

A Spatial Analysis of the Recreation Potential of Cirebon, Indonesia's Kratons

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Cirebon is an important port city located on the provincial, as well as cultural, border of West and Central Java. Historically, an important Indonesian melting pot, it is an expanding center of commerce and industry. There remain, however, a number of special artistic and cultural features of the city revealed by motifs reflecting the traditions of the Kratons, or former palaces of the Sultanate of Cirebon, which reached its height in the fifteenth century. This paper presents an analysis of the Kratons of Cirebon as a recreational and tourism resource within the concept of the spatial analysis of recreational behavior. It is structured around various aspects of the relationship between human spatial behavior and leisure environments.

Keywords: Kratons; Cirebon; Tourism; Human Spatial Behavior; Leisure Environments

Introduction

Cirebon is an important port city in the south-western part of the Indonesian archipelago. It is located on the north coast of the most populous Indonesian island of Java. Although it is in West Java Province, it stands on the border of Central Java. This makes it an important cultural melting pot of the Sundanese and Javanese people respectively. Chinese immigrants also play an important role. As the second port of Jakarta, and one with an expanding export production zone, it is important for the whole of West Java. It is also the point of export for a large number of agricultural commodities such as tea, rice sugar, coffee, and essential oil, teak and other products of the surrounding region (Encarta, 2013). Development is occurring at a high rate with Indonesian and foreign investment increasing. Cirebon is an important transportation center for goods to and from Jakarta, as well as a transit town between West Java and Central Java, where the trucks and buses pass by the busy major east-west highway.

Nevertheless, life in Cirebon retains much of its charm, with bicycle rickshaws (becaks) still plying its wide, tree lined streets. There are a number of special artistic and cultural features of the city, including its unique glass painting and special batik cloth, both of which are characterized by motifs reflecting the traditions of the Kratons, or former palaces of the Sultanate of Cirebon, which reached its height in the fifteenth century. This old and almost forgotten sultanate, contains four Kratons or palaces, the refuge for still living lines of an ancient royal family. Symbolic of a feudalistic and aristocratic past, the sultans have long since relinquished their traditional lifestyle (Lim & Gocher, 1990).

This paper will analyze the Kratons of Cirebon as a recreational and tourism resource within the concept of the spatial

analysis of recreational behavior. It will be structured around various aspects of the relationship between human spatial behavior and leisure environments.

First, the Kratons will be viewed from the perspectives of those who interact with it. Its several layers of meaning will be discussed depending on the viewpoints, interests, and cultural context of 1) those living in the immediate area surrounding the palaces, 2) the citizens of Cirebon, 3) the inhabitants of Java, 4) Indonesians as a whole, and 5) foreign tourists.

Second, the four major sets of factors identified by Pearce relating to accommodation, to attraction, to the economic impact of tourism and to the tourist themselves will be discussed in relation to the groups of the preceding paragraph (Pearce, 1995).

Background: Indonesia, Java and Cirebon

Indonesia: A Country to Explore

Indonesia, the world's most populous Moslem country, is situated in Southeast Asia. As was stated in the previous section, its land mass is an archipelago, but it is one divided into two unequal strings of islands: a southern chain containing the comparatively long, narrow islands of Sumatra, Java, Timor and others, and the northern chain of Borneo (Kalimantan), Celebes (Sulawesi), the Moluccas, and New Guinea. The country consists of nearly 13,700 islands, almost half of which are inhabited, and stretches across some 5100 km of sea in the region of the equator.

Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world. According to a 1995 estimate, it has 250,586,000 inhabitants (World Population Review, 2013). Nearly three-fifths of the people live on Java and Madura, which makes this the most

densely populated region of the country. Indonesia has many ethnic groups, the variety of which makes the country very rich in culture and traditions. The indigenous people of Indonesia are mostly of mixed Malaysian origin, and the most distinctive ethnic groups are the Javanese and the Sundanese, who live mainly on Java and Madura; the Balinese, in Bali; and the Bataks and Acehnese, on Sumatra. Other minority groups distributed throughout the islands include a number of related Malay groups, several million Chinese, and other Asian people. The number of Dutch who still live in Indonesia is less than 10,000 (Encarta, 2013).

Java: The Dominant Island

Indonesia is dominated both by Javanese culture and by the sheer number of its inhabitants. The overwhelming majority of the people living on Java are either the Sundanese, who inhabit the extreme western part of the island, the Javanese, who inhabit the central part, and the Madurese, who inhabit the eastern part. The overwhelming majority of the population is Muslim, although there are significant numbers of Catholics and Protestants. Bali, directly to the east of Java is mostly Hindu.

Cirebon: Historical Development and Current Importance

Cirebon, which rose to prominence in the late 14th century, had its origins in the small fishing village of Muara Jati. This village later became a port in the Kingdom of Rajagaluh, which had its capital near the present day town of Ciamis. Later on, the harbor master, Ki Gedeng Tapa relocated, founding a settlement at Lemahwungkuk, the site of present day Cirebon. The new area was named "Caruban", meaning "mixture". This referred to the large number of foreign merchants and traders who were settling there. It became a melting pot of traders and of different tribes and races. This small settlement grew to become modern day Cirebon. At that time, however, the ruler of the Pajajaran Kingdom appointed the harbour master as a chieftain with the title "Kuwu Cirebon". Later on, he was succeeded by Walangsungsang, a son of Siliwangi, king of the Sundanese Pajajaran kingdom, whose name is later changed to "Cakrabuoni" (Lim & Gocher, op. cit.).

Around 1415, the great Muslim Chinese eunuch, Admiral Cheng Ho, visited the port of Muara Jati on one of his legendary expeditions as an envoy from Imperial China to induce local rulers to send tribute to the Ming Court. He had 62 ships, which carried 28,000 men. It is believed that the chronicler Ma Huang stayed and married a local girl, and began a small settlement of Chinese Muslims at Muara Jati. They built a lighthouse to mark the port (Lim & Gocher, op. cit.).

Syarif Hidayatullah (Gunung Jati), nephew of Prince Cakrabuoni, was born in Egypt. He travelled through the Middle East, India and China before reaching the land of his Javanese mother to spread the word of Islam. He became the Sunan Gunung Jati after arriving in Cirebon in 1470. He was later appointed by the Nine Walis as a messenger to spread Islam in Sundaland and to join his uncle Cakrabuoni in Caruban. Having studied mysticism in Baghdad, he was the most respected person in the whole of Cirebon and the land of the Sundanese people. He could influence people with his mystic power, and that made him the most powerful and influential person in the region. He separated Cirebon from the Kingdom of Rajagaluh and built Cirebon's first Kraton (palace), Pakungwati in Le-

mahwungkuk. Cirebon had already become a leading coastal town with a busy and well-maintained harbor.

In 1475, however, Cirebon was conquered by Demak princes, and in 1480 began the construction of Mesjid Agung (the Agung mosque). It was known then as Sang Cipta Rasa, and it is one of the earliest Islamic structures in Java. The mosque was completed around the same time as the Great Mosque in Demak.

The Kingdom of Mataram, centered in the central Java city of Yogyakarta, soon started to expand its power to the coastal towns, and the port of Cirebon and its surrounding areas became a vassal of the kingdom. Mataram, under the ruler Sultan Agung, became the dominant power in Java. The Javanese cultural mix was further enriched by the spread of Islam in the 15th and 16th centuries. The coastal population and the aristocracy were the first elements to be influenced by the new culture, and by the 16th century the nominally Muslim Kingdom of Mataram had established control over the entire island (Suhartono, 1993).

By 1615, Mataram people had begun to settle in Cirebon, strengthening Mataram's cultural influence, while the intermarriage of the princes and princesses of the two kingdoms helped to increase Mataram's power. Javanese cultural influences had now become very strong in Cirebon and became the way of life of the Cirebonese people.

The last pieces of the complex of Kratons in Cirebon that form the focus of this paper were built in the second half of the 17th century. One of them, the Klinteng Thiaw Kak Sie, is not strictly speaking a part of the Kraton complex, but because it is within walking distance, forms part of the resource from the tourist perspective. This building is actually a still functioning Buddhist temple, built by the Chinese in 1658. The last two Kratons, Kasepuhan and Kanoman, were built in 1678 and the former is built on the site of the earlier Pakungwati Kraton of the Hindu-Javanese regents.

Turning from the historical development of the city, which puts the Kratons within a historical and cultural framework for recreation and tourism, it is now useful to describe in brief the growing economic importance and development of the city, because this indicates the opportunities for the further exploitation of the Kratons. Cirebon's general importance has been outlined in the introduction. Here, however, it is important to note that the city is the fastest growing on Java. Its downtown real estate has been rising in value with the construction of shopping malls, hotels and office buildings. Green spaces have been disappearing, and the city centre is becoming more dense. The economic impetus for this has been Cirebon's excellent port facilities and its proximity to both Jakarta and Bandung, as well as a major natural gas field of the national oil company, Pertamina. This has caused Cirebon to be seen as a second port for the Jakarta region and has led to the construction of a high-speed, modern highway linking the three. Excellent rail connections for Jakarta and Cirebon already exist. Cirebon has hence been developed as a free port for the manufacture of export goods and a break of bulk center for the distribution of imports. Both domestic and foreign investment is increasing and the number of non-Cirebonese middle-class and foreign residents connected to the economic boom has also been on the rise.

Given this cultural importance of the Kratons and the economic transformation of Cirebon, the recreational and tourism potential of the Kratons has also been transformed. However,

before suggesting the role of the Kratons in the future, it is first necessary to look at how the possible “consumers” view the Kratons and how they are currently utilized.

Perspectives of the Kratons

To assess the recreational and tourism potential of the Kratons, five distinct groups with different spatial relationships to the Kratons will be discussed with regard to the meaning of the Kratons to them. These are: 1) those living in the immediate area surrounding the palaces, 2) the rest of the inhabitants of the city, 3) the inhabitants of Java, 4) Indonesians as a whole, and 5) foreign tourists

The Neighbors: Those Living Closest to the Kratons

Generally speaking, the people living in closest proximity to the palace complex are working and lower to middle class. They are mostly Cirebonese, which means they are native born and speak the local dialect comprising a mixture of Sundanese and Javanese. Of course, this excludes the descendants of the Sultans themselves, who actually still live in some of the Kratons and elsewhere in parts of the complex. For them, of course, the Kratons are their private homes. However, they are seen by Cirebonese as still belonging to the people.

This, in fact, causes no conflict, because the family of the Sultan recognizes this. They have demonstrated this by recently hosting the Kraton Festival, which is a kind of exhibition and historical celebration for all of Indonesia and some neighboring countries. It is clear, that any development of the Kratons requires their approval and active participation, but that should not be a barrier. Their living quarters could be modified with little trouble, for example. They have frequently shown themselves to be co-operative in these matters, since the Sultan and his family require income to maintain their holdings.

Living in close proximity to the Sultan and his family, the surrounding community considers the Kratons and their owners as simply neighbors. They have normal relations, and there is no awe of the social positions of the members of the Sultan’s family, although their status is respected. For the community, the palaces are considered in much the same way as its neighboring community regards the King’s palace in The Hague, although the social relations are quite different.

The Cirebonese

For the rest of the Cirebonese, the Kratons are an important historical and cultural symbol. They are proud of them in that they represent the past power and glory of their forefathers. Nevertheless, they are also not impressed by the royal titles of the inhabitants, but consider them fellow citizens. This is, nonetheless, a bit simplistic. Actually, what is referred to here are the urban Cirebonese, or rather those of all classes living in the city itself. In the villages surrounding the municipality, but still considered part of Cirebon, the Kratons are more important to the cultural identity of the residents. They visit them at certain special times of the year and consider the Sultan’s descendants as people worthy of special honor.

Nevertheless, a large number of urbanized Cirebonese and their rural brothers and sisters share certain traditional views towards the ancestors of the royal family. This concerns the pre-Islamic, mystical strand of Javanese culture, and it gives added importance to the Kratons (See the previous discussion

of the Gunung Jati). The Cirebonese are very superstitious people, and the influence of the Gunung Jati’s magical power remains quite strong in their daily lives. This is important in understanding Indonesian Islam, because the religion never replaced Javanese or Sundanese traditions but was simply adopted in addition to them

The Javanese

Here, the term Javanese refers to all the Indonesian inhabitants of the island of Java, rather than to the Javanese ethnic and cultural group referred to above, which is centered in the middle and eastern parts of the island. Because of its physical position as a transport node linking Central and West Java Provinces, many Javanese frequently pass through Cirebon. Thus, everyone in Java knows of Cirebon, and it is a heavily used rest stop for those travelling the length of the island. The rest of Java’s inhabitants are equally as superstitious as the Cirebonese, and the Kratons, therefore, have importance to them as well. Visitors to the Kratons include many Indonesians who do not live in Cirebon. For them, the main attraction is the actual tomb of the Gunung Jati and his Chinese wife. Thus, the site is important to Indonesian Chinese as well, who often visit it in conjunction with a visit to the Buddhist temple located there. Thus, if it were easier to visit both the tomb and the Kratons between train changes in Cirebon, there would be more visitors to both.

Indonesians from Other Islands

As far as the 35% to 40% of Indonesian citizens not living on Java are concerned, the Kratons of Cirebon exert far less influence, although the history of the country taught in any secondary school (SMP) will include a section on the development of Islamic kingdoms, of which the Sultanate of Cirebon is an important one. Indonesia is composed of dozens of cultures and traditions, hundreds of ethnic groups and hundreds of languages and dialects as well. The dominance of the Javanese and Sundanese cultures extends to the other islands in varying degrees, but the pre-Islamic traditions of the island do not have much meaning. They have their own cultural symbols and relics.

Foreign Tourists

Put simplistically, foreign tourists in Indonesia generally have two destinations: Bali and Yogyakarta. The former is largely developed for mass tourism and the convention trade, while the latter, “Yogya”, attracts the growing number of tourists more interested in Javanese culture. Cirebon and its Kratons are not widely known to them, although a small number are starting to appear in the city because they have read about Java and realize the importance of the palaces. However, these are the few foreigners interested in Indonesian culture to a more than ordinary depth.

Current Utilization of the Kratons

While the basic argument of this paper is that the Kratons of Cirebon are an underused recreational resource, this does not mean that they are not used at all. As has been previously noted, they are inhabited. Moreover, festivals are occasionally held there, and the occasional Indonesian or foreign tourist passes by. However, these are normally visiting because they have come

to Cirebon as pilgrims to visit the nearby tomb of the Gunung Jati, which is one of the holiest Moslem places in Java. Malaysians and people from Brunei also consider the place holy. On a daily basis, however, the citizens of Cirebon living both nearby and elsewhere in the city and its surroundings do not visit.

Their most important use at present, however, is once a year at Maulud, the biggest Moslem festival of the year, celebrating the Prophet Mohammed's birthday. Celebrated largely at Kasepuhan and Kanoman Kratons, it attracts visitors from all over Java and overseas.

One of the biggest attractions is the "Panjang Jimat" ceremony. For this, all the heirlooms of the palaces are taken out and displayed. This includes the sacred Kris (dagger) and blue and white Ming dynasty plates and trays, illustrated with Islamic verses from the Koran. For several days before, the grounds of the Kratons fill with people, and hawkers abound selling food and toys. It is a very festive occasion, with mountains of rice consumed.

The ceremony is also interesting because it contains elements of pre-Islamic Javanese culture. In the ceremony, all the daggers and other heirlooms are washed with special water, which has been prepared a few days earlier to have the smell of flowers. For the people from the villages, this ceremony is very important, and they collect the flowered water after it has been used because they believe it has magical power.

Suggested Recreational Potential of the Kratons in Relation to the Groups Identified

Given the history of Cirebon, its economic growth and development, the perspectives of the Kratons held by a number of groups of possible users of its tourist and recreational potential, their cultural and religious significance and their current use, it is clear that they are an under-utilized resource. In this section, how this potential might be better developed for the groups of people who interact with it are outlined in relation to the factors identified by Pearce. As a note of caution, these suggestions are very preliminary in nature and represent the views of the authors, one of whom has grown up in the city, without the benefit of detailed study.

Pearce has written about four sets of factors to consider in his discussion about measuring the spatial variations of tourism. Measurement per se is not the purpose of this paper, but Pearce's four sets of factors form useful analytical elements in considering the possible future recreational development of the Kratons. These are demonstrated below.

Pearce has identified in a well-known article accommodation, attraction, economic impact and the tourists themselves as these factors (Pearce, *op. cit.*). The tourists themselves have here been treated as the five groups of people who interact with the Kratons. What will now be done is to relate these groups to the other three factors to frame some ideas that recreational planners might consider for tourism in Cirebon.

The Neighbors: Those Living Closest to the Kratons

Those living closest to the Kratons see them as simply an object of their environment (attraction), except for those few days of the year when the Kratons become the center of social, cultural and religious life in the city; that is during Maulud. Accommodation is, of course, no issue for this group. For them, the further development of the Kratons for recreation and tourism is most important for its economic value. They would seek

jobs there and also invest in businesses ranging from selling food and cigarettes as petty traders to larger restaurants and guesthouses.

The Cirebonese

For the rest of the people in the Cirebon area, who also require no accommodation, the Kratons could become a recreational attraction, if they were developed for day trips. For example, one of the palaces could be restored to its former state, and the treasures of all put on permanent display in it. In this sense, it would be a sort of museum demonstrating local history and culture. In contrast to an ordinary museum, however, Cirebon's unique art forms of glass painting and batik, both based on Kraton motifs, could be sold there and their creation demonstrated. A restaurant could also be built featuring the local cuisine (e.g., Cirebon is widely known for its prawns) and offering traditional cultural performances of music, theatre and dance.

These cultural events will preserve the local culture, which has begun to fade under the influence of western mass culture. The young people here have also been influenced by what Dietvorst (1995) calls a shift from the "Gutenberg generation" to the "MTV generation". In his words, "The former was educated with the printed word and with logical, sequential thinking, the later prefers crossing and fragmented stories (as in the soaps): no linear logic, no consistency, no separation between private and public, between commerce and arts, between illusion and reality." This cultural influence seems to be getting into the blood of the young people who live in the Cirebon urban area.

The economic impact of this development would have several dimensions. First, it would generate jobs, both temporary (e.g., for artisans, painters, masons and other skilled tradesmen, as well as for ordinary construction workers) and permanent (e.g., for guards, waiters, guides, artists and musicians), and these would be for the Cirebon population at large.

The Javanese

As was mentioned previously, people from all over Java come to Cirebon during the Maulud festival. The attraction of the Kratons is thus already there. The challenge is to make it more attractive so that even more people will come, stay longer and find out that there are other, year round reasons to visit the city and its surroundings. Accommodation is also adequate, although Cirebon is currently experiencing the construction of a significant number of three and four star hotel rooms. These are of a high standard and relatively cheap for European tourists. However, they are too costly for average Indonesian families. For them, there are a large number of affordable family hotels located at some distance from the Kratons. While this is not a problem in itself, finding one is not always so easy. With the increasing sophistication of the Indonesian consumer, advertising hotels and their rates, as well as developing a booking system through a centralized service would be helpful. A tourist desk in the central train station would also be appreciated. In addition, an island wide advertising campaign in the various media focusing on the Kratons could be useful.

The economic impact here begins to be significant. If the city becomes a tourist destination for the Javanese, it will experience economic expansion. The target group here is Javanese families. They will stay in the city itself and thereby pay entrance fees to the Kratons, eat in local restaurants, sleep in the

city's hotels, buy its glass paintings and batik, purchase t-shirts and other tourist trinkets, listen to its music and view its cultural performances. They would also visit the area's other attractions, which include sand beaches and Linggarjati, a semi-rural resort area known for its lovely landscapes. Some, especially the young, would climb, as do the local youth, Mt. Ciremai, which, at 3100 meters, is West Java's highest mountain. This would generate further expenditures.

Indonesians from Other Islands

This group was characterized earlier in this paper as not having much interest in the Kratons of Cirebon. That is, the attraction of the resource to them is minimal. Accommodation is similar as for the Javanese in the previous section. Some of these people will visit Cirebon if they are making a tour of Java, but it makes little sense to target them specifically given the higher attractiveness of the Kratons to the other groups. Thus, the economic impact here is likely to be minor.

Foreign Tourists

The authors believe that there is significant potential for developing the Kratons of Cirebon for this group. While the average foreign tourist is less interested in the religious significance of the site as an attraction, there is appeal in the historical and cultural components. The culinary, architectural, musical, artistic, and theatrical aspects of its development would be of interest, as would be its popularity for "Indonesian" tourists. It would appear "genuine". Accommodation is more than adequate, and the range of hotels fits any pocketbook. The choices range from local accommodation for backpackers to fully equipped four star hotels with swimming pools and air-conditioning.

Nevertheless, the Kratons themselves are unlikely to attract large numbers of foreign tourists, with their large economic impacts, to Cirebon. The development of the neighboring tourist attractions to international tourist standards might. Cirebon has extensive and visually appealing sand beaches, but they are not particularly clean, and the water is polluted from both the harbor and domestic sewage. Good beaches are about a forty-five minute drive. If some hotels were developed there at the standard of the best in the city, wealthier Javanese tourists, as well as international visitors, might find the area to be an at-

tractive base for excursions to the sites of the area. Similarly the rural vistas and the appeal of climbing Mt. Ciremai might be enhanced by improved accommodation and services.

Nevertheless, it should be stressed that tourist development in Cirebon's surroundings should remain balanced; that is, what Dietvorst (1996) calls the "accelerating" forces of modern society (e.g., mass tourism) should not overwhelm the "inert" ones (e.g., the rural idyll) of the countryside which attract the tourists to begin with.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a spatial analysis of the recreational and tourism potential of the Kratons of Cirebon. It has explained their history and culture, looked at the Kratons as a resource from the points of view of a number of spatially disparate user groups, outlined the current uses of the palaces and offered some ideas for their further recreational and tourism development based on the sets of factors identified by Pearce. It is clear that there is significant scope here for the further development of this rich cultural and historical resource within the context of a growing and modernizing city still proudly conscious of its past.

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