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Preserving cultural heritage of Denpasar: local community perspectives

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Abstract

Bali is well known as the Island of Paradise on earth. Its unique landscape and cultural practices attract large number of tourists from all over the world. Bali's cultural heritage is the main attraction for tourists and tourism is the main source of the local economy. Population growth in Bali due to tourism and migration is undeniable and it has led to several new developments in Denpasar city to accommodate the growth. New developments have noticeably transformed the identity of Denpasar. Urban development strategies, in general, do not necessarily take into account urban character and identity. Urban character and identity is important because it adds to the strength of the city and differentiates it from others. This paper brings out the significance of cultural heritage as an important planning element to preserve the character and identity of Denpasar. The planning aspiration of Denpasar city "Denpasar is a Cultural City based on the harmony between God, Human and the Nature" which has come about in recent years after the population boom. Nevertheless, lack of guidelines about appropriate policies suggest that current policies are not effective in tackling the ongoing multi-layered threats of urban development on cultural heritage conservation. This paper seeks to identify suitable conservation strategies for Denpasar. This paper uses descriptive analysis to gain knowledge from place and its community. NVivo 10 software helps to capture views and perspectives about the importance of cultural heritage and evolve strategies to retain the cultural identity and heritage of Denpasar through the interview of various heads of local communities in Denpasar. It concludes with ways of conserving cultural heritage and how it could improve planning and development policies of Denpasar.

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1. Introduction

Heritage is one of the important elements which create character, identity and image of city. It is not the set of authentic buildings and landscapes; it is a mirror which reflects the social and intellectual circumstances of our time. Heritage concerns our past history, present and future¹. It could be seen as a diverse knowledge that has content and meaning which change through time and across space². Furthermore, heritage is also seen as a reflection of pattern and behavior of dominant local communities within the entire society³. Technology, demographic and economic changes have put pressures on the cultural heritage, therefore culture and heritage are not stable and they transform and change dynamically. Economic, technological and demographic changes transform behavior, way of life, landscape and natural sites in the developing countries. Modernization, nationalization and uniformity of different ethnic groups in the developing countries in order to cope with global modern world force the communities to consume the same products, media and new lifestyles³.

The significance of cultural heritage is often discussed in the perspectives of urban development strategies with strong emphasis on the relationship between cultural heritage and tourism. In general, it can be seen that both tangible heritage, such as natural and cultural, and intangible heritage compromise substantial opportunities for the tourism^{4,5,6,7,8}. Views about heritage as artefact seem more important than the views as knowledge. Furthermore, lack of adequate management of cultural heritage including building sites and landscapes can significantly impact on the capacity of heritage sites to attract visitors. This happened all over the world with changes in environment and society as a result of tourism. Thus, management of heritage sites needs to combine viable commercial strategies and specific conservation methods¹.

Technological, demographic and economic changes exert pressure on cultural heritage, therefore culture and heritage are not stable and they transform and change dynamically. The awareness about losing local culture in Asian countries has emerged due to the rapid urbanization and population growth and come in conflict with sustaining the place identity. Economic, technological and demographic changes transform behavior, way of life, landscape and natural sites in the developing countries. Furthermore, cultural dynamism and pluralism are an issue in the developing countries due to population growth. Change from singulars to plurals possibly will create cultural conflicts and dissonant^{3,9}. Thus, the need for conservation in developing countries is paramount.

Demographic and technological changes, economic growth and tourism impact on the conservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Denpasar. The influx of population through migration and tourism and the lack of guidelines on conservation in Denpasar have hampered the conservation process of cultural heritage. Cultural heritage is the main attraction for tourism industry and it is the main source of local economy. Historically the local community called *Adat* has the major responsibility for the conservation process as most of the cultural heritage sites were temples, royal palaces and Balinese Hindu rituals of Balinese Hindu population. Thus, an appropriate strategy for the conservation process is urgent because the demographic changes pose significant challenge to the conservation process and tourism industry has exploited both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

2. Significant of cultural heritage in Denpasar

Denpasar is the capital of Bali province in Indonesia. Bali is known as ‘the island of god’ and has become one of favorite tourist destinations in South East Asia. The population of Denpasar has grown from 532,440 in 2000 to 788,445 in 2010¹⁰. Tourism industry is the main driver of migration to Bali. According to Bali Statistical Bureau¹⁰ 30.6% of population in Denpasar migrated to Bali with the highest number migration from the island of Java. Denpasar is also the center of government, commerce, business, and education.

With the influx of population, Denpasar is undergoing a rapid transformation fueled by the demand for infrastructure and services. Population growth has affected the original character and identify of Denpasar which is built around the architectural traditions of Hindu city and the building code. The traditional architecture based on Hindu religion and its traditions are the main heritage of Denpasar that creates the character and identity of this city.

The concept of space, building and landscape, and urban design in Bali based on the harmonization between god, human and the natural environment is the main aspect of the Balinese concept. The psycho-cosmic concept of the Balinese culture found in the Balinese traditional landscapes is known as ‘*Sanga Mandala*’ (*Sanga* is nine and *Mandala* is area/site division) which is hard to implement in new developments due to the change of values and

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