The Pace of Change.
The Diverging Development of Tossi's Built Environment and Living Community

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Abstract

By examining various elements in the living heritage site of Tossi village in Sumba, Indonesia, this contribution explores the question of possible synchronization between Tossi's built environment and society. Considered as one of Sumba's oldest villages, Tossi is considered the embodiment of Marapu beliefs through its megalithic burials and its urban planning. However, it is in an existential junction with the threat of abandonment and decay on its urban fabric. The pressure from external influence affected the societal decline of Marapu, and the push of touristification has disrupted the organically established socio-cultural Sumbanese society in Tossi. With its built environment's immobile nature, Tossi is at a crossroads to adapt to the dynamic socio-cultural evolution of its inhabitants. And as Tossi is inevitably becoming more recognizable and interconnected to its surroundings, through infrastructure and economy, its ability to adjust persists, while maintaining its cultural integrity is being tested.

Contemporary architecture is strongly associated with time, which influences space so much that it can be considered its fourth dimension.

The formation of a functioning architectural space is influenced by numerous elements, such as form, pattern, material, construction method, perception by the society and its users, and space. In terms of influence, architecture can be described in two distinct languages: pattern and form languages. Pattern language combines the society's cultural and social behaviour patterns into a set of forms, while form language delves into the geometrical realm (Salingaros, 2006). In its essence, the pattern language is also constrained by the time coefficient. Time dictates the pace of the pattern and form languages, and its interaction between humans and their environment, life, customs, history, and conduct. Contemporary architecture is strongly associated with time, which influences space so much that it can be considered its fourth dimension (Heynen, 1999). In the ever-changing societal demands, the stationary nature of architecture is challenged to adapt to the speed of expansion and change in society. However, architecture is also the culmination of civilization and technological advancements of a society. The contradiction between the evolution of culture and the pressure of development pace has created a paradoxical relationship between architecture and society, especially towards traditionally based urban fabric. Modern architecture is pressured at such a pace that it can maintain its availability to meet societal demands. Due to this demand for faster construction, much of modern architecture prioritizes functionality and universalist ideals over culture and history (Collins, 1998). It reduces the unnecessary architectural elements and symbolism to minimize the time dimension for the construction progression. Traditional architecture, however, develops much slower. It does not consider the basic needs of society as a priority, rather the appreciation of culture takes precedence. It also uses materials provided by its surroundings, creating a sustainable architecture for both the environment and society (Semprebon, 2024). The appreciation in traditional architecture can be seen in their willingness to incorporate rites and rituals into their built environment (Domenig, 2014). These rites and rituals often do not directly contribute to the structural integrity of construction, but repre-

sent the connection between tangible and intangible elements through space and form. Buildings are considered the embodiment of a sacred space, and it can often be seen in its shape, form, and its various decorative schemes (Harris, 1999). Traditional architecture, therefore, represents not only space but also the culmination and built form of a society's culture. The immobility nature of traditional settlements provides a fixed memory towards people, where its characteristics of space form the perception of place and belonging (Casey, 2000). It provides an anchor for society to attach themselves to their surroundings. These understandings can be seen in the Tossi village in Southwest Sumba, Indonesia. Tossi village is a combination of two traditional villages, Tossi Barada and Tossi Bukubani. It is known as *parona induk* (ancestral village), the oldest settlement for the Kodi people, one of the three largest local tribes in Sumba (Kleden, 2017). It has a strong connection with the Majapahit Kingdom from Java that can be traced in the shape of their traditional roof and their naming system (Soelarto, 1979). Tossi acts as the genesis from which other *parona* from this tribe sprawl. It is believed that the settlement began to flourish in the 1700s. It is one of the few traditional villages in Indonesia that complements itself with megalithic culture, represented by its burial rites and tombs. At its height, Tossi had as many as 58 buildings within its perimeter. The village's built environment is also strongly influenced by the Marapu belief. The Marapu belief system is an integral part of the Sumba society's identity (Soe-

Fig. 1 - Tossi village, showing the surviving houses that incorporate the Marapu belief and symbolism. Photo by P. Yoakim Ndelo, 2022.

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riadiredja, 2014), and influences the architectural language of the villages. The belief is represented in the design of the house, and also the rites and rituals during the gathering of the materials of the house, the construction process, to the periodic maintenance rituals (Handini, Geria, Simanjuntak, 2016; Tulistyantoro, 2022). The megalithic tombs acted as an ancestral link and an integral part of the village's urban fabric (Adams, 2007), and the link embodies the basis of the Marapu faith, which priorities the ancestral connection.

The construction and maintenance of the houses within the village involve strict rites that connect the built environment and the cultural essence of Marapu, such as the cutting of the trees for the houses' main pillars and the pulling of the rock foundations from nearby forest or beach (Winandari, 2017). However, the interdependency between the culture and architecture in Tossi has created a contradictory position, as the traditional village of Tossi is currently in a declining trajectory. As the built environment of the traditional village of Tossi is stationary, its urban fabric and fixed perimeter inadvertently restricted its ability to adapt to the natural expansion of its inhabitants. The expense of maintenance, materials, and the strict connection between construction and rites also put an additional burden on the inhabitants. Inhabitants leave the damaged house and live in another place until they have enough money to fix it, exposing the houses to further decay. In 2022, out of 58 traditional houses in Tossi, only 32 still stand, and only ten are still actively used. More buildings are being abandoned and left in decay due to the lack of monetary funds. The younger generations also lack the adequate skills to maintain the traditional construction of the houses. However, due to prolonged abandonment, the damage usually becomes worse, and there are cases where the house was abandoned entirely for an extended time and became too difficult to fix. Marapu belief, as an integral identity of the society, also presents resistance to change (Arisanti, 2019). The traditional settlement is built based on agriculture, which has become less economically feasible for the young generations. The traditional way of staying within the village's perimeter limited the economic opportunity for the inhabitants, pushing younger generations to move away from

the village to work in the island's modern cities. As the traditional village is faced with contemporary time, we also need to see two external factors that strongly influence the urban fabric of Tossi: The changing societal value of the inhabitants and the push of traditional village touristification. These factors created a paradoxical relationship between maintaining the culture and developing its living community. Does protecting the pattern language of Tossi take priority over its existence? Has maintaining culture and rituals to become tourist attractions slowed the village's pace of adaptability to keep up with the ever-changing socio-cultural context of Tossi inhabitants? Is it possible to synchronize the time coefficient between the built environment of Tossi and its society?

The modernization of Sumbanese society and the blurring cultural existence of Marapu belief
Marapu, which was the dominant belief for Sumbanese people, emphases connectivity with their ancestors (Maria, Limbeng, 2007). Its rites and rituals are based on their communication with their ancestors and preserve the megalithic culture of Sumba through its burial rituals. It binds the culture of the Sumbanese people, which includes farming systems, practical dowry systems, and the construction of their traditional houses (Keremata Lede, Dapa, 2021; Ngongo, Ngongo, 2021). As the oldest settlement between the traditional villages in its society, Tossi is the pedestal of Marapu beliefs. The *Rato Marapu* (High Priest of Marapu), who is responsible for managing and organising the rites and rituals, resides in this village. All traditional and cultural rites in the area must start from Tossi village, signifying the importance both in social and cultural standing. These intangible elements put Tossi village not only as a built space but also as the reinterpretation of Marapu beliefs in a built form. Architecturally, Marapu is incorporated in most building phases, from choosing the materials to the completion ceremony. It also serves as the basis of the village's settlement pattern, where burial sites became the central axis for the villages. However, outside influence also started to seep into the socio-cultural construct of the Sumbanese people. The introduction of Christianity into Sumba strongly changed the social hierarchy of the Sumbanese.

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About 90% of Sumbanese converted from Marapu to the Protestant or Catholic religion in the 2020 census (Lovestrand, 2021). This situation is a significant shift in Sumbanese society, as in the 1980s, almost 80% of them still identify themselves as active Marapu believers. The Indonesian legislation can be considered a large influence in this mass conversion, as it does not officially recognize the presence of traditional beliefs until 2017. Before 2017, social discrimination and the legislation's refusal to acknowledge traditional beliefs such as Marapu affected the social standings of these traditional beliefs (Nalle, 2021). This situation restricts the growth of Marapu. However, many Sumbanese converts still incorporate Marapu beliefs in their everyday life, creating a unique religious hybrid not uncommon in Indonesia. Even so, the devout Marapu believers detested the converts, did not openly welcome them as part of the traditional society, and even went as far as not letting them live within their *parona* (Kamuri, 2020). This has also precipitated the exodus of the younger generation from their ancestral space.

This societal shift has also created a conflicting situation for Tossi's built environment. Being one of the main strongholds of Marapu, the architectural language of Tossi becomes more significant as it represents the belief's essence and existence. However, as newer generations become more modernized, Tossi faces a steep challenge in adapting to the changes. The time coefficient does not move at the same pace between the shifting society and the urban fabric of Tossi village. Tossi represents a vulnerable living heritage site where the relationship between the built environment and its community has detached significantly. An ideal living heritage site has a healthy sense of placement, attachment, and identity between the community and the site (Scannell, Gifford, 2010; Kalantidou, 2018). This condition can be found through the preservation of culture and rites, among others. However, the rites and rituals, the place's primary identity, evidently bogged down the adaptability of the Tossi village. The high economic factor of the rites has proven unsustainable to a society with relatively low and unstable household income (Handini et al., 2023). This situation is also reflected in the gradual decay of the village's built environment.

Rather than reluctance, the community does not have adequate resources to maintain its integrity. Marapu's reluctance to have an open dialogue with the contemporary societal context has also prevented the living heritage site from adapting adequately.

The nature of Tossi and other traditional villages connected to it in Southwest Sumba has always been more static than contemporary villages. Rather than expanding its space, the urban concept of a village has a predetermined expansion limit, both in terms of space and number of inhabitants. Historically, newer generation inhabitants were culturally obliged to move away from their progenitor village to construct

Fig. 2 - One of the houses in Tossi village, where interventions are needed to repair the rooftops and stabilization of the house's structural integrity. Photo by P. Yoakim Ndelo, 2022.

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new villages beyond the original village, creating a continuous urban sprawl over time, which can still be linked to their *parona induk* (Soelarto, 1979; Adams, 2019). However, considering the socio-economic shift in society, this concept of sprawl became much more difficult and became a restriction rather than an advantage. As the community continues to develop dynamically, the built environment in Tossi has significantly lost its progressive pace coefficient. Considering that the village is partially abandoned by its inhabitants, Tossi gradually becomes a static monument rather than a functioning space. It has so far evaded the pressure of modernisation within its urban fabric, creating a built relic that materialises its society's memory and culture. Such construction can reflect the essence of the bond dissolved between man and territory (Di Figlia, 2015). With the further decline of Marapu in the societal hierarchy, Tossi village is at a crucial junction of intervention between preserving its intangible values or creating a more functional space for its remaining inhabitants.

The touristification of traditional villages: The machination, exploitation, and inhibitor of Tossi
Traditional villages have become an integral part of the tourism industry due to their unique offering of atmosphere, culture, authenticity, and contrast to the urban areas (Kastenholz et al., 2012). It encourages the participation of the community in the industry to distribute the benefits and create a balanced and sustainable industry (Dewi et al., 2018). This notion is also shared in Indonesia, where it is valued as a potential tourist destination (Susyanti and Latianingsih, 2015). Indonesian laws and regulations also legitimize this perception. By transforming and incorporating traditional villages into the tourism industry, it is hoped that it can benefit its inhabitants economically. At the same time, it also helps to maintain the village's built environment. Rural tourism is also being pushed in Sumba, although they are still not well interconnected into a working ecosystem (Hary Jocom et al., 2021). Tossi and other traditional villages in Sumba are also part of this movement. While some villages focus on their traditional houses, Tossi's tourism focuses more on its unique history, culture, and rites. While this inclusion gives more recognition to Tossi,

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the tourism industry also affects the village's living heritage features. The *pasola*, connected to a harvest ritual, has become one of the main tourist attractions in Sumba tourism. It is one of the main examples of commodifying rituals to become tourist attractions (Hoskins, 2002). Continuous association is crucial to maintaining a strong living heritage site (Site, Idriss, Dawson, 2014). However, the constant evolution of the community becomes a deciding factor that determines the strength of a living community, especially sites that have become tourist spots.

Tourists expect to have a genuine experience of traditional culture during their visit, and the rural tourism spot is expected to adapt to fulfil this demand (Kastenholz et al., 2012). This situation introduces the traditional villagers to contemporary activities that lack connection to their original cultural identity, and in the case of Sumba, exploited the Marapu culture to become part of the industry rather than being a basis of everyday lives. The rites and rituals became touristic selling points rather than being organically embedded into the socio-cultural understanding of the community. As tourism brings economic benefits through visiting tourists and eager investors, in some cases, such as Tossi, it also inadvertently halts traditional villages' societal development, creating a static living heritage site that is afraid to move forward due to the economic advantages provided by the tourism industry. Macleod has noticed that prioritizing tourism has created the tendency of commodification of culture to adhere to tourists (MacLeod, 2006). They are required to maintain their cultural rites for tourism voyeurism, restricting the possibility of the organic evolution of culture that genuinely corresponds to societal needs. Daily activities are being replaced by touristic tours, and cultural products have become merchandise for visitors.

The drive of rural tourism significantly pushes the pace of changes in traditional villages in Sumba. Modernization began to enter the villages to answer the tourists' demands, with additional elements incorporated into the villages and modern infrastructure, such as provincial and regional roads that connect the villages with the modern cities. It presses the stationary nature of the Sumbanese *paronas* to accept modernization, incorporating foreign architectural

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aspects into its already established pattern language. The corresponding stakeholders and investors gradually add contemporary technology, sanitary standards, disaster prevention, and supportive facilities and infrastructure to augment more value to the tourism industry. It also influences the change of the built element in traditional villages, such as the case of Tarung village. The reconstruction of the traditional houses in the village uses modern materials such as reinforced concrete to speed up the construction process (Muzaqii, 2020). These new materials deprive the need for rites to choose and process the traditional materials. Although these changes still honour the architectural form language of the village, such changes diminish the built environment's socio-cultural value and blur the importance of Marapu's built heritage to appease the architectural aesthetics expected by tourists. With its current trajectory, Tossi is slowly being relegated from being an architectural embodiment of Marapu to a commercialized object of rural tourism. It also reduces the socio-cultural value of Marapu's rites and rituals to spectacles for the industry. While it provides much-needed acknowledgement of Tossi's status and threats, tourism gradually sways Tossi's authenticity and integrity. And as Tossi became more recognizable in the tourism industry, it became more prone to accepting changes that serve the interests of tourism. Tourism can become an essential aspect of the survivability of a historic property. It contributes to GDP and employment, but effects are felt significantly in the living heritage elements of the affected space (Mihalic, 2002). It becomes a critical coefficient that distorts the organic nature of the time-space continuum of Tossi's living heritage elements. It hinders societal progress while accelerating architectural changes in the village to cater to tourist demands.

Synchronizing the diverging flow of Tossi's living heritage elements
Considering the situation today, there is a disruption of balance between Tossi's built environment and its society. As it stands, the development pace of Tossi's built environment and society today is not fully controlled by its inhabitants. Societal change and tourism have disrupted the organic flow of time dimension that determines the development pace of Tossi's living

heritage elements. They have significantly disrupted the organic dialog between the inhabitants and their space, changing the dynamic interrelationships between them. The fading presence of Marapu as the cornerstone of the society has affected the connectivity between Tossi and its inhabitants, with the younger generation becoming less attached to the traditional village. The presence of competing religions/beliefs reduces the socio-cultural hierarchy and dominance that Marapu once held amongst the Sumbanese (Anggraeni et al., 2022). The introduction of rural tourism in Tossi also gradually changes the built environment of the village. Although the main ideal of sustainable rural tourism is to maintain the culture and spirit of place of the space, many cases have proven that the presence of tourism disrupted the lives of the inhabitants (Yang, Ryan, Zhang, 2013; Sanagustin-Fons, Lafita-Cortés, Moseñe, 2018).

These changes are inevitable, and as Tossi becomes more recognized and interconnected with the rest of the Island and the world in general, other disrupting factors will affect Tossi's development pace. With the threat of abandonment and decay looming at Tossi's future, intervention and management are needed to preserve the village. Considering that the main issue of Tossi is the stark imbalance of development pace between its community and the built environment, a middle ground should be determined to maintain the site's integrity. To preserve the integrity of Tossi, its two main formative factors, the built environment and the community, are the most affected, but they are also the elements that are more susceptible to changes. Tossi's built environment is idle in nature. It has a fixed boundary and a strong pattern language. It is an ideal traditional settlement, rich with the cultural symbolism of its people. Its society, however, slowly moves away from their ancestral culture as socio-economic conditions pressure them to change. Considering the nature of its urban fabric and its decaying situation, the adaptation should be focused on the community. Marapu, as the strong influencer of the community, should be recognized as the key factor that is potentially necessary to synchronize the time factor between them. It may not be the current societal basis of the majority, but it is an intangible factor that has the adaptability factor through contemporary

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The push of tourism in Tossi should also need to be carefully curated, as its pressure towards the traditional village can result in the permanent loss of the authenticity and integrity of this already vulnerable living heritage site.

interpretations. Rural traditional values have the capability and acceptance to adapt to modernization (Inglehart, Ronald, 2000; Petković, 2007). Cases such as Kampung Naga, which maintains their traditional way of living while refusing technological advantages, and Baduy Dalam society in West Java which is slowly adapting to modernity, show the crossroad that Tossi community is currently facing (Harashani, 2018; Solikhah, 2020). As the Tossi community is more dynamic in nature compared to its urban fabric, they are the key to the traditional village's socio-cultural survival and adaptability towards the contemporary environment. The push of tourism in Tossi should also need to be carefully curated, as its pressure towards the traditional village can result in the permanent loss of the authenticity and integrity of this already vulnerable living heritage site.

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