



PLANNING MALAYSIA:

Journal of the Malaysian Institute of Planners

VOLUME 23 ISSUE 2 (2025), Page 379 – 393

AGILE CITIES: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF SPATIAL PLANNING FOR URBAN ECONOMIC RESILIENCE IN THE ISLAMIC CULTURAL CONTEXT OF Banda Aceh, INDONESIA

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Abstract

Urban economic resilience is increasingly critical for cities facing environmental, economic, and social challenges. This study investigates the prospects and challenges of agile spatial planning in fostering economic resilience within the Islamic cultural context of Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Grounded in the agile cities framework, which emphasises flexibility, adaptability, and stakeholder engagement, this research examines how Islamic principles, including social cohesion, environmental stewardship, and public welfare (maslaha) inform urban planning to build resilience. Using a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews involving 10 key stakeholders and systematic observation, the study identifies key strategies such as flexible zoning, adaptive reuse, and sustained community engagement as prospects to enhance resilience while preserving cultural identity. Nevertheless, challenges remain in balancing tradition with modernity, institutional inertia, and sustaining stakeholder commitment. Findings suggest that integrating cultural heritage with adaptive planning supports sustainable development, positioning Banda Aceh as a potential model for cities seeking to harmonise tradition and modernity. Recommendations include revising zoning regulations for adaptability, fostering continuous community engagement, and utilising digital platforms to improve participation. Future research should examine the long-term impacts of these strategies to further support resilient and culturally cohesive urban development.

Keywords: Cultural Integration, Flexible Zoning, Islamic Cultural Values, Spatial Planning, Urban Economic Resilience

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INTRODUCTION

Urban economic resilience has become a pivotal theme in urban studies, particularly in response to escalating environmental, economic, and social challenges. Resilient cities are characterised by their capacity to absorb, adapt, and recover from disruptions, maintaining core functions and facilitating recovery (Simmie & Martin, 2010). This resilience is especially pertinent for cities like Banda Aceh, which are culturally Islamic and highly vulnerable to external shocks (Haiqal et al., 2019; Ismail et al., 2018). Although factors such as economic diversity, human capital, and governance efficacy contribute to resilience (Zhou & Qi, 2023), research is limited on how spatial planning rooted in Islamic values can strengthen economic resilience within an agile city framework.

The "agile cities" concept advocates flexibility and adaptability in addressing complex urban challenges, encouraging iterative spatial planning, stakeholder engagement, and diverse perspectives (Lukman & Hakim, 2024). While this framework endorses resilience through strategies such as mixed-use development and green infrastructure (Cao, 2023), the influence of culturally specific values, such as those inherent in Islamic urbanism, remains underexplored (Zuraidi et al., 2021, 2022). Understanding how Islamic cultural contexts shape agile spatial planning and resilience in urban settings like Banda Aceh reveals a significant research gap.

In Banda Aceh, Islamic principles of social cohesion, environmental stewardship, and public welfare (*maslaha*) inform the urban landscape, structuring spatial layouts and communal spaces around elements like mosques and markets to foster social bonds and inclusivity (Zuraidi et al., 2020, 2023). Natural landmarks, such as the Krueng Aceh River and the Bustanussalatin Garden, exemplify environmental stewardship, symbolising harmony with nature and enhancing the adaptability of public spaces (Istiqamah & Herlily, 2018). This cultural framework is reinforced by Indonesia's Special Autonomy Law for Aceh (Law No. 18 of 2001), granting Banda Aceh authority to apply *Sharia*-based regulations in urban planning titled *Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 18 Tahun 2001 Tentang Otonomi Khusus Bagi Provinsi Daerah Istimewa Aceh Sebagai Provinsi Nanggroë Aceh Darussalam* (2001). This autonomy enables the integration of Islamic principles into spatial planning, aligning urban design with both cultural identity and resilience objectives.

Despite these unique cultural and legal contexts, research is scarce on how Islamic values, when embedded in agile spatial planning, support urban economic resilience in Banda Aceh. This study addresses this gap by examining the prospects and challenges of implementing agile spatial planning within an Islamic cultural framework, specifically investigating how the integration of Islamic principles in Banda Aceh supports or limits urban resilience. This study

offers insights into how Islamic cultural contexts can harmonise with agile city strategies, guiding urban planners in Muslim-majority cities aiming to enhance economic resilience while preserving cultural identity. By exploring the intersection of agile spatial planning and Islamic urbanism, this research presents a model for culturally integrated resilience in urban planning, offering practical implications for cities facing similar challenges in an evolving global landscape.

METHODS

Study Area

This research was conducted in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, a city characterised by its vulnerability to natural disasters and predominantly Muslim population (Figure 1a.). In 2004, an earthquake and tsunami destroyed approximately 27% of the city's 60.33 km² area, leaving extensive structural damage and claiming around 27,000 from a population of 243,895 (Aceh Disaster Management Strategic Plan (2018-2022), 2018). Figures 1b and 1c illustrate Banda Aceh's integration of cultural heritage into its urban landscape. Figure 1a captures *Peunayong* Market during the *Meugang* festival, highlighting its cultural and economic significance, while Figure 1c shows *Mesjid Raya Baiturrahman* hosting a *Rapai Geleng* performance, symbolising its dual role as a religious and cultural venue.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach, ideal for exploring complex social phenomena such as urban resilience within specific cultural contexts. This approach enabled an in-depth examination of how spatial planning aligns with Islamic cultural values, capturing participants' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions (Crewell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews and systematic observation documented both stakeholders' subjective experiences and the objective realities of spatial planning in Banda Aceh.

Semi-structured interviews

To examine spatial planning and economic resilience in Banda Aceh, purposive sampling was used to select 10 key stakeholders with expertise in urban planning, disaster management, socio-economics, and cultural dynamics within an Islamic framework. This diverse group, including public officials, private sector leaders, and community representatives, provided a comprehensive understanding of urban resilience (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants were selected based on professional experience, community influence, and sectoral involvement (Table 1). Interviews, lasting 30-45 minutes each, were conducted over several months to gather detailed insights.

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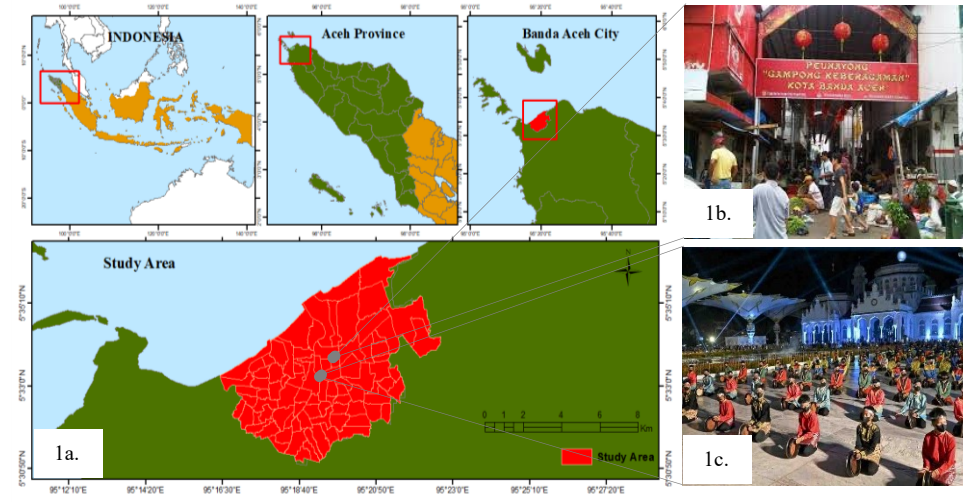


Figure 1: a) Study Area, b) *Peunayong Market*, c) *Masjid Raya Baiturrahman*

Source: a) Author (2024), b) Arief Maulana (2017), c) Chaideer Mahyudin/AFP via Liputan6.com (2024)

Systematic Observation

In addition to interviews, systematic observations were conducted to capture real-time interactions and behaviours in urban spaces, enhancing data depth (Kawulich, 2005). Over three months, the principal researcher observed key sites, including *Peunayong Market* and *Masjid Raya Baiturrahman*, to assess how Islamic cultural values shape urban dynamics and community responses to planning changes. These observations offered a holistic perspective, bridging the gap between stakeholder perceptions and on-the-ground practices.

Triangulation and Data Analysis

The integration of interviews and observations enabled methodological triangulation, enhancing the study's validity and reliability (Yin, 2018). Thematic analysis identified recurring themes, providing a nuanced understanding of cultural influences on spatial planning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Comparative analysis was employed to evaluate planning strategies in Banda Aceh, contrasting Islamic urban planning principles with practical applications, particularly regarding flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness. Table 2 presents ratings for these factors.

Table 1: Profile of Stakeholders Interviewed in Banda Aceh

Inf. Code	Profession	Age Range	Year of Exp.	Sector	Selection Criteria
SH1	Urban Planner	40-45	15-20	Public Sector	Expertise in spatial planning, key urban projects
SH2	Disaster Management Specialist	50-55	25+	Disaster Management	Leadership in disaster recovery
SH3	Researcher	45-50	15-25	Research Center	Disaster management research
SH4	Academic	40-45	20	Education	Socio-economic culture, urban resilience expert
SH5	City Council Representative	40-45	15-20	Private Sector	Local governance expertise
SH6	Islamic School Leader	40-45	15-20	Private Sector	Insights on socio-cultural development
SH7	Urban Development Consultant	35-40	10-15	Private Consultancy	Spatial planning and resilience consulting
SH8	Environmental Specialist	45-50	15-20	Public Sector	Sustainable development
SH9	NGO Representative	35-40	10-15	Disaster Risk Reduction	Community resilience, risk reduction
SH10	SME Development Expert	35-40	10-15	Private Sector	Economic diversification, SME support

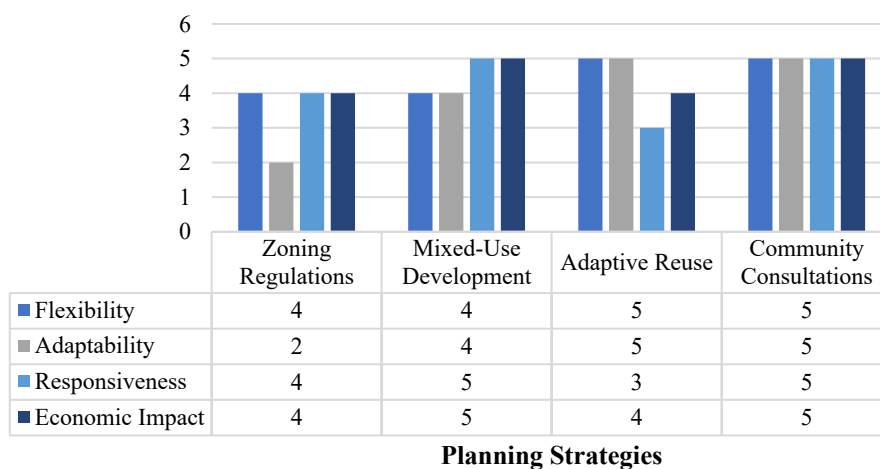
Table 2: Interpretation of the Ratings for Each Factor

Factor	Low	Low to Moderate	Moderate	Moderate to High	High
Flexibility	Rigid regulations, difficult to modify	Limited adjustments within boundaries	Some adjustments possible	Generally flexible, allows modifications	Quick and efficient modifications as needed
Adaptability	Struggles with unexpected changes	Adapt with significant effort	Can accommodate changes with planning	Adjusts to new circumstances with effort	Easily adapts to new circumstances
Responsiveness	Slow, Feedback ignored	Acknowledges feedback, delayed	Considers feedback, moderate speed	Swift integration, timely action	Proactive, immediate action
Economic Impact	Minimal, may hinder development	Contributes, but not substantially	Supports growth, not transformative	Drives growth, encourages resilience	Significant impact, drives resilience

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The prospect of Agile Spatial Planning for Urban Economic Resilience in Banda Aceh

The thematic and comparative analyses of planning strategies in Banda Aceh provide insights into their flexibility, adaptability, responsiveness, and economic impact, consistent with existing literature on urban resilience and adaptive planning (Figure 2). From the thematic analysis, five themes emerged:



1= Low; 2= Low to Moderate; 3= Moderate; 4= Moderate to High; 5= High

Figure 2: Planning Strategies Comparison

Source: Author Analysis (2024)

Theme 1: Integration of Islamic Values in Urban Planning

Integrating Islamic principles into urban planning in Banda Aceh is fundamental to enhancing social cohesion and securing community support for new developments. This alignment with cultural values fortifies the social fabric while promoting sustainable practices inherent in Islamic teachings (Awaliyah, 2023). As one urban planner articulated, “*Islamic values like social cohesion and environmental stewardship are foundational. They shape our approach to resilience by fostering a sense of collective responsibility*” (Interviewee SH1). This perspective underscores the critical role of Islamic values in guiding urban resilience strategies, fostering an environment where cultural heritage is preserved alongside economic adaptability.

Literature highlights the importance of culturally inclusive planning for urban resilience, as it respects community values and fosters social cohesion and collective agency. For example, Eren & Henneberry (2022), illustrate how

Istanbul's 'glocalisation' – the blending of local identity with global economic forces – strengthens resilience. Similarly, Founoun et al. (2022), emphasise that resource-efficient or 'frugal' planning approaches, aligned with local culture, are vital in resource-limited contexts. In Banda Aceh, applying these principles supports a resilience model that is both cost-effective and culturally sensitive, ensuring urban development respects Islamic values while adapting to modern challenges.

While some contend that traditional values may hinder modernisation (United Nations, 2019), Banda Aceh's model demonstrates that integrating Islamic values into urban planning aligns development with cultural identity, supporting both economic resilience and continuity. This active incorporation of local values illustrates that cultural identity and innovation can synergise to foster a sustainable and resilient urban environment. By embedding Islamic values into the urban landscape, Banda Aceh preserves its cultural heritage while enhancing its capacity for economic adaptability and environmental stewardship.

Theme 2: Flexibility and Adaptability

The comparative analysis identifies flexible zoning regulations and adaptive reuse as key strategies for bolstering economic resilience. As Davoudi (2021) observes, resilience planning must accommodate uncertainty through adaptable approaches. Flexible zoning enables cities to quickly adjust land use to accommodate economic shifts without compromising community values. Adaptive reuse, such as the transformation of old markets into multifunctional spaces, further illustrates this adaptability. In Banda Aceh, the old *Peunayoung* market area now hosts a variety of cultural and community activities, including the *Meugang* festival marking Ramadan, the *Barongsai* parade and the 'Peunayoung and Krueng Aceh Festivals,' demonstrating how spaces can serve multiple purposes throughout the year.

Mazlan et al. (2022) found that spatial flexibility and adaptability, particularly in informal economies, are essential for resilience. During the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses in Kuching maintained operations through flexible locations and digital platforms. Similarly, Banda Aceh's adaptive zoning and reuse strategies preserve cultural heritage while meeting evolving economic needs. Zoning regulations in Banda Aceh are rated "moderate to high" in flexibility, though adaptability improvements are required. "*Flexibility in zoning allows us to quickly adapt to changing economic needs without compromising community values,*" noted one expert (Interviewee SH1). Adaptive reuse, rated high in flexibility, efficiently meets new demands, as noted by another expert: "*Repurposing existing structures efficiently meets new demands without extensive new construction*" (Interviewee SH7).

Flexible zoning and adaptive reuse are critical for fostering resilience, allowing cities to respond swiftly to economic changes and community needs (World Economic Forum & Accenture, 2024). Davoudi (2021) also stresses that adaptability is essential for resilience, with these strategies minimising the need for new construction and aligning with sustainable development goals. Mazlan et al. (2022) further emphasise that adaptive strategies, including digital integration, enhance cities' responsiveness to economic shifts. However, excessive flexibility can introduce regulatory uncertainty, potentially deterring investment (V. H. Hoffmann et al., 2009). Banda Aceh's balanced approach, maintaining regulatory stability alongside flexibility, offers a viable model for other cities pursuing resilience.

Theme 3: Community Engagement and Responsiveness

Effective community consultations have led to planning initiatives that are highly responsive to local needs, achieving high scores across key factors (Figure 2). Observations at community meetings indicated active participation and a diversity of perspectives, resulting in more inclusive planning outcomes. "*Creating platforms for ongoing dialogue with the community is crucial for responsive planning*", stated one NGO sector participant (Interviewee SH9). This continuous engagement ensures that urban planning adapts to the community's evolving needs while cultivating a sense of ownership and cooperation among residents.

Ongoing community engagement is essential for maintaining relevant and effective urban planning (Gagan Deep, 2023). By actively engaging stakeholders, Banda Aceh can promote more inclusive and adaptable planning initiatives, which enhances both the quality of urban development and the community's trust and cooperation – factors essential for long-term economic resilience. Evidence indicates that participatory planning processes often lead to more effective and sustainable urban outcomes (Iamtrakul et al., 2021). However, critics argue that extensive consultations may slow down decision-making and lead to compromises that dilute the effectiveness of planning. Banda Aceh's experience suggests that the benefits of community engagement, including increased relevance and community buy-in, outweigh these potential drawbacks.

Theme 4: Economic Diversification

Spatial planning strategies that promote mixed-use developments and support small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are key opportunities for economic diversification. Mixed-use development rates highly in adaptability, responsiveness, and economic impact, demonstrating its potential. Observations of mixed-use areas revealed thriving local businesses and active community interactions. As one interviewee noted, "*Mixed-use developments provide a*

platform for small businesses to thrive and diversify our economy" (Interviewee SH5). Supporting local businesses, fostering tourism, and developing mixed-use areas help to buffer economic shocks and create a more robust local economy. *"Diversifying our economic base through spatial planning is vital for resilience against economic downturns"* (Interviewee SH10).

Economic diversification through spatial planning is essential for reducing vulnerability to economic shocks (Coulson et al., 2020). By promoting mixed-use developments and supporting SMEs, Banda Aceh can build a more resilient and dynamic economy. These strategies not only generate economic benefits but also enhance social cohesion by fostering vibrant, mixed-use communities (Mbata, 2024). Encouraging tourism and local business development further strengthens economic resilience, offering a buffer against external economic fluctuations (Watson & Deller, 2021). Literature supports the view that a diversified economic base significantly contributes to urban resilience (Cao, 2023). Although some scholars highlight challenges with mixed-use developments, such as congestion and higher infrastructure costs (Lehmann, 2016), the economic benefits observed in Banda Aceh suggest that the advantages of these strategies can outweigh potential drawbacks.

Theme 5: Infrastructure and Sustainability

There is a strong alignment between sustainable urban planning practices and Islamic principles. Observations of green infrastructure projects, such as eco-friendly parks and water management systems, underscore benefits for both economic resilience and environmental health. *"Our principles of environmental stewardship align well with sustainable development practices"* (Interviewee SH1). Leveraging Islamic principles that advocate for environmental stewardship and social equity can guide the development of resilient urban environments that are both culturally and economically sustainable. *"By integrating our cultural values with sustainable practices, we can achieve a resilient urban ecosystem"* (Interviewee SH8).

Belaïd et al. (2023) observe that successful smart city initiatives in the MENA region often integrate local cultural values with modern infrastructure, fostering public engagement and long-term sustainability. Applying this approach in Banda Aceh could strengthen sustainable development by ensuring infrastructure respects Islamic principles while embracing modern solutions. This balance fosters a resilient urban model that is both culturally rooted and future-proof. Although initial costs for sustainable infrastructure can be high (Nasereddin & Price, 2021), the long-term benefits—such as reduced environmental impact and improved public health—justify the investment. Studies consistently show that green infrastructure and sustainable planning

significantly enhance urban resilience and environmental quality (Ashinze et al., 2024).

Challenges of Agile Spatial Planning for Urban Economic Resilience in Banda Aceh

Thematic analysis identified key challenges to agile spatial planning aimed at enhancing urban economic resilience in Banda Aceh. Addressing these challenges requires tailored solutions and policy recommendations, as highlighted by stakeholders during interviews, as summarised in Table 3. The main challenges identified include balancing tradition with modernity, institutional inertia, and sustaining stakeholder engagement.

Table 3: Challenges and Solutions

Challenges	Solutions/Policy Recommendations
Institutional Inertia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop tailored capacity-building programs for planning institutions. • Establish innovation incubators to nurture and implement new planning methodologies in spatial planning.
Balancing Tradition and Modernity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate collaborative design charrettes that bring together traditional and modern stakeholders, fostering integration of cultural aesthetics with contemporary urban design. • Develop adaptive planning guidelines that balance cultural heritage preservation with promoting modern infrastructure needs.
Maintaining Stakeholder Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce digital engagement platforms to enable real-time feedback and communication. • Organise regular inclusive workshops and forums to support ongoing community participation and transparency.

Sources: Author analysis (2024)

Theme 1: Institutional Inertia

Addressing institutional inertia within planning institutions is essential for implementing agile, adaptive planning effectively. While zoning regulations in Banda Aceh allow for flexibility, bureaucratic delays often impede adaptability. Observations of planning meetings revealed slow decision-making, highlighting a need for capacity-building initiatives and policy reforms to encourage innovative practices. *"Institutional change is slow, but with the right training and policies, we can adopt more agile methods"* (Interviewee SH3). Current bureaucratic processes thus challenge the swift adoption of flexible and adaptive strategies.

The challenge of institutional inertia is widely discussed in urban planning literature, with calls for institutional reform to enable adaptive governance (Liu, 2020). The proposed solutions align with prior studies, underscoring the importance of capacity-building and fostering innovation within planning institutions (Healey, 2006). However, while innovation incubators offer

potential, their impact may be limited by broader institutional resistance (Hartono, 2018). Effective reform thus demands comprehensive reforms at multiple governance levels.

Theme 2: Balancing Tradition and Modernity

Balancing the preservation of Banda Aceh's Islamic cultural heritage with the need for modern economic infrastructure presents a significant challenge. Observations reveal a tension between conserving historical sites and expanding commercial areas. Integrating tradition with modernity is essential for sustaining cultural identity alongside economic growth. One interviewee highlighted this, noting, *"We need to ensure our Islamic heritage value is preserved while we bring in new infrastructure to support economic activities"* (Interviewee SH2). This balance is particularly relevant in mixed-use developments, which must respect cultural contexts while fostering economic activity.

While the need to balance tradition and modernity is widely acknowledged in urban planning literature, Banda Aceh's context presents unique challenges and opportunities. Studies emphasise the role of cultural heritage in enhancing urban identity and supporting tourism (Loulanski & Loulanski, 2011). Collaborative design charrettes, as suggested, align with inclusive planning processes recommended by scholars, who advocate involving diverse stakeholders in decision-making (Kempenaar, 2021). However, the success of such approaches may depend on community engagement levels and the willingness of planning institutions to adopt adaptive methods.

Theme 3: Maintaining Stakeholder Engagement

Sustaining engagement and consistently integrating feedback throughout the planning process remains a challenge. As one participant stated, *"While initial consultations are thorough, continuous engagement is where we often fall short"* (Interviewee SH4). Developing mechanisms for ongoing feedback and participation, such as digital platforms for continuous communication, could enhance the relevance and effectiveness of spatial planning initiatives. Observations of previous projects showed lapses in follow-up engagement. *"Creating platforms for ongoing dialogue with the community is crucial for responsive planning"* (Interviewee SH9).

The significance of stakeholder engagement in urban planning is well-documented, with studies highlighting its role in fostering trust, legitimacy, and social inclusion. The proposed solutions align with recommendations for participatory planning processes that empower communities and promote transparency (Sulemana, 2016). However, while digital engagement platforms create new opportunities, they may also heighten existing inequalities in access to information and participation (Nations et al., 2021). Thus, meaningful

stakeholder engagement requires a balanced approach that combines online and offline methods, tailored to the local context (C. P. Hoffmann & Lutz, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of integrating agile spatial planning with Islamic cultural values in bolstering urban economic resilience in Banda Aceh. Findings demonstrate that incorporating principles such as *maslaha* (public welfare) and environmental stewardship into urban design promotes social cohesion and multifunctional public spaces, enabling adaptability. Effective strategies such as flexible zoning and the adaptive reuse of existing structures, as illustrated by the *Peunayoung* market area, support a variety of cultural and economic activities. Continuous stakeholder engagement ensures that urban planning remains attuned to community needs, balancing modern economic demands with traditional values.

These findings suggest that combining cultural heritage with adaptive planning can facilitate sustainable urban development, positioning Banda Aceh as a model for other cities with similar challenges. However, a balance between flexibility and regulatory stability is essential to sustain investment confidence. Therefore, it is recommended that zoning regulations be revised to support more adaptable land use, encouraging the adaptive reuse of cultural landmarks within a sustainability framework. Furthermore, maintaining inclusivity and responsiveness through ongoing community engagement, supported by forums and digital platforms, is vital.

Future research should incorporate quantitative analysis to enhance understanding of how agile spatial planning supports urban resilience across diverse contexts. Investigating the long-term impacts of such strategies will further contribute to the development of resilient and culturally cohesive cities. In conclusion, Banda Aceh's experience shows that integrating cultural values with modern planning fosters an adaptable and resilient urban environment, achieving a sustainable balance between tradition and innovation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was funded by "Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) and Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, Riset, dan Teknologi in International Collaborative Research-World Class University" scheme, grant number: 3/UN11.2.1/PT.01.03/PNBP/2024.

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Received: 7th December 2024. Accepted: 5th March 2025