts on mere analysis why alun-alun and its heritage values should be preserved, this article is also inclined to underline the intentions of local strategies in using presevation issues as tools throughout political decisions for succeeding multiple aims. The research method then investigates the prescribed regulations, law
policy and its implementations regarding spatial planning and preservation actions in the level of city, regional and national as well. It is also expected to exemplify the conservation process of colonial alun-alun as an architectural element, urban space, and cultural heritage in local cities of Indonesia.

The composition of team members came from the Department of Architecture and Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Faculty of Engineering Universitas Indonesia. This research team consists of members who have diverse educational backgrounds, experience in practice, and expertise in various related fields of science that completes and assists in the realization of ideas, findings, analysis and justifications that are scientific, comprehensive and accountable. The research method of this study using a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative approach by involving scientific views in a multidisciplinary field of sciences. This study will accommodate a variety of perspectives especially urban aspects, architecture, civil and environmental engineering, and sociocultural aspects so as to enrich arguments and conclusions about the feasibility of the site.

The collection of primary data and secondary data is gathered before analytical actions. Primary data is generated by conducting direct observations through surveys and site visits to the area of alun-alun and its surroundings, correspondence and in-depth discussion to related parties who understand and having insight and knowledge into cultural preservation regulations in Serang City and Banten Province, such as the BPCB Banten and the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappeda) of Serang. The secondary data is obtained through literature studies of written sources both printed and electronic. The team collected topographic maps as well as cartography records since colonial to post-colonial modern period from various official websites of institutions providing open access of public data.

As the research team studied of local regulations such as the Serang City Spatial Plan (Rencana Tata Ruang Wilayah, abbreviated as RTRW) for year 2010-2030 as stipulated in the Regional Regulation (Perda) of Serang City No. 6 of 2011, Spatial Detail Plan (Rencana Detail Tata Ruang, abbreviated as RDTR) of Serang and Cipocokjaya District Zoning for year 2013-2033 in Perda No. 9 of 2014. In addition to observing the physical condition of the site, the study also underlines the concern of status of alun-alun as a cultural heritage structure in Serang registered in the List of Cultural Heritage Objects by Banten Cultural Heritage Preservation Centre (Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Banten, or BPCB Banten), protected by the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 11 / 2010.

In addition, the research team also included various opinions, proposals, suggestions, criticisms and recommendations from the audience during the open presentation of the feasibility study results since the Initial Report stage (13 November 2018 in the Department of Architecture of FTUI, Depok), Intermediate Report (30 November 2018 in the Serang City Government Complex, Serang), up to the Final Report (13 December 2018 at Puri Kayana Hotel, Serang) including bureaucrats, religious leaders, community leaders and the general public to enrich the arguments of the study. Contrary to all expectations due to the political regime changes, the new government in opposite dealing that former idea by collaborating together with university team, asking them to justify in academic attitude to assess how feasible the alun-alun to bear such project. The results instead showed the un-feasibility of it, primarily due to its registered later status as cagar budaya (cultural heritage). It certainly raised more dispute following the unsatisfactory comments, heated debates and rebuttals during the open presentation session with the government and public citizens of Serang city.

3. Results and Discussions

Most of the historical buildings in Serang tend to be centred around two regions, namely Old Town of Banten (Banten Lama) and city centre of Serang. Some alleged cultural heritage objects in Serang City mainly include the colonial Alun-alun (covering East Square and West Square), Office of Regent (Bupati) Daerah Tingkat II Serang, railway station, and Class II B Serang Detention House. In 2017, there were at least 58 total documented cultural heritage in Serang by BPCB Banten consisting of 37
buildings, 16 structures, and 5 sites. Based on a list of inventory, *Alun-alun* object is noted in number 50 with details No. Old Inventory 416.01.01.04; 074.01.01.04.04, and No. New Inventory 054.01.07.04.08, and falls into the category of Structure [4]. The definition of the ‘Structure of Cultural Heritage’ itself is well regulated in Article 1 Paragraph (41) point 4 of Law No. 11 / 2010, which explains that, "Cultural Heritage Structure is a built structure made of natural objects and / or man-made objects to meet the space needs of activities that are integrated with nature, facilities and infrastructure to accommodate human needs." [5]

**Table 1. Data Inventory of *Alun-alun* kota Serang as the city cultural heritage [6]**

| Data Objek Cagar Budaya | ID Pendaftaran Objek | Tanggal Daftar | Nama Pendaftar | Kategory Cagar Budaya | Nama Objek | Kategori Objek | Periode/Masa | Letak Administratif | Provinsi | Kode Pos | Luas (Hektare) | Keterangan |
|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|---------|--------|---------------|------------|
|                         | P020/809/000001      | 19 September 2008 | Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya (BPCB) Banten | Struktur | Alun-alun Kota Serang | Struktur | Islam/Kolosal | Jl. Ki Mus Jingga | Banten | 12117 |               |            |

(see: *Balai Pelestarian Cagar Budaya Banten*, 2018)

Both Old and New Inventory Number BPCB Banten appeared due to reference of the old inventory to Law Number 5 of 1992 concerning Cultural Heritage Objects (*Benda Cagar Budaya*) not in accordance with developments and legal current needs of Indonesian societies, while the new inventories have referred to in Law Number 11 / 2010. As it also relates with the substances of *Perda* of Serang City regarding the RTRW and RDTR that several articles and verses might be applied in considering the feasibility of building new mosque in *alun-alun*. [7] [8]

Unfortunately, the city of Serang does not yet have any policy that specifically regulates the management of preservation of cultural heritage, especially Cultural Heritage Buildings and Heritage Sites, let alone the expert team of cultural heritage TACB (*Tim Ahli Cagar Budaya*) every municipalities in Indonesia should form. The *Perda* No. 5 of 2017 of RTRW classifies cultural heritage as ‘part of the protected space pattern areas’ (Article 40 point a juncto Article 41 Paragraph (1) point d), among other scientific knowledges to covering the preservation of cultural environments in Banten [7]. In addition, *Perda* No. 9 of 2014 concerning RDTR of Serang and Cipocok Jaya Subdistricts have the Protected Area Patterns Plan, described in Article 22 Paragraph (1) point c including cultural and scientific reserves. [8]
In the discussion about determining cultural heritage, an understanding of cultural significance is required to be categorized as a cultural heritage. Cultural heritage as a cultural resource has been a fragile, unique, rare, limited, and not up-to-date nature, as described in the Explanation of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 11 / 2010, in paragraph 5. Alun-alun of Serang clearly has the characteristics as mentioned above. When the research team compared the existing situated map (2018) with the colonial map of 1915 of alun-alun of Serang as shown in Figure 2, a general information drawn is that the present morphological patterns of Serang City are still strongly influenced by the past morphological pattern of Serang City since the Dutch colonial period [9]. This conclusion is withdrawn from interesting findings in the process of comparing the two maps, which are:

1. The shape of alun-alun from the very beginning of its presence was designed and built by the presence of a lane that separates the field between West Square and East Square, to arrange a unique pattern existing in its original model currently in general.

2. There are several similarities in the city pattern including the colonial buildings that still continuing its functions like offices/pendopo (Regentschapskantoor) and regent houses, post offices, detention house (Gevangenis), old market, stations, and school. As for some colonial buildings that their functions have been adjusted, among others are the O.S.V.I.A school which has now shifted functions to the police resort office. There are also sites undergone changes in shape but still retain similar functions, such as church, post offices, mosques (Ats-Tsauros the Great Mosque), and cemeteries complexes scattered in several places around the city centre.

![Figure 2. City centre of Serang afdeeling in 1915 (left) and 2018 (right) (sources: Topographische Inrichting, Batavia 1915 Blad 12 a & Google Maps, edited)](image)

Even though the centre of Serang City and its surroundings have not been designated as Cultural Heritage Sites or Regions with contained buildings and historic structures, it should be underlined that the treatment of objects presumed as Cultural Heritage must be the same as the legitimate Cultural Heritage. Therefore, they must be preserved by referring to statutory provisions according to the law No. 11 / 2010. Maintaining the original characteristics of the Cultural Heritage Structure as well as the original characteristics of the cultural landscape and/or land surface is required before making adaptations. The construction of the Great Mosque of Serang does not guarantee the authenticity of the city image or vista, and it clearly risks destroying the physical values of the structure of alun-alun. [5]

The provincial and municipality governments in this case are responsible for the duties and authorities of Cultural Heritage as well as the alleged Cultural Heritage, such as the management of National Register of Cultural Heritage in the area (Article 40 Paragraph (2) juncto Article 95 Paragraph (1) and (2) Chapter VIII Duties and Authorities of Law No. 11 / 2010. [5] Besides, there are several assumptions and aspirations among the people who consider that the construction of the grand mosque in the alun-alun is based on historical arguments which refer to the model of urban centre space in the kingdom/sultanate era in the archipelago. The argument may not be fully in accordance with the context of alun-alun of Serang, due to these following reasons.
The first reason is that *alun-alun* was built during the Dutch East Indies (or *Nederlands Indies*) colonial state period between the moving centre of power of Old Banten to Serang City (around the 1800s), and before the beginning of the 20th century. *Alun-alun* here was a form ‘new city centre’ which were built later as a physical consequence after the kingdom and sultanate demise in Old Banten. This square less or more has a different space configuration with the precolonial *alun-alun* model in Nusantara, thus made it distinctive and unique urban element in local cities of Java. The similarity between the precolonial and colonial *alun-alun* was the office or pavilion of the regent as local authorities still represents the presence of the palace as central power in the precolonial city model. Many elements of the city found were not in accordance with the principles or types of Islamic sultanate square, such as the absence of mosque building, and even was replaced by the church as the official religious symbol of Dutch colonial state. [9]

Even though the *alun-alun* was built as referred to the precolonial type, the siteplan of *Masjid Agung* should be chosen and built around the *alun-alun* and would be side by side with the Serang Regent's office and market too, not on the very existing space volume of the *alun-alun*. Building a new structure/building on top of the square is conducted by removing the square area. Thus, a firm policy to guarantee and maintain the existence of cultural heritage from the threat of physical development in urban areas is absolutely necessary, when *alun-alun* as a ‘living monument’ governed by its utilization.

In addition to being a Cultural Heritage Structure, *alun-alun* of Serang also functions as a green open space in Serang City which is regulated by Regional Regulation (*Perda*) of Serang City No. 5 of 2017 concerning the Banten Province RTRW, which can also be found in Article 44 paragraph (1) point f to regulate the local protected area, juncto Article 41 Paragraph (1) point c which covers urban Green Open Space (*Ruang Terbuka Hijau*, abbreviated as RTH). [7] This is in line with the *Perda* of Serang City No. 9 of 2014 concerning RDTR and Zonation Regulations of Serang & Cipocok Jaya District in 2013-2033, located in Article 22 Paragraph (1) regulating Protected Area Pattern Plans include cultural preservation and RTH. [8]

The total volume of RTH in Serang City is regulated in *Perda* No. 9 of 2014 in "Chapter III Objectives, Policies, and Strategies". In Article 6 point p, the amount of RTH has been set at 30% (thirty percent) of the total area of city. The Article 7 Paragraph (16) point a and point b further regulate the strategy for determining the amount, by maintaining the existing open space of approximately 39 km², or about 9-14% of the total area of Serang. The above strategy is also supported by Article 7 Paragraph (16) point d by keeping open space in regards with its function, to sustain the maintenance of the amount of RTH remains effective and stable. The article that lists *alun-alun* of Serang as part of RTH of Serang City can easily be found in "Chapter V Regional Space Pattern Plans" in the same RDTR Regulation in Paragraph 7 Green Open Space, Article 29 Paragraph (2) point g including an area of approximately 20 Ha, such as Maulana Yusuf Stadium, Brimob Stadium, and *Alun-alun*. [8]

Therefore, it is clear that *alun-alun* of Serang City contributes to the amount of RTH in the city. By continuing the construction plan on the site, it will automatically reduce the amount of existing green open space, thus, the number of RTH decreases before it even reaches 30%, referring to the amount of 14% listed in *Perda* No. 9 of 2014 of RTRW. *Perda* No. 9 of 2014, in Paragraph 7 about Disaster Mitigation Facilities and Infrastructure System especially in Article 19 Paragraph (2) letter b, it regulates the direction of development of disaster mitigation facilities and infrastructure including the Earthquake Disaster Mitigation Space to the Maulana Yusuf Stadium, West and East Square of *alun-alun* and any vacant land closest to community housing. Specifically, the empty space on the *alun-alun* also serves as a community gathering place in order to mitigate natural disasters. [8]

As another consideration, the research team tried to look at the Draft of Revisions of *Perda* of RTRW of Serawng City that had not been approved as an additional reference. By referring at Article 50 paragraph (5) letter a, a similar development may be carried out on cultural heritage that are in the
zoning of public and social facilities by maintaining the following matters, and construction of places of worship on the *alun-alun* in other sense is performed with the following not, that of: (1) not eliminating the original function, in regards with Article 7 Paragraph (11), namely its use as a community and open space is kept well maintained, (2) meeting the requirements and intensity standards of supporting zones and developers in cultural heritage areas, as stated in Article 50 letter b, and (3) meeting the requirements of establishing a worship house in accordance with the Joint Regulation of the Minister of Religion and Minister of Home Affairs Number 8 and 9 of 2006. [10]

4. Conclusions
The strict protection and preservation efforts against the Cultural Heritage (*Cagar Budaya*) and Green Open Space (*Ruang Terbuka Hijau*) regulated by the formal regulations and legislations reinforce to the conclusion that there is a need to reconsider the feasibility of colonial *alun-alun* (both West and East Square) including its surrounding historic environments intended as a site for the construction of the *Masjid Agung*. Some recommendations were given by the research team as a series of alternative solutions to resolve the presented problems as input that might be implemented at the next stage of the assessment and development planning. This reconsideration does not mean declaring a plain rejection of the plan in building a new grand mosque in Serang, but as a special statement regarding the location plan. The authors continue to support the Municipal Government and the people of Serang City in holding the construction, yet with some recommendations provided as next better steps to be implemented by both Municipal Government and the general public after the activity of feasibility study.

![Figure 3](image)

*Figure 3. Historical mosques surrounding *alun-alun*, left: Masjid Kaujon, right: Masjid Raya Ats-Tsauroh (source: Private collection, 2018)*

The first conclusion is not recommending the *alun-alun* of Serang, which strongly has many historical buildings surrounding, to serve as the construction site for the Grand Mosque erection or any similar massive structures, with due consideration referring to the legal basis and as for implementing cultural preservation management efforts in Serang. Encouraging the Regional Government of Serang City is another effort to submit a city centre consisting of squares and various historical buildings around it into the Cultural Heritage National Register System (*Sistem Register Nasional Cagar Budaya*), especially buildings and other structures that have not been registered and are still alleged as Cultural Heritage.

Other suggestion is encouraging any authorized stakeholders to conduct intensive and comprehensive publications and socializations to the people of Serang City regarding Cultural Heritage laws, its historic knowledge, and the importance of distinctive, unique, rare and valuable cultural significance. Optimizing the use of *alun-alun* as a Cultural Heritage Structure as facility of public infrastructure and Green Open Space (RTH) by inviting the general public to hold various activities in it for the interests of religion, social, education, science, technology, culture and tourism, as stipulated in Article 85 Paragraph (1) of Law No. 11 / 2010. [5] Reflecting on various religious activities in recent years, the concerned efforts have often been carried out in the National Monument (Monas) Structure in DKI Jakarta, *alun-alun* of Serang can also potentially be utilized as a facility for religious activities such as *tabligh akbar* congregations, *zikr* assembly, and other religious activities.
Organizing efforts to optimize and develop other main types of worship areas and buildings around the city centre, such as the Great Mosque of Kaujon and the Great Mosque of Ats-Tsauoro which are both historical buildings that have historical links and physical connectivities in the location. The problem of spatial need for prayers space can be adjusted to the scheme of developing the area around the already existing built mosque(s), especially the Ats-Tsauoro Great Mosque which is an old mosque but not included yet in the Cultural Heritage List of BPCB Banten, therefore, development can be perform according the community’s need towards adequate worship facilities in the city centre. Finally, the research also suggests to be more considerate in selecting sites to hold the possibility of increasing land property values in other areas instead of city centre, so that the construction of Grand Mosque would give benefits to potential lands to open new centre of religious, economic, social and open spaces too.

However, the use and abuse of the political decision towards heritage conservation were eventually immense, such as documentation and registering actions of colonial alun-alun were only taken into account when the changes of political regimes happened, probably done for any particular partisan’s interests. The issues on heritage and/or the need for open space of alun-alun in the city become a merely political tool to legitimate political decisions rather than as quintessential fields to take into account for building a better city planning [11]. Finally, the urge for creating the expert team of cultural heritage (Tim Ahli Cagar Budaya) in recommending law and regulations towards cultural heritage (cagar budaya) should be immediately decided by local municipalities, together with the educational programme in to encourage, introduce and familiarize the values of local unique cultural heritage in city.

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