Adrian Perkasa, my friend and colleague from Airlangga University, drove a circuitous route, avoiding trucks, chickens and rice drying on the road, on our way to the shrine known locally as Watu Ombo. As occurred at all of the small shrines near villages, the Caretaker (Juru Pelihara) appeared a few minutes after we arrived to see what we were doing and chat about the place his family had looked after for three generations. It was the day after the monthly special day on the Javanese calendar (Malam Jumat Legi) when many Javanese people visit shrines, and the offerings from the night before were evident. The Caretaker had also gathered a set of fourteenth century foundation stones from the Majapahit kingdom, excavated by traditional brick makers, that he was keeping on site. There were large trees within the shrine’s compound and other residents were sitting around chatting or keeping an eye on their rice drying in the parking lot.

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THE MANAGEMENT and spatial organisation of Watu Ombo differs considerably from the larger sites that were reconstructed earlier this century. While indeed monumental and a focal point for the celebration of Indonesian independence, and the growth of oil prices. Take, for instance, the construction of Mount Merapi, an entrance gate to a compound, is located in the middle of a European style garden with little shade. While indeed monumental and impressive, the lack of shade, seating and other activities in the surrounding park lessens the utility of the site for residents, and visitors tend to stay for short periods where they enter the park, take pictures of the gate, walk briefly around the garden before returning to their car or bus, and heading to the similarly organised Candi Tiuks. Paid staff maintain the site during opening hours, and it is locked at night. Until the mid-1990s, this site was like Watu Ombo before graves and homes were relocated to make way for the park.

While Indonesia has historically been the richest of Indonesia’s relationships with heritage and how they exist in tension with official management practices, there is no simple binary between expert and community site and practices. Local people worked for years on the reconstruction of ‘official’ sites, becoming experts in such conservation work, not to mention the strong feelings that remain for these sites amongst residents. The state pays local residents to maintain the ‘community’ sites and has done so since colonial times: local people work as gardeners and officials at the larger sites to service the tourist trade. However, the Indonesian State. Cultural Policy across the Twentieth Century to the Reform Era was lost due to the absence of implementing legislation, leaving both the experiences of visitors and the returns for locals.

Heritage in broader processes of spatial change

Considerations of heritage should take into account the effects of broader processes of spatial change. Trowulan, the previously mentioned location of the capital of the Majapahit kingdom, is located within an hour’s drive from Surabaya on a major road. Although the population of Trowulan is just under 70,000, it is part of Gdunggersitownk – the mega-region of ‘Greater Bangkalan Mojokerto Surabaya Sidoarjo Lamongan’ that had a population of 9 million people in 2010. While Trowulan’s red bricks have clearly been manufactured for hundreds of years, the urbanisation of this region has created an unprecedented demand for building materials. The remains of the Majapahit capital inhabit an area of approximately 90 square kilometres under contemporary structures and sugar cane fields. Traditional red brick construction removes the top one to two metres of top soil from a field that is rented from a farmer, making the traditional red brick manufacturers the most active excavators of Majapahit era artefacts. While this is near-impossible to prevent (even as part of a national heritage listing in 2013), my research with Adrian Perkasa indicates that the red brick manufacturers have relationships with Majapahit heritage and value the artefacts they find. The potential is there for engagement and interaction around their excavations to build new relationships between residents, researchers and Trowulan’s underground capital.

Changing heritage management practices

The political climate in democratic Indonesia also has offered opportunities for civil society groups to push new heritage agendas. The Indonesian National Trust (Badan Pelestarian Pusaka Indonesia – BIPPI) formed in 2004 from a network of city-based groups and individuals across Indonesia. Protests and actions by these groups, the World Monuments Fund, and the Save Trowulan resident group, prevented a steel factory that had been approved in 2013 by the archeological bureau from being built in an area close to residential areas. 1 Changes within archaeology towards site management led in the early 2010s to a greater willingness to accommodate access to previously closed archeological areas, in particular the smaller, less-visited sites. 2 This new access has driven both local activities, such as guiding tourists and local events, as well as new online groups, like Boll Bruto who use Facebook and What’s App to share photographs and news, to organise short and long trips for visiting heritage places, as well as other activities like exhibitions and recording local histories. However, these lower level activities still run into the issue of official heritage management. At the larger, more regulated heritage sites, local guides who are not officially registered cannot seek customers, and Boll Bruto cannot undertake their creative activities.

The entry of democratic politics has been beneficial to the cultural ecology of Indonesia and has enabled new coproductions of heritage through a more open approach to site management and more incentives for collaborations across different groups and levels of government. However, heritage management could do more to support the cultural ecology, in particular through finalising the heritage legislation, encouraging further engagement with public archaeology in state archaeological institutions, and allowing even greater access to residents who want to seek inspiration and opportunities from access to state-managed heritage sites and objects. Dennis Byrne has pointed out to us that most of the population of Asia seeks special connections and favours from their relationships to heritage objects and sites. 3 There are openings in Indonesia for heritage management to be relevant to the vast numbers of people who hold this understanding.

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Centralisation
development

The Suharto era command centralist model of cultural management, which was challenged by the rise of mass cultural popular culture in the 1990s, began to break down in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis and the resignation of Suharto in 1998. 2 Two shifts in particular were important. First, cultural policy was realigned from an affiliation with education to an affiliation with tourism. 3 Second and more importantly, cultural policy was no longer a number of policy areas decentralised in 2002, devolving control of the cultural bureaucracy from the national to the provincial and district levels. While thousands of staff shifted from the national bureaucracy to the provincial and district bureaucracies, this did not include archaelogical offices (Badan Pelestarian Cagar Budaya and the Bala Konservasi Borneor) that remain centrally controlled from the Directorate of Culture and Tourism to manage archaeological sites. From an educational function, culture was aligned with the economic goals of tourism and regional development. Distinctive cultural areas became important not only to heritage planning and management, but have differing levels of commitment and capabilities. Furthermore, heritage legislation reform, which passed parliament in 2010, has stalled due to the absence of implementing legislation, leaving heritage management frameworks weak and uncertain. Nurturing a management vision requires a balance between different interests in the contemporary period. 4 Banten

Fig. 1 (left): Kajang Ratu, Trowulan, East Java (photo by Tod Jones).

Fig. 2 (right): Masjid Agung, Banten Lama (photo by The Suartina).

References

3 This realignment of cultural policy was initiated in the final 1997 Suharto cabinet, but executed during the Reform period; see, Jones, T. 2012. “Indonesian Cultural Policy in the Reform Era”, Indonesia 93:147-76.