

The Hybridization of Rumoh Aceh Architecture in the Context of Urbanization: A Study on the Negotiation of Tradition, Modernity, and Visual Identity

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ABSTRACT

Rumoh Aceh, the traditional house of Aceh, is increasingly threatened by rapid urbanization and the growing dominance of modern concrete-based housing, raising concerns about the preservation of cultural identity and local wisdom. This study aims to analyze changes in residential patterns caused by urbanization, examine the transformation of Rumoh Aceh into hybrid architectural forms, and formulate adaptive preservation strategies. A qualitative approach was employed through in-depth interviews, field observations, and literature analysis to explore the relationship between urbanization and the sustainability of traditional architecture. The findings reveal that urbanization has significantly reduced the presence of traditional Rumoh Aceh while encouraging the emergence of hybrid houses that combine traditional spatial values and symbolic elements with modern materials and construction techniques. Rather than representing a simple decline of traditional architecture, this transformation reflects a process of cultural adaptation and negotiation between heritage preservation and contemporary living requirements. The study further identifies community participation, supportive government regulations, and economic incentives as key factors for sustaining traditional architectural values. It concludes that the long-term preservation of Rumoh Aceh depends on collaborative efforts among communities, policymakers, and cultural stakeholders, supported by strategies that integrate cultural tourism and locally based renovation incentives.

KEYWORDS

Hybridization, Rumoh Aceh, Urbanization, Transformation, Cultural Preservation

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INTRODUCTION

The decline of Rumoh Aceh in recent decades has become a critical concern due to its implications for the sustainability of cultural identity and traditional architectural heritage. Rapid urbanization in Aceh, reflected in the increasing urban population reported by Badan Pusat Statistik (Maulidya, 2023), particularly in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, has accelerated the transition from traditional wooden stilt houses to modern concrete-based dwellings. This trend indicates that urban expansion has become a significant factor influencing the existence and continuity of Rumoh Aceh (Dwita Amaliah & Runing Sawitri, 2023). Such challenges are not unique to Aceh. Previous studies have highlighted that traditional architecture represents an essential component of cultural heritage and collective memory that requires continuous preservation efforts (Havinga et al., 2020). Nevertheless, modernization and industrialization have contributed to the decline of traditional housing in many regions of Southeast Asia, resulting in the gradual erosion of local cultural identities (Ugah et al., 2024). Despite growing attention to heritage conservation, limited research has comprehensively examined how urbanization reshapes residential patterns, transforms traditional

architectural forms, and influences the long-term sustainability of Rumoh Aceh. Therefore, this study investigates the dynamics of urbanization and explores adaptive strategies for preserving Rumoh Aceh within contemporary urban contexts.

Studies on traditional architecture in Indonesia, including Rumoh Aceh, have predominantly examined its historical, aesthetic, and symbolic dimensions (Afriadi, 2024; Nabila et al., 2022; Natasya, 2019; Wijaya et al., 2022). While these studies have successfully revealed the philosophical meanings and cultural values embedded in traditional architecture, they provide limited insight into how contemporary urbanization influences its transformation and sustainability. Other studies have focused on heritage conservation; however, they generally adopt normative preservation perspectives that pay insufficient attention to the socio-economic realities faced by local communities (L. H. Sari et al., 2018). At the regional level, research on traditional architecture in Southeast Asia has largely explored environmental and cultural adaptation, yet rarely investigates how modernization and urbanization generate architectural hybridization and reshape cultural identity (Akshar & Solissa, 2025). Consequently, there remains a significant research gap in understanding the interconnected relationship between urbanization, the transformation of Rumoh Aceh into hybrid architectural forms, and the development of adaptive preservation strategies. Addressing this gap, the present study offers a comprehensive analysis of how urbanization affects the distribution and transformation of Rumoh Aceh while identifying preservation approaches that balance cultural sustainability with contemporary societal needs.

The purpose of this paper is to complement the shortcomings of previous studies that have not seen the problem from the point of view of the relationship between the spread of traditional Acehese house architecture and the dynamics of urbanization that continue to erode the existence of local culture, and have not examined the long-term consequences of neglecting the preservation of traditional architecture on the identity and collective memory of the Acehese people. In line with that, this paper answers three important questions: (1) how the distribution of Acehese traditional house architecture is influenced by the urbanization process; (2) the extent to which social, cultural, and economic factors play a role in encouraging or hindering conservation efforts; and (3) what are the long-term implications of the sustainability or loss of this traditional architecture for the cultural heritage and identity of local communities. Answering these three questions will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the dynamics of urban modernization, the preservation of traditional architecture, and the continuity of the cultural identity of the Acehese people.

The argument tested in this study departs from the hypothesis that massive urbanization in Aceh is the main factor that affects the distribution, transformation, and even reduction of the number of traditional Acehese houses, both from the physical aspects, functions, and cultural values inherent in them. In this context, the process of urban modernization slowly encourages people to abandon traditional architectural models that are considered less adaptive to the needs of modern space, thus causing a reduction in the existence and continuity of Aceh's traditional architectural heritage. In addition, this study also examines the argument that the lack of conservation regulations and weak awareness of local communities reinforce the negative impact of urbanization on the sustainability of traditional architecture. Thus, the relationship to be tested is the relationship between urbanization dynamics, conservation awareness and policies, and the continuity of traditional Acehese architecture, which is theoretically expected to reveal a more systematic pattern of cause-effect.

METHOD

This study was conducted in Aceh Besar and Pidie Regencies, which were selected because of their historical significance as major centers of Rumoh Aceh distribution and their exposure to different levels of urbanization. Aceh Besar represents an urban-exposure area experiencing rapid development, whereas Pidie reflects a relatively rural context where traditional housing remains more prevalent. These contrasting settings provide an appropriate basis for examining how urbanization influences the existence, transformation, and preservation of Rumoh Aceh. The study focuses on the

form, structure, and function of surviving traditional houses and their transformed variants, as well as the social, economic, and policy factors that shape these changes.

This research employed a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of Rumoh Aceh distribution, architectural transformation, and preservation efforts in the context of urbanization (F. D. Sari et al., 2020). The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the exploration of meanings, experiences, and perspectives that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. Data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews, and the examination of policy documents and cultural archives. By integrating multiple sources of evidence, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the sustainability of Rumoh Aceh in contemporary society.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, focusing on key stakeholders directly involved in the preservation and use of Rumoh Aceh, including traditional house owners, community leaders, and local government representatives. A total of three key informants participated in the study, and additional participants were identified through snowball sampling. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively through data reduction, categorization, and interpretation to identify recurring themes and relationships. The findings were subsequently interpreted using perspectives from urbanization, heritage preservation, and architectural hybridization theories, enabling the study to reveal the socio-cultural dynamics underlying the transformation of Rumoh Aceh and to formulate relevant preservation recommendations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Increasingly Limited Distribution of Rumoh Aceh Architecture

Rumoh Aceh, a traditional Acehnese architectural style, holds significant historical, functional, and philosophical value. However, in recent decades, the preservation of these traditional houses has faced increasing challenges due to rapid modernization and urbanization. The shift in societal preferences towards modern concrete houses has led to a substantial decline in the number of Rumoh Aceh, particularly in urban areas that are more susceptible to lifestyle changes. Concrete houses are perceived as more practical, durable, and indicative of social status, resulting in their gradual replacement of traditional architecture that necessitates intensive maintenance. This phenomenon has caused the concentration of Rumoh Aceh in rural areas, where social ties and traditions remain relatively robust. This limited distribution not only reflects changes in residential patterns but also underscores the vulnerability of traditional architectural heritage in the face of modernity.



Figure 1. Front View of Rumoh Aceh set in a Picturesque Setting in the Aceh Besar Region



Figure 2. Side View of Rumoh Aceh with a Concrete Structure Added to the Lower Section



Figure 3. Bottom View of Rumoh Aceh Section that has been Modified with a Concrete Structure

The data presented in figures 1, 2, and 3 indicate a significant decline in the distribution of Rumoh Aceh architecture within the Aceh Besar and Pidie regions. This decline is evident from the limited discovery of traditional houses in their original form. Three visual documentation sources reveal that the majority of the remaining Rumoh Aceh structures have undergone modifications. These modifications include the incorporation of concrete material at the base of the houses and the replacement of thatched roofs with zinc roofs. These changes have rendered the original specifications of Rumoh Aceh, such as the construction of wooden stages with traditional connection systems, increasingly indistinct and compromising their authenticity. Consequently, the existence of Rumoh Aceh in its traditional form is diminishing, making it increasingly challenging to locate in the area that once served as its primary distribution center.

The overall data from figures 1, 2, and 3 can be derived from three primary patterns: first, the number of authentic Rumoh Aceh is decreasing and is only found in specific villages; second, there is a pattern of material adaptation, in which concrete, zinc, and ceramics replace traditional local materials due to factors such as strength, cost, and maintenance; third, the spread of Rumoh Aceh in urban areas has almost ceased, while in rural areas, its original form is increasingly rare. In conclusion, the pattern indicates that Rumah Aceh's architecture is in a critical phase, urgently requires modernization, and necessitates an urgent preservation strategy to preserve Aceh's cultural identity.

The declining number of Rumoh Aceh and the increasingly limited distribution, which is now more prevalent in the countryside, reflects the crisis of the sustainability of traditional architecture in the vortex of modernization. This shift occurred due to the transformation of space needs, lifestyle orientation, and increasing public preference for modern concrete houses that are considered more efficient and have a high social status. This phenomenon is in line with the theory of space production [Chandel et al., \(2016\)](#), which explains that architectural spaces are not only shaped by tradition, but also by the social, economic, and power dynamics that govern them. The loss of Rumoh Aceh in urban areas has a serious impact on the disconnection of cultural transmission between generations and has implications for the weakening of the collective identity of the Acehnese people ([Rong & Bahauddin, 2023](#)). In addition, the limited distribution in rural areas suggests that traditional architecture is in danger of being confined to marginal spaces, rather than as part of the mainstream of urban development, which in turn has the potential to erase the material traces of culture ([Go-Sam & Keys, 2018](#)). Thus, the decline of Rumoh Aceh is not just a physical change in the building, but a socio-cultural process that threatens the sustainability of the community's collective memory.

2. The Influence of Urbanization on Changes in Housing Patterns

Urbanization as a global phenomenon not only affects demographic and economic patterns, but also has a significant impact on the transformation of space and the form of people's housing. In Aceh, the flow of urbanization has created a sharp shift from traditional houses, namely Rumoh Aceh, to modern houses made of concrete. This shift is not just a technical issue of development, but is closely related to changes in values, lifestyles, and social aspirations of the community. The reason for efficiency is the main consideration, considering that modern houses are considered more

practical in terms of maintenance and able to adapt to the limitations of land in urban areas. In addition, concrete houses are often perceived as a symbol of a new social status that is more prestigious than wooden stilt houses. On the other hand, the increasing need for space due to the increasing number of family members and economic activities also accelerated this transition. Thus, urbanization has become the main motor in shifting traditional residential patterns towards modern forms that are more adaptive but erode local cultural heritage. It is described in detail in the following interview data:.

Table 1. Interviews Related to the Influence and Change of Housing Patterns

No	Name	Statement	Coding
1	Salaudin (67 years old)	Rumoh Aceh used to be functional, but now children prefer concrete houses because they are considered stronger and less troublesome to maintain	Efficiency & material strength
2	Nanda, (40 years old)	If you live in Rumoh Aceh, the space is limited, let alone a large family. Modern houses are more spacious and can be added on a level.	Space requirements & flexibility
3	Amarullah (32 years old)	Having a concrete house in the city is considered more prestigious, while Rumoh Aceh is only suitable for tourism or traditional events.	Social status & prestige

Source: Research Data, 2025

Interview data table 1 shows that urbanization has accelerated the change in the housing pattern of the Acehese people from Rumoh Aceh to modern houses for various practical and symbolic reasons. Overall, table 1 data, can be deduced three patterns which include: first, the pattern of structural efficiency, where modern houses are seen as more practical and durable than Rumoh Aceh; second, the pattern of space expansion, which emphasizes the need for wider and more flexible housing for large families; Third, the pattern of social status, where modern home ownership is associated with prestige and life achievements in the urban era. In essence, urbanization not only changes the physical form of housing, but also affects the orientation of values and people's identities towards their traditional architecture.

Urbanization has driven a shift in housing patterns from Rumoh Aceh to modern homes, not only due to changes in taste, but also due to the pressure of space needs, functional efficiency, and the construction of new social identities. This move shows that the modernization of living space is not only related to the physical aspects of the building, but also the process of negotiating values and status in society. This can be understood through a modernization approach [Bai et al., \(2017\)](#) which affirms that urbanization accelerates the transition of traditional societies towards rational and materialistic values. Consequently, traditional houses are considered less relevant to urban needs that demand flexibility and status symbols, so concrete houses are preferred ([Internship, 2017](#)). This shift has an impact on the weakening of the social and philosophical function of Rumoh Aceh as the center of community life, as well as strengthening the dominance of economic orientation in shaping the urban landscape ([Ugah et al., 2024](#)). Thus, urbanization is a key factor that changes the relationship between architecture, identity, and social practices of the Acehese people.

3. Architectural Transformation: Form Traditional to Hybrid

The architectural transformation of Rumoh Aceh in the era of urbanization was not only marked by the shrinking number of traditional houses, but also by the emergence of hybridization forms that combined traditional and modern elements ([Wirandi & Sukman, 2023](#)). This phenomenon was born as an adaptive response of society to practical, economic, and symbolic demands in daily life. Typical elements such as stages, wooden staircases, and wall carvings that are full of cultural significance began to be combined with new materials such as brick, concrete, and ceramics that were considered stronger, more durable, and in accordance with the image of modernity. This change signals a negotiation between cultural identity and contemporary needs, in which society does not completely abandon its traditional roots, but also no longer retains its authentic form intact. Thus, hybrid houses are not just architectural products, but a representation of socio-cultural compromise that shows the dynamics of preservation and transformation of Acehese identity in the midst of urbanization.



Figure 4. Rumoh Aceh in a Hybrid Style



Figure 5. Rumoh Aceh in Materials for the Staircase, which was originally made of wood but is now made of concrete

The transformation of Rumoh Aceh architecture to a hybrid form is increasingly evident field data that shows a mixture of traditional elements with modern materials. The transformation of Rumoh Aceh architecture into hybrid forms is increasingly evident from field findings that reveal a combination of traditional elements and modern construction materials (Anggakarti et al., 2024). As shown in Figure 4, houses that were originally constructed predominantly from wood have undergone significant material changes through the use of concrete walls and cement-based structures, while traditional carvings that were once integrated into wooden components are now reproduced as decorative reliefs on wall surfaces. Similarly, Figure 5 illustrates the replacement of the traditional wooden staircase, a distinctive feature of Rumoh Aceh, with permanent concrete materials. These findings indicate a growing tendency among local communities to retain selected visual characteristics of traditional architecture while adopting modern materials that are perceived as stronger, more durable, and easier to maintain. Consequently, the contemporary form of Rumoh Aceh increasingly reflects a hybrid architectural expression that combines traditional symbolism with modern construction practices.

The emergence of hybrid houses incorporating traditional features such as stilt structures, staircases, and ornamental carvings alongside modern materials including brick, concrete, and ceramic reflects an ongoing process of cultural adaptation. This transformation can be understood through the theory of cultural hybridization, which explains how interactions between local traditions and modern influences generate new architectural expressions rather than simply replacing one another (Salkhi Khasraghi & Mehan, 2023). However, the findings also suggest a gradual reduction in the philosophical and symbolic meanings embedded within traditional architecture, as traditional elements increasingly function as decorative features rather than culturally meaningful components (García-Esparza, 2015). This phenomenon can further be interpreted through the concept of kitsch, where traditional forms are reproduced superficially without preserving their original proportions, meanings, and cosmological significance. In Figure 4, for example, ornamental motifs are attached to concrete surfaces and become detached from their original structural and cultural context. From a visual semiotics perspective, this shift represents a transformation from meaningful cultural symbols into decorative signs that primarily serve aesthetic purposes. Therefore, while architectural hybridization may be viewed as a strategy of adaptive sustainability, it simultaneously poses a risk to cultural authenticity when the values and meanings underlying Rumoh Aceh architecture are no longer fully understood or practiced (Alonso González, 2016).

4. Conservation Strategy in the Midst of Ueurbanization

The preservation of traditional architecture, especially Rumoh Aceh, faces great challenges in the midst of increasingly massive urbanization. The modernization of housing and the orientation of

the community towards efficiency and social status have caused traditional houses to be increasingly marginalized. In this context, conservation efforts cannot rely solely on symbolic or ceremonial approaches, but require an integrated and sustainable strategy. The strategy ideally combines the power of local communities, government regulations that favor the protection of cultural heritage, and economic incentives that encourage community participation. A community-based approach is important considering that the community is the main actor in maintaining the sustainability of Rumoh Aceh, while policy support provides formal legitimacy. Preservation efforts can be seen from the narratives that have been carried out on various online news platforms (table 2).

Table 2. Conservation Strategy

No	News headlines	Narrative and sources	Coding
1	Preserving the Traditional Architect Values of Acehnese Traditional Houses	The preservation of various cultural and traditional values of regional buildings remains a priority of the Directorate General of Housing of the Ministry of PUPR in building infrastructure for the community. In addition, the structure of the building must also be in accordance with the philosophy of the regional traditional house so that it can be part of education for the current young generation. https://indonesiahousing.id/melestarikan-nilai-arsitek-tradisional-rumah-adat-aceh/	Preservation based on government policies and the education of the younger generation
2	Getting to Know the Traditional Houses of South Aceh Regency	Traditional houses in South Aceh face conservation challenges. Modernization, urbanization, and lifestyle changes have put great pressure on the survival of this culture. However, the spirit of preservation from the local community and the support from the local government show a commitment to keeping this cultural heritage alive and valuable for future generations. https://rri.co.id/wisata/805605/mengenal-rumah-adat-kabupaten-aceh-selatan	Conservation challenges due to modernization and the role of local communities
3	Acehnese Traditional House: The Beauty of Traditional Architecture Full of Meaning	Acehnese traditional houses are still preserved and are still used in various traditional ceremonies or as residences in several regions. Its existence is a symbol of cultural identity that reflects history and noble values inherited from generation to generation. Mursyidah and Ramadhona also underlined the need to increase public knowledge about Acehnese traditional houses and traditional Acehnese tools. This can be done through modern technology, such as augmented reality. https://kumparan.com/sejarah-dan-sosial/rumah-adat-aceh-keindahan-arsitektur-tradisional-yang-sarat-makna-24YYFVlvIIO/4	Cultural identity, symbolism, and technological innovation in preservation

The data presented in table 2 should not be interpreted as empirical evidence of actual conservation strategies, but rather as a form of media discourse analysis that reflects how conservation issues are framed in public narratives. The media tends to construct conservation as a normative and idealized agenda, emphasizing government commitment and cultural values, while often overlooking the practical challenges faced by local communities.

More concretely, field findings indicate that some home owners have initiated bottom-up conservation efforts by transforming their Rumoh Aceh into homestays or cultural tourism spaces,

which provide economic incentives while maintaining architectural authenticity. This practice demonstrates a more sustainable and contextual model of preservation compared to top-down policy discourse. Efforts to preserve Rumoh Aceh in the midst of urbanization pressures require a strategy that is not only symbolic, but is able to integrate communities, government regulations, and economic incentives as a unit. Community involvement is important because they are the main actors that maintain the sustainability of cultural practices, in line with the concept of community-based heritage management that emphasizes local participation in conservation (Li et al., 2020). Without formal policy support in the form of regulations and incentives, it will be difficult for people to maintain their traditional architecture because the burden of maintenance costs is much higher than that of modern homes (Méraï et al., 2022). Integration in cultural tourism can make preservation not just a burden, but an economic opportunity, in line with the view that Fayez (2024) that cultural heritage can be used as an asset of sustainable development. Thus, failure to build a comprehensive strategy will result in a further decline in the number of Aceh Rumoh, while the successful implementation can create an adaptive preservation model while strengthening Acehnese cultural identity in the modern era.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Rumoh Aceh is not merely a physical structure but a representation of collective identity, cultural values, and community memory. The findings reveal that urbanization has contributed to the declining distribution of Rumoh Aceh, shifts in residential patterns, and the emergence of hybrid architectural forms that reflect a negotiation between tradition and modernity. These results suggest that the sustainability of traditional architecture cannot rely solely on symbolic preservation but must be integrated with contemporary social and economic needs through approaches such as cultural tourism, economic incentives, and cultural education. The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between urbanization, architectural transformation, and community-based preservation strategies, while highlighting the influence of socio-economic factors, cultural values, and policy interventions on the sustainability of traditional architecture.

Despite these contributions, the study is limited by its qualitative scope, restricted geographical coverage, and limited involvement of broader stakeholders such as government agencies and the tourism sector. Consequently, the findings may not fully represent the overall condition of Rumoh Aceh across Aceh Province. Future research is recommended to employ mixed-method or quantitative approaches, expand the study area, and incorporate multidisciplinary perspectives to develop a more comprehensive understanding of traditional architectural preservation in the context of urbanization and sustainable development.

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