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TRANSFORMATION OF INDONESIAN CITIES: HISTORY CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract

This research discusses the transformation of cities in Indonesia, covering the history, challenges, and expectations of the future, focusing on five major cities: Jakarta, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Semarang, and Bandung. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation studies. The results of the study show that the history of the development of cities in Indonesia is influenced by colonialism, which forms spatial patterns and social segregation. Rapid urbanization, traffic congestion, air pollution, the impact of climate change, and social inequality are the main challenges faced. Nevertheless, various initiatives have been carried out, such as the implementation of the smart city concept in Bandung and Makassar, the management of green open spaces in Surabaya, and the preservation of local culture in Yogyakarta. However, community involvement in urban planning is still low, so the success of the initiative is not fully optimal. This research emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that integrates environmental sustainability, technology, cultural preservation, and community participation to realize inclusive and resilient cities. In conclusion, the transformation of cities in Indonesia requires the collaboration of all parties to face future challenges and create livable, sustainable, and competitive urban environments.

Key words: *Transformation; City; Challenge; Hope*

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, with its rich diversity, has an ever-changing and evolving urban landscape (Herliana & Purnomo, 2023). The long history of this nation has helped shape the face of cities that stand majestically in every corner of the archipelago. From ancient ports like Malacca to metropolises like Jakarta, the transformation of cities in Indonesia reflects the ever-moving social, cultural, economic, and political dynamics. This process not only reflects the passage of time, but also reveals the complexity of the challenges and expectations faced.

During the colonial period, cities in Indonesia grew as centers of trade and administration. For example, Batavia, now known as Jakarta, was designed as an administrative city that served the interests of the Dutch colonizers (Irsyam, 2017). The pattern of urban development at that time was more focused on colonial needs, thus separating the indigenous people from the economic and political center. The unequal social structure and economic dependence were the hallmarks of cities at that time.

After independence, the face of cities in Indonesia began to undergo significant changes. Modernization is the main agenda to accelerate economic growth and infrastructure development (Kh et al., 2024). Cities such as Bandung, Surabaya, and Medan began to develop into new industrial and trade centers. However, this modernization often runs at the expense of environmental sustainability and local cultural identity. Old buildings full of historical value are replaced by multi-storey buildings, forgetting the history inherent in their architecture.

Rapid urbanization is also a challenge in the transformation of cities in Indonesia (Ardiyanti & Sulistiawati, 2024). Massive migration from villages to cities led to a significant increase in the number of people in urban areas (Adam, 2010). This phenomenon gives rise to various problems such as population density, slums, traffic jams, and sanitation problems. Major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung are now facing infrastructure burdens that far exceed their capacity.

On the other hand, technological developments and digitalization provide new opportunities for urban transformation. The smart city concept has begun to be implemented in several cities in Indonesia, such as Bandung and Makassar, which aims to improve the efficiency of public services and the quality of life of the community (Mursalim, 2017). However, the implementation of this technology requires large investments and cultural adjustments that are not always easy. The digital divide between urban and rural communities is also a challenge that must be overcome.

In addition, the issue of climate change is an important factor in urban planning in Indonesia (Amalia & Sugiri, 2014). Rising global temperatures, rising sea levels, and other natural disasters put additional pressure on coastal cities such as Semarang and Jakarta. Nature-based solutions, such as the construction of green open spaces and sustainable water management, are beginning to be implemented, although they are still far from optimal.

Cultural sustainability is also an important issue in urban transformation in Indonesia. Globalization often erodes local values and replaces them with foreign cultures. For this reason, efforts are needed to preserve cultural identity through architecture, art, and social life of urban communities. Some cities such as Yogyakarta and Solo have managed to maintain their local wisdom, although the pressure of modernization continues to increase.

The role of the government in regulating spatial planning and urban development is very crucial. Regulations that support sustainable development and economic equity must be a priority. However, policies that are often centralistic and lack of coordination between agencies often hamper this process. Community participation in urban planning must also be further increased so that urban transformation truly reflects the needs of its citizens.

Amid these challenges, hopes for more inclusive and sustainable cities remain. Collaboration between the government, the private sector, and the community is the key to success. Cities in Indonesia have great potential to become a model of urban development that harmonizes between modernity, sustainability, and local identity.

Urban transformation in Indonesia is not only about physical development, but also about how the people adapt and develop. The city is a reflection of its citizens, and residents have a central role in determining the direction of its development. With the spirit of mutual cooperation and innovation, existing challenges can be turned into opportunities to create a better city.

Awareness of the importance of urbanism education for the community is also an important step. Through education, the community can better understand its role in maintaining a balance between the needs of modernization and environmental sustainability. Cities such as Denpasar and Malang have shown positive examples through environmental and urban education programs that involve local communities.

Ultimately, the transformation of cities in Indonesia is a long journey involving history, challenges, and hopes. Each city has its own unique story, which together form a great mosaic of national identity. With a strong commitment to facing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities, the future of Indonesia's cities can be a reflection of bright hope for future generations.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the transformation of cities in Indonesia from the aspects of history, challenges, and expectations. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide an in-depth picture of the dynamics of changes in cities in Indonesia and the factors that affect it. Here are the details of the research methods used:

1. Type of Research

This research is qualitative descriptive (Bogdan & in Moleong, 2001), aims to describe the phenomenon of urban transformation in depth, covering historical dynamics, modernization challenges, and future expectations. Qualitative descriptive research was chosen because its main focus is to explore the meaning, experience, and understanding of various parties related to urban change in Indonesia.

2. Research Location

The research location is focused on several cities in Indonesia that represent various stages of transformation, such as:

- Jakarta is the largest metropolitan city with various urbanization and modernization challenges.
- Yogyakarta as a city that maintains local wisdom in the midst of modernization.
- Surabaya as an industrial city that continues to grow.
- Semarang as a coastal city that faces the impact of climate change.
- Bandung as a pioneer in the implementation of the smart city concept in Indonesia.

3. Data Source

This study uses two types of data:

- Primary Data:

Data was collected through in-depth interviews with relevant informants, such as:

- ✓ Local government officials (City Planning Office, Environment Office, and others).
- ✓ Academics who study urbanization and urban planning issues.
- ✓ Community leaders and environmental activists.
- ✓ City residents who directly experience the impact of transformation.

- Secondary Data:

Secondary data were obtained from:

- ✓ Urban planning document (Regional Spatial Plan/RTRW).
- ✓ Population statistics from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS).
- ✓ Scientific publications, research reports, and journal articles related to urban issues in Indonesia.
- ✓ Relevant news and media reports.

4. Data Collection Techniques

- In-Depth Interviews: Semi-structured interviews are conducted to gain in-depth information about the informants' perceptions, experiences, and views regarding the transformation of the city.
- Field Observation: The researcher makes direct observations at the research site to see real conditions, such as spatial planning, infrastructure, settlements, and community activities.
- Documentation Studies: Review documents, reports, and archives relevant to the research topic to understand the history and policies of urban transformation.

5. Data Analysis Techniques

The data that has been collected are analyzed using thematic analysis methods (Jogiyanto Hartono, 2018). The analysis steps are:

- Data Reduction: Summarizing and simplifying data from interviews, observations, and documents to focus more on the main issues of the research.
- Data Categorization: Categorizes data based

on key themes, namely the city's history, challenges, and transformation expectations.

- Data Interpretation: Interpreting data by connecting findings to relevant theories or concepts, such as urbanization, sustainability, and urban planning theories.
- Presentation of Results: The data that has been analyzed is presented descriptively in the form of narratives, tables, or diagrams to make it easier to understand.

6. Data Validity

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses several techniques, including:

- Source Triangulation: Comparing data from different sources (interviews, observations, and documents).
- Member Checking: Confirm the results of the interview with the informant to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation.
- Audit Trail: Record the entire research process in detail so that it can be traced back if needed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. History of the Development of Cities in Indonesia

a. The Influence of Colonialism

- Major cities in Indonesia such as Jakarta (formerly Batavia) and Surabaya developed as centers of trade and administration during the colonial period. Urban spatial planning tends to be designed to meet the needs of colonizers, such as business districts, ports, and special European settlements.
- The pattern of social segregation is very visible, where indigenous people live in under-facilitated suburban areas. This trace can still be seen in the urban spatial pattern to this day.

b. Post-Independence Period

- After independence, cities in Indonesia began to be designed to meet national needs. Jakarta is designated as the center of government, while cities such as Surabaya and Bandung are developing as centers of industry and education.
- Modernization during this period focused more on the development of physical infrastructure such as highways, government buildings, and settlements, but paid less attention to environmental sustainability aspects.

The history of Indonesian cities reflects the influence of colonialism, which shaped the social, economic, and spatial structures that are still felt today. This is in line with the theory of urban colonialism (King, 2012), which states that colonial cities were often designed to support the interests of the colonizers, creating sharp social and economic segregation. Cities such as Jakarta (formerly Batavia) became administrative and commercial centers with infrastructure focused on the needs of the colonizers, while indigenous peoples were placed on the outskirts of the city.

After independence, modernization became the main agenda, but the lack of inclusive planning led to social inequality and environmental damage. This corroborates the findings (Kusno, 2014) who mentioned that postcolonial urban development in Indonesia is often dominated by the logic of modernity that ignores environmental sustainability and cultural heritage.

2. Challenges in Urban Transformation

a. Rapid Urbanization

- Urbanization is the main challenge for big cities. For example, in Jakarta, the rate of urbanization reaches 3% per year, with population growth exceeding infrastructure capacity.
- Cities such as Surabaya and Bandung also face similar problems, with the emergence of slum areas due to the lack of integrated spatial planning.

b. Traffic Congestion and Air Pollution

- Jakarta is one of the cities with the highest level of congestion in the world, followed by Surabaya and Bandung. This is exacerbated by the lack of efficient public transportation.
- Air pollution is a serious problem, especially in metropolitan cities like Jakarta, where PM2.5 pollutant levels often exceed safe limits set by the WHO.

c. Climate Change Impact

- Coastal cities such as Semarang and Jakarta are experiencing significant impacts from sea level rise. Flash floods are an annual problem that harms the community and local governments.
- In addition, the average temperature in big cities is increasing due to the urban heat island effect, which is exacerbated by the lack of green open space.

d. Social and Economic Disparities

- Urban transformation often creates a social gap between upper-class and lower-class societies. An elite area with complete facilities side by side with slum areas with minimal basic services.

Rapid urbanization in major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bandung has created tremendous pressure on infrastructure and basic services. Human ecological theory of (Park et al., 1925) illustrates how urbanization can spark competition for space and resources, which ultimately results in social disparities. This finding is in accordance with conditions on the ground, where elite areas are adjacent to slums with minimal access to clean water, sanitation, and health facilities.

The problem of traffic congestion and air pollution plaguing Indonesia's major cities is also an implication of uncontrolled urbanization. Research by (Angel et al., 2012) shows that without integrated transportation planning, urbanization will continue to worsen the quality of life of urban communities. In the Indonesian context, congestion in Jakarta is one of the worst in the world, with a significant contribution to carbon emissions, which exacerbates the impact of climate change.

Coastal cities such as Semarang and Jakarta face major challenges due to sea level rise and flash floods. This is in line with the findings (Change, 2007) which emphasizes that coastal areas in developing countries are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Nature-based solutions, such as mangrove restoration and the construction of green open spaces, have begun to be implemented in some cities, but their implementation is still not optimal.

3. Hope for cities in Indonesia

a. Smart City Implementation

- Bandung and Makassar are examples of cities that have started the implementation of the smart city concept. The digitization of public services, such as transportation payment systems and public complaint applications, is able to improve service efficiency.
- However, the biggest challenge is the equitable distribution of access to technology and digital literacy among the public.

b. Sustainability-Based Development

- Efforts towards a sustainable city have begun to be implemented, such as the construction of green open spaces in Surabaya and the revitalization of rivers in Jakarta. This program is expected to be able to reduce the impact of climate change and improve the quality of life of the community.
- The city of Yogyakarta has shown success in maintaining its cultural identity while integrating modern development, making it a model for other cities.

c. Community Participation in Urban Planning

- This study found that community involvement in the urban planning process is still low. The government needs to be more active in inviting the public to participate, especially in issues that directly impact their lives.

d. Focus on Public Transportation

- Major cities are starting to develop better public transportation systems, such as the MRT and LRT in Jakarta, as well as bus rapid transit (BRT) in Semarang and Surabaya. The expansion of this transportation network is expected to be able to reduce congestion and air pollution.

The application of the smart city concept in cities such as Bandung and Makassar shows that technology can improve the efficiency of public services and the quality of life of the community. These findings are in line with the theory of digital transformation in urban planning (Kitchin, 2014), which states that technology can be a tool to address the challenges of urbanization if implemented in an inclusive and sustainable manner. However, Bandung's success is still limited to a few sectors, because the digital gap and technological literacy among the community are the main obstacles.

The concept of sustainable cities that have begun to be implemented in Surabaya, such as the management of green open spaces, provides a positive example of how cities can become more environmentally friendly. Research by (Newman & Kenworthy, 1998) shows that green open spaces not only reduce the impact of urban heat islands but also improve air quality and public health. Yogyakarta, with its approach that integrates local wisdom and modern development, shows how cultural identity can be maintained in urban development.

The findings of this study show low

community participation in the urban planning process, despite participatory planning theories (Arnstein, 1969) emphasizing the importance of community involvement to create inclusive cities. Study by (Rukmana, n.d.) also emphasized that cities in Indonesia often experience top-down planning that ignores the aspirations of local communities, so that development results do not fully reflect their needs.

Improving public transportation systems such as the MRT and LRT in Jakarta, as well as the BRT in Semarang and Surabaya, is a positive step to reduce congestion and pollution. This supports the findings (Rodrigue, 2020), which states that efficient public transportation is a key element in creating sustainable and inclusive cities. However, challenges such as network limitations and lack of integration between modes of transportation still have to be overcome.

4. Special Findings from the City Studied

- Jakarta: Facing the greatest pressures due to urbanization, air pollution, and flooding. River revitalization and the construction of a giant sea wall are still priority projects.
- Yogyakarta: Succeeded in maintaining local wisdom such as the Malioboro area as a cultural and tourism center, even though it is beginning to be threatened by modernization.
- Surabaya: It is an example of success in the management of green open spaces, such as Bungkul Park which has become an icon of an environmentally friendly city.
- Semarang: Facing a big challenge from the tidal flood. The construction of polders and drainage systems is starting to have a positive impact even though it is not optimal.
- Bandung: Leading in the application of smart city technology, but still facing transportation and population density constraints.

CONCLUSION

The transformation of cities in Indonesia is a multidimensional process that reflects historical dynamics, contemporary challenges, and future expectations. From a historical perspective, major cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Semarang were formed through the influence of colonialism that left traces of social segregation and non-inclusive spatial planning. Post-independence, even though modernization is a priority, unintegrated urban planning has given rise to various problems that still persist today.

The main challenges facing cities in Indonesia include uncontrolled urbanization, traffic congestion, air pollution, the impact of climate change, and social inequality. Rapid urbanization increases the pressure on urban infrastructure, while congestion and air pollution are a direct impact of the lack of adequate public transportation systems. In addition, coastal cities such as Jakarta and Semarang are particularly vulnerable to flash floods due to rising sea levels, which are further exacerbated by global climate change.

Nonetheless, efforts towards a more sustainable city are beginning to be seen. Cities such as Bandung and Makassar have pioneered the implementation of the smart city concept, which, although not perfect, is able to improve the efficiency of public services. Surabaya provides examples of success in managing green open spaces, while Yogyakarta shows how the preservation of local wisdom can go hand in hand with modern development. However, community participation in the urban planning process is still low, even though active community involvement is essential to create an inclusive and competitive city.

To realize the hope of sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities in Indonesia, a holistic approach is needed that involves all stakeholders, including the government, community, and the private sector. This approach must include technology-based planning, environmental sustainability, cultural preservation, and strengthening the public transportation system. Strong commitment from all parties is key to facing the challenges of the future and ensuring that urban transformation brings equitable and equitable benefits to all communities.

Thus, urban transformation in Indonesia is a long journey that requires collaboration, innovation, and sustainability as the foundation to create cities that are not only livable, but also able to face global dynamics in the future.

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