

CONSERVATION OF PRINCIPLES OR OBJECTS?: An Approach of Conserving the Traditional Balinese Cultural Landscape in Urban Areas

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ABSTRACT

The idea of 'non-physical' cultural heritage conservation and preservation has been around since the early 1980s, however such an idea was never specifically explored, particularly in regard of the Bali's cultural heritage conservation and preservation. Based on pluralistic approach (Appleyard, 1976; Lynch, 1960; Rapoport, 1969, 1977), a research was conducted on 1998-1999 to gather some findings for the purpose of utilizing urban design as a means to produce Balinese towns conducive to cultural identity. This paper is developed from this research and it attempts to propose an approach of the conservation of the traditional Balinese cultural landscape in the urban areas. The approach relies on the understanding that a Balinese traditional townscape is deemed as cultural heritage, and consequently it develops within the urban design framework.

Keywords: Bali, cultural landscape, *desa adat*, conservation, urban design.

INTRODUCTION

The cultural heritage conservation and preservation within the urban areas is becoming popular and indeed emerging into a crucial force for the future urban design. It is said that urban conservation will be the source of survival strategies for cities in the twenty-first century (Cohen, 1999). Basically, conservation and preservation in this context aims at achieving more preferable or better urban environmental qualities through the maintenance of the cultural and temporal continuity.

The cultural heritage conservation and preservation project has been commonly limited to the physical object or material culture although its ultimate goal is indeed the conservation of the fostering culture itself. Shirvani (1985) confined the area of conservation and preservation as addressing the protection of existing neighborhoods and urban places as well as historical buildings and places, and to a certain extent, some particular activities. Some has questioned the validity of such an approach (e.g. Rapoport, 1983) and other argued that urban environment quality—thus regarding a broader domain—should be the underlying concept of the project (e.g. Appleyard, 1982).

Against such backdrops, this paper aims at proposing a conservation strategy which concentrating on conserving the underlying

principles of the creation of cultural landscapes¹, particularly the one worth considered as a cultural heritage. Such being the case, firstly, it has to be defined the concept of cultural heritage in order to establish some common grounds for further discussion. Subsequently, this paper elaborates a part of the findings from my field research in the town of Gianyar during October 1998 – March 1999, as a way to convey the idea of cultural landscape-making principle conservation. The ideas discussed will be confined within and utilized the terminology and technique of urban design.

HIGH AND LOW CULTURES

... culture may be said to be about a group of people who have a set of values and beliefs which embody ideals and are transmitted to members of the group through enculturation. These lead to a worldview—the characteristic way of looking at, and, in the case of design, of shaping the world. The world is shaped by applying rules which lead to systematic and

¹ The geographical concept of urban cultural landscapes is the man-made urban elements and their relationships, and the 'historical' built places (man-made environments of the past) which give landscapes their character.

consistent choices, whether in creating a life-style (i.e. the specific way of allocating temporal, material, and symbolic resources), a building style, or a landscape of a settlement. (Rapoport, 1984: 51).

As can be observed from the above quoted text, in regard to human made environment or in the environment-behavior system, culture is embracing the whole continuum of what Singer (1972) called 'high' and 'low' cultures. The 'higher' cultures are usually more reflective and more systematically presented and embody the greatest intellectual and aesthetic achievement of the culture. As such, they tend to be stored in 'high style designs' as opposed to 'low style or vernacular designs'. The first is recognized in the distinguished buildings and built places such as historic buildings and places or culturally significant ones such as sacred temples, palaces, and the like. The 'vernacular designs' are attributed to the buildings and places created by common people or in many cases to the traditional buildings, dwellings and settlements which actually occupy a larger area in the towns and cities in the world compared to the historic places which represent only a minor part of the urban areas.

The conservation of the cultural heritage in the urban areas is generally confined to the historically and culturally significant urban artifacts –the material culture, thus, of the high style designs. Cohen (1999) limited the area of conservation only to deal with the urban historic buildings and places in the sense that they are old and possessed a very high architectural merit, thus, emphasizing that conservation is a cultural necessity in maintaining cultural continuity. Such a view of conservation also popular in Europe (e.g. Punter and Carmona, 1997) and America (e.g. Shirvani, 1985) where the conserving criteria are of historic-archeological-based ones. It is only logical that the larger area of the 'non-historic', or specifically vernacular areas are often neglected, although such areas are also known as possessing significant traditional values and conceptions so important as to be acknowledged as cultural heritage (hence, signifies a what so called 'living culture') (see e.g. Oliver, ed.; 1975). Therefore as far as low and high cultures dichotomy is concerned, we will find that the cultural landscapes of a traditional village such as Desa Adat Penglipuran, Kabupaten Bangli (Bali) is worth to be conserved. Such cultural landscapes have

several features which need to be regarded in terms of conservation. Firstly, their characters clearly reflect the traditional Balinese Hindu cosmic philosophy. Secondly, these particular cultural landscapes are of interest because they are recognizably different. They are highly place- and culture-specific. Thirdly, they are the result of many apparently independent decisions by many people, yet they add up to a recognizable whole.

Thus, all such cultural landscapes are designed in the sense that they embody human decisions and choices –any purposeful change to the face of the earth. In this respect, the work of common people in laying out a settlement is as much an act of design as the urban designer's act of dreaming up ideal cities or the architect's act of creating beautiful buildings. In fact many of these mundane activities just described have the most impact on the earth and particularly on the urban area where man-made environments are dominant.

Such being the case, the way neighborhoods and cities look and feel depends on the design activity of many individuals and groups or the choices taken by them from all the possible alternatives. The specific nature of choices tends to be lawful, to reflect of the culture of the group in question (Rapoport, 1983). As one way of looking at culture is in terms of the most common choices made, therefore it is the lawfulness of choices which make Balinese urban places such that characterizes by *desa adat* and *banjar adat* different from the Australian or even Javanese. Therefore, in this sense, it is logical that the cultural heritage conservation has to embrace all kinds of culture, high style or vernacular; historic or common and vernacular places.

PHYSICAL FEATURES OF AND PRINCIPLE BEHIND THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

On the above quotation, Rapoport also suggested that there were rules in creating both the high style designs and the vernacular ones. This means that in a cultural landscape comprised of various 'level' of cultures there are some principles underlie the creation of this kind of landscape. Thus, the project of preservation and conservation of cultural landscapes can be considered in two major ways: 1) the actual, direct preservation of the existing, physical

cultural landscapes; and 2) the conservation of certain principles which such cultural landscapes may have and created upon.

As already elaborated on the preceding section, the first point is concerned with the meaning commonly used when conservation is discussed. It maintains the cultural as well as temporal continuity, provides link with the past which can be important in many ways, and enhances the urban environmental quality (Rapoport, 1983; Cohen, 1999). For example, the proposal of colonial buildings conservation in Semarang, Bandung and most recently, Medan will make possible the maintenance of a sense of place and a certain necessary environmental quality. Actual, physical preservation is also important in order to preserve variations in cultural landscapes –old, new, colonial, post colonial, modern, indigenous, and so on. Thus, in a way is a strategy to maintain the aesthetic quality of the landscape (through contradiction and complexity). This first point also plays a role in the preservation of the culture and lifestyle which goes with them.

However, towns and cities are growing very fast, which in many places both population growth and urbanization rate are such that most urban environments we encountered with are now, or soon will be, new. This is the case of the Third World countries in which the rate of urban physical development is high in order to catch up with the modernization process of their Western contemporaries. Thus, most urban environments for most people will be totally new and the sense of place in the urban areas is affected and somewhat faded by this modernization-driven development. It is this kind of urban environment quality that people will experience. Therefore, there is a need to concentrate on the second point, that is the conservation of principles inherent in traditional cultural landscapes which can be applied in new designs and design processes in order to achieve certain necessary environmental qualities.

It has indicated that the preservation of existing urban environments alone will have limited impact on environmental quality. Thus, preservation of the physical cultural landscapes, although important and necessary, is not quite sufficient. We have to go beyond preservation and give more attention to the conservation of the principles inherent in traditional or vernacular cultural landscapes, from which we can learn some lessons to be applied to new

development, to the planning and design of new urban environments.

CONSERVATION OF PRINCIPLES

In the above respect, we must combine both kinds of conservation to provide us with a set of traditional (which may be contains historical parts) environments which are containers of environmental knowledge which must be maintained, since they are the basis for valid generalization about human-environment interaction and hence good environmental design. Such places, Desa Adat Penglipuran, Kabupaten Bangli (Bali) is one of such extreme examples, act as a cultural resource by which we can learn from in the future.

Two approaches can be sought in learning from traditional environments, observes them as a process and as a product. The stress here will be on process, that is those principles which the cultural landscapes possess which have lessons for us. In Bali case we can observe the traditional-religious conceptions of space as the useful approach to initiate the stages of ‘non-physical’ conservation of the Balinese cultural heritage. I will address this matter by elaborating my recent research in some desa adat in the town of Gianyar within the urban design framework.

Description of the Research

My research was intended to gather findings to be utilized in the analysis of developing urban design as a means to produce a Balinese town – in this case, the town of Gianyar—conducive to cultural identity. A pluralistic approach (Appleyard, 1976; Lynch, 1960; Rapoport, 1969, 1977) was adopted for the field survey, using questionnaires and mental map sketching techniques. Such an approach put the popular accounts as the mechanism to extract current operative values and conceptions in spatial planning and design. A sample population of 100 was employed and consisted of three groups, each representing 1) the town residents with a knowledge of traditional-religious conceptions of space, 2) the lay residents, and 3) the residents with a knowledge of formal or modern planning concepts. Indepth interviews with some key informants were conducted before, during and after the field survey for the purposes of composing questionnaires and subsequently

canvassed detail information and reconfirmed findings.

One part of the findings is concerning the Balinese traditional-religious conceptions of space. It is this issue that will be elaborated to address the theme of this paper.

Popular accounts on the Balinese traditional-religious conceptions of space

During the field research, a proposal² on the currently operative Balinese traditional-religious conceptions of space was introduced to the respondents and followed by a brief elaboration of seven most important of those conceptions. The final part of the proposal was a recommendation of the core-periphery continuum of those conceptions in which the respondents were asked for their comments on the order of the continuum. The proposal was first composed theoretically and presented in discussions with the key informants. These sessions resulted in a revised proposal which was used as material for the field survey questionnaire. The following text is the brief introduction on that proposal:

Spatial planning and design in Bali is fundamentally relied on the religious philosophy of Balinese Hinduism in which the five elements of *Panca Mahabhuta* are harmoniously interplaying within the relationship between nature/environment (*bhuwana agung* or macrocosm) and human being (*bhuwana alit* or microcosm) as a whole unit of life³. Life is created where the enabler elements occur, that is: *atma*, *angga*, and *prana*.

In a human settlement, a village or *desa adat*, those elements of life are materialized in the form of *Tri Kahyangan (atma)*, *wawidangan* or territory (*angga*) and *sima krama* or the residents (*prana*). Subsequently this concept was named *Tri Hita*

*Karana*⁴ and inspired the formulation of *Tri Angga* which qualitatively structures a space into *utama* (sacred, upstream), *madya* (neutral, middle) and *nista* (profane, downstream).

This spatial structure underlies the settlement or *desa adat* patterns of linear, crossroad (*pampatan agung*) and combination between these two. The settlement functions (marketplace, palace, open space, and so on), then, were laid out around the patterns in accordance to those philosophical fundamentals, spatial structuring system and orientation conceptions such as *Kaja-Kelod* and *Kangin-Kauh*.

The pattern by which those functions were arranged is conceptually known as *Sanga Mandala*. However, such arrangement will differ in its detail according to the operative local knowledge system including the *Tri Pramana* and *Tri Masa* principles.

The followings are seven Balinese Hindu conceptions of space and their core-periphery continuum order which reflects their degree of importance in the contemporary Balinese spatial formation: 1) psycho-cosmic concept; 2) *Tri Hita Karana*; 3) *Tri Angga*; 4) *Kaja-Kelod*; 5) *Kangin-Kauh*; 6) *Sanga Mandala*; 7) *local knowledge systems (Tri Pramana and Tri Masa)*.

Of the one hundred participating respondents, nearly all of them (87%) agreed that the above mentioned conceptions are the currently operative Balinese traditional-religious conceptions of space, and some 15% of the respondents mentioned *Tri Mandala* (literally 'three spaces') as an additional conception. However, this conception is basically has been accommodated by the *Tri Angga* conception. A further investigation to some traditional customary law, *awig-awig*, of four *desa adat* in the town of Gianyar shown that *Tri Hita Karana* is the fundamental aspect *desa adat* establishment (see *Awig-awig Desa Adat: Gianyar, 1982; Pacung, 1982; Beng, 1982; Serongga, 1994; Baturisari, 1995; and Tegal-Tugu, 1982*).

Some 64% of the respondents strongly agreed that the proposed continuum has captured their aspirations on the conceptions' roles in shaping Balinese spaces. Interestingly, quite a

² The proposal was first developed theoretically and then discussed with some key informants from around the town of Gianyar area, consisting of a high priest, a *dalang* (shadow puppeteer) and *balian* (traditional healer), an informal leader and chairman of the local board on traditional affairs. The resulting proposal was then used for the field survey.

³ This explains the psycho-cosmic concept, being the 'umbrella' or foundation of other conceptions, thus it is the core conception.

⁴ Therefore, the closest one to the core conception within the continuum.

substantial number of respondents (32%) added comments on the primary role of the *Tri Hita Karana* above the others, thus concluded that other conceptions, such as *Tri Angga*, *Sanga Mandala* and *Tri Pramana*, are essentially derived from *Tri Hita Karana* conception. On the contrary, although with only a small percentage, 12% of the respondents tended to consider all the seven conceptions as existing in a similar plane, thus not in a continuum relationship, while at the same time agreed on the notion that those are the operative conceptions of space.

Three conclusions can be generated from the above findings in regard to urban design as follows:

1. The spatial design has to consider the Balinese Hindu traditional-religious conceptions of space as its fundamental spatial design basis. The relationship between microcosm and macrocosm is the core conception of all. Therefore the relationship between the town of Gianyar and its residents and the cultural landscapes as the byproduct resulting from such an interaction are not a 'conventional' one such that of Jakarta, Melbourne or other Western cities. Thus, the present characteristic and image, hence the sense of place, of the Balinese towns is essentially generated by this principle. In this respect, an urban design process has to consider manipulating town space and townscape as an act to harmonize the relationship between the town and the residents within a set of Balinese-Hinduism rules. Such being the case, this unique worldview can be best described as an attitude which both presupposes and anticipates public perception for manipulating (i.e. planning and design) their environment. Or in Rapoport's words, '... a worldview –the characteristic way of looking at, and, in the case of design, of *shaping* the world' (1984: 51).
2. *Tri Hita Karana* is the main philosophy that embodies the psycho-cosmic concept of a harmonious balance between the microcosm (the resident), the macrocosm (the resident's immediate environments), and the Creator. However, it only territorially addresses the balancing of those elements in the form of *desa adat*, that is through the relationships between *pawongan* (*desa's* residents), *palemahan* (*desa's* territory) and *parahyangan* (*desa's* triad temples, the *Tri*

Kahyangan)⁵. As such, the town of Gianyar urban design process should acknowledge *desa adat*, --being the embodiment of this philosophy⁶-- as a design unit or area to ensure that any design action taken is in accordance with the spatio-cosmological organization brings about by this principle.

3. The Balinese traditional-religious conceptions of space to be utilized in the urban design process in the town of Gianyar, in a core-periphery-continuum order, are: 1) psycho-cosmic concept; 2) *Tri Hita Karana*; 3) *Tri Angga*; 4) *Kaja-Kelod*; 5) *Kangin-Kauh*; 6) *Sanga Mandala*; 7) local knowledge systems (*Tri Pramana* and *Tri Masa*).

The core conception of space in the Balinese traditional-religious domain, the psycho-cosmic concept, will be further elaborated below to create some points which will be discussed in the following section.

Psycho-cosmic concept

The psycho-cosmic concept is a Balinese Hinduism conception, which can be explained through symbols of the spiritual world within the sphere of physical world (*sekala*) and its relation with the metaphysical world (*niskala*) in a way similar to the relations between the *bhuwana alit* (microcosm) and the *bhuwana agung* (macrocosm). As such, the human body is regarded as the world of microcosm which is differentiated from his immediate environment or universe (macrocosm). The philosophy of Balinese Hindu urges that a man as a *bhuwana alit* (microcosm) should harmonize himself with the universe as a *bhuwana agung* (macrocosm), because the human body and the universe are originated from the same elements, the element of *Panca Mahabhuta* or five basic elements (Puri, 1995) i.e. *pertiwi* (earth/solid substance),

⁵ Within a larger area, for instance, a town, the *Tri Hita Karana* is not manifested in a fullest composition as it does in the *desa adat* case. For one thing, a town does not have temples which act as a unifier as *Tri Kahyangan* temples do. A uniting temple in a town scale only found in Denpasar, however is not functioning as *Tri Kahyangan*.

⁶ *Perda Propinsi Bali No. 6 (1986) tentang Desa Adat* or Local Bali Province Regulation No. 6 (1986) on *Desa Adat*, stated formally and explicitly that *Tri Hita Karana* is the underlying philosophy of the existence of a *desa adat*. See for example Surpha (1991).

apah (water/fluid substance), *teja* (fire/light/heat), *bayu* (air), and *akasa* (space/ether)⁷.

The application of the psycho-cosmic concept in the cultural landscapes of the urban environments by way of environmental design reflects the cosmic conceptions of both Hinduism and Balinese tradition. Such a claim can be observed from the Balinese environmental design in which the Balinese settlement always acts as the symbol of macrocosm. Thus, the Balinese cultural landscapes are necessarily created in accordance with the natural characteristics of Bali environments, traditions and the Hinduism conceptions about the universe, because the cultural landscapes are means of adaptation for human beings (microcosm) towards the universe (macrocosm) in order to achieve a harmonious relation among them. In this case the Balinese settlement, particularly in the form of *desa adat*, is acting as a symbol of macrocosm whereas its resident is the microcosm, with the balance between the two as the ultimate goal. Thus, essentially the main target to be achieved by the Balinese environmental design is harmony between man and his surrounding environment.

Such being the case, the philosophy of balance between cosmoses is the fundamental principle in every mind of a Balinese Hindu, thus underlying human decisions and choices, in any purposeful change to the Balinese environments including the urban areas. It suggests that the Balinese cultural landscapes encode or embody certain cognitive schemata or images derived from this particular principle. Therefore, this is certainly the core principle to be conserved and maintained for the future environmental and urban design in particular, since the urbanization rate will transform most of settlement in the face of the earth into an urban one.

HOW TO CONSERVE THE CONCEPTION?

One thing must springs into our mind, since most of the Balinese are Hindu, surely such a conception is embedded on their decisions and choices. Thus, in urban design and management point of view, what is the urgent need to conserve it? Didn't the urban planning projects

in Bali have already accommodated the traditional-religious conceptions in their products? Didn't Bali Province have a regulation of *Perda No. 6 (1986) tentang Desa Adat* which in particular promotes the role of *desa adat* as the cultural preserver institution, thus, there is no urgency in establishing a new venue, or *Perda No. 2/PD/DPRD/1974 tentang Tata Ruang untuk Pembangunan* which urges the incorporation of cultural-religious values in any physical development?

In relation to the first question, firstly, we have to be reminded that urban design process will also expose to urban design regulations, policies and guidelines, thus putting the formal planning values above common or popular ones. Secondly, there always were disputes and polemics in the effort of accommodating those conceptions in formal urban planning and design. Furthermore, it is quite common that the market- and tourism-driven design process will override the local and traditional design values (see e.g. Budihardjo, 1986; Townsend, 1988; Picard, 1996). The conservation is needed to ensure that the fundamental principle in the creation of a Balinese space and place or the worldview by which the Balinese shaping their world always inherently incorporated in the urban design process, hence ensuring the production of a quality environment.

Regarding the second question, *desa adat* is recognized as the most important institution in preserving Bali cultures, however its role is somewhat limited to the cultural-religious aspects of development (Geriya, 1995; Pitana, ed., 1994). A critical role in the manipulation of the physical cultural landscapes, hence urban spatial design, is never been the designated character of *desa adat* from the 'formal' point of view. In addition, the above-mentioned second regulation is primarily confined to architecture matters.

My research produced a number of outputs, among others are several approaches on the conservation of the conception behind the creation of the Balinese cultural landscapes, however this paper only elaborated one of such approaches, as the following text will explain:

What my research findings demonstrated is that the town of Gianyar residents' worldview or cosmic sense is the core conceptions of space by which –to paraphrase it in general terms–the manipulation of the Balinese Hindu human settlement is based upon. Thus, the understanding and feeling of the completeness of a

⁷ For example, brick as one of building materials is made of soil and water, and hardened with the help of fire/heat which in itself needs air to flame.

cosmic territory is deemed important in any decision and choice made by the dweller of such a territory. To incorporate this principle in the contemporary environmental design, and particularly the urban environments in respect to the above mentioned urbanization reason, we have to install this cosmic territory as a single unit for urban design purpose. As such, only one kind of cosmic territory which possesses aspects of a formal planning and design, such as 1) population, 2) comprehensive socio-economic activities and networks, and 3) infrastructure, that is the urban *desa adat*.

The designation of the *desa adat* as an urban design area or unit within the cultural confinement of the Bali Island will replace the conventional urban design unit based on administrative boundary (such as *kelurahan* or *kecamatan*) or on functional use (such as CBD, civic center, or industrial park). Such a strategy to be applied for future urban planning and design projects will adopt a complete macrocosm (hence cosmic territory) and subsequently spatial organization within the Balinese Hinduism cosmological sense. By doing so, the urban design process—which is essentially an act of harmonizing the urban dweller as microcosm and the urban *desa adat* as macrocosm—will produce the best policies and programs in regard to the achievement of a culturally acceptable space. Hence a good quality cultural landscape, and cultural and temporal continuity in the sense of what so called the conservation of a living culture.

CONCLUSION

The conservation of the Balinese urban cultural landscape as a cultural heritage has been proposed in this paper by way of the installation of the *desa adat* as an urban design unit in the formal planning and design in Bali. However, its utilization will require the political will of the bureaucracy since the current planning and design system has been firmly established within a standardized and rigid format. The will to interpret relevant legal products in favor of the localism which exist throughout the Indonesian archipelago is needed as the prerequisite condition in applying such an alternative approach.

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