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Heritage and the COVID-19 pandemic: the meaning of visitation

Cut Dewi[1*], Matthew Rofe[2], Julie Nichols[3] and Izziah Izziah[1]

Abstract

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted global mobility. 'Lockdowns' and travel bans have been used as control measures by international governments. Consequently, the ways that we use buildings have also been impacted by these actions. Thus, this paper explores the roles of heritage sites in a post-COVID-19 pandemic society. This research is part of the Urban Heritage and Community Resilience: Conservation, Tourism, and Pandemic project, and it employs methods such as semistructured interviews, participant observations, archival research, and focus group discussions (FGDs). This paper is based on semistructured interviews conducted with one hundred eighteen participants across ten popular heritage sites in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, Indonesia. The findings confirm the debated claim in postdisaster studies asserting that some of these Acehnese heritage sites, especially those imbued with religious values, have become places of resilience. Specifically, during the pandemic, these sites have facilitated community resilience by helping people feel closer to God. For practising Acehnese Muslims, prayer at home is culturally acceptable, but praying at the mosque, which is one of the essential heritages of the Acehnese, has contributed to and strengthened the sense of community resilience. Therefore, visitation and participation in heritage sites that include experiencing the sense of place and conducting religious and cultural activities is integral to community resilience.

Keywords Heritage, Pandemic, Visitation, Resilience

1 Introduction

Aceh, in its most recent history beginning in 2004, has sustained the impacts of environmental and related human health disasters, ranging from the tsunami to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this postdisaster context, some scholars have highlighted the role of heritage sites as active agents supporting survivor resilience (Daly and Rahmayati 2012; Rico 2014; Dewi 2017). Engaging in community participation in familiar places that facilitate everyday cultural practices is an important aspect of survivor resilience (Stanley-Price 2007; Samuels 2010; Daly and Rahmayati 2012). These places provide respite, as they are typically sites embodying tacit knowledge and local wisdom that have historically sustained the Acehnese people through previous environmental disaster events (Mahdi 2012). This paper explores disaster mitigation through the lens of the tacit knowledge housed at specific heritage sites in Aceh. Scant research has been undertaken in this context to investigate the extent to which heritage plays a role in community resilience. In addition, how might the various forms of community resilience then impact the future conservation or adaptation of heritage sites to meet the future needs of the population?

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the resulting pandemic have challenged the entrenched sociocultural practices of Acehnese communities. Socially gatherings, social

*Correspondence:
Cut Dewi
cutdewi@usk.ac.id
[1] Architecture and Planning Department, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Jl. Syech Abdulrauf No.7, Darussalam, Banda Aceh, Aceh 23111, Indonesia
[2] UniSA Creative, University of South Australia, Magill Campus (B1-04), Adelaide, South Australia, SA 5072, Australia
[3] UniSA Creative, University of South Australia, City West Campus (K3-14), Adelaide, South Australia, SA 5000, Australia

interactions, religious practices and religious customs were some of the facets of life that required rethinking. The need for physical separation also meant that some communities could no longer access their culturally significant spaces. These included natural landscapes, religious buildings, and urban public places. Both the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage are associated with these sites, ranging from the built fabric to personal memories. Scholars have suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic will have long-term effects on several aspects of human life, and it represents an important turning point in human history (Silberman 2020). Thus, in the last two years, several studies have also discussed the COVID-19 pandemic and cultural heritage from the perspective of wellbeing (Sofaer et al. 2021), adaptive heritage reuse (Fava 2022), the effect of the pandemic on cultural heritage (Pagano, Romagnoli, and Vannucci 2021), and different ways of understanding heritage (Silberman 2020).

Fava (2022) argues that the concepts of community and resilience are becoming increasingly important in the field of cultural heritage. She highlights the roles of heritage in well-being under the pandemic in the context of England. This paper offers an alternative contribution to the ongoing debate on cultural heritage and resilience by presenting and evaluating the meaning of heritage sites to participants, the potential resilience people might derive from their visits, the adaptive (re)use potentials and the types of behaviours that prevailed during the pandemic under the Southeast Asian context where intangible heritage values have prevailed (Byrne 2012; Karlström, 2005; Dewi et al. 2022), such as sites imbued with religious focus (Akagawa 2016). For example, everyday religious activities contributed to community resilience after the 2015 Kathmandu Valley earthquake in Nepal (KC, Karuppannan, and Sivam 2019). The case studies of Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, which exemplify places with diverse cultural and historical backgrounds, serve as promising analyses of disaster and conflict history. In addition, Aceh is renowned in religious cultural studies as a centre for Islamic learning and literature in Indonesia and the wider Malay world (Feener, Daly, and Reid 2011). Scholarship combining studies on disaster mitigation, conflict, Islam, and local culture (Adat) has been focused on Aceh (see, for example, Aspinall 2009; Smith 2012; Rico 2014; Feener, Daly, and Reid 2011, among others).

This paper argues that heritage sites have become alternative mechanisms for building community resilience amid the pandemic. This role is supported by the sociocultural rituals and other religious activities conducted at heritage sites. This process continues even amidst the pandemic's lockdowns, when mobility is limited, but it does so in different ways. To some Acehnese communities, the significance of heritage sites emanates from the cultural activities and interactions that occur through visitation. Thus, when heritage sites that are entangled with sociocultural religious values close their doors, it is very challenging for these communities.

2 Aceh pandemic history and local knowledge

Like other parts of the world, Aceh has a long history of cholera plague, endemic, and pandemic, which is closely associated with widespread deadly diseases impacting the human condition. Acehnese called one such deadly disease *Taeuen*. *Taeuen* is also strongly related to a cholera virus (Hurgronje 1996). *Taeuen* is, in addition, associated with *muntah* ciret (vomiting and diarrhoea), smallpox, and *budok* (leprosy). *Taeuen* can also attack animals such as chickens and buffalo, causing them to weaken and die within hours. The pandemic and plague history of Aceh coincides with the colonial history in Aceh, which is related to the Dutch Colonial era that occurred around the early to late 19th century. For example, cholera was brought to Aceh by the Dutch Army during the second invasion of Aceh in 1873 (Reid 2005, 52). Cholera first appeared in Batavia and then spread across Indonesia following the path of colonial mobility. On their trip to Aceh, seventy-seven Dutch troops were infected by cholera (Said 2007). The Dutch buried the dead bodies of their troops that had been infected by cholera in Aceh. Thus, the disease spread across Aceh in no time (Oktorino 2018). Indeed, one of Acehnese Kings, Sultan Mahmud Syah, died of cholera on 28 January 1874 (Oktorino 2018, 60; Reid 2005). Despite the invention of the cholera vaccine in 1911, the cholera disease epidemic continued until 1920 (Manan and Putra 2020). There were some villages, such as Lubuk Gapuy and Gampong Rabeu, that were annihilated by a vast number of deaths. Almost five people died every day, and no *fardhu kifayah*, which is an Islamic funeral, was performed for these fatalities (Manan and Putra 2020, 655).

After the cholera epidemic, other plagues and pandemics ravaged Indonesia. In 1918, the Spanish flu killed 20 to 40 million people across the world and caused fatalities during the colonial era (Wibowo et al. 2009). During the Spanish Flu Pandemic, although its impact spread at a slower pace, the Dutch government established a task force and regulations, which was named influenza *Ordonantie,* on 20 October 1920 to enforce measures designed to limit the spread of the disease (Fathoni 2021). In addition, from 1930 to 1960, another pandemic, which was called Vibrio El-Tor and had symptoms that were similar to those of cholera, attacked the people of Aceh (Manan and Putra 2020). In 1980, two major viruses, Variola Mayor and Variola Minor, affected adults and children by causing smallpox. Later in the 20th century, Aceh

was subjected to avian influenza in 2003, and the most recent ailment was the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in 2019, which killed 2,222 people and affected another 43,999 (data from Dinas Kesehatan Aceh on 10 September 2022).

In Aceh, neither the mitigation of the coronavirus pandemic nor the previous health epidemics curtailed access to important religious and cultural places. In addition, the residents of Aceh use local plants as medicine to treat diseases. Hurgronje (1996) mentions that patients with cholera (*Taeuen, ta'un, muntah ciret*) and similar diseases were treated with sugar cane juice mixed with turmeric powder, rice water with a little *gambir*, or *Uncaria Gambir Roxb*, which is a finely ground betel nut extract, and pomegranate juice, served at room temperature. In addition, cholera patients were cooled by frequent bathing (Hurgronje 1996). Cholera patients were bathed by using *ija broek* (used or rotten cloth), so cholera was also known as *Taeuen ija broek*. Instead of using cloth to cover the dead body, during the funeral process, the body was covered with *leuhop*/mud to prevent transmission of the disease (Usman et al. 2020). In Aceh, each region has its own way to address large-scale health concerns. For example, on the west coast of Aceh Province, Woyla Subdistrict, Aceh Barat Regency, the local communities conduct traditional rituals called *Meujalateh* as a form of disease rejection. This is a significant resilience building exercise and an example of how cultural processes can strengthen society. The ceremony is performed in the river and at a *meunasah* in the village centre. This ritual also includes the *Tulak Bala* tradition, which is imbued with Islamic nuances. People gather at the *meunasah* after *magrib* (early evening prayer) to carry out a dhikr (reciting the name of God), and this part of the ceremony is followed by parade to carry the *sua buloh*, a bamboo torch, around the village (Usman et al. 2020). This ritual takes place nightly for approximately 45 min.

In Islamic history and teaching, a pandemic may be seen by those of the Islamic faith as a way of catering to these challenging experiences. In his hadith (the word), the prophet Muhammad mentions the method of mitigating disease through social distancing lockdowns and travel prohibitions to and from the epicentre of the pandemic. One of the hadiths reads as follows: 'When you hear of a leprosy epidemic in a country, then do not enter it, but if it infects a country while you are in it, then do not leave that country.' (Narrated by Bukhari Number 5287). Thus, lockdowns and mobility restrictions built into Islamic practices to maintain safety during pandemic outbreaks. The alarming situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic has raised religious awareness for everyone, especially Muslims (Saputra and Zuriah 2020). This awareness increases the faithful's dependence on God through various forms of religious practice, such as prayer, remembrance, and *qunut nazilah,* or Islamic prayer readings, which are carried out on either a small or large scale (Saputra and Zuriah 2020). For Muslims, the pandemic is perceived as a God's will, and no one can avoid it. Thus, there is the wisdom of God behind every calamity. The Islamic faith reinforces the idea that occurrences such as the coronavirus pandemic are a reminder for humans to improve their spiritual selves and prepare for life under such conditions. Consequently, the government of Aceh combined local traditions and health protocols to form approaches to controlling the pandemic. In addition to regulating health protocols such as mandating masks in public places, social distancing, quarantine for the infected, mobility limitation, verification of negative test results, and curfew, they also encourage practising religious rituals such as reciting the Quran, praying, and dhikr (reciting the name of God).

3 Heritage amidst the pandemic and community resilience

This paper builds upon Laurajane Smith's (2006), a scholar of critical heritage studies, claim that heritage is solely a cultural process. However, the argument presented here focuses on architectural heritage as a representation of a tangible expression of identity, particularly of national identity (Smith 2006). Smith (2006) defines heritage as not necessarily being the site itself or referencing a physical place, but rather as a cultural performance to which recall, experience, dissonance, and sense of place all contribute. Similar understandings have also been advanced by Bella Dicks (2000), David Harvey (2001), Denis Byrne (2009) and John Urry (1996), who understand heritage as a series of cultural processes, acts of communication, or acts of connection to the past through which we negotiate our social values, cultural identity and personal and collective memories. Through these scholars' work, they have shifted the understanding of heritage as a 'thing' to that of a 'verb' (Harvey 2001), that is, as something that is done or performed. Smith's (2006) definition considers heritage beyond of its mere material forms. Rather, the social and cultural aspects of heritage and the importance of using and engaging with heritage sites and places through social, religious, and cultural activities are prioritised. This process repiques tangible qualities, such as the beauty and authenticity of fabric, to enable a focus on the ways that heritage may contribute to contemporary society and facilitate socio-cultural practices (Sofaer et al. 2021; Smith 2006). Recent heritage debates have focused on inclusion, involvement, outreach, contestation, public value, and well-being. Thus, there is a need to collect definitive data on these kinds of relationships (Sofaer et al. 2021). In short,

assessing the visiting experience of heritage sites and collecting data to support the assessment are important aspects of the heritage process (Smith 2006).

The postdisaster heritage literature emphasises the importance of heritage that extends beyond its physical vulnerabilities. After a series of major disasters, including the 2004 tsunami and earthquake in Aceh, the 2011 tsunami and earthquake in Japan, and the 2005 Hurricane Katrina in the US, postdisaster reconstruction narratives have given significant attention to intangible heritage attributes such as memory and spirituality in the reconstruction of heritage sites. (Daly and Rahmayati 2012; Dewi 2017; Rico 2014). In the early phases of recovery, intangible heritage, its hidden meanings and longevity in the memories of local communities may be better leveraged when these associations are known and included in reconstruction aid distribution. Community beneficiaries are best placed to assist with reconstruction in such a way that they feel ownership and empowerment in the process of rebuilding, which influences their ability to recover from extreme postdisaster situations. (Stanley-Price 2007). Tangibly built forms of reconstruction are therefore more meaningful to the community if they addresses the intangible heritage associations at play (Stanley-Price 2007). Daly and Rahmayati (2012), in their extensive research on cultural heritage following the 2004 Tsunami Disaster, argue that altering the previous priorities and structure of the built environment of the village contributed to the dislocation of the community through negations to reinstate public buildings such as mosques and *meunasahs* (community centres for religious and education purposes). The *meunasah* is a central and important place for communal decision-making. Those heritage sites that facilitate religious activities, such as mosques, provided survivors with resilience through spiritual guidance gained through strength in their faith (Clarke et al. 2018; Dewi and Rauzi 2018). According to Daly and Rahmayati (2012), mosques gained added value due to their survival rates during the tsunami. In addition, Rico (2014) examines the concept of heritage at risk and argues that heritage is in fact a form of cultural capital that sustains resilience. As the first author, Dewi (2017) had previously highlighted architectural heritage as a tangible anchor that connects to the past and acts to ease trauma in postdisaster societies such as Aceh. Place familiarity and the continuity of cultural practices such as religious and other sociocultural rituals have been documented in the postdestruction literature as important contributing factors in survivors' resilience (Rico 2020; Barakat 2007; Al-Nammari and Lindell 2009; Vale and Campanella 2005). As a response to these ongoing debates, UNESCO published the 'Managing Disaster Risks for World Heritage guidelines' (UNESCO 2010). The document recognises the resilience afforded by traditional heritage (tangible and intangible heritage properties) and its role in providing shelter and psychological support to affected communities (Samuels 2010; Daly and Rahmayati 2012). In addition to this guideline, the Sendai Framework of 2015 stresses the importance of traditional knowledge and heritage practices in risk prevention, mitigation, and postdisaster reconstruction.

While in the postdisaster context, permanent loss or destruction is seen as a formative aspect of cultural heritage reconstruction (Rico 2020), during the COVID-19 pandemic, the temporary and restricted access to heritage sites may have altered the perceptions regarding the value of heritage. The following ideas reflect this point (Sofaer et al. 2021). Community fears concerning the potential harm and impact of the spread of a highly infectious disease were met by government and health officials' policies limiting the number of people that could attend social and religious gatherings. This respiratory-based illness, COVID-19, required changes in behaviour, which included strategies such as wearing masks, implementing social distancing, limiting mobility, and self-quarantining when infected. These measures were implemented to prevent the spread of disease and to protect humans from exposure when possible. This entailed enforcing restrictions on access to heritage sites and other public facilities. The tourism industry, in which heritage is featured, was severely impacted due to the limited mobility policy. Heritage tourism, prior to the pandemic, was a 'driver of local economic development' that had commodified several places exhibiting heritage sites and narrated their collective memories for the benefit of tourists (Silberman 2020). For some heritage experts, the decrease in tourism to overcrowded iconic heritage sites such as Venice, Angkor Wat, and Macchu Pitchu that occurred during the pandemic was acknowledged as a positive solution to overtourism (Silberman 2020) and as a motivation to rethink sustainable heritage development (Ioannides and Gyimóthy 2020). Despite the risk of the spread of infection by visiting heritage sites, some communities continued their patronage of their religious buildings and traditional ceremonies. Thus, amidst the pandemic, heritage, both tangible and intangible, was prioritised as a means of community resilience (Sofaer et al. 2021). Heritage in this instance may be considered to be an ideological tool for developing community resilience through sustained engagement, whereby heritage sites form a type of 'resilience hub' (Fava 2022). Therefore, heritage sites might be recognised for their positive mental health and well-being benefits (Power and Smyth 2016; Sofaer et al. 2021). The scale of the societal challenges that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the need to understand the social benefits

of heritage (Sofaer et al. 2021). What resilience benefits does visitation to heritage sites offer a community, given the significant health risks associated social gatherings?

The disaster and pandemic have prompted the inclusion of cultural heritage sites in emergency planning and resilience building (Macalister 2015) and the rethinking of the concept of heritage and conservation (Silberman 2020) beyond the role of its built fabric. The concept of community heritage resilience (CHR) integrates community resilience and community heritage to design circular development pathways for larger areas (Fava 2022). Adaptability is one of the characteristics of resilient systems. In heritage conservation, this adaptation is implemented through processes or initiatives concerning adaptive reuse (Wong 2017). Therefore, heritage sites may offer new uses and functions for existing buildings and structures (Plevoets and Cleempoel 2019). Stone (2020) argues that adaptive reuse is increasingly being perceived as an opportunity to progressively adapt to other challenges, such as environmental changes. Thus, the built environment's resilience is paired with its ability to manage long-term use under threats of environmental impacts such as climate change (Bullen and Love 2011). The pandemic has highlighted certain human behaviours (Megahed and Ghoneim 2020) that require different built responses. For example, to accommodate increased vigilance in the maintenance of public health, greater air reticulation in internal spaces has become required for buildings (Marotta, Porras-Amores, and Rodríguez Sánchez 2021; Mahima et al. 2022; Megahed and Ghoneim 2020).

In the face the COVID-19 pandemic challenges, disaster destruction, the looting of affected sites, and other climate change challenges such as sea-level rise, massive deforestation, natural resource extraction; there is simply not enough resource available to physically preserve or even conserve the large extend heritage that is being physically destroyed every year by these challenges and destruction (Silberman 2020). Limited staffing, funding and resource management have resulted in the physical destruction of some heritage sites over time (Silberman 2020). Cut Dewi (2017) and Caitlin DeSilvey (2017) provided alternative solutions to this situation. Dewi (2017) proposed recognising adaptive reform as an alternative conservation approach for heritage that has lost its physical authenticity but has remained in use serving the same cultural and social functions. DeSilvey (2017) suggested the awareness of curated decay which includes a strategy of recognising and documenting the processes of physical transformation of sites and artefacts over time. This process displaces physical preservation as the primary goal in cases where such preservation cannot be achieved. Therefore, decay and destruction do not necessarily destroy the significance of heritage and its meaning for the community; similarly, physical preservation does not necessarily preserve meaning and value. In the face of a changing world, decay and destruction are ever present; therefore, change is unavoidably entangled with natural forces and human designs (DeSilvey 2017). Under the pandemic, heritage conservation and its patronisation were pursued through (ongoing) adaptive reuse (Fava 2022). Consequently, heritage planning is a tool for managing change rather than for preventing change (Ashworth 1991).

4 Research method

This paper utilises research methods such as semistructured interviews and participant observation data collected by the *Urban Heritage and Community Resilience: Conservation, Tourism, and Pandemic project.* Fieldwork was carried out at 10 heritage sites in Banda Aceh that each represent different kinds of attractions. These span a range from primarily green space to museums and mosques. Such sites include the Baiturrahman Mosque, the grand mosque established by Acehnese Sultan around the 17th century, which was destroyed and rebuilt by the Dutch colonial government in the 19th century; the Baiturrahim Mosque, a colonial mosque that survived the 2004 Tsunami Disaster despite its being located only five hundred metres from the coastline; the Teungku Dianjong Mosque, a 17th century mosque established by an influenced ulama/religious leader; the Tsunami Museum, which houses the 2004 Tsunami and Earthquake memorial; the Aceh Museum, or the state museum; Cut Nyak Dhien Museum, a replica house of Cut Nyak Dhien's, who was an Acehnese heroin, that has been turned into museum; Taman Sari Park, which is part of the Bustanussalatin sultanate garden; Blang Padang Park, another part of the Bustanussalatin sultanate garden; and Kapal Apung Tsunami Memorial, which is an electrical ship that became stuck onshore during the 2004 Tsunami and Earthquake and has since been turned into a memorial. In addition to these nine sites, which are listed in the government heritage list, we also conducted semistructured interviews and participant observations at Lampuuk Beach, one of our favourite tourism destinations and an area affected by the 2004 tsunami. The beach is considered part of the everyday cultural landscapes (heritage) and serves as a place for people to remember the tsunami as well as to enjoy the beautiful beach. this site contains both free locations and pay-to-enter locations.

Mixed-methods data were collected at each site between May and July 2022. We randomly interviewed people at the heritage sites while attempting to ensure a variety of respondents from various genders, ages, and backgrounds. Before conducting the interviews, we

sought consent from the respondents. During this time, the pandemic effects were changing all the time. The vaccination rate in Aceh was approximately 525,000 for the 1st dose, with a total of 43,999 cases. Data were collected by means of semistructured interviews and participant observation using a grounded theory approach to assess the meanings of heritage as expressed by respondents. A total of 118 people were interviewed at 10 sites in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar. The researchers followed health protocols by wearing facemasks, maintaining social distancing, and performing diligent hand washing. The interviews were recorded through paper transcription at the time of the fieldwork. The questions included the motivations for visiting heritage sites, the participant's visitation patterns since the pandemic began in late 2019 and lockdown was imposed in Aceh in early 2020, the frequency of visit to the sites, the meaning of place and the perceived ways that this place imparts resilience (if any), the resilience mechanism during the pandemic, demographic information, and the level of willingness to follow new rules (including health protocols) during the visit. These questions enabled us to identify the motivation behind visiting heritage sites during the pandemic and the associated values and meanings. In addition to semistructured interviews and participant observation, we also conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) with local experts and members of the government, including Badan Pelestarian Cagar Budaya (BPCP), the Board for Tangible Heritage Conservation; Dinas Kebudayaan dan pariwisata, the Cultural and Tourism Board; Dinas Pendidikan, the Board of Education; Dinas Kesehatan, the Board of Health; Badan Nasional Penanggulan Bencana (BNPB), the Disaster Mitigation Board; Badan Pelestarian Nilai-Nilai Budaya (BPNB), the Board for Intangible Heritage Conservation; Satgas COVID-19, the COVID-19 taskforce; Heritage and Tourism site management, etc., as well as the archival studies at Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia (ANRI), The *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, or the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV) and other archival sources. This research focuses primarily on the ways that people build resilience, their motivations to visit heritage sites and the meaning of heritage sites as reflected through semistructured interviews and participant observation. Fifty-eight percent of our respondents were female, and 42% were male. Below are the statistics of the respondents (see Table 1).

Table 1 Respondents Occupation

No	Occupation	Number
1	PNS (government employer)	21
2	Self employed	33
3	Student	40
4	Others	24
TOTAL		118

Table 2 Community Ways of Resilience Amid the Pandemic

No	Mechanism	Percentage
1	Staying at Home	18
2	Doing Tourism Activities	11
3	Being with Family and Friends	8
4	Becoming Closer to the God	25
5	Following Health Protocols and Positive Thinking	37
6	Do not Trust COVID-19	1
TOTAL		100

5 Results and Discussion: The meaning of heritage sites during the pandemic

To understand the meaning of heritage sites, as well as the potential resilience that people might derive for their visits and ongoing adaptation in the use of heritage sites during the pandemic, it is necessary to understand the social impacts of the disruption that has been caused by COVID-19. The government restrictions imposed on the community consequently impacted social, economic, and wellbeing issues throughout the majority of our population research sample. According to our interviews, many people experienced feelings of helplessness, social isolation, anxiety, boredom, and safety concerns, as well as undergoing economic difficulties. However, some positive aspects have also been experienced and expressed in our interview data, such as the ability to spend more time with family, engage in self-contemplation, increase the faith in God, and negotiate life priorities. In response to increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases, some hospitals, if not all, were adapted to increase their inpatient capacities and further equipped with pandemic isolation wards, and a COVID-19 task force was established. Households were adjusted to address the pandemic rules by expanding their functions to include spaces for offices and learning environments.

Here are some of the ways our respondents reported building resilience and personally adapting their lives to survive the pandemic (see Table 2).

Following health protocols and maintaining positive thinking for mental health (37%) were the dominant mechanisms that people pursued amid the pandemic. People also performed religious activities such as praying to bring them closer to God (25%). Staying at home (18%) and engaging in tourism activities (11%) were each mentioned by the respondents. Friends and family

(8%) have also been reported as a source of resilience; spending time and conversing with friends and family eases the pandemic burden and consequent stress levels. Some of our respondents reported attempting to accept the pandemic by adapting their behaviours and considered the situation to be temporary. For some of them, this acceptance related to their religious beliefs being *ikhlas*, or sincere. Everything comes from God, Allah, so humans simply do their part by following His rules. In their acceptance, some of our respondents made use of the pandemic as a time to contemplate the power of God, creativity, and making a good start in developing a healthier lifestyle by eating well and exercising. Some expressions of resilience under the pandemic are presented as follows:

> *Stay creative, see what the opportunities are during the pandemic, even during the pandemic the opportunities are getting bigger and better able to enter the digital world. Qadarullah actually, whatever it is God's will, and we surrender. We can relax our minds by travelling that makes us survive (MRB_HL_03)*
> *During the pandemic, just stay at home, and if we go out with family and stay away from crowds, the most important thing is to just surrender to Allah (MT_HL_01).*

Some interviewees expressed their resilience by describing and referencing the history of pandemic mitigation and resilience in Aceh by examining how cultural traditions are entangled with religious practices. We also observed several communities performing traditions that are entangled with religious values, such as dhikr. As discussed earlier, COVID-19 was not the first pandemic outbreak in human history, and it is evident that humans are working on building their resilience to environmental hazards and threats. Thus, traditional knowledge empowers people to accept and adapt to hazards and allows them to move forwards (Suleiman 2020). Such knowledge includes social processes. Therefore, this response is shaped by its context and there is no point in preserving it throughout time; rather, it should be adapted over time (Suleiman 2020). Below is an example of an excerpt from our interview referencing the history of the pandemic and subsequent mitigation using local knowledge:

> *The practice I did to survive COVID-19 was reading wirid-wirid, remembrances such as reading surah Yasin after prayer, praying after prayer, reading qursi verses, and others. The disease does exist but don't be too afraid and worried because the disease is from Allah SWT. Even the first plagues that existed like taeun disease, so every time there was a disease, there was also a cure that Allah provided (MRB_IM_03)*

It has been noted that the ways that the respondents built resilience in the face of COVID-19 was quite varied. The interview data reveal greater nuance from the themes, although not mutually exclusive, that emerged from visitors of heritage sites. Some of these themes are not necessarily unique to heritage sites but nevertheless emerge as important factors in the responses and reflections of heritage site visitors. The intention to leave the houses depended on the severity of the pandemic at that time. In the early stages of the pandemic, most respondents preferred to stay at home with their family to avoid virus exposure. However, in the second phase, once the vaccines and the medication had been administered to the population, some interviewees tried to go out for various purposes, including relieving boredom, working, meeting friends, etc. In the stage phase when the COVID-19 curve was sloped, the virus variant was considered no longer deadly.

The meanings attributed to visiting heritage sites to derive resilience included seeking out God for help enduring the pandemic through local Acehnese knowledge and religious practices. The mosques are places of hope and are closer to God (the pandemic is an act of God, as are other disasters); thus, it is no wonder that people treat heritage sites with religious values differently than other sites. While people can also pray at home, praying at the mosque, which is one of the fundamental heritages of Acehnese, religious sites, have become even more highly valued due to these circumstances. Access to religious sites such as mosques needs to be rethought. The materiality of a place is just temporary and is less important than the activities and the relationship between humans and their god that develop there (Dewi 2017). Mosques are religious places where practising Moslems feel an intimate experience of god; thus, their physical and psychological attachments to mosques are essential. In Islam, nevertheless, acts of prayer can be performed anywhere on earth, and one place is not necessarily more sacred than others. Mosques, at least for the Moslems in Banda Aceh, are places where the Islamic faith is enhanced and the sense of togetherness with other Moslems is evoked. This means that worshipers become closer to God because they perform acts of worshipping, and places such as mosques provide tangible places to stand, kneel, sit, and prostrate to worship God. The pandemic has brought additional value to heritage sites imbued with religious values, such as mosques. Being resilient not only involves physical resilience but also mental resilience for some of the interviewees who can accept that all of these disasters are God

will. According to the Muslim perspective, only God can stop a bad situation and replace it with a better situation. Humans simply do their part to exert their best efforts, but the decision is in God's hands. Below are some examples of resilience becoming stronger at the mosque:

> *I personally like quiet places and want to find calmness. I prefer to go to mosques and other religious visits (MB_HL-01)*
> *.... Actually, I get strength and resilience at home praying to Allah, but if we go to the mosque, it is closer to Allah (MRB_HL_03)*
> *I sometimes went to the Baiturrahman Grand Mosque during the pandemic. The atmosphere in the mosque was quiet, and there was enforcement to wear a facemask inside the mosque. I visited the mosque because I felt this place was comfortable and calming (MRB_IM_02)*
> *During the pandemic, I did a bit of tourism activities and surrendered to Allah at the mosque (BP_HL_05)*

The commodification of heritage as a tourism attraction, especially iconic attractions such as mosques, causes them to continue to experience high visitation of the locals even during a pandemic. The substantial reduction in tourist visits suggests that cultural heritage will transition to be where the local people live rather than only residing in places of leisure (Silberman 2020). As people were not allowed to travel outside of the city during lockdown, the local heritage and tourism sites became alternative places to visit. In this sense, local actors had more power in the heritage process. The pandemic increased the strength of local voices in the absence of national and international tourists' ideas about heritage. In addition, these locals celebrate and valorise local memories to make them more meaningful; thus, meaningful local memories become more resonant and powerful than the expert-defined 'outstanding universal value' (Silberman 2020).

During the pandemic, heritage places have been used in various ways to support resilience. For example, historic buildings and cultural sites have been repurposed as vaccination centres and others. The Banda Aceh Acehnese Museum has been reproposed as a vaccination centre. Those places that have already provided strength, such as Kapal Apung and other disaster heritage sites, have provided space for extra contemplation on the power of God in human life. As people learn from previous disasters and continue to reflect on the pandemic situation, they rely on the power of God. In addition, as most tsunami heritage sites, except the Tsunami Museum, are open places, they have become favourable destinations amid the pandemic. Below are some excerpts from our interview:

> *From this place I saw the power of Allah, nothing is impossible if Allah wills. The Kapal Apung (Electrical Generator Ship) does not provide comfort, but this was a disaster in 2004. Allah willed a ship weighing 6 tons to become stranded in the centre of this city. We must believe that Allah exists. The Kapal Apung could make me realise that everything is not eternal, and I could see the remains of the Aceh tsunami (KA_IM-01).*
> *Despite its location very close to the sea, this mosque (Baiturrahim Mosque) survived the 2004 tsunami. It was not destroyed by the 9.3 earthquake, even though the waves reached 15 metres. This is the power and miracle of Allah. That is why I wanted to go to this mosque…Allah still maintains the sturdiness of the mosque so that it remains a lesson to us that we must always visit the mosque in every situation as the house of Allah for worship. This mosque is very comfortable and has an incredible history (MB_IM-02).*

People negotiated pursuing risky leisure activities as they got bored being confined at home for many months and needed to relieve their boredom by visiting open air sites (Dewi, C., Nichols, J., Rofe, M. and Izziah, A: Negotiating Risk and Leisure-Resilience: Visiting Tourism Sites during the COVID-19 Pandemic, forthcoming). During the pandemic, open air heritage sites were among the favourite destinations to visit (see Table 3). Beyond religious sites, open air heritage sites were among the first places to reopen and stay open during the second phase of COVID-19 in Banda Aceh. They are relatively

Table 3 Reasons for Visiting and Not Visiting Heritage Sites

No	Preference	Number
1	Stay at Home for safety reason (not visiting)	36
2	Visiting Mosque for praying and closer to the God, but following Health Protocols	11
3	Visiting Heritage Tourism Sites for relaxing and killing boredom, but Following Health Protocols	59
4	Visiting Heritage sites for leisure purpose, but do not follow health protocols	12
TOTAL		118

'safe' options for people to visit. In their visit, people adjusted by wearing masks, maintaining social distance while praying together, etc. Although instituting distance between one praying participant and another in congregational prayer is prohibited in normal times, during the pandemic, it is used as solution allowing participants to be together while still protecting one another. Adapting to the disruptions in the relationship between humans and heritage can be regenerative, allowing for the emergence of new significance, meanings and attachments to heritage (DeSilvey 2017). However, there were differences between those citizens who believed in the threat of COVID-19 and thus adjusted or adapted their behaviours by following health protocol to protect themselves and their families and those who did not adapt their behaviour. Even when these individuals wore face masks, they did so to avoid the face mask raids that were regularly held by the government. Table 3 below shows the reasons for visiting and not visiting heritage sites during the pandemic.

As heritage is a cultural process (Smith 2006), Ballard et al. (2020, 104) note that the process of cultural transmission might be disturbed by a loss of population, distance from ancestral lands, loss of material culture, or loss of critical cultural aspects such as traditional language or practices. The closure of heritage sites where cultural practices are performed disturbs the heritage process. There is loss or damage to heritage sites in a postdisaster society; the pandemic does not affect heritage directly, but rather the closure of heritage sites affects the connection between humans and heritage. The disruption caused by the pandemic, such as mobility limitations and the closure of heritage sites, reformulates the issues around access to important places where people can kneel and pray closer to God. It has also been argued in the heritage literature that prohibitions on visiting sites during the COVID-19 lockdown removed the capabilities and agency of the people, and the reopening of heritage sites became a means of restoring these qualities. (Sofaer et al. 2021). Thus, the ability to regain access to heritage sites is closely linked to a sense of regaining control over one's life (Sofaer et al. 2021). Resilience is not only a matter of physically surviving the pandemic and bringing lifestyles back to normal, as there is no such normal as there was before, but rather a new normal prevails. Resilience is also a matter of well-being. COVID-19 s has strengthened the claim that process is more important than product (Silberman 2020).

COVID-19 has become a filter or mechanism through which people determine which place is more important than others. What aspect of heritage is more important? If heritage sites are generally only visited for nostalgia, then this must be looked at differently in Asia, especially in Aceh, where heritage sites are also combined with religious places. Visiting these places is important for resilience. Other nonreligious heritage is still entangled with religious values such as the destiny of God's Power. It is very difficult to close the doors to religious heritage during a pandemic. People keep coming, and some instances mosques are forced to open. What local people need is a safe mechanism through which they can engage with these sites while still maintaining their health and safety.

6 Conclusion

The material presented in this paper as part of the *Urban Heritage and Community Resilience: Conservation, Tourism, and Pandemic* project is unique in that it was collected during a very particular time when the people were facing a pandemic. Thus, the meaning of heritage sites under a pandemic is that it serves as place of resilience. Leveraging heritage sites as places for religious practices, tourism (leisure) destinations, meeting friends, and spending time with family contributes to people's resilience during a pandemic. Heritage sites provide resilience amid a pandemic by providing well-being through being used as a place for friends and leisure (Sofaer et al. 2021). In addition, it is a place where visitors need to be closer to God. In addition, religious places and open-air heritage sites that coincide with leisure uses, such as Blang Padang Oval, Taman Sari, and Lampuuk Beach, provide people with stress and boredom relief. The tsunami-related sites that have been used as symbols of resilience and have provided people with resilience to the disaster serve to trigger further contemplation of God's power and resilience. In the absence of international and national tourism, heritage sites return to their local communities, as they become visited by locals only, for the most part. In the use of a heritage site, ongoing adaptations regarding both visitor behaviour and the site facilities and arrangements become necessary, such as social distancing and face mask recommendation, to enable people to come together and use the place to establish resilience.

This research highlights the importance of being together and maintaining the ability to conduct social, cultural, and religious activities as among the more important aspects of community resilience that are adopted and negotiated at heritage sites. Thus, based on these research findings, future policies regarding cultural heritage should consider allowing people to visit heritage sites under certain rules. This is supported by Sofaer et al. (2021), who argue that access to heritage sites is important for the community. Future heritage conservation should consider the uses of heritage in every situation, including health disasters such as pandemics. There is no heritage without people's engagement. Thus, we need

natural disaster mitigation for heritage conservation, and health mitigation or protocols put into effect while using heritage sites should be one of the most important aspects in future heritage conservation. However, as this research took place in urban areas and within communities practising Islam, it might be limited in that it does not capture the relationship between heritage and community and the ways that people have developed resilience during the pandemic in more rural and remote areas or beyond the Islamic society of Southeast Asia. Thus, as every context is unique, further investigation is required to examine the relationship between heritage and community amidst health disasters such as pandemics in different contexts.

Abbreviations

UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019
ANRI	Arsip Nasional Republik Indonesia
KITLV	The *Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies
BNPB	Badan Nasional Penanggulan Bencana/Disaster Mitigation Board
BPNB	Badan Pelestarian Nilai-Nilai Budaya/Board for intangible heritage conservation
BPCB	Badan Pelestarian Cagar Budaya/Board for tangible heritage conservation

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Availability of data and materials
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Declarations

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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