

Contemporary Meaning and Function of Minaret. An Exploration of Grand Mosque Hasyim Asyari

Muhammad Al Fatih
Department of Architecture
Universitas Indonesia
Depok, Indonesia
archfatih@gmail.com

Herlily
Department of Architecture
Universitas Indonesia
Depok, Indonesia
herlily@gmail.com

Kemas Ridwan Kurniawan
Department of Architecture
Universitas Indonesia
Depok, Indonesia
kemas.ridwan@gmail.com

Abstract—*This paper has investigated and interrogated the significance and existence of minaret in contemporary urban mosque in Jakarta. Etymologically speaking, minaret derives from the word manara, which means tower. Throughout history, minaret was not built to amplify call prayer and its development in the Middle Eastern context were various among regions. Yet, in Indonesia minaret was only known during the modern Indonesian era following different cultural and historical contexts. In contemporary context, prominent Indonesian architects are still put minaret in their mosques design. Through an exploration of Jakarta Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asyari, Jakarta and the lens of the architect and the ummah, we will analyze the meaning and function of the minaret and how it transform or not transform the ritual spatial practice of the ummah in contemporary urban context.*

Keywords—*architecture, contemporary mosque, minaret, Jakarta, Hasyim Asy'ari*

I. INTRODUCTION

Architecture has a capacity to deliver messages which could be different with what physically appears. Those relation is well known as signifier – something that we see physically, and signified – something intangible yet it conveys meaning or symbol [1]. This makes architecture can be interpreted from different viewpoints. Lewis Mumford, an urban hystorian even argued that human was the creator of symbol first before they became athe creator of tools [2].

Buildings became a tools to deliver meaning and also became a part of a system of communication and have a role to distributing knowledge [1]. The use of symbols in architecture is not uncommon to Islam. Islam also use architectural design as a metaphor to deliver the value of Islam [2].

Historically, mosque is a cultural product of Islam. Mosque was known as a signifier of the presence of Ummah Muslim in a certain location. Mosque even become the symbol of Islamic architecture. This building type appeared during the era of prophecy in the 6th century. It is important to note that most building types in Arabic peninsula during pre-Islamic era were different with mosque. This demonstrated that the significance of Islamic architecture before recognizing other buildings was the Islamic house of worship. Because, Islamic architecture is a supporting system for daily practice of Islam. For Muslims, worship should be stimulated by some kind of praying space [3].

The question that has arisen recently is, what has constituted a buiding as a mosque? Islamic history asserts that The Prophet said that “*wherever you perform prayer, that place is your mosque*” [6]. Therefore, a mosque can be recognized with the existence of a space dedicated for praying. As an illustration, a wall or divider with orientation to *qiblah* in Mecca. There is no other requirements such as roof, minimal size, does not have an enclosed wall or particular ritual

equipments [7]. However, mosque has experienced design developments of forms and shapes throughout history.

Mosques are the representation of the presence of moslem community in muslim majority’s countries including Indonesia. Mosques have been built in almost cities in Indonesia complete with features that we are all familiar with, such as *mihrab*, domes and minarets. However, unlike dome and *mihrab* which forms are of repetitions in different places and countries, minaret has be experiencing design development of forms in different places and era [8] components, incorporating the applicable criteria that follow.

Etymologically, the word minaret comes from Turkish language, which is derived from *nur* and *nar*, Arabic for light or fire [7]. Some also argued that the word minaret comes from *manaras*, derived from Tunisian language of lighthouse [9]. In this view, minaret has the same philosophical meaning with lighthouse. while others also cited that manaras derives from *sawma’a*, the term from Yemeni spoken Arabic. *Sawma’a* in literal translation means a hermitage or a word those associated with the small cabin-like structures built at the top of the mosque roof which supposed to shield the muezzin from direct sun or weather [4]. In this view, minaret has the same philosophical meaning with lighthouse. The historian named Thiersch even argued there was a strong connection between history of lighthouse and minaret especially in Cairo, Egypt [5].

Minaret develops in countries that are directly governed by Islamic state. Its shapes and forms develop in each specific location resulting in different architecture. There are cubical minarets in Africa, cylindricals in Iran, stacking up in Egypt until the pagoda shapes in China [12].

In Indonesia, until now minarets have always closely related as part of newly built grand mosques. One of them is Masjid Raya KH. Hasyim Asy’ari in West Jakarta. This mosque has a capacity of 12,500 *ummah* has 5 minarets of 50 meters height which has pointed end resembling the minarets in Turkey. This “idealized” form that is identical with the Middle East culture could reach the South East Asia through “globalization.” In the 20th century, globalization has its role in spreading the homogenous image of minaret architecture, or copying the form that was existed before [13]. Yet, what is the actual function of a minarets and how relevance for today’s architecture?

II. THE HISTORY OF MINARET AS SYMBOLS

Based on British history, the tower has symbolized monarch’s authority and became an icon of overwhelming power [6]. The history of minaret as symbols started as old as the era of prophecy, which continued in the Islamic Caliph. In Ummayah Dynasty, Islam came as a new belief in Europe [15]. Yet, after they conquered Spain, Mu’awiyah as the

caliph changed the function of minarets in churches to be minarets of mosques. This was a statement that symbolized that Islam as a religion came as something that is not unfamiliar. This means that Islam did not mean to completely replace the previous civilization yet Islam came and would employ the minaret such as the previous religion as their symbol of victory but in different meaning and context. [16]

However, some argued that the minarets were built purely because of the existence of Islam. They believe that through history, especially during the 9th century, not all house of worships had minaret. There was no church that had a bell tower during that time, yet in 829 M in Sevilla there was mosque that already have minaret [16]. The minaret remains until two centuries later it converts to bell tower of the cathedral of Seville, known as Giralda [7].

In Turks Utsmani, after Sultanate Mehmed in 1453 conquered Constantinople Capital, one of the things that he did was building a wood minaret, which was attached to Hagias Sophia Church. This officially marked the functional change of a 900 years old church to Mosque [8]. In a different sultanate periode the wood minaret had been permanently built incrementally using stone and become four towers [12].

However, if we study the root of the word, we are wondering why minaret has the pronunciation closer to *manaras* or *mercusuar*, and not to *mi'dhana* or *sawma'a*? [18]. In fact, the word *manara* - which means guidance, signage and *mercusuar* - is utilized to name minaret in mosque. *Minaret*, *manaras* have the etymological roots with light, that has relation to spirituality, guidance and other cosmological grandeurs [19]. This has proven that the development of minaret is not in line with the needs for call prayer (*adzan*).

In the case of Grand Mosque KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, we are questioning the meaning and function of the five minarets which stand around the mosque. We question the existence of the minarets since they are not a compulsory element of a mosque to support the ritual in the mosque.



Fig 1. Site Plan of Grand Mosque Hasyim Asy'ari (Source: M.Al Fatih, 2018, adopted from Atelier 6)

III. GRAND MOSQUE HASYIM ASY'ARY

A. General Description of Grand Mosque Hasyim Asy'ary

Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari has 5 minarets that located around the mosque. The placement of the minarets is arranged according to the following order: two minarets in

front of the entrance gate to the mosque; two minarets in the north side of the mosque and one minaret in the south side of the mosque. All five minarets are identical and have similar height and form.



Fig. 2 Grand Mosque KH Hasyim ASy'ari from elevation (Source: M.Al Fatih, 2018)

Minarets have become the identity of the mosque. There are variety of interpretations of the meaning of and in relation to quantity of the minarets of Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari. For example, 5 (five) can be interpreted as a symbol of 5 *rukun Islam* or 5 pillars of Islam, or could be interpreted as 5 principles in *Pancasila*, as the ideology of the nation. The 5 minarets and 1 pyramid dome roof could be interpreted as $5 + 1 = 6$ that represents the total number of 6 *rukun iman* or 6 pillars of faith.

The minarets also symbolize the existence of the mosque. In an urban scale, the height of the minarets makes the function of minarets as a "sign" becomes relevant. In the case of Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari, the minarets can be seen from high or elevated vantage points. For example, since it is located nearby the Sukarno-Hatta International Airport, airplane passengers can see the minarets when the flight makes a turn in the air. The minarets can also be seen from the commuter trains windows that go through Kalideres Station.

B. The Minaret of Grand Mosque Hasyim Asy'ari

Throughout history, the function of the minarets varies and depends on local contexts, conditions and locations. For example, in North Africa such as Morocco minarets had function as a direction of *qiblah*. Meanwhile in other countries, it has different functions. There are previous functions of minarets, which then relates to the minarets of Grand Mosque KH. Hasyim Asy'ari.



Fig. 3 Grand Mosque Hasyim Asy'ari and its 5 minarets (Source: Atelier 6)

- Minaret as a Sign of *Qiblah* Direction

In the old era, there were occasions that minarets were placed in the eastern part of the mosque, in the opposite direction to *qiblah*. In the era of Aghlabid which part of Abbasiyah Dynasti, the minaret was revitalized and become a significant city center in North Africa [20]. One example of the cultural product of Aghlabid is Grand Mosque Kairouan in Tunisia. The Grand Mosque has a unique identity – a minaret that is located in an opposite direction with the *qiblah*. Grand Mosque Kairouan has a single square form minaret. Its geometric form has four corners. Therefore, it is not difficult to see where the orientation of the minaret is.

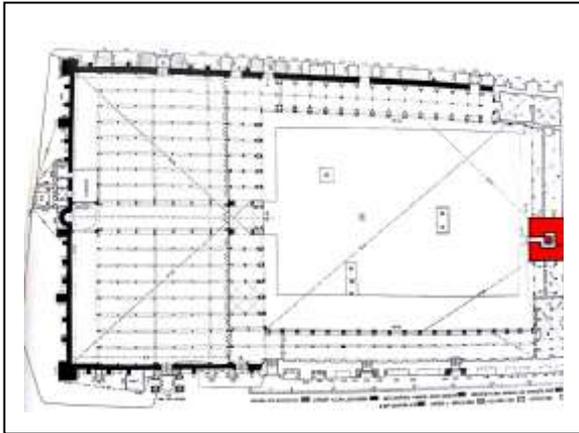


Fig. 4 Grand Mosque Kairouan
(Source: The Minaret by Jonathan M. Bloom, 2013, page 75)

In our case study, the minaret of Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari has different function with Grand Mosque Kairouan. Not all of the minarets of Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari are located in the opposite direction with the *qiblah*. Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari has 5 (five) minarets, which are spread in 3 compass directions. In this case, it is rather difficult to refer to the 5 minarets in order to locate the west of *qiblah* direction. The minarets in KH Hasyim Asy'ari also have cylindrical shape so it is not possible to be referred as an orientation of direction. Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari has minarets in north, south, and east. Considering the surrounding contexts, it is rather difficult to imagine where is the orientation of the *qiblah* only by referring to the position of the minarets.

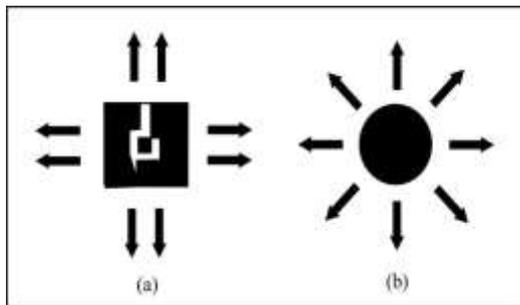


Fig. 5. Rectangular and Cylindrical Shape of Minaret
(Source: M. Al Fatih 2018)

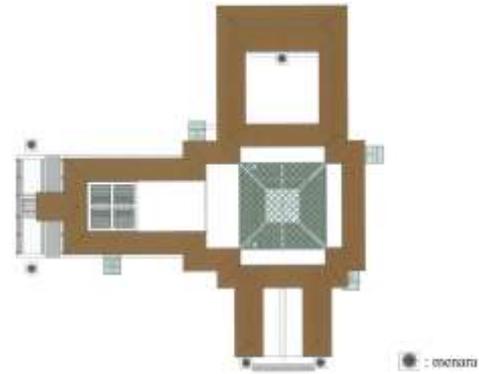


Fig 6 Plan of Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari
(Source: M. Al Fatih, 2018, adopted from Atelier 6)

- Minaret of a Sign of Entry

The history of minaret's existence as the sign of *qiblah* has been closely related to the gate of the mosque, which at that time located in opposite direction to the *qiblah*. As a consequence, this adds the function of the minaret as a sign of mosque entrance.

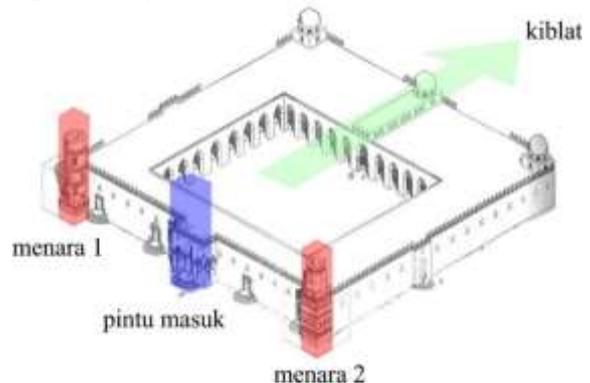


Fig 7. Minaret as a Sign of Entry
(Source: The Minaret by Jonathan M. Bloom, 2013, page 200, emphasis added)

The minaret makes the visitors easily recognized where is the main entrance of the mosque. One of the examples is Nedroma Mosque in Algiers, North Africa. Although the placement of the minaret is not directly in the opposite direction of *qiblah*, the existence of the minaret has similar function with the minaret in Kairouan Grand Mosque, which is close by the entrance. The function of minaret as the sign of main entry gate is also existed in Hakim Mosque in Cairo, Egypt. The mosque has two minarets that are located in the left and right of the entrance gate.

In the case of KH Hasyim Asy'ari Grand Mosque, there are two minarets that enjoy its function to welcome the incoming *jama'ah* since it is located in the two sides of entrance door. In his statement, Ir. Mustafa, IAI as part of the design team asserts that one of the functions of the minarets is to assist or direct people to come in through the main door of the mosque. Mustafa adds that in an urban scale, a grand mosque needs to be seen from afar [21].

For example, it has to be seen or observed from the place where many people passing by such as arterial road, railway line as well as from the flight.

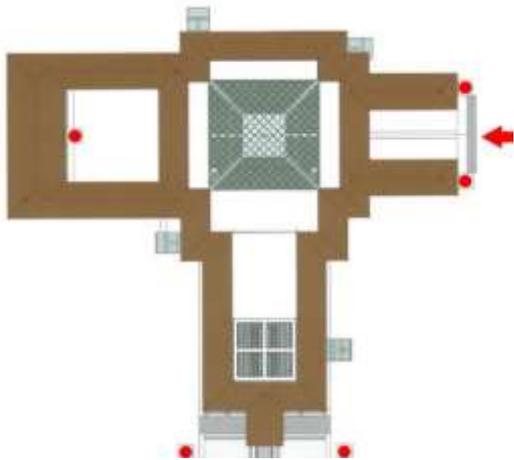


Fig. 8 Minaret as a Sign of Entrance in Grand Mosque Hasyim Asy'ari (Source: M. Al Fatih, 2018, adopted from Atelier 6)

- **Minaret as a Sign of Mosque's Territory**
 Apart from its functions as a sign of entrance, a minaret also functions as a sign to mark a mosque's territory. These two functions are supplementary and relate one another. Yet, the function of minaret as a territorial border is originated from significant history. The history started during the Ummayah Dynasti, where Nabawi Mosque was the only mosque, which placed its minaret in its corners of mosque complex. The total number of minarets was four located in each corner. During that time, the term *manara* was already used in Nabawi Mosque. This is quite unique considering that the word *manara* has two meanings: *mercusuar* and border. If we observe their need during that time, Medina City did not need a *mercusuar*. Therefore, the only function it was built was minarets as a sign of border of Nabawi Mosque's territory [20].

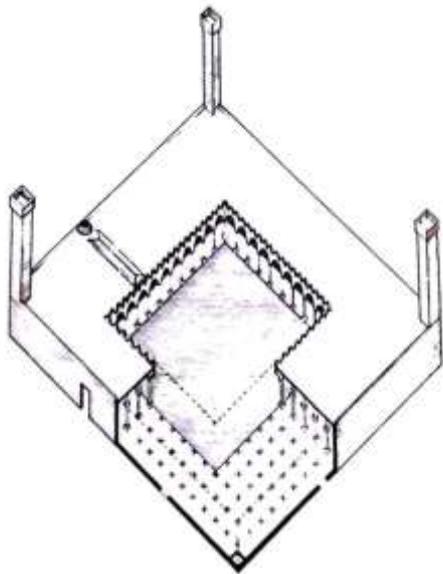


Fig 9 Minaret as a Sign of Territory (Source: Bloom, 2013, pg. 49)



Fig10 Minaret as a Sign of Territory at Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari (Source: M. Al Fatih 2018, adopted from Atelier 6)

KH. Hasyim Asy'ari Grand Mosque is also utilized the minaret as the sign to mark its interior and exterior spaces. The minarets become the outer part of a divine border that marks the maximum distance area that can be overstepped using footwears. This is enhanced by the placement of minarets' foundation or base, which were stood on the ceramics base and not on the soil or plaster without floor base.

- **Minaret as a Sign of Mosque's Identity**
 Mosque has existed as a city landmark. According to the definition, landmark means *berarti "a building or place that is easily recognized, especially one that you can use to judge where you are"* [22]. Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari is located close to Daan Mogot Street, an arterial road in West Jakarta. The road is the primary access to the mosque complex. From the traffic direction the mosque needs to be clearly seen and recognized to give a sense that the mosque is easily reached by visitors and *ummah*. In this case, it is necessary that the minaret of KH Hasyim Asy'ari Grand Mosque have a certain height and shape to meet that criterion. Now, lets imagine what it would be in some parts of this grand mosque if the minarets do not existed. Does the Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari still be recognized as a mosque without minarets?



Fig 11 Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari with 5 minarets (Source: Google Street view)



Fig 12. Grand Mosque Hasyim Asy'ari from a different angle
(Source: M. Al Fatih, 2018)

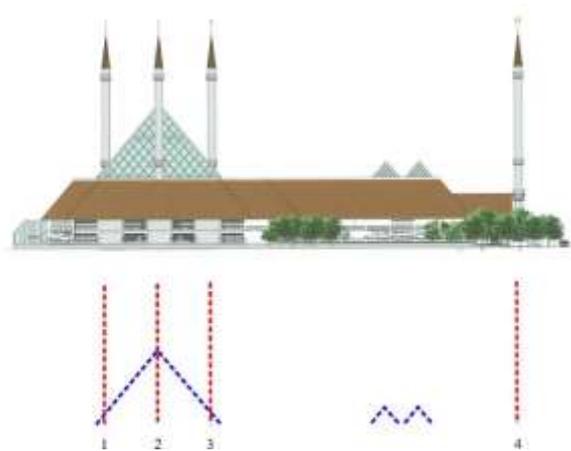


Fig 13. Geometrical Balance of Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari
(Source: Elevation: Atelier 6; Diagram: M. Al Fatih, 2018)

- **Minaret as Geometrical Balance of Building Mass**
Since the beginning of our investigation, we have questioned on how did they decide the quantity and placement of the minarets in KH Hasyim Asy'ari Grand Mosque. Why it has to be five minarets? Why the formation of placement arrangement is 2-2-1? We could not find the answer even from the architect. The architect of KH Hasyim Asy'ari Grand Mosque, Mr. Adhi Moersid argues that there is no particular philosophy related to the placement of the minarets. He just did it and it feels right to put the minarets there after he manages to finalize the mosque's plan composition [6]. And for the quantity, Moersid also does not have a particular purpose or intention. He only offers the analysis of meaning to everyone interpretation. Yet, we thought that the five minarets are existed without coincident. This is confirmed by Mr. Moersid in our interview:

"Setelah coba mendudukkan komposisi denah, udah sini aja deh.. menara... [6]."

He said that he was trying to manage the composition and arrangement of the floor plan, so put it there.... minarets..... [6]. The sentence shows that there is a relation between the minarets and the floor plan composition. There is a consideration from the geometrical balance of the building mass. We also observe the front and side facades of KH Hasyim Asy'ari Grand Mosque and analyze the geometry of the building facades.

On the side façade we can see that there are three minarets that "divide" or "split" the roof of KH. Hasyim Asy'ari Grand Mosque. Two minarets in the northern side and a minaret in the southern side of the mosque are arranged in such a way that creates a balance composition of building mass especially in the part of main prayer space. Meanwhile, the other two minarets, which are on the eastern part of the mosque become the geometrical balance of four Betawi triangle-pyramid like shape roof that is smaller compare to the main roof of the mosque.

IV. CONCLUSION

We conclude that the existence of the minaret nowadays is not defined by the needs to perform its function. It is more influenced by the architect designer as the main responsible designer of the project. In addition, there is no strong requirement to control the final decision of the design and during the implementation or construction.

We believe that in contemporary mosques minarets have existed not necessarily to serve functional needs. Yet, it is resulted from the creativity and decision of the architects in practice. Minaret exists merely as aesthetic scenes as a unity in design philosophy for the whole mosque complex. We could not escape from the fact that there are some functional needs that met with the existence of the minaret, for example, as a territorial border, a sign of entry and direction of *qiblah*. Yet, other architectural forms than minaret can also serve these functions such as the gate in Ukhuwah Islamiyah Mosque at Universitas Indonesia, which also function as landmark.

In order to investigate more the needs of minarets in mosques, we suggest studying further minarets and making comparative study between minarets in similar conditions or contexts. For example, comparing the minarets that are come from some mosque's complexes, which are designed by same designers. It could also be the minarets that are built in the same period, for example, the mosque that were built post-reform in Indonesia. We could also investigate and compare the mosque that have different owners, for example compare mosques that are built by the government with mosques that are built co-operatively by the community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We thank Mr. Ir. Adhi Moersid, IAI and Mr Ir. Mustafa, IAI as the architectural design team of Grand Mosque KH Hasyim Asy'ari for their availability to be interviewed and providing data for this research. We also thank the Directorate Research and Community Engagement (DRPM) Universitas Indonesia for their financial support for this research and publication under the scheme of PIT-9 Grant, 2019.

REFERENCES

- [1] N. Leach, "Structuralism," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, New York, Routledge, 1997.
- [2] A. Fanani, *Arsitektur Masjid*, Yogyakarta: Bentang Pustaka, 2009.
- [3] R. Joseph, "The Semiotics of the Islamic Mosque," *Arab Studies Quarterly*, vol. 3, pp. 285-295, 1981.
- [4] J. N. Erzen, "Reading Mosque: Meaning and Architecture in Islam," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 69 no. The Aesthetics of Architecture: Philosophical Investigations into the Art of Building, pp. 125-131, 2011.
- [5] S. Omer, "Towards Understanding Islamic Architecture," *Islamic Studies*, vol. 47, pp. 483-510, 2008.
- [6] A. Moersid, Interviewee, *Personal Interview*. [Interview]. 16 November 2018.
- [7] R. Hillenbrand, "The Mosque," in *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function, and Meaning*, Edinburgh, University Press, 1994, p. 31.
- [8] R. Hillenbrand, "The Mosque," in *Islamic Architecture: Form, Function, and Meaning*, Edinburgh, University Press, 1994, p. 33.
- [9] J. M. Bloom, "Manaras and Manars," in *The Minaret*, Edinburgh, University Press, 2013, p. 46.
- [10] T. Marchand, "Reconsidering the role of the minaret in San'a," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies*, vol. 29, pp. 95-102, 1999.
- [11] D. Behrens-Abouseif, "The Islamic History of the Lighthouse of Alexandria," *Muqarnas*, vol. 23, pp. 1-14, 2006.
- [12] J. M. Bloom, "Introduction," in *The Minaret*, Edinburgh, University Press, 2013, p. 1.
- [13] J. M. Bloom, "The Minaret: Symbol of Faith and Power," 1 April 2002. [Online]. Available: <http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/200202/the.minaret-symbol.of.fai.th.power.htm>.
- [14] K. Deiter, "'What Citadels, what turrets, and what towers': Mapping the Tower of London in Thomas Heywood's Lord Mayors' Shows," *Comparative Drama*, vol. 47, pp. 473-503, 2013.
- [15] J. M. Bloom, "Creswell and The Origin of The Minaret," *Muqarnas*, vol. VII, pp. 55-58, 1991.
- [16] J. M. Bloom, "The Triumph of The Cordoban Minaret in The Maghrib," in *The Minaret*, Edinburgh, University Press, 2013, p. 144.
- [17] J. M. Bloom, "Mosque Towers and Church Towers in Early Medieval Spain," in *XXVII International Congress of the History of Art*, Berlin, 1992.
- [18] J. M. Bloom, "The History and Scholarship and The Nature of The Problem," in *The Minaret*, Edinburgh, University Press, 2013, pp. 7-8.
- [19] R. Hillenbrand, "The Minaret," in *Islamic Architecture: Function, Form, and Meaning*, Edinburgh, University Press, 1994, pp. 129-135.
- [20] J. M. Bloom, *The Minaret*, Edinburgh: University Press, 2013.
- [21] Mustafa, Interviewee, *Personal Interview*. [Interview]. 16 November 2018.
- [22] "Cambridge Dictionary," 2018. [Online].
- [23] R. Hillenbrand, "The Minaret," in *Islamic Architecture: Function, Form, and Meaning*, Edinburgh, University Press, 1994, p. 132.
- [24] J. M. Bloom, "The History and Scholarship and The Nature of The Problem," in *The Minaret*, Edinburgh, University Press, 2013, pp. 7-8.
- [25] Cambridge Dictionary, "Meaning of 'landmark' in the English Dictionary," 12 January 2018. [Online]. Available: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/landmark>.
- [26] A. Moersid, Interviewee, *Wawancara Pribadi*. [Interview]. 16 November 2018.
- [27] Nurmandi, A., & Purnomo, E. P. (2011). Making the strategic plan work in local government: a case study of strategic plan implementation in Yogyakarta Special Province (YSP). *International Review of Public Administration*, 16(2), 143-164.