



UDC 332

LOSING THE SENSE OF THE FORTRESS: TOURISTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ADAPTATION STRATEGY OF FORT VREDEBURG IN YOGYAKARTA, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Adaptation under the Burra Charter means modifying a place that has historical and cultural significance with existing or proposed uses. This strategy has been implemented in many places, such as Fort Vredeburg, which is currently being used as a museum. This research aims to evaluate the adaptation strategy for Fort Vredeburg, which has become a museum. The methods used were in-depth interviews with three respondents outside Yogyakarta who had finished enjoying Fort Vredeburg and also autoethnography for documentation, raising issues, and validating information from respondents to avoid subjectivity bias. The results obtained by the adaptation strategy carried out at Fort Vredeburg were proven to be able to preserve the physical form of the fort, but the sense of the fort itself was lost because the values of the fort could not be felt by visitors. There are two recommendations for its management. Firstly, information regarding the fort, which is very minimal, needs to be further enriched because visitors who visit the fort have an interest in Fort Vredeburg, not just the museum. Second, visual preservation around the fort needs to be maintained because previously the function of the fort was defense, so the visual aspect was an inseparable part of the fort. The visuals around the fort that are not maintained have proven to reduce the sense and values of the fort and ultimately disappoint visitors. This research will provide insight into conservation efforts in the form of adaptation, especially for historic fort sites.

KEY WORDS

Historic fort site, landscape tourism, sense of place, significant value, tourism management, visual preservation.

A key text in the realm of cultural heritage protection is the Burra Charter, especially when it comes to the idea of adaptation. According to the charter, adaptation is the process of changing a location to accommodate a planned or current usage while maintaining its cultural relevance. This concept places a strong emphasis on striking a balance between the necessity of change and the preservation of the site's historical integrity and cultural assets (Jasme et al., 2014).

The Burra Charter provides a framework for conservation policies guided by systematic importance assessments. This assessment is important for identifying important cultural values and developing management programs to effectively control future impacts to the site or site. The charter's philosophy is based on the principles of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), which emphasizes the importance of preserving cultural heritage for future generations (Strachan, 1988).

In practice, the Burra Charter is really applied in a variety of settings to direct conservation initiatives. For instance, the charter serves as a guide for the preservation of European-style cultural heritage buildings in Indonesia, with an emphasis on preserving the structures' architectural uniqueness and cultural value. One of them is the adaptation strategy for Fort Vredeburg in Yogyakarta which is used as a museum.

Situated in the center of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, the Vredeburg Fortress, often referred to as Fort Vredeburg, is a fortress from the colonial era. This stronghold is situated close to significant sites including Yogyakarta Palace, Malioboro Street, and Beringharjo Market in the city's core. Its advantageous position and the chance it offers to learn about the history of the city make it a well-liked tourist destination.



When it was first constructed in 1760, this fortress had just four bastions and was made of basic wood. Frans Haak, a Dutch architect, oversaw the fortress's gradual expansion and transformation into a more permanent building. "Resting fort" is how the fort was dubbed once it was finished in 1787, Fort Rustenburg. The fortress was later renamed Fort Vredeburg, which translates to "Fortress of Peace," in 1767. The fortress was taken over by the Japanese forces in 1942 during their conquest of the Dutch East Indies, and it served as both their headquarters and a war jail. Fort Vredeburg functioned as a military command center, barracks, and prison for those believed to be communist party members following the Japanese withdrawal in 1945 (Sulistya et al., 2019).

The Fort Vredeburg Museum, also known as the Benteng Vredeburg Museum, is now housed in Fort Vredeburg. Yogyakarta's history is preserved and shown in this museum, which features displays of the country's history, Indonesian independence, and Dutch colonial control. It showcases historical artifacts, dioramas, and images that document the 18th and 19th century's events. The museum provides guests and tourists with an engaging opportunity to learn about Yogyakarta's past and rich cultural legacy.

All forms of preservation efforts applied to historical sites need to be evaluated. Especially when it comes to forms of adaptation whose use changes with the times. The success of conservation is not only related to its physical existence but also to the values within it. Evaluation also plays a role not only in assessing success but also in identifying obstacles that need to be resolved (Dupeyron, 2021).

As a museum, Fort Vredeburg certainly cannot be separated from visitors, many of whom are tourists from outside Yogyakarta. Unfortunately, many tourism success paradigms are reported quantitatively, for example, in relation to the number of visitors, income earned, or how many events are held (Brohman, 1996; Syahadat & Kusworo, 2022). More specifically, the research conducted on Fort Vredeburg discussed more about the market strategy, not the values of the fort itself (Rukmana, 2019; Santi et al., 2023). The question then arises, can the policy strategy in the form of adapting it to become a museum for the Fort Vredeburg site really preserve this site not only physically but also non-physically? Therefore, this article aims to evaluate this issue. It is hoped that this study can provide insight into adaptation strategies as well as management at historical sites.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

The research was conducted in March 2022. The approaches used were interviews and autoethnography. Interviews were conducted with three tourists who came from outside the Special Province of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The three tourists came from the provinces of West Java, East Java, and the Riau Islands. The questions asked were about their experiences before, during and after visiting the fort. This includes things they like and dislike, expectations and realities, insights they gain, and their feelings and hopes regarding the fort.

At the time of data collection, restrictions on community activities were being implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we assume that these three tourists have a great interest in visiting Fort Vredeburg, so the implementation of restrictions on community activities will not be an obstacle for them to travel. The interviews were conducted after they left the fort so that all the information and experiences they conveyed were truly experienced and felt by them. Statistical representation was not used because this study is a qualitative one that aims to explore experiences in depth (Westling et al., 2014).

The autoethnographic approach refers to the researcher's real experiences, which are thoroughly documented, such as through memos and photographs (Y. Huang, 2015; Oktadiana & Pearce, 2020). This method can be considered accurate because, during preparation, it is carried out with discussion and critical examination (Decrop, 2004; Ellis et al., 2011). This approach also serves to validate information from the interview stage so that subjectivity bias can be completely avoided. Both interview and autoethnographic results were analyzed descriptively.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The three respondents from outside the Special Province of Yogyakarta were men aged 22 to 29 years. Their average income is above 300 USD per month. In a year, they travel at least one to two times. The average duration of their stay is 3 days, and the expenditure they usually make on one trip is at least 93 USD for a distance of 100 to 700 km. Expenditures will double if they travel by plane. The three respondents represent generations Y and Z. As is known, they are a generation that loves to travel, discover interesting locations, independent, brave, and like to share their experiences on their social media. This generation is also known to be quite good at managing finances during travel, so they are able to visit many places even at low costs (Priyanto, 2021).

All respondents stated that the fort structure was well maintained. They could also feel that the structure was a colonial-era structure. Two out of three respondents said firmly that the environmental conditions around the fort did not allow them to imagine what the meaning of the fort was. Furthermore, one respondent did not directly say this, but his meaning was the same because even though he said he could interpret the fort, his understanding was about the contents of the museum, not the fort itself.

Respondents admitted that they chose Fort Vredenburg to visit because they really like history. They also think that the location of Fort Vredenburg is very strategic because it is in the center of Yogyakarta and is close to other tourist attractions, which are icons of this province (Figure 1). Apart from that, the relatively cheap prices and adequate facilities for visitors are the main attractions for visitors of all ages. The neat and shady interior arrangement made respondents feel comfortable in the fort. Respondents also appreciated the existence of a space that can be used as a place to hold events, so that the fort is not only an exhibition space but also an inclusive social space. This is in line with previous research reports, which stated that Fort Vredenburg is considered attractive by tourists because it has buildings with historical value, good facilities, and an atmosphere that supports family group tourists (Widiyastuti, 2017).



Figure 1 – One of the Views from Inside the Fort which Shows Several Historical Objects in the Heart of Yogyakarta

Things that respondents didn't like were the lack of information regarding the fort itself and the lack of clear routes. All respondents agreed that they did not receive any information regarding the history of the fort, and this made them quite disappointed (Figure 2). They also end up wondering what the function of this structure is, why it is shaped like that, why it is



located there, and who used to watch over it. They finally got the information because they had to find out for themselves via the internet after visiting the fort, not because it was based on their experience while touring the fort. Even then, the information they get is only a glimpse, and they hope it would be better if they could get it directly inside.

The condition of the fort with adaptation efforts does increase comfort regarding the structure, but there is a difference in orientation which in our opinion changes the sense of the fort. If previously the fort was used for defence, then the direction out of the fort was an important thing to also maintain. What is happening now is that the direction into the fort is a new orientation that attracts the attention of visitors (Figure 3). Visitors who come to Fort Vredeburg don't care or perhaps don't understand the values of the fort. This is made worse because even though the fort is a museum, there is no in-depth information about the fort in the museum. The museum collection tells more about the dioramas of the national struggle that did not take place at the fort.



Figure 2 – The Only Information about Fort Vredeburg that Found in the Museum



Figure 3 – The Inner Side of the Fort is the Most Preferred Side by Visitors Which Has Changed the Importance of the Fort Orientation



The positive implications of adaptation efforts can also be seen from the insights of respondents who were able to tell national history. However, all respondents were unable to explain the history of the fort. So we conclude that the Fort Vredeburg which was used as a museum has obstacles in comprehensive preservation because preservation efforts can preserve the structure and increase understanding of national history but are unable to maintain the sense and are unable to provide education regarding the value of the fort itself.

Because it is essential to comprehend the relationship between people and the places they live, a sense of place is important for heritage conservation. It is a crucial component of managing and conserving cultural heritage, impacting many facets of heritage preservation such as the success of management programs and the emotional bond that visitors have with historic locations (Dameria et al., 2023; Ma et al., 2023; Wei et al., 2022). Physical surroundings, intangible surroundings, and engaging activities all contribute to the formation of a sense of place by fostering a mental image of visitors' emotions and a sense of acceptance (Wei et al., 2022). Since it promotes a greater respect and understanding of the cultural significance of these locations, this emotional connection is crucial for the preservation and development of heritage sites.

Furthermore, heritage and cultural identity are strongly related to the sense of location. Heritage sites are defined not just by their physical attributes but also by the meaning they hold intangible. To guarantee the preservation of the cultural values connected to these locations, heritage place conservation must take these symbolic meanings into the site (Dameria et al., 2023).



Figure 4 – Unmaintained View Direction from Inside to Outside of the Fort

We consider that the preservation of a fort should not be limited to preserving its structure. The adaptation effort is a good effort because it is proven physically, and in appearance, it can be seen that the structure of the fort is currently well maintained. Respondents also responded well to the adaptation strategy at Fort Vredeburg. Currently, the fort is not a defense area, but that does not mean we have to forget the functional, historical, cultural, and educational values related to ancient defense. One of the things we feel is necessary is that information regarding Fort Vredeburg must be the main information. Tourists who come to the fort mean that they have great curiosity about the fort, while other information, such as that in the museum, should complement the experience that visitors will get. Several studies are in line with this, stating that good interpretation and information on



historical objects are reported to have a positive impact on visitor satisfaction and loyalty (Ham & Weiler, 2007; S. Huang et al., 2016; Kuo et al., 2016; Lee, 2009).

Furthermore, the external landscape of the fort should be an inseparable part. When the fort was built, of course, the location could not be separated from what was seen around it (Figure 4). Ignoring the outer landscape of the fort means eliminating the authenticity and integrity of the fort itself. These two things are important in efforts to preserve historical landscapes (Otero et al., 2023; Sukwai et al., 2022; Syahadat et al., 2024; Wang, 2015). Therefore, visual protection from the inside to the outside of the fort is an important thing to do because the boundaries of the fort are not the walls of the fort but the limits of the direction of view.

CONCLUSION

The sense of place is a critical component of heritage conservation, as it helps to maintain the connection between individuals and their cultural heritage, ultimately contributing to the long-term preservation of these sites. It is important for heritage conservation because of the sense of place enhances emotional connection, influences management initiatives, and also preserves cultural as well as historical values.

The adaptation strategy at Fort Vredeborg to become a museum actually has a positive impact on the preservation of the structure, and this can be felt directly by visitors. However, this does not apply to his senses and values. Based on the results of this research, we recommend two things to strengthen the adaptation strategy at Fort Vredeborg for its management. These two recommendations are to encourage managers and related stakeholders not to ignore information regarding the fort, which is very minimal at Vredeborg Fortress, and also to preserve the visuals around the fort because the fort's boundaries are visual boundaries, not just structural ones.

We realize that there are still many limitations that we have in this study. Therefore, there are several suggestions for further research. First, all of the respondents in this study were men and came from outside Yogyakarta. In the future, research can consider female respondents as well as local tourists, who can represent the local population's point of view. Second, replication research on other historical fort sites in Indonesia or perhaps around the world is also interesting to carry out so that comparisons can be obtained regarding the successes and failures of conservation efforts. Third, regarding the topic of visual boundaries in fortifications, which seems to have often been ignored, and their relationship with sense, it is also important to do so that it can increase insight regarding the fortification landscape.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research is part of the pre-research for a dissertation to obtain a doctorate at Gadjah Mada University. During the preparation of the article we received a lot of moral and material support from various parties; therefore, the author would like to thank those who cannot be mentioned one by one.

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