

Vita Activa On The Riverbanks Settlements of Aceh Tamiang: Critical Architecture Study

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Abstract

The settlements along the Lintang River in Aceh Tamiang as the target objects of policy products are only oriented towards the physical housing and environment. Improving their quality of life is neglected because policy products do not side with them. The geographical location of their residence which is vulnerable to natural disasters such as flooding which occurs almost every year has made it difficult for them to leave the riverbank settlement environment. As an approach, a study is needed to be oriented towards their quality of life as a reference for policy products that support improving their quality of life. The literature used to reveal the quality of life of riverbank settlers uses the idea of vita activa which consists of labor, work, and action. Meanwhile, the analytical literature uses the idea of dialectics in the realm of critical architecture on the relationship between the form of riverbank settlements and the way the residents live. The study uses qualitative methods to reveal the phenomenon of residents living based on observations and information from residents as critical architectural analysis units. Based on the analysis results, it was found that they are a low-income society with labor on standard mental and intellectual consumption, work that prioritizes energy performance over intellectual performance and expertise, and action characterizes kinship like tribal society groups that view ties based on social status. The products of the settler's environmental policy will not be sustainable due to the limitations of the quality of life that prioritizes survival over maintaining life.

Keywords: settlements, vita activa, labour, work, action

Introduction

Lack of land capacity and inaccessibility of land ownership are analyzed as the causes of the continued growth of slum settlements on riverbanks. of the 63,256 sub-districts in Indonesia located on riverbanks, 26% of them have settlements on riverbanks. The development of slum settlements on riverbanks has undoubtedly become a hereditary tradition (Wiwit Heris., 2021). The characteristics of riverbank slums that can be seen from the physical aspect are: the function of residential buildings is divided into residential houses, commercial houses, and residential plus commercial houses, the form of the mass of residential buildings is predominantly a stilted structure with wooden construction and zinc roofs, environmental utilities in wastewater treatment conditions have not been completed, and waste management is still minimal, especially regarding river waste problems, ecological infrastructure is in the form of footbridges as the main circulation whose condition is inadequate, public and social facilities have not accommodated community needs (Fuji Amalia et al., 2023). Several characteristics of the environmental form are often the basis for settlement policies in riverbanks areas in Indonesia.

Various policies and programs for housing and settlement development in Indonesia have so far been dominated by a biased modernization paradigm. Housing and settlement policies in Indonesia are implemented separately or called a dichotomous model or settlement dualism (Noor Hamidah et al., 2016). The physical housing and place are often the orientation of policy targets, planning and development policies in the settlement sector have not been fully oriented towards the community (J. Santoso, 2006). Housing and settlement in a broad sense do not only mean a place to live, but a complex unity that involves various cultural elements. These elements not only highlight biological activities, but also various social, political, religious activities, and so on. The process of changing housing and settlements cannot be seen only from the material side or as a means of living, but

also as a process of settling, a place for human presence in creating living space in the community and surrounding natural environment (Nurmaida Amri, 2013). Policies related to the material side will be easily overcome with material while humans as objects of wisdom have certain phenomena in the quality of their lives that determine the success of the policy product.

Desa kota lintang bawah, located in the Desa kota lintang bawah, has an area of 110 Ha with the largest land use used for residential areas. Desa kota lintang bawah has a population of 7113 people with 3629 Heads of Families (KK). The residential settlement pattern located in the riverbank area of the Desa kota lintang bawah is in the form of displaying following the flow on the banks of the river and the road, this linear circulation pattern is found along the road in zone one which can already connect directly to the main road access to the city (Mayang et al., 2023). The riverbank only covers the area that is usually submerged during floods, while the river boundary line covers the river area and the surrounding area that has the potential to experience riverbank landslides. The main purpose of this line is to ensure the sustainability and function of the river, as well as to protect residents from potential natural disasters around the river, such as floods and landslides (H. A. Kurniawan, 2019). With the geographical conditions of residential land that is vulnerable to disasters, it will further worsen the quality of life of settlers and it is difficult to get out of the riverbanks to get habitable settlements.

Creating a riverbank housing program that is in favor of its settlers is an intellectual act that must be done. Each riverbank settler has different characteristics of living in each region. Not only limited to the ecological function of the river, but political, economic, and cultural aspects also influence the formulation of policies because they are indirectly closely related to the lives of the people who live around it (Anta Sastika & Abdul Yasir, 2017). Therefore, research is needed to understand the quality of life of riverbank settlers, especially settlers in disaster-prone areas on the Lintang River, Aceh Tamiang Regency. Vita activa is a term used by Hannah Arendt to name her idea of the quality of human life based on labor, work, and action (Sergius Lay, 2024). The idea of vita activa is an intellectual instrument to understand the relationship between place and humans based on the quality of their life (Ivana Ivković, 2002). The realm of architecture is involved as a reference for thinking about policies because of the orientation of settlers in answering the problem of settlements in riverbank areas that favor settlers (Kurt H. Wolff, 1961) in Indonesia, especially for riverbank settlers in the Lintang River, Aceh Tamiang Regency.

Literature Review

Architecture is an art because of intellectual interest not only in the purity of basic housing needs but also includes the relationship of meaning between material and space, this will be seen through the relationship between factual and formal thinking (Patchen Markell, 2011). The human condition is a typical human situation in the world that is always related to everything that can support its existence as a human being. This human condition is explained in detail by Hannah Arendt in her book *The Human Condition* by revealing the three conditions for humans to be in the world, namely labor, work, and action (Hannah Arendt, 1998). These three things are absolute requirements for humans to be in the world and Arendt calls it the term *vita activa*. According to Arendt, the term *vita activa* is used for three basic human activities, namely labor, work, and action because these three activities each correspond to one of the basic conditions of human life on earth (Jacqueline Tuwanakotta, 2024).

In her book, Arendt explains the three activities, namely labor is an activity that is by the biological processes of the human body. This activity grows spontaneously with the body's metabolism which then decays because it is bound to the vital needs produced and included in the human life process through work activities (John Levi Martin, 2017). The human condition in this work activity is what is called life itself. Work is an activity that refers to unnatural conditions, not inherent in its existence, and whose work is not balanced by the life cycle of species that always repeats (Andrew Norris, 2013). Work produces a world of "artificial" objects that are different from natural things. Like technology that is produced from human work and is useful for human life.

Individual life has been placed within certain boundaries so that everything created through human work is expected to last a long time. The human condition in this work is what is called worldly things. Action is the only activity that occurs directly between humans and without the intermediary of objects or materials according to the condition of human plurality with the fact that there are humans and not just individual humans who live on earth and become inhabitants of the world (P. Walsh, 2011). *Vita activa* is an instrument about a formal perspective to reveal the condition of a certain human quality of life in living related to the essence of living. Architectural Interpretation attempts to reveal this as an intellectual act that proves that policy products cannot ignore humans as the root of urban housing problems.

Research data through *vita activa* will be reduced through analytical actions using dialectical thinking. Marx assumes that 'ideas' are unable to describe empirical reality regarding what exists in society because they are abstract, therefore what changes society is not 'ideas' but 'material' (Nanang Martono, 2016). Marx's assumption comes from his dialectical attitude towards the idea of historical materialism as an answer to a different perspective on dialectics put forward by Hegel. Marx stated historical materialism based on his belief that "it is not the consciousness of men which determines their consciousness" (Irzum Fariyah, 2015). It is undeniable that Marx's thinking was influenced by Hegel, this can be seen in his dissertation entitled "The Difference between The Natural Philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus" which discusses the phenomenon of the formation of patterns of social order and its changes (Alex Callinicos, 2011).

Marx's exploration of changes in the social order of society is related to historical materialism from the 'idea' or 'concept' of the systematic subject put forward by Hegel. There is a conflict in understanding matter not only stopping at the value of idealism through the internal relationship of thought alone (thesis) but in certain relationships, the existence of matter turns out to give birth to a different view from other classes of matter (antithesis). With this conflict, it becomes the starting point for

the birth of a new material reality (synthesis). The relationship between these materials has given rise to differences of view between institutions and audience ideas (John Torrance, 1995). This is a picture of the change in the dialectical perspective on historical matters from idealism to reality.

Policy is a hydrological materialism that assumes that an action in improving the physical environment of urban residential areas along the riverbank is a product as an antithesis in this research. By making the policy an antithesis, the units of analysis are the answer to obtain a synthesis as the object of findings in this research.

Materials & Methods

The location taken in this study is a residential area on the banks of the river in Desa Kota Lintang Bawah, Kuala simpang District, Aceh Tamiang Regency, Aceh Province. This location was selected to determine the characteristics of housing on the banks of the river with low-income people and limited mobility of housing. The area of Desa Kota Lintang Bawah has an area of 110 Ha, specifically the area on the banks of the river is 1.3 Ha which is inhabited by 140 heads of families, the area on the banks of the river in Desa Kota Lintang Bawah is Al-Ikhsan Hamlet with a length of 1.29 km. The residential housing pattern makes the road the orientation of the front of the house and makes the Lintang River the back of the house. Based on data obtained from the Village Office, the residents of the riverbank area of Desa Kota Lintang Bawah consist of residents and immigrants or tenants. This area has a very high density because the riverbank with a length of 540m has an average residential area of 4 sqm per family or 0.5 sqm per person.

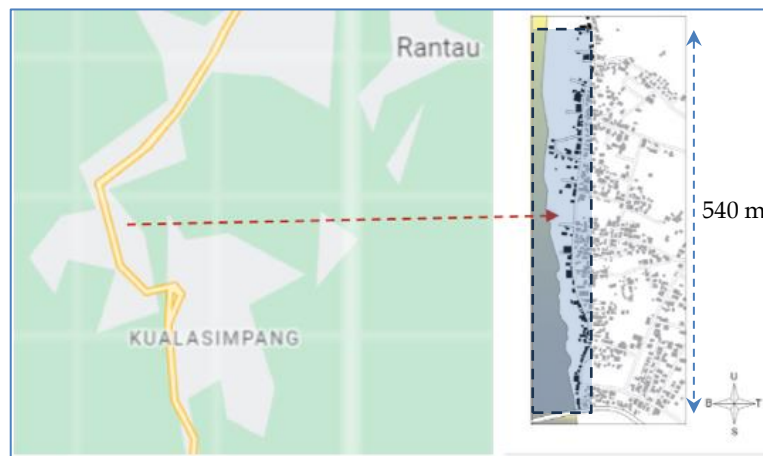


Figure 1. Lintang River Settlements Area in Aceh Tamiang

The method of selecting samples into population units of analysis is random so that each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected as a sample of research objects. In this method, all members of the population become part of the sample frame. Random sampling is often used when the population has a high level of homogeneity (Sugiyono, 2013). The sampling process is carried out by selecting sample individuals and locations randomly to represent the population and region as a whole (Hadari Nawawi, 1991). The research area is divided into 3 zones to represent each area of riverbank housing. Meanwhile, the research method as a unit of analysis uses a qualitative exploratory method (Samsu, 2017), namely research actions to obtain direct information from the perpetrators or settlers in this case as well as observations of the housing and environment of the research object as descriptive material to obtain the relationship between the two. Settler information is obtained through direct interviews with the perpetrators, while physical information on housing and the environment is obtained through documentation of the research object area. Furthermore, information related to settlers will become units of analysis in the realm of vital assets, while data related to the physical environment and housing will be supporting data in sharpening analytical thinking to obtain findings as research results.

Results and Discussion

The discussion of achieving findings will begin with an understanding of terms through the etymology of the research context, a description of the residential environment of the research location, the vita activa of riverbank settlements, interpretation of policies in an architectural context, and research findings.

Etymology of Housing and Settlements and Environmental Conditions

Housing is a building where humans live and live their lives, besides that, the house is also a place where the socialization process takes place in an individual who is introduced to the norms and customs that apply in a society (Murbaintoro T. et al., 2009). As a container for human life, it does not only concern technical and physical aspects but also social, economic, and cultural aspects of its inhabitants.

While the etymology of the term settlement (based on etymonline.com) in the 1620s meant the act of clarifying, repairing, or establishing; 1640s, placing people or goods in a fixed or permanent position, from settlement means a colony

especially in a new one, a community of people of a country who settle in a new country; a newly colonized country area. Then proven from the 1690s; means a small village on the border comes from 1827, American English. Alternative civilization for the state or quality of settlement (1570s) according to the OED. In the late 19th century, settlements were also used by Christian socialists for building in poor neighborhoods where middle-class intellectuals lived daily among the working class for cooperation and social reform in the Settlement House environment. So the terms housing and settlement based on etymology mean an area, region, or residential area where there is a colony of settlers to carry out the process of living.

Settlement housing in the riverbank area of the research area is a geographical area that is not suitable for habitation because it is vulnerable to natural disasters such as floods that can hinder the process of living during the disaster. Due to these conditions, the existence of their quality of life, the majority of whom have low incomes, will not be able to plan for a better life

Settlement Housing Environment

The economic development of the population of Desa Kota Lintang Bawah has increased over time, this has increased the number of residents from the area and its surroundings who then moved and settled in the riverbank area of Desa Kota Lintang Bawah as an option. Armed with limited abilities, they try to get jobs because they are on the outskirts of the city, so many of them open stalls in front of their houses selling snacks or fast food. Some open restaurants in front of their houses, in the riverbank area there are many wooden warehouses often called panglong. On average, people on the riverbank work in the panglong from splitting wood to making planks as building materials that can be marketed. The physical condition of the riverbank housing they occupy is said to be a semi-permanent building, namely the lower part of the physical housing consists of concrete material, while the upper part of the building consists of wood and plank material.

The condition of the residential environment is flanked by two routes, namely the land route as vehicle access at the front of the housing building, and the Lintang River flow route at the back of the housing. Aceh Province has several rivers that pass through urban areas, these rivers accommodate urban waste from activities that produce waste. These rivers include Krueng Daroy, Krueng Aceh River, Krueng Doy, and Krueng Tamiang. The Krueng Tamiang River is located in Aceh Tamiang Regency, it is a large river that divides the city of Kuala Simpang. The Lintang Village River is also called the Krueng Tamiang River. The river functions as the main source of clean water for the people of Kuala Simpang and flows into the Strait of Malacca. The upstream of the Krueng Tamiang River has many industries operating, such as the palm oil industry, the wood industry, and the rubber industry (Anta Sastika & Abdul Yasir, 2017). The downstream of the Krueng Tamiang River is the location where Kuala Simpang city waste is channeled upstream, namely to the Strait.

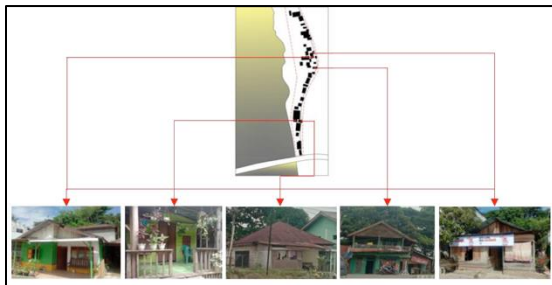


Figure 2. Condition of Residential Zone 1 Housing

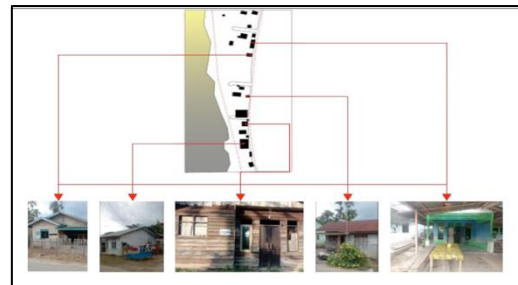


Figure 3. Condition of Residential Zone 2 Housing

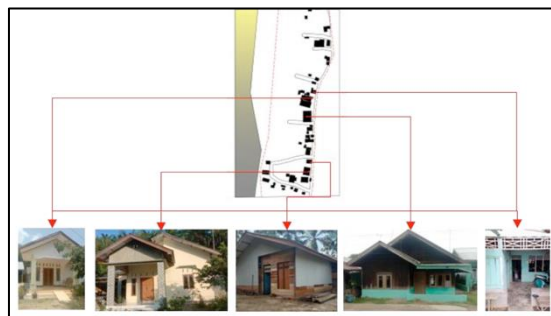


Figure 4. Condition of Residential Zone 3 Housing

Based on the environmental conditions of riverbank housing, it can be concluded that the river flow is not the main location for improving the quality of life of the settlers, but rather the capacity of the land that they can reach according to their living conditions. The settlers have hopes in living their lives from the pulse of the city's economic activity and strive to be independent by making their homes a place of work to earn income. Figures 2, 3, and 4 can be used as a picture of a perception that will lead the discussion towards their quality of life.

Vita Activa Riverbanks Settlers

Based on their physical residence, the settlers on the banks of the Lintang River were a colony of low-income people. The labor factor based on information obtained in zones 1 and 2 explains that settlers in their consumption of nutrition for the body, mind, and intellect are only oriented towards basic needs, just to not get sick so that they can be active in the next day for work. Nutrition for the body, mind, and intellect has a high cost to achieve a complete quality of life. The period of the daily life of the settlers is much longer or longer outside the home than inside the home. The value of mental consumption for family growth becomes less important because it is obtained randomly outside the home. The house is only a place to rest, due to the lack of mutual guidance, consolidation, and mutual care between family members together in the home. Likewise, with the consumption of body nutrition, food intake does not comply with the principles of nutrition. The orientation of consuming cheap and affordable food is the main thing. Consumption of food from independent processing for family food needs is rare. Then, longer outdoor activities make settlers dependent on food consumed where they work, and the food does not necessarily meet human health values.

The work factor of settlers with standard education levels does not have sufficient skills to get decent jobs. Settlers in zones 1 and 2 emphasize more on living close to their work locations. Therefore, the status of work as underemployment, namely the extent of part-time work is not balanced with the wages generated, makes them use every type of work to earn income (Robert B. Potter & Sally Llyoid-Evans, 1998). Working intellectually which prioritizes the power of thought with sufficient income will be difficult for settlers to achieve due to the limited intake of formal knowledge nutrition. The work performance of settlers produces products in income that can be used in the short term to survive. This work phenomenon explains that the existing settlers on the banks of the river do not have a life plan to move towards a better quality of life.

The action factor of settlers places themselves as a tribal society, namely a class of society that prioritizes family values between each other, the same fate, and the same burden. With this social class, they have been emotionally bound to be sensitive to opportunities, chances, inequality, and social gaps. The actions of the settlers are at a point of sensitivity that remains when they are in the midst of society. Because of this condition, sometimes policies when offered to them can be manipulated formally even though they are essentially less beneficial to their quality of life. Colonies of people based on family values often face losses due to cooperation on actions and reactions that are not supported by a broad social network.

Due to this condition, settlers in zones 1 and 2 will find it difficult to develop to improve their quality of life except for a policy product that can handle them as a colony, not as a small group or as a particular individual. In addition, settlers need comprehensive guidance and consolidation through the form of an integrated community management system as a result of policies that favor them. A house as a less important residence is a wrong target for a policy that should have been specifically aimed at labor, work, and action to improve their quality of life. The living conditions of the settlers in zone 3 are better than those in zones 1 and 2. The settlers in Zone 3 have been able to do their best within a certain range for labor, namely the consumption of food nutrition for the body, mental consumption to raise a family because time at home has a longer span than time outside the home, and intellectual consumption by providing formal education above standard needs. The work of the settlers in Zone 3 produces products that come from knowledge and mental performance in employment status (permanent workers) to earn a tiered income that results in better quality of life planning. The actions of the settlers in Zone 3 have a social network that can gain more trust from their superiors which makes their social status increase over time. The settlers in this zone do not need urban housing policies because they are independently able to improve their quality of life. After all, housing is a place of consolidation.

Policy Interpretation in Architectural Context

In the previously explained *vita activa* research data, it is explained that zones 1 and 2 are research objects that have a low quality of life living in slums. Dialectically in the realm of architecture, the material and hydrology of the residential environment of the riverbank settlement of Lintang Village is not a form of environment that can improve their quality of life. In addition to being vulnerable to floods that can hinder their process of living, the riverbank environment is only used as a temporary place for them. With a longer period outside the home to work compared to the time inside the house, it has been explained that the physical form of the residential environment for settlers is not important for their quality of life.

The main thing needed by settlers in zones 1 and 2 is a guarantee of formal and informal intellectual nutrition as capital that can be used as performance in getting a better income. Then settlers need a workplace policy that makes it easier for them to get a decent income. The creation of the workplace makes it easier for them to mobilize performance at a low and affordable cost. A good workplace will give birth to certain location characteristics that are easily recognized by the wider community towards a certain existence. The existence of a place makes a sustainable workplace because the place serves the actualization of the settlers as the actors of the work. Finally, the settlers need a policy of guaranteeing companions who have a higher social status than them to provide direction for the performance of labor and work to run well by the process of improving the quality of life that has been targeted.

The meaning of the results of the analysis of the quality of life-based on the settlers' *vita activa*, then the dialectic in the realm of architectural interpretation of research zones 1 and 2 states that the orientation of riverbank housing policy for settlers is the best approach for wise people in solving urban settlement problems compared to the orientation of policies in their housing environment. The product of urban settlement housing policy is a thesis. The living conditions of settlers as a policy orientation as an antithesis. And the orientation of urban settlement housing policy that favors settlers is a synthesis. Dialectical thinking in the realm of architectural interpretation is the meaning of the relationship between a place and its

inhabitants. Interpretation is the substance to place problems that require resolution with the right targets at their core.

Conclusions

Policy products are born from the analysis of complex problem-solving because they involve places as factual evidence and humans as intellectual evidence. Riverbank settlers have certain characteristics in their perception of using a house. Architectural knowledge is needed to reveal their existence to be reduced as reference material to produce policy products. By ignoring settlers as the main actors in urban housing policies, the problem-solving process will be slow and take a long time. Vita Activa and dialectics have produced findings about their existence as an approach to solving riverbank housing problems in Lintang Village, Aceh Tamiang Regency, in particular, which can be used as a reference to produce policy products that support their quality of life. Homes for them are unimportant because their lives have a longer span outside the home than inside the home (workspace), the house becomes a place to rest later so the physical house and environment cannot be used as factors to form policies in solving urban housing problems.

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