

## The Development of Curup from a Market-Based Settlement into an Urban Structure: An Urban Ecology Approach

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### Abstract

Urban development is often influenced by the interaction of economic, social, and historical factors that shape urban spatial structures. However, studies concerning the development of Curup from a market-based settlement into an urban structure remain limited and have not been extensively analyzed using the perspective of urban ecology. This study aims to analyze the development of Curup from a market-based settlement into an urban structure through the urban ecology approach proposed by Robert E. Park. The study employed a descriptive qualitative method with a case study design. Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and literature review, and were subsequently analyzed using the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the market became the primary factor driving the growth of settlements and economic activities in Curup. The strategic position of Curup as an interregional connecting route accelerated urban development and expanded spatial functions. This developmental process reflects the existence of competition, dominance, and succession that shaped the urban structure and was accompanied by social and cultural adaptations within the community. Therefore, the development of Curup was influenced not only by economic factors but also by historical and social dynamics within the local context. The implications of this study contribute to the fields of urban history and social ecology, particularly in understanding the transformation of market-based cities in local regions.

**Keywords:** Curup, Urban Ecology, Market, Urban Development, Urban Structure, Social Transformation.

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### INTRODUCTION

Urban areas constitute a form of human settlement characterized by high population density, diversity of activities, heterogeneity, as well as the complexity of spatial structures and social interactions within them. In general, a city is not only understood as an administrative territory but also as a dynamic living space in which various processes, such as urbanization, industrialization, and modernization, take place (Pasaribu, 2020).

The term *city* itself originates from Old Javanese or Sanskrit words *kuta*, *kotta*, or *kuto*, meaning fortress or fortification (Siregar in Kustiwan, 2014), while in English it is distinguished into *city* (larger urban settlement) and *town* (smaller urban settlement). A city may be understood as a village that gradually undergoes transformation until it reaches a more complex form (Basundoro in Hisna, 2025), which initially often emerged from agricultural areas functioning as points of

transaction and exchange before developing into strategic trade locations (Kahanna, 2025).

Within this context, the mountainous region of Bengkulu was inhabited by the Rejang ethnic group as the indigenous population, who were initially known to practice a nomadic lifestyle before eventually settling in the Ketahun River Valley area. Based on oral traditions (*folklore*), the Rejang people originated from four *petulai*, each led by an *Ajai*. During the leadership period of the *Ajai-Ajai*, four brothers bearing the title *Bikau* (or *Biku*) arrived and were later appointed as leaders of the Rejang people due to their wisdom and supernatural abilities. Under their leadership, the Rejang community began to spread into the Musi Rawas and Lahat regions and gradually shifted toward a sedentary lifestyle and agricultural activities (Syah, 2016).

One of the settlements that developed from this process was Curup, which was originally known as *Cu'up*, meaning “waterfall,” referring to its geographical condition dominated by river flows situated between valleys. Over time, this settlement evolved into an agricultural and strategic market center, which naturally generated socio-economic dynamics and eventually led to its status as the capital of Rejang Lebong Regency.

Studies concerning the history of Curup and the Bengkulu region have been conducted by several researchers. The Regional Cultural Research and Documentation Project Team led by Bambang Suwondo (1978) produced a book entitled *Sejarah Daerah Bengkulu (History of the Bengkulu Region)*. The book explains the history of Bengkulu Province in general, beginning from ancient times up to the period of independence. Meanwhile, Emong Soewandi (2018), in his work *Sejarah Ringkas Dwi Tunggal–Curup (Kisaran 1942–1960-an) (A Brief History of Dwi Tunggal–Curup [Around 1942–1960s])*, discussed more specifically the socio-political conditions and colonial influences in the central urban area of Curup.

According to several scholars, cities are entities that grow and develop uniquely according to their local contexts, including historical background, community needs, and social, economic, and political dynamics (Trancik; Rowley; Gospodini). Cities become spaces where various activities take place while simultaneously creating new economic opportunities amidst urban competition. Therefore, a city can be understood as a “melting pot” of various interests that shape the complexity of human interactions, in which its form and meaning are the results of historical processes between space and the actors involved (Pasaribu, 2020). Within the perspective of urban ecology, Robert E. Park viewed the city as a social organism formed through human interactions in utilizing space. From the perspective of urban ecology, urban development is influenced by the processes of competition, dominance, and succession that produce particular patterns within urban spatial structures (Sociology.Institute, 2025).

Although various studies have discussed the history of the Bengkulu region and the socio-political development of Curup, the available literature still tends to focus on general historical aspects, colonialism, and regional governmental dynamics. Research regarding the development of Curup as an urban space has not been extensively analyzed through the perspective of urban ecology, which

positions human interaction, spatial utilization, and economic activities as factors shaping urban structures. Previous studies have focused more on regional historical chronology and have not explained in depth how markets functioned as the core of settlement growth that later developed into a complex urban structure.

Based on these conditions, this study argues that the development of Curup cannot merely be understood as administrative changes or physical territorial growth, but rather as a socio-ecological process involving spatial competition, the dominance of economic activities, and changes in land functions over time. This approach is important in examining the relationship between market development, settlement growth, population mobility, and socio-cultural transformation in shaping the urban identity of Curup.

The research gap in previous studies lies in the absence of analyses that specifically connect the historical development of Curup with the urban ecology concepts proposed by Robert E. Park, particularly through the processes of competition, dominance, and succession. In fact, these three concepts are highly relevant for explaining the transformation of Curup from a market-based settlement into a regional economic and governmental center.

The novelty of this study lies in the application of the urban ecology perspective to analyze the historical development of Curup at the local level by positioning the market as the initial point in the formation of the urban structure. This study not only describes the historical development of Curup but also explains the mechanisms of spatial transformation, social dynamics within the community, and cultural adaptations that occurred during the urbanization process. Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to urban historical studies and social ecology research in the Bengkulu region.

Thus, this study aims to examine how Curup developed from a market-based settlement into an urban area through the influence of the processes of competition, dominance, and succession as part of historical dynamics within the local context.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at understanding the developmental process of Curup from a market-based settlement into an urban structure through the perspective of urban ecology. This approach was selected because the study focused on the interpretation of social phenomena, the historical development of spatial patterns, and the dynamics of community interactions that shaped the urban structure. The research design applied in this study was a case study, with the research location situated in the Curup area, Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu Province, Indonesia. The location was selected purposively because Curup represents an area that experienced development from a market-based settlement center into a regional administrative and economic activity center. The research was conducted from January to April 2026 over approximately four months, encompassing the stages of preparation, field data collection, analysis, and report writing. The research participants consisted of community leaders, local historical figures, indigenous Rejang community members, market traders, and individuals who possessed knowledge regarding the development of the Curup area. The informants were determined

using purposive sampling by selecting participants based on specific considerations, such as knowledge, experience, and involvement in the historical development of Curup. This technique was employed to ensure that the data obtained were relevant to the research objectives. The research instrument utilized the researcher as the primary instrument, supported by interview guidelines, observation sheets, documentation tools, and field notes. Data collection was carried out through several techniques, namely: (1) observation, to examine spatial conditions and the development of the Curup area; (2) in-depth interviews, to obtain information concerning historical development, market activities, changes in spatial functions, and the social dynamics of the community; (3) documentation, including archives, photographs, maps, and historical documents; and (4) literature review, which was used to strengthen the theoretical framework and support the interpretation of research findings. Data analysis was conducted using an interactive analysis model consisting of three stages, namely: (1) data reduction, by selecting and classifying relevant information; (2) data presentation, through organizing the findings in the form of descriptive explanations according to the research themes; and (3) conclusion drawing, to interpret the development of Curup based on the concepts of competition, dominance, and succession within the urban ecology theory proposed by Robert E. Park. The analysis process was carried out continuously and iteratively throughout the research period in order to obtain interpretations that corresponded with the field conditions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to oral historical folklore, the Rejang ethnic group was one of the indigenous communities originating from the Lebong region. Initially, the Rejang people practiced a nomadic lifestyle before eventually occupying an area within the Ketahun River Valley. The Rejang ethnic community originated from four *Petulai*, namely the core families (or clans) that founded the Rejang tribe. Each *Petulai* was led by an *Ajai* (King) who governed the traditional customary administration of *Renah Sekalawi*, a term referring to a political entity that exercised authority over the Rejang territory in ancient times. During the leadership period of these *Ajai*, four *biku* or *bikau* (Buddhist monks) arrived from the Majapahit Kingdom. They were *Biku Sepanjang Jiwo*, *Biku Bermano*, *Biku Bejenggo*, and *Biku Bembo*. Due to their intelligence and extraordinary abilities, the Rejang people accepted them favorably. Consequently, at the request of the Rejang community, the *Biku* replaced the leadership of the *Ajai*.

Each *Bikau* subsequently established a *Petulai*, through which the Rejang people were later grouped according to kinship relations. This historical development also encouraged the change of the name *Renah Sekalawi* into *Lebong*. From this region, the Rejang people spread into various areas, extending to the Musi Rawas and Lahat river regions, while gradually adopting a sedentary lifestyle and agricultural practices (Syah, 2016), including migration to areas within South Sumatra Province (Pareke & Arisandi, 2020). One of the settlements established by the Rejang people was Curup.

At the initial stage, Curup was formerly a settlement known as *Cu'up*, derived from the Rejang language meaning “waterfall,” referring to the surrounding landscape characterized by numerous river streams flowing between

the valleys of the region. The term *Cu'up* specifically referred to *Dusun Curup* (or *Sadie Cu'up*), one of the villages within *Marga Selupu Rejang* located near a waterfall. However, according to an informant, due to the process of Malayization, the pronunciation of *Cu'up* gradually changed into *Curup*. The term *Curup* was later used to refer to the surrounding areas, including *Pasar Curup*, which eventually became the precursor of Curup Regency (Delda, 2025).

The fertile environmental conditions of Curup encouraged the formation of an agricultural economic pattern and market activities that became the starting point of regional growth. Markets themselves possessed high economic value and functioned as centers of social interaction. Within this context, spatial competition occurred, in which economic actors attempted to occupy strategic locations around the market in order to maximize economic benefits. This competition encouraged the concentration of economic activities at particular points, which later became the core of the development of the Curup area. Several informants stated that *Pasar De* (or in the Rejang language *Pasar Serbo Ade*, meaning “everything is available”), *Pasar Bang Mego*, and *Pasar Atas*, all of which are located in the urban center, were among the oldest economic centers in Curup that have remained active until the present time.

Through the *Treaty of London* in 1824, United Kingdom relinquished its colonial territories, including Bengkulu, to Netherlands. However, the Rejang Lebong region itself was only successfully controlled by the Dutch in 1859, and Curup was established as the administrative area of *Pasar Curup* in 1887. In 1904, Curup, together with the districts of Kepahiang and Padang Ulak Tanding, was incorporated into the *Onderafdeling Rejang*, which was administratively centered in Kepahiang (Reski, 2021). Over time, market activities in Curup demonstrated symptoms of dominance, in which economic functions became the primary factor controlling the spatial utilization of the area.

Supported by abundant natural resources, particularly plantations and forests, especially coffee and vegetable commodities, the market developed into a center of economic activities that attracted both local traders and migrants. This process was also encouraged by several factors, including: the arrival of various ethnic groups through transmigration policies implemented by the Dutch colonial government and later continued by the Indonesian government (Lindayanti, 2006); and the openness and tolerant attitude demonstrated by the Rejang people, which became the foundation for the formation of a social life that was uniquely distinctive within the Indonesian cultural context due to the interaction and integration between indigenous and external cultures in Curup (Sumai & Naumi, 2019).



**Image 1.** A view of the main building of De Market  
(Source: Muhammad Alif Athallah. Curup. August 2025)

The traders originated from various regions, including Muara Aman, Padang Ulak Tanding, Musi Rawas, and the western part of Sumatra, who not only engaged in trading activities but also gradually settled around the market area (Pratama, 2022). Sundanese and Javanese ethnic groups were also recorded as having arrived since 1911 (Regional Cultural Documentation Project, 1978), followed by Indian and Chinese communities, who are currently concentrated around Jalan Baru and its surrounding areas. This dominance not only strengthened the market's function as a commercial center but also encouraged the emergence and expansion of settlements in its surrounding areas. Along with its development, Curup was recorded as an important trading center connecting Kepahiang, Lebong, Empat Lawang, and Palembang (Soewandi, 2020).

Entering the 1910s, Curup became an important transit area when the *Onderafdeling Rejang* separated from *Onderafdeling Tebing Tinggi*, causing the connection between Rejang and Empat Lawang to be disrupted. This condition encouraged the construction and improvement of roads connecting Kepahiang–Curup–Lubuklinggau, positioning Curup at the center of the route leading to Palembang (Soewandi, 2020). Furthermore, this strategic role continued when Curup temporarily served as the capital of South Sumatra in 1948 after Palembang was occupied by the Dutch (Government of South Sumatra Province Level I, 1996).

Subsequent developments indicate the existence of a succession process, namely the transformation of spatial functions over time. Areas that initially functioned solely as market activity centers gradually transformed into zones with more diverse functions, including permanent settlements, public facilities, and administrative centers. Examples include the construction of *Lapangan Setia Negara*, which functioned as a military field and sports facility (currently transformed into a city park and culinary center), public schools such as *HIS Rejang Setia*, paved roads, Simpang Nangka Terminal, office complexes, small hospitals, irrigation dams, and Dutch and Japanese military headquarters that are now utilized as government offices. In addition, Curup once had three cinemas, namely *Kaba*, *Sempurna*, and *Pat Petulai*, all of which ceased operation during the 1990s. One of these buildings was subsequently converted into a badminton hall. This process marked the transition from a simple spatial structure toward a more complex urban structure.

Curup became the capital of Rejang Lebong Regency, replacing Kepahiang, through Emergency Law Number 4 of 1956 and Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 28 of 1959. Subsequently, the designation of Curup as the governmental center was further strengthened through Regional Regulation Number 5 of 2005, which divided the area into several districts, namely North Curup District, East Curup District, South Curup District, and Central Curup District. This regulation was later ratified through Rejang Lebong Regency Regional Regulation Number 4 of 2010 (Rejang Lebong Regency Government, 2010).

Along with these developments, the people of Curup also experienced adaptation processes in response to changes within the urban environment. This adaptation is reflected in shifts in lifestyle patterns and transformations in spatial utilization. Such changes can be observed through the increasing role of civil

servants as one of the primary drivers of economic activities in Curup, the use of Islamic banking services, and the utilization of social media for transactions and community identity formation, including platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube. On Facebook, for example, people in Curup and surrounding areas not only communicate but also conduct transactions and trading activities through digital platforms. Furthermore, new economic activities and actors have emerged, including the fast-food restaurant chain AlBaik, food stalls specializing in *ayam geprek*, fried rice, and meatballs (*bakso*). Modern retail stores such as Alfamart and Indomaret have also become part of the urban economic landscape. Traders in Curup additionally utilize online marketplace services such as Shopee and Tokopedia, as well as transportation and delivery services for interprovincial goods distribution.

Road networks have also been organized according to urban spatial functions. Heavy vehicles are prohibited from entering the main roads and are usually redirected through areas such as Pasar Hewan, Talang Rimbo Lama, and Tasikmalaya (North Curup). Buses generally use the main route of Lubuklinggau–Simpang Nangka–Bengkulu but avoid the city center by passing through Talang Rimbo Baru and Talang Rimbo Lama before continuing toward Bengkulu via the Kepahiang–Curup Road in front of Infantry Battalion 144 Jaya Yudha. Conversely, buses departing from Bengkulu commonly use the dual carriageway route (*Jalur Dua*), which directly connects to Simpang Nangka Terminal before continuing to Lubuklinggau. In addition, certain roads have been designated as prohibited routes (*verboden*), while others have been restricted to one-way traffic systems. Examples include the intersection at Merdeka Street traffic lights, where one road segment permits only one-way access, and a road section on Jalan Baru that prohibits two-way vehicle movement.

Moreover, the heterogeneity of Curup society encouraged the emergence of communities based on ethnicity and regional origin, such as the *Ikatan Keluarga Minang* (IKM) and *Kesatuan Keluarga Padang* (KKPd). Cultural acculturation is also evident in activities such as *Kuda Kepang* (*jaranan*), originating from Javanese culture, as well as the implementation of Rejang customary traditions as the indigenous culture for the broader Curup community through customary institutions such as the *Badan Musyawarah Adat* (BMA). This can be observed in the application of the *setawar sedingin* tradition (also referred to in some records as *tepung setawar*) as a conflict mediation mechanism and a form of restorative justice in local dispute resolution practices in Curup, which also affects non-Rejang communities. This phenomenon demonstrates that urban development does not occur solely in physical terms but also involves social and cultural transformations within the community.

The findings of this study reinforce previous research indicating that urban development is generally influenced by economic activities and the strategic position of a region. Studies concerning the history of Bengkulu explain that regional development was influenced by trade dynamics, colonialism, and population mobility. Research related to Curup also demonstrates its role as a center of economic activities and an interregional connecting route. However, previous studies have predominantly focused on historical aspects, governmental administration, and socio-political conditions.

In contrast to previous studies, this research positions the development of Curup within the perspective of urban ecology, thereby providing an explanation of the mechanisms of spatial transformation through the concepts proposed by Robert E. Park, namely competition, dominance, and succession. Therefore, this study not only describes the chronological development of Curup but also explains the processes of spatial transformation and the accompanying social changes.

The findings of this study are also consistent with the perspective of Robert E. Park, who argued that cities develop through human interaction in the utilization of space. Economic activities, population movements, and social adaptation become important factors shaping urban structures. In the context of Curup, the market functioned as the center of spatial competition, which subsequently generated the dominance of economic functions and transformation in the regional structure.

The findings of this study provide both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study extends the application of the urban ecology theory proposed by Robert E. Park in studies concerning urban history and local-scale urban development, particularly within the Bengkulu region. The study demonstrates that the concepts of competition, dominance, and succession are not only relevant to large cities but can also be applied to explain the development of medium-sized cities that emerged from traditional trade-based systems. Nevertheless, this study still has several limitations. First, the study employed a qualitative approach; therefore, the findings emphasize interpretations of social and historical dynamics without incorporating quantitative measurements related to spatial growth and land-use changes. Second, the scope of the study was limited to the Curup area; consequently, the findings cannot yet be generalized to all urban regions within Bengkulu Province. Third, the limitation of historical records and archival sources caused several aspects of the early development of Curup to remain dependent on oral sources and interpretations of supporting documents.

Therefore, future studies are recommended to apply a mixed methods approach, utilize spatial analysis, and compare the development of Curup with other cities possessing similar characteristics in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of market-based urban transformation processes.

Practically, the findings of this study may serve as a reference for local governments in planning the development of the urban area of Curup. An understanding of the market's role as the core of urban growth can be utilized in formulating spatial planning policies, strengthening local economic development, preserving historical areas, and promoting community cultural identity. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between urban modernization and the preservation of local cultural values.

## **CONCLUSION**

The development of Curup from a market-based settlement into an urban structure occurred through a gradual process influenced by economic, historical, social, and geographical factors. At the initial stage, Curup developed as a settlement of the Rejang community that utilized agricultural potential and the

strategic position of the region. The existence of markets, particularly *Pasar De*, *Pasar Bang Mego*, and *Pasar Atas*, became the main factors encouraging the establishment of economic activity centers, settlement growth, and the expansion of spatial functions. From the perspective of urban ecology proposed by Robert E. Park, the development of Curup demonstrates the processes of competition, dominance, and succession. Competition occurred through the concentration of economic activities within market areas, dominance was reflected in the strong influence of commercial functions in controlling spatial utilization, whereas succession was indicated by the transformation of market areas into centers of government administration, education, public services, and socio-cultural activities. These changes not only generated the physical transformation of the city but also gave rise to social and cultural adaptations among the community in response to urban dynamics.

This study demonstrates that markets play a strategic role as the core of urban development and function as a linkage between economic growth, spatial transformation, and the formation of Curup's urban identity. Therefore, the development of Curup cannot merely be understood as an administrative transformation but rather as a socio-ecological process occurring historically and continuously. The findings provide theoretical contributions to the advancement of urban ecology studies, particularly in understanding the transformation of local cities that developed from traditional trade-based systems. Practically, the research findings be utilized as a reference in formulating spatial planning policies, preserving historical areas, strengthening traditional markets, and developing local cultural identity in Curup. The study also highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between urban modernization and the sustainability of community cultural values.

Future studies are recommended to expand the scope of research to other areas in Bengkulu that possess similar developmental characteristics in order to obtain a more comprehensive comparison of urban transformation patterns. In addition, future research may apply mixed methods approaches, spatial analysis, and land-use change mapping to measure urban development in greater detail. Longitudinal studies are also necessary to examine the dynamics of Curup's development over a longer period and its impacts on social, economic, and cultural transformations within the community.

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