

Empowerment of Cultural Heritage Stewards as An Effort to Preserve Historical Tourism Objects in Aceh

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Abstract. *Aceh is an area that has a lot of historical heritage in the form of cultural heritage sites. The problem that occurs now is that there are so many cultural heritage sites that are not maintained. One way to care for them is by placing a caretaker in charge of maintaining and preserving the site. The purpose of the research is to examine the concept of empowerment carried out by the government towards cultural heritage and how the role and duties of this caretaker. This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive analysis approach. Data sources were obtained from literature studies, field observations, and direct interviews with the CPC and the caretakers at the Indrapatra Fort, Sultan Iskandar Muda Fort, Inong Balee Fort, and Kandang XII Tomb. The results showed that the BPK has placed 83 caretakers in several cultural heritage sites that have been recorded. The empowerment strategy carried out is to provide capacity-building training once a year, provide salary wages according to the provisions, and evaluate and monitor the performance of the stewards. The duties and roles of these stewards are to maintain, care for, clean, and guide visitors who come to the cultural heritage site.*

Keywords: *empowerment, stewards, cultural heritage, historical tourism*

1. Introduction

Aceh is an area that has a lot of historical heritage, this can happen because Aceh in the past was the center of civilization of several kingdoms that had triumphed in Aceh (Said, 1981). This historical heritage has an important role in the identity of the Acehnese nation and has educational value that needs to be studied. Historical heritage or cultural heritage can be tangible or intangible (Mas'ad, 2020b). Tangible cultural heritage is often referred to as cultural heritage. In its definition, cultural heritage is an archaeological relic of a certain community group that has an important value because it can show the level of a civilization (Wibowo, 2014). Law No. 11/2010 on Cultural Heritage explains that cultural heritage is an immaterial cultural heritage in the form of Cultural Heritage Objects, Cultural Heritage Buildings, Cultural Heritage Structures, Cultural Heritage Sites, and Cultural Heritage Areas on land and/or in water that needs to be preserved because they have important values for history, science, education, religion, and/or culture through the determination process (Kemendikbud RI, 2014).

Aceh has a lot of cultural heritage objects, so the number of cultural heritages is very large and continues to grow every year, must be preserved and maintained so that it can be utilized by various groups. Cultural preservation is not only the task of the government, but also the community must participate so that the preservation of cultural heritage can be achieved. Cultural heritage preservation is an effort to preserve and protect the existence or existence of various types of cultural heritage objects so that they do not become extinct.

The preservation of cultural heritage is explained in detail in Law No. 11/2010 on Cultural Heritage. As historical objects and heritage of the ancestors, cultural heritage can be damaged and even lost. Therefore, all responsible elements must maintain and care for its preservation. Cultural heritage is usually in the form of objects, buildings, or sites that are old, so when exposed to the weather it can cause damage if not properly cared for.

One way to preserve cultural heritage sites is by assigning people as caretakers who will look after the cultural heritage sites. In the regulation, these stewards are tasked with guarding, maintaining, and preserving cultural heritage areas and sites. Cultural heritage stewards are responsible for maintaining the integrity and physical condition of cultural heritage, including existing buildings, sites, or artifacts. This includes regular cleaning, minor repairs, and damage monitoring. They are also in charge of ensuring that cultural heritage is safe from damage caused by human actions such as vandalism, theft, or activities that can damage sites or artifacts.

This important role of a cultural heritage caretaker needs to be given more attention by the government, in this, case the Cultural Preservation Center of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The government should ensure that the people assigned as caretakers are fully committed to safeguarding the site. These caretakers must also be educated to be able to understand the history and narrative contained in each cultural heritage that they guard. Therefore, the caretakers must be empowered to ensure they can fulfill their rights and obligations to the fullest (Ibrahim & Dirkareshza, 2020).

In theory, the term empowerment is defined as a continuous movement and process to awaken potential, strengthen participation, and build civilization. More broadly, empowerment is understood as a process that aims to improve the skills of individuals or groups so that they have the ability, empowerment, and opportunity to take action (Susilo, 2016). The main impact of the empowerment process of the caretakers is that the cultural heritage site can be maintained and maintained optimally. In addition, the cleanliness of the area will bring a positive image so that it can invite tourists to come to travel and learn history at these cultural heritage sites.

To obtain data and an overview of the concept of empowerment and the role of cultural heritage caretakers in Aceh, observations and interviews were conducted with the government in charge of this issue, namely the BPK and several cultural heritage caretakers in Aceh. Departing from these facts and issues, this research aims to see how the form of government empowers cultural heritage caretakers in Aceh. And want to see the role of these caretakers in maintaining and caring for cultural heritage sites that will have an impact on the development of historical tourism in Aceh.

2. Method

This research uses qualitative research methods with a descriptive analysis approach. According to Lexy J. Moleong, qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the participants involved in it. This research emphasizes the subjective and interpretive meaning of human experience rather than quantitative measurement (Moleong, 2010). Dedi Mulyana emphasizes that a qualitative approach provides flexibility and depth in understanding complex social phenomena, and allows researchers to understand human experience in a more meaningful way (Mulyana, 2010).

Data sources in this study were obtained from observations and interviews with caretakers in several locations of cultural heritage sites such as Makam Kandang XII, Benteng Indrapatra, Benteng Inong Balee, Makam Mahalayati, and Benteng Sultan

Iskandar Muda. Furthermore, to strengthen the data, a documentation study was also conducted to find written sources in books, journals, archives, and research notes. After the data is collected, the data analysis process is then carried out using three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Thus, a study of the facts will be obtained which will be arranged in a narrative related to the focus of the research.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. *Empowerment concepts carried out by the government towards cultural heritage caretakers in Aceh*

In the Aceh region, the government agency responsible for carrying out the tasks of maintaining and preserving cultural heritage objects is the Cultural Preservation Center (BPK). In the regulation of Permendikbudristek No. 33 of 2022 concerning the Organization and Work Procedures of the Cultural Preservation Center explains that the BPK has duties and functions as (1) implementing the protection of cultural heritage, objects suspected of being cultural heritage, and objects of cultural promotion, (2) facilitating the utilization of cultural heritage and objects of cultural promotion, (3) implementation of partnerships in the field of preservation of cultural heritage, objects suspected of cultural heritage, and objects of cultural promotion, (4) implementation of data collection and documentation of cultural heritage, objects suspected of cultural heritage, and objects of cultural promotion, (5) implementation of monitoring and evaluation, and (6) implementation of administrative affairs.

Data obtained from the BPK Aceh Region states that the number of cultural heritage caretakers in Aceh under their auspices is 83 people. These caretakers have been decreed and their job locations are scattered at cultural heritage sites in all districts/cities in Aceh. The decree states that these caretakers have the status of non-civil servant contract workers. These caretakers are bound by a contract with a duration of 1 year and will continue to be extended with some predetermined rules. This is done through an evaluation process of the performance and ability of the stewards to perform their duties. (Interview with BPK Wil Aceh).

In terms of recruiting these stewards, the BPK has its own mechanism. They disseminate recruitment information with the same requirements as other job recruitment systems. However, there is one special consideration, namely that the person assigned as a caretaker is a local resident, namely a person who lives near the location of the cultural heritage site, and is proven by a certificate from the local village government. This is done because local people are the most knowledgeable and alert if anything happens at the cultural heritage site.

In addition, if the caretaker becomes seriously ill or dies, the descendants of the previous caretaker are prioritized to replace him. This is done with the consideration that the descendants are the ones who know more about the condition of the site. However, if none of his descendants can replace him, then another person will be selected through the applicable recruitment mechanism. As is the case at the Bukit Remis prehistoric heritage site in Aceh Tamiang, the land is owned by a family, so the BPK directly appoints one person from the family to be the caretaker.

The person who becomes the caretaker is also not limited by gender differences, men and women are allowed to become caretakers as long as they can take responsibility for taking care of these historical heritage sites. Adhi Surya, the person in charge of the BPK's caretakers, said that the number of caretakers assigned to each site varies. This

depends on the condition and area of the site. As in the case of the Indrapatra fort in Ladong Village, Aceh Besar, there are 6 caretakers. Similarly, the Inong Balee Fort site has 2 people. While the Kandang XII Tomb complex has 1 person.

3.2. *Empowerment of Cultural Heritage Caretakers*

In the legislation, namely Law No. 11 of 2010 concerning cultural heritage, in Article 1 paragraph 21, it is stated that what is meant by management is an integrated effort to protect, develop, and utilize cultural heritage through policy planning, implementation, and supervision for the greatest welfare of the people. In Article 1 Paragraph 22, it is stated that what is meant by preservation is a dynamic effort to maintain the existence of cultural heritage and its value by protecting, developing, and utilizing it.

The cultural heritage caretaker is the foremost person who knows best about the condition of the cultural heritage site both the condition of the physical building and the cleanliness of the site area. The role of these stewards is so vital that they need to be continuously empowered. The empowerment of cultural heritage stewards is an effort to improve the capacity, skills, and welfare of those responsible for the conservation, maintenance, and protection of cultural heritage sites (Mas'ad, 2020a). This empowerment is important to ensure that existing cultural heritage can be preserved for future generations, especially in the face of modern challenges such as environmental change, urbanization, and vandalism.

Several strategies can be done to empower cultural heritage caretakers in Aceh, namely; first by conducting training and capacity building for caretakers, this has been done by the BPK as the responsible government. This training is conducted once a year involving 83 custodians in Aceh. They are given materials to refresh their knowledge about cultural heritage and how to manage cultural heritage sites. The government also needs to provide ongoing training on methods of preserving, maintaining, and restoring cultural heritage, including the use of the latest technology.

The second strategy is economic empowerment; the caretakers' welfare also needs to be considered, especially about income. The CPC has provided monthly salaries to the caretakers, but from the testimony of several caretakers, they said the nominal was still relatively minimal. Nevertheless, they are grateful and do not protest the nominal amount that has been determined. The BPK should evaluate this and hope to propose wage increases as well as additional job opportunities related to the tourism and culture sector. The third strategy is to encourage stronger law enforcement related to the protection of cultural heritage, including strengthening the rights of these caretakers.

The fourth strategy is to cooperate with local communities. To protect cultural heritage, especially in Aceh, it is necessary to involve all communities. These communities have different roles, such as being cultural heritage custodians. Anyone who becomes a cultural heritage caretaker must certainly understand the importance of cultural heritage and feel the benefits of the existence of these important values. Schiffer and Gumerman have assessed a more detailed criteria reference, which categorizes the importance of an archaeological resource into importance for science, history, ethnicity, public, law, and funding. Widhi and Widarto also explained that several important values are the basis for managing archaeological resources, including culture, education, religion, tourism, tradition, and art (Panggabean, 2014).

The concept of understanding the important value is very necessary to be actualized and developed by the government to all elements of society, especially to the caretaker considering that so far the caretaker's understanding of cultural heritage is only limited to

historical relics without any understanding of other values of cultural heritage (Adhityatama, 2015). Understanding of the caretaker of the important values of cultural heritage can certainly be done through socialization as described by Prasodjo (2004) that presenting archaeological discourse by conducting socialization activities is one form of *empowering* the public to appreciate the *past* (*empowering the public to appreciate the past*) socialization form can be in the form of technical guidance, a workshop that must be done on an ongoing basis. In addition to understanding the important value of the caretaker, and the community in general must also be given an understanding of the legal regulations relating to cultural heritage considering that from the results of interviews, it is known that the caretaker does not know and understand that there are legal regulations governing cultural heritage (Gunungwingko, 2019).

3.3. Duties and Roles of Stewards in Preserving Cultural Heritage Sites in Aceh

The caretaker is one of the workers in the field of cultural heritage who has the task of maintaining, maintaining the security and safety of cultural heritage so that it is not lost, destroyed, or damaged. The role of this caretaker is the most important key to preventing damage. Several agencies are responsible for the maintenance and management of cultural heritage sites, namely the state, local governments, cultural heritage expert teams, and local administrators. All parties work together in the preservation of cultural heritage (Sasmito, 2014).

Caretakers have several tasks and roles that have been assigned to them by the provisions made by the BPK. These duties include; (1) cleaning cultural heritage or suspected cultural heritage, (2) caring for cultural heritage and its environment, (3) maintaining the security of cultural heritage or suspected cultural heritage and its environment, (4) receiving and guiding visitors who come to the cultural heritage site, (5) carrying out emergency handling to secure cultural heritage or suspected cultural heritage, (6) making reports of loss, damage, destruction, or destruction of cultural heritage or suspected cultural heritage. (7) report on the implementation of duties to the BPK no later than the first week of each month (Interview with BPK Wil Aceh).

The first task of the caretaker is to clean the cultural heritage site and the area around it from garbage, dust, and dirt. Rusdiansyah, the caretaker of Makam Kandang XII who has been working for 7 years, said that he cleans the site every day so that it is always clean and tidy from leaf litter. Even at that time, he was appointed as a caretaker to replace the previous caretaker who did not carry out his duties properly (Interview with Rusdiansyah). The same thing was also experienced by Fakhruddin, the caretaker of the Iskandar Muda fort site. The main problem he faces is that many animals such as cows, goats, and chickens enter the fort site area, leaving behind a lot of feces. It is his job to ensure that the fort site remains clean so that visitors feel comfortable (Interview with Fakhruddin).

The job of the caretaker, apart from cleaning the cultural heritage, is to help protect the cultural heritage from damage caused by nature and/or human actions. For example, the risk of falling trees around the cultural heritage or vandalism committed by visitors. This is often done by Abdullah, the caretaker of the Inong Balee fort who has been working for 20 years, he always ensures that the condition of the cultural heritage is maintained from various threats (Interview with Abdullah).

Caretakers are also expected to provide brief information about the cultural heritage they maintain and can provide the information needed if for example there are people who want to apply for permission to use the area in the cultural heritage. The caretaker

must be well versed in the cultural heritage material they manage, including its condition, background, and history to explain to tourists. In addition, the caretaker must have the ability to communicate and be able to behave well so that it will make tourists feel comfortable and enjoy their visit. In the implementation of guiding Cultural Heritage objects that become tourist attractions, information must be delivered clearly and easily understandable, timely, not boring, meet the needs of visitors, and be interesting.

4. Conclusions

Aceh has a lot of cultural heritage objects, so the number of cultural heritages is very large and continues to grow every year, must be preserved and maintained so that it can be utilized by various groups. One way to preserve cultural heritage sites is by assigning people as caretakers who will look after the cultural heritage sites. These stewards are tasked with maintaining, caring for, cleaning, and accompanying visitors who come to tour the cultural heritage site. In the Aceh region, the government agency responsible for carrying out the tasks of maintaining and preserving cultural heritage objects is the Cultural Preservation Center (CPC). The role of these stewards is so vital that they need to be continuously empowered. The empowerment of cultural heritage custodians is an effort to improve the capacity, skills, and welfare of those responsible for the conservation, maintenance, and protection of cultural heritage sites. Several strategies can be done to empower cultural heritage custodians in Aceh. First, by conducting training and increasing the capacity of the custodians. Second, by conducting economic empowerment, the custodians also need to pay attention to their welfare, especially with regard to income. Third, to encourage stronger law enforcement related to the protection of cultural heritage. Fourth, to collaborate with local communities.

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