

Cultural Landscape in Change

Research >
Southeast Asia

During the last one hundred years, the region around Lore Lindu National Park in Central Sulawesi has represented an area in slow transition. A couple of years ago this development changed significantly. Thus, the Park offers an interesting field for scientific research on stability and destabilisation of the margins of one of the few remaining tropical primary forests in Indonesia. As presented below, one field of study which is important for the understanding of present dynamics in the region is the reconstruction of the historical development of cultural landscape since the beginning of the twentieth century.

By Robert Weber

During fifteen months of fieldwork, I used mainly qualitative research methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews with families and key persons in nine selected villages. These villages are located in four different valleys surrounding Lore Lindu National Park (LLNP) (see map). The villages were selected by a stratified random sampling, including the following three characteristics: population density, ethnic composition, and distance to the national park. The results of the interviews will provide information on the village history, migration patterns, historical, spatial, and functional development of the settlement, internal and external influences and their impacts on settlement and population structure, as well as on land use. Further information gathered at the sub-district, district and province level will allow us to connect the data on the micro (village) level with developments on the macro level, and thus lead to a differentiation of endogenous and exogenous processes that shaped the villages' status quo.

The fieldwork in Lore Lindu region

The Lore Lindu region consists of a national park area of around 231 km² that provides habitat for a wide range of endemic flora and fauna. The national park is surrounded by five valleys. The most densely populated Palu valley offers the best infrastructure of the region and was frequented by Arab and Chinese traders long before the Dutch conquest in the early twentieth century. The other valleys, Kulawi, Palolo, Napu, and Bada, remained relatively untouched by external influences and thus were able to conserve their traditional beliefs, customs, and lifestyle to a certain extent. Up until today, their population has been diverse in terms of local languages.

A first breaking point of the development of cultural landscape was the Dutch incursion into various upland valleys between 1905 and 1908. The colonial rulers introduced main changes in terms of settlement structures, beliefs and economy. However, the Ethical Policy that influenced Dutch colonial policy since 1900 led to a more considerate implementation of colonial changes. People were resettled from the mountains down to the valleys, where new settlements with village structures were established. After the area was 'pacified', missionaries of the Salvation Army respective of the Dutch protestant church entered the valleys and tried to convert the people from their animist beliefs to Christian religion. In terms of economy, the Dutch influenced local agriculture less intensively than in Java or Sumatra. Large-scale plantations and compulsory labour in agriculture, two attributes of the so-called *Cultuurstelsel*, were not practiced in Central Sulawesi. In fact, the Lore Lindu region has remained an economic smallholder system up to the present day. The

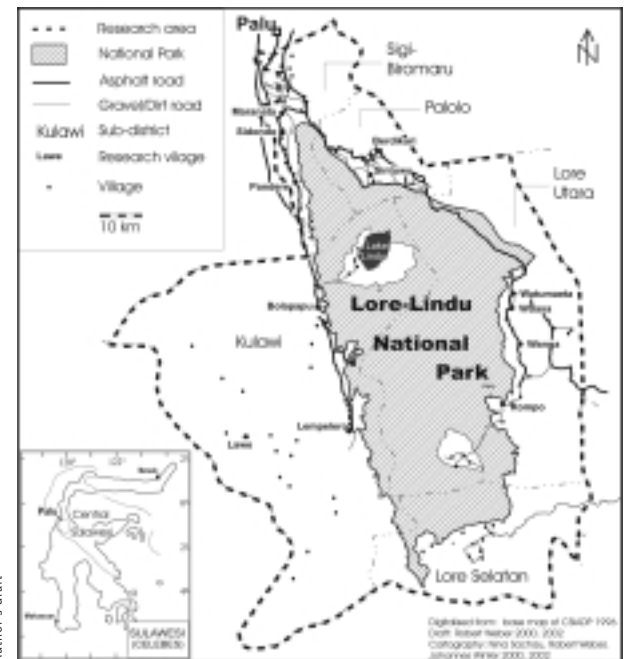
Dutch, however, promoted the cultivation of paddy rice instead of the dry land rice that was traditionally planted in slash-and-burn shifting cultivation. For that reason, a huge irrigation project was established that still guarantees sufficient paddy rice production in the naturally dry Palu valley. In upland areas like the Kulawi valley coffee was introduced to the locals and created the base for cash-crop economy in the area. Following the Dutch, Arab, Chinese, and Bugis (South Sulawesi) traders entered the remote upland valleys and supported the development of a more vital market structure. Road construction programmes to connect the hinterland with Palu were realized using compulsory local labour.

The short period of Japanese rule (1942-45) burdened the local population more than the Dutch influence had. Cotton production and longer working hours on the fields became obligatory for every household. Action against the will of the Japanese was quickly answered with physical punishment.

During the first two decades since the independence of Indonesia, the Lore Lindu area remained in a relatively static situation. However, the rebellion of Kahar Muzakkar in South Sulawesi and the Permesta rebellion in North Sulawesi in the 1950s led to changes in terms of migration when refugees of the rebellions moved to Central Sulawesi. This time can be regarded as the first period of a greater immigration from other parts of the island. As land was still abundant at that time, these people could easily settle and there were no problems with land distribution.

With the change to Suharto's New Order era, the economic production of food and cash crops was enforced and new local resettlement programmes from remote hillside locations to the plains were implemented. While Napu valley in the East was still lacking sufficient transport infrastructure and thus remained quite scarcely populated, starting in the 1960s Palolo valley was the main area of local immigration, mainly from Kulawi and overpopulated areas along the Palu bay. None of the five valleys surrounding the today's national park developed as fast as Palolo valley where more than half of the villages were founded between 1960 and 1980.

The most far-reaching changes to the cultural landscape took place during the last decade of the twentieth century. Immigration from South Sulawesi, where land scarcity became a major problem, had already begun on a considerable scale during the 1980s. The main impact of this immigration was the introduction of cacao and the beginning of land sales from locals to the mostly financially better-off Bugis migrants. Due to the boom of cacao prices during the 1990s, immigration from the south of Sulawesi reached a peak. This was mainly the case in Palolo and Napu valley where settlement, population, and climatic conditions offered better opportunities for cacao farmers than in other areas of the region. Besides, inter-island transmigration programmes



Our research area

from Java and Bali raised the number of population, mostly in Napu valley. Land sales led to new forms of economic relationships like wage-labour. Furthermore, locals started to encroach on the national park area in order to substitute the land that they had sold before.

The Lore Lindu region still can be regarded as an area in fast transition. The present results of the research on cultural landscape and the projections for future development (e.g. effects of modernization, revitalization of a conservative regionalism, local conflicts in neighbouring Poso district) of this region serve as a base for further research in cultural and social geography. <

Adat dress of Kulawi nobles

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My fieldwork is part of the Indonesian-German interdisciplinary research programme STORMA (Stability Of Rainforest Margin Areas). For detailed information on our sub-project A1, supervised by Prof. Werner Kreisel and Dr Heiko Faust visit www.geogr.uni-goettingen.de/kus/sfb552/A1.htm