

KABUYUTAN SACRED SITES IN THE SUNDANESE LANDSCAPE OF INDONESIA:
A REEVALUATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The issue of sacred natural sites has been a concern for conservationists through various studies in the context of the evaluating the critical role of sacred places. Thirty-three *kabuyutan* as sacred natural sites in Indonesia that sanctified for generations by the Sundanese people were explored and identified their forms and functions. This study aims to understand the existence of *kabuyutan* in the Sundanese landscape as a basis for reevaluating its existence both from the standpoint of ecology and culture and to identify the potential of tourism through participant observation methods included field surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGD) with key informants who have a relatively good knowledge. This study revealed that *kabuyutan* have a unique structure compare to surrounding landscape which particularly sacred due to the presence of ancestral graves or other associated natural element. Their existence was closely related to the water resources which mainly springs as an integral part of the hydrological system. Several *kabuyutan* functions as the boundary of water catchment area and delineate the watershed boundary. Results revealed that 249 of 332 plant species were reported to exist in *kabuyutan* and 96 of them have been verified based on vegetation survey. It is assumed that *kabuyutan* is potential to be hotspots of plant diversity as a preferable habitat for abundant plant species. In addition, the presence of all fifteen endangered plant species as well as 32.9% of native species such as a native and IUCN's threatened *tanglar* tree (*Aglaia elliptica* Blume, Bijdr), indicating the importance of *kabuyutan* towards biodiversity conservation. The presence of endemic and threatened species is important in designating a biodiversity hotspot that leads to making up conservation priorities. Also, findings that 130 of plant species could be identified for land and water conservation reinforced the potential of *kabuyutan* in the watershed management in addition to being a biodiversity hotspot. However, The lack of local people's awareness according to the critical role of *kabuyutan* causes the vulnerability of springs. Therefore, knowledge-sharing, especially by encouraging and strengthening the custodian's role as a presentative of both cultural and religious person is crucial to make up a positive perception of people that have a high impact on their awareness. Further, some preventive efforts should be applied to preserve the local plant species. Considering the influential role of religion in *kabuyutan*, there is a potential to set the appropriate rules by combining religious, customary, and governmental rules into an adaptive management strategy that would encourage people to utilize *kabuyutan* sufficiently. Furthermore, this study revealed that *kabuyutan* have a potential to be designated as a tourism destination by encouraging the readiness of the local people and strengthening a good partnership of government. Finally, this study emphasized that an application of landscape ecological method in understanding about phenomena of sacred natural sites in a cultural landscape shows a positive result and a potential to be further developed in the future study. The use of a hierarchical theory correspond to the traditional ecological knowledge of the Sundanese people indicates a high capability of this approach in providing sufficient information to understand the general characteristics of *kabuyutan* at a different scale and notifying a foundation for setting strategies and recommendations based on locality. Further, combination among religious laws (*sharia*), customary laws (*adat*), and governmental regulations should be elaborated and not to be contradicted.