

Adaptive Reuse Study on Balai Kota Cirebon for Sustainable Heritage Conservation

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ABSTRACT (9 pt)

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Balai kota Cirebon as a heritage building is no longer in use. To preserve the existence this building, efforts need to be made to conserve it. One of measures taken to maintain heritage buildings is application of the Adaptive Reuse. This concept can be a viable solution to maintain heritage building and ensure the sustainability of the building. According to the findings of this research, it proposes an idea of transforming function of *Balai kota* Cirebon into a museum based on analysis of historical value, architectural character, and location. This research aims to determine the conservation methods to be applied in preserving the *Balai kota* Cirebon. Qualitative descriptive method with a historical approach is utilized in this research. Observations are conducted to investigate building's history. Results of this research can serve as a reference and a standard for success in specific context or application when implementing adaptive reuse on heritage buildings. This building can be transformed into a museum that functions as a place for storing and preserving historical artifacts, a public education center, and supporting further research and studies. Additionally, this museum can enhance cultural awareness and support sustainable tourism development in Cirebon.

INTRODUCTION

The conservation of historic buildings is essential for several reasons. One of them is the important role of cultural heritage in maintaining the history and identity of society (Sonaesti & Purwanto, 2020). Preservation also supports the field of education. Historic buildings not only reflect past architectural styles but also provide insights into the construction technologies of their time and the historical, social, and economic contexts of specific periods (Kurniawaty & Suharjono Ekomadyo, 2022). Maintaining the authenticity of these buildings simultaneously preserves valuable resources for understanding and appreciating the development of civilization (Kusuma et al., 2021).

Sustainability is another important aspect of preservation (Khofif, 2021). Repairing and maintaining existing historic structures is often more environmentally beneficial than constructing new buildings, as it reduces the need for raw materials and significantly minimizes construction waste. This approach not only limits the environmental footprint associated with new developments but also promotes the longevity of cultural landmarks. This approach helps reduce construction waste and the negative environmental impact of new developments. Additionally, the conservation of heritage buildings can stimulate local economies through cultural tourism. Historic sites attract visitors, which in turn generates income for the surrounding communities. This boost to the local economy can also create job opportunities (Foster, 2020). Particularly in the fields of tourism, hospitality, and construction-related trades. By fostering sustainable tourism, communities can benefit economically while preserving their cultural heritage for future generations. Hence, integrating sustainability in conservation efforts not only safeguards

the environment but also enhances social and economic resilience (Wirasati & Suprihardjo, 2012).

The problem with preserving heritage buildings is that current conditions often disregard their values, sometimes unintentionally, leading to preservation efforts that actually damage the heritage buildings themselves (Ismaeel & Mohamed, 2023). There are still many heritage buildings in Cirebon, but many of them have changed or disappeared, replaced by new constructions. The current focus of preservation has not fully emphasized conservation and architectural aspects. Preservation, with a focus on these aspects, is the issue addressed in this study.

Historic buildings serve as significant symbols of a place's history and the characteristics of its community. They become an integral part of a nation's cultural heritage, storing stories and values essential to be learned and passed down to future generations (Poinsett, 2019). Historic buildings hold significant value that needs to be maintained so they can be utilized as research objects. Heritage buildings must be maintained well and protected from damage by nature and human activities. To avoid mistakes, preservation actions must be based on proper principles and arguments. Historic buildings can play a crucial role in tourism, serving as attractions due to their unique historical, cultural, and architectural values (Ulva et al., 2022).

Historic buildings are essential symbols of a place's history and the characteristics of its community (Tri Wijaya et al., 2019) They become an inseparable part of a nation's cultural heritage, storing stories and values essential to be learned and passed down to future generations. In the development of a city, cultural heritage is an inseparable element. Cultural Heritage is a tangible 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 water that need to be preserved due to their significant value for history, science, education, religion, and/or culture through a determination process. Heritage buildings are groups of buildings consisting of man-made or natural objects designed to meet space needs, either walled or non-walled with roofs (Arfa et al., 2024).

Efforts are needed for the preservation of heritage buildings. One way to preserve cultural heritage is through conservation. Conservation is a series of activities aimed at preserving and maintaining the cultural values of a place (Burra Charter, 1981). Conservation comes from the word "conservation," which consists of two words, "con" meaning "together" and "servare" meaning "to keep" (Brinkley & Holland, 2009). Therefore, conservation can be interpreted as an effort to collectively preserve what we have. Architectural conservation is the effort to preserve and maintain old buildings with aesthetic and cultural values (Rukayah & Malik, 2012).

One of the methods commonly used in conservation is adaptive reuse. Adaptive reuse is a conservation effort for heritage buildings (Vafaie et al., 2023). This is done by repurposing heritage buildings into new functions that better suit current community needs (Rahmadya & Hartono, 2021). The importance of adaptive reuse in old or historic areas or buildings, whose current condition and function are not optimal, is recognized as highly significant. This effort is carried out wisely, considering the sustainability aspects of the place (Tohjiwa, 2021). This approach allows old and historic buildings to remain as evidence of past history, while their physical conditions are improved or enhanced to be better or more attractive and to serve more appropriate functions (Choirunnisa & Karmilah, 2021).

The problem in this study is how to apply conservation to the *Balai kota* Cirebon, which is currently underutilized and poorly maintained, with no proper management. The aim of this study is to identify the physical condition and find appropriate functions to be implemented in the *Balai kota* Cirebon as a primary heritage building. The desired benefit of this research is to enrich the academic study of heritage building preservation at *Balai kota* Cirebon with an appropriate conservation strategy approach. Practically, it is hoped to provide ideas and innovations in the preservation of the *Balai Kota* Cirebon

RESEARCH METHOD

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The method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive method to identify the issues occurring at the *Balai kota* Cirebon building. Qualitative research aims to deeply understand social phenomena, including events, developments, and their authenticity (Somantri, 2005) the research approach is as follows:

- Conduct direct observations at the *Balai kota* Cirebon and interview several employees and members of the TACB Cirebon to gather their opinions. Additionally, document the overall condition of the building to obtain a comprehensive overview.
- Identify specific aspects to be observed in the Balai kota Cirebon area and then provide a thorough explanation of the chosen location and objects.
- Utilize theories underlying this research to process data from documentation and interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Balai Kota Cirebon

The construction of the *Balai kota* Cirebon was related to the political policies of the Dutch East Indies government (De Stadsgemeente Cheribon Uitgegeven, 1931). The development of the *Balai kota* Cirebon illustrates how this port city was increasingly noticed by the Dutch East Indies government, which in the early 20th century had the fourth largest population in Java with 20,000 people. Therefore, there was a need to improve the city's infrastructure for the government and its residents. The *Gemeente* Cirebon (*Kota Praja*) was established on April 1, 1906, along with other cities in the archipelago. Then, in 1926, its status was elevated to *staadsgemeente*.

To assist the operations of the Dutch government, the *Staadhuis* (City Hall), *Raadhuis* (City Council) and other city facilities were built. This building initially functioned as the *Raadhuis* (City Council Building), which was the center of the municipal government of Cirebon (Tim Ahli Cagar Budaya, 2021). The construction of this building began on July 1, 1926, and was completed on September 1 1927, can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure. 1 The Construction process of the *Balai kota* Cirebon

To build the *Raadhuis Cheribon*, Mayor R.A. Schotman appointed J.J. Jiskoot as the regional secretary of Cirebon, known at that time as *Gemeentewerken Cheribon*. The construction of this building was carried out by two architects, H.P. Hamdl and C.F.H. Koll. The construction of Balai kota Cirebon was completed in 14 months, with a cost of approximately 165,000 guilders. This project demonstrates the government's commitment to the modernization and development of the city's infrastructure. To build the *Raadhuis Cheribon*, Mayor R.A. Schotman appointed J.J. Jiskoot as the regional secretary of Cirebon, known at that time as *Gemeentewerken Cheribon*. The construction of this building was carried out by two architects, H.P. Hamdl and C.F.H. Koll. The two architect designed the *Balai kota* using an art deco style combined with art nouveau, as seen in Figure 2.



Figure. 2 *Balai kota* Cirebon

Balai kota building is one of the structures featuring art deco architecture, influenced by the modern style of art nouveau in its interior. In this building, the use of geometric materials is evident. The entire roof of the building consists of a flat deck roof. Like other art deco buildings, the dominant characteristic is seen in the façade, which prominently features variations of geometric shapes such as squares, trapezoids, triangles, and semicircular arches. During the period when it served as the administrative center of the Cirebon Municipality, the building not only functioned as the administrative hub but also became a preferred venue for official and festive meetings, as well as wedding ceremonies among the European community. From the era of Japanese military administration to the independence period, the role of the *Balai kota* was further expanded

as the government center of Cirebon City. Besides its administrative functions, the building stood as a historical witness to various events and transformations, reflecting significant changes in governance and the local community's life during that period. The independence of Indonesia triggered nationalization policies, including the takeover of assets and the renaming of places. *Raadhuis* Cheribon was not exempt from these changes; it is now known as *Balai kota* Cirebon, symbolizing an independent and sovereign Indonesia. The current condition of the *Balai kota* can be seen in the Figure 3.



Figure. 3 Current *Balai kota* Cirebon

Balai kota Cirebon building is located at Siliwangi No. 84, Kejaksan Subdistrict, Kejaksan District, Cirebon. This building is situated in the central government area of Cirebon City. At the time of its construction, the location was on *Jalan Kedjaksan*, which was a swampy area on the southeast side of Kedjaksan Station. *Balai kota* area is divided into two main buildings, as seen in the Figure 4. The first building, located in the front area, is a heritage building. Meanwhile, the building in the back area serves as the office for the Regional Secretariat of the City of Cirebon.

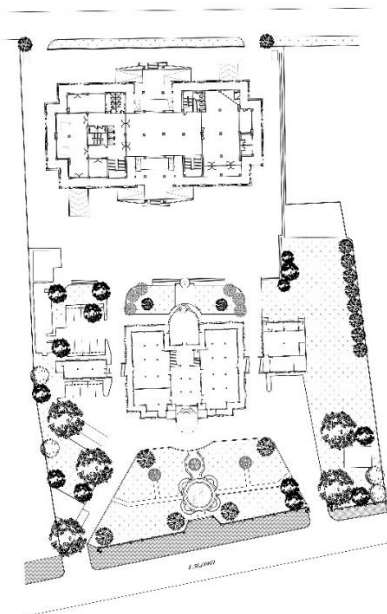


Figure. 4 Siteplan *Balai kota* Cirebon

This building consists of two stories and faces east. It features thick walls and is equipped with an open terrace that has a semi-circular shape. Meanwhile, the terraces on the left, right, and back sides form corridors that are enclosed by short wall fences, with open walls decorated in a trapezoidal shape. In the *Balai kota* building, there is an office equipped with paneled glass windows. The supporting facilities for the building are located on the north and south sides, with the supporting building on the north measuring 15 m x 16 m, while the one on the south measures 16 m x 6 m. A corridor 3.5 meters wide connects the two buildings. *Balai kota* Cirebon consists of three separate buildings, including the main building and the accompanying structures on both its left and right wings, can be see on Figure 5. On the facade of the main building, there is a portico with a semi-circular arch shape. Above this portico, there is a composition of square geometric fields adorned with six shrimp decorations attached to its corners. The hall inside the main building features numerous stained glass windows with various decorations.

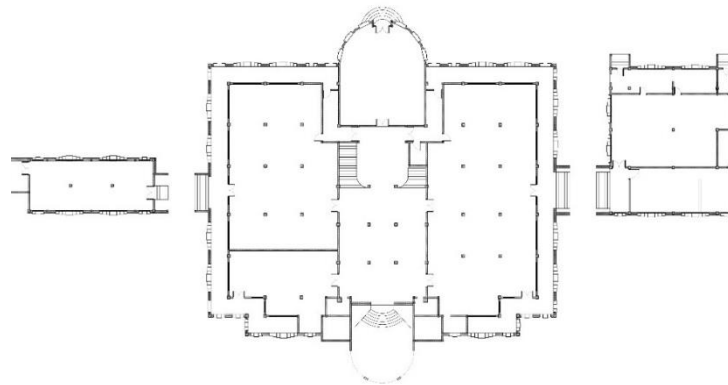


Figure. 5 *Balai kota* Cirebon floor plan

Function of Balai Kota Cirebon

Initially, *Balai kota* building functioned as the *Raadhuis*, or City Council, and served as the government center for the *Kota Praja* Cirebon (Sulendraningrat, 1978) During this period, the building not only served as the administrative center but also became a preferred venue for official and festive meetings, as well as wedding ceremonies among the European community. As seen in Figure 6, one of the rooms in the *Balai kota* was used for meetings by the Dutch government. Additionally, this room was also used as an other activity space for government. During the Japanese military administration, the role of the *Balai kota* was further expanded as the government center of Cirebon.



Figure. 6 Meeting room in 1931

Until now, the *Balai kota* Cirebon still serves as the center of government for Cirebon. As a building classified as a cultural heritage site, it continues to receive adequate maintenance. *Balai kota* is divided into three buildings connected by a covered walkway. From independence until 2019, the *Balai kota* Cirebon functioned as the regional government center of Cirebon. The main building was used for the offices of the mayor, the deputy mayor, the regional secretary, and staff, with the second floor serving as a command center room. As seen in Figure 7, one of the rooms in the city hall is used as a meeting room. This room, called the *Adipura* Room, is commonly used by the Cirebon city government for various activities such as meetings, seminars, or other purposes. The south wing was used as a press room, while the north wing was used for the Cirebon *Dharma Wanita* office.



Figure. 7 Adipura room at *Balai kota* Cirebon

Since 2019, the *Balai kota* building has only been used in certain areas. In the main building, only a few rooms are in use. On the first floor, it is used solely for a meeting room, the mayor's office, and a reception room. Other rooms on the first floor are left unused and poorly maintained. The second floor is currently used as the workspace for the Cirebon Command Center. In the south wing, it is still used as a press room. In the north wing, only one room is used for the chairwoman of *Dharma Wanita*. Other rooms in the building are no longer in use and are left poorly maintained.

Application of Conservation Methods

The preservation of the *Balai kota* Cirebon building employs one methods: adaptive reuse. The concepts have benefit the community, and it emphasize the importance of maintaining cultural heritage. For the *Balai kota* Cirebon, revitalization aims to restore the building to its original state. Meanwhile, the adaptive reuse concept involves repurposing the old building with a new function. Adaptive reuse is an option for preserving and maintaining historic buildings that have lost their original function (Saputra & Purwantiasning, 2020). These old buildings may have become damaged or unsuitable for use due to utility, function, and structural issues. The application of this concept offers several benefits, including:

- The first benefit is the preservation of cultural and historical values: It is crucial to preserve the cultural and historical values of the Balai kota. Adaptive reuse can help maintain these values by retaining the original elements of the building, such as structure, materials, and ornamentation.

- The second benefit is the increase in economic value: If the Balai kota is appropriately repurposed and has economic appeal, it can enhance the surrounding area's economic value. The economic revenue generated from the area or structure can be used to support maintenance and preservation efforts.
- The third benefit is time savings: Existing heritage buildings can be repurposed, eliminating the need to construct new buildings from scratch. This can save construction time.
- The fourth benefit is tax advantages: The local government can offer tax incentives to the owners of heritage buildings who undertake adaptive reuse efforts.

In preserving the *Balai kota* building, the local government should strive to prevent the building from becoming damaged. Given the current condition, where the building has started to deteriorate, especially in the interior spaces, the government must make efforts to revitalize the damaged parts to ensure they function properly again. Any changes that occurred when the building was used by related agencies should be restored to its original form when the building was first established, but with functions suitable for the present era.

The implementation of the adaptive reuse concept in an area or building is a step to improve and alter it, both in terms of physical condition and functional purpose, while still preserving the historical values contained within the area. For the *Balai kota* building, the adaptive reuse concept being applied involves converting the unused City Hall into a museum. A museum is a place that collects, preserves, researches, and exhibits historical, artistic, or scientific items for educational, recreational, and research purposes (Tovmasyan & Gevorgyan, 2022). The museum in the *Balai kota* building is an effort to preserve the structure. The museum serves as a medium to introduce and maintain the continuity of the historical and cultural values contained in the building. Here are some functions and objectives of the museum in the heritage building:

- Preservation of Artifacts and Historical Objects: The museum within the Balai kota functions as a storage and preservation site for artifacts, historical items, and artworks related to Balai kota. This helps maintain the authenticity and integrity of cultural history.
- Public Education: The museum within the Balai kota plays a crucial role in public education. They organize exhibitions, tours, and educational programs to introduce the history and culture of the place to the general public and visitors.
- Research and Study: Balai kota Museum has facilities for further research and study on the history, art, or architecture of the place. They can assist researchers, academics, and students in gaining a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural context.
- Cultural Awareness Development: The museum in Balai kota can build cultural awareness through exhibitions and public programs to enhance the community's understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage values.
- Sustainable Tourism Development: The museum within Balai kota can also support sustainable tourism development. They attract people interested in learning more about local history and culture.

In the implementation of adaptive reuse in the *Balai kota* Cirebon, the focus is more on the main building area and the north building area, can be seen in Figure 8. The main

building and the north building will be repurposed as the Cirebon Museum. This museum will house items of historical, cultural, or artistic value to Cirebon. These items can include artifacts, fossils, artworks, or other objects of significant importance to the Cirebon community. A museum is a public institution or place that serves to meet the community's needs by collecting, preserving, researching, communicating, and displaying tangible objects to the public for educational, recreational, and research purposes. This museum will play a significant role in maintaining the sustainability of Cirebon's cultural heritage. It will serve as a repository and a place to study Cirebon's history, culture, and art.

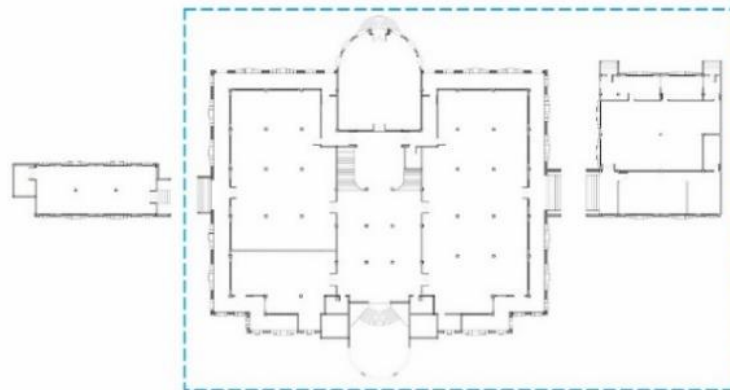


Figure. 8 Function change area

The development of the *Balai kota* Cirebon can be focused on promoting economic growth, with the proceeds allocated for the maintenance of the *Balai kota* and the improvement of community welfare. A museum within a heritage building not only serves as a storage place for historical items but also becomes a center for education and appreciation of the cultural and historical richness of a region. One of the rooms in the main building of the *Balai kota* change the functions, can be seen in Figure 9-10. The function of the room will change as a display case to display several *Megamendung batik* fabrics and *Panca Wanda* masks as one of the heritages of Cirebon local culture.



Figure. 9 Interior of *Balai kota* museum

The showcase room is designed with a layout that highlights the beauty and uniqueness of each artifact. The *Megamendung batik* cloth is displayed in a way that allows visitors to see the details of each motif, while the *Panca Wanda* masks are arranged in an order that tells the story of each character they represent. This room will also serve as an educational

center for visitors. Information about the history, meaning, and creation process of each artifact is presented comprehensively, providing a deep understanding of the importance of this cultural heritage.



Figure. 10 Interior of *Balai kota* museum

The north wing of the City Hall building has also been repurposed into a museum. As part of the building's revitalization efforts, the floors in this museum area have been restored to their original materials or similar ones. This step was taken to preserve the building's authenticity and originality, providing visitors with a more genuine experience. This revitalization not only enhances the building's aesthetics but also honors the history and architectural heritage of the *Balai kota*. This area is used to store and display photographs of the *Balai kota* building from its inception to the present day, can be seen on Figure 11-12.



Figure. 11 Interior of the north wing *Balai kota*

The collection of photos displayed in this museum provides deep insights into the history and development of the Balai kota, inviting visitors to observe the changes in the building's architecture and function over time. Through the photo collection and the authentic atmosphere created by the restored floor materials, this museum becomes an important place for education and historical reflection. Visitors can understand how the Balai kota has functioned as a center of government and a symbol of pride for the city of Cirebon. This museum also plays a role in preserving the stories and memories associated with the Balai kota, inspiring current and future generations to appreciate and care for their city's cultural and historical heritage.



Figure. 12 Interior of the north wing *Balai kota*

In another room in the north wing of the City Hall, the space has been thoughtfully repurposed to serve as a vibrant showcase of the diverse cultural elements that are integral to Cirebon's rich heritage. This room is not just a display area but a dynamic cultural hub that offers visitors an immersive experience into the various traditions, arts, and customs that have shaped Cirebon over the centuries. The collection within this room is meticulously curated to provide comprehensive information about the development of culture and art in Cirebon over time. Visitors are greeted with a visually stunning array of artifacts, ranging from traditional clothing and handcrafted textiles to intricate artworks and historical relics. Each piece tells a unique story, reflecting the intricate tapestry of influences from different ethnic groups and communities that have contributed to Cirebon's cultural.

CONCLUSION

Conservation of heritage buildings requires a meticulous and responsible approach to ensure the preservation of their historical, cultural, and architectural significance. Adhering to conservation ethics is essential in safeguarding not only the physical structures but also the moral, spiritual, and cultural values embedded within them. These buildings serve as tangible links to the past, embodying stories, traditions, and craftsmanship that reflect the identity of a community. Therefore, it is crucial for society to understand the importance of protecting these historical assets, as they represent a shared heritage and cultural legacy. By fostering a collective awareness of their value, communities can contribute to the preservation of these historic buildings, ensuring they continue to inspire and educate future generations while maintaining their original essence.

From field observations and further analysis, it is evident that the *Balai kota* Cirebon holds substantial historical and architectural significance, qualifying it as a Cultural Heritage Building. Its rich historical value makes it an ideal candidate for preservation through thoughtful conservation efforts. This approach offers a sustainable solution, allowing historic buildings to coexist with modern developments, thereby preserving their legacy amidst urban growth.

For the *Balai kota* Cirebon, adaptive reuse as a museum is a particularly fitting solution, as it would enhance public understanding of Cirebon's history and cultural heritage through curated exhibits. To support this transformation, several key recommendations are proposed. First, the conservation process should focus on fostering creative and

cultural activities within the site, attracting public engagement and ensuring the building's relevance in contemporary society. This effort must be supported by governmental regulations to ensure the proper maintenance and protection of heritage buildings, preventing deterioration over time.

Furthermore, any restoration work on the building should respect its original materials, forms, and colors, maintaining its architectural authenticity. Collaboration between the government, the Cultural Heritage Expert Team (TACB), and academic experts is essential to ensure that all conservation activities align with established principles and guidelines. Such a coordinated approach would guarantee that the revitalization of *Balai kota* Cirebon honors its historical integrity while repurposing it for future generations to appreciate and engage with.

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