Bridging traditions: Placemaking and authenticity in architecture for city branding

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Abstract:
This paper explores the symbiotic relationship between placemaking and the authenticity of traditional architecture in the realm of city branding, using Surakarta City in Indonesia as a pivotal case study. It posits that the conscious integration of placemaking initiatives with the preservation and celebration of traditional architectural authenticity can significantly amplify any city's brand identity, rendering it distinct and resonant on the global scale. Surakarta, with its rich cultural heritage and commitment to preserving Javanese architectural motifs, exemplifies how traditional elements can coalesce with contemporary urban development strategies to foster a sense of place and community identity. Through a qualitative analysis of Surakarta's urban planning and community engagement practices, this study underscores the transformative impact of authentic architectural preservation in placemaking processes. The findings suggest that such an approach not only enhances the aesthetic and cultural landscape of cities but also strengthens their branding, attracting tourism and investment by offering a unique narrative. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for urban policymakers and planners, advocating for a balanced integration of cultural authenticity and innovative placemaking to achieve sustainable and impactful city branding. This study contributes to the broader discourse on urban development, highlighting the indispensable role of architectural authenticity in crafting compelling city narratives.

Keywords: placemaking, architectural authenticity, city branding, urban identity, cultural heritage

INTRODUCTION

The intricate fabric of urban environments is often woven with the threads of history, culture, and community aspirations, epitomised through the lens of traditional architecture and placemaking practices. Placemaking, a multifaceted approach to the planning, design, and management of public spaces, emphasises the creation of meaningful, inclusive, and dynamic environments that reflect and nurture the social fabric of communities (Thomas, 2016). Traditional architecture, on the other hand, serves as a tangible chronicle of a city's heritage, embodying the authenticity that is increasingly valued in our globalised world (Schneekloth and Shibley, 1993). In the context of city branding, these elements are not mere backdrops but are instrumental in crafting a city's identity, offering a unique narrative that distinguishes it on the global stage (Kolotouchkina and Seisdedos, 2016).

The confluence of placemaking and the preservation of authentic traditional architecture presents a nuanced avenue for enhancing city branding. This intersection fosters a sense of place that resonates with both inhabitants and visitors, weaving the historical and cultural essence into the urban identity (Nugroho et al.,

2020). This paper posits that a deliberate integration of placemaking principles with the conservation and celebration of traditional architectural authenticity can elevate city branding, transforming urban spaces into emblematic representations of community values and historical lineage. However, navigating this integration poses challenges, including balancing modernisation with preservation and engaging diverse community stakeholders in the placemaking process. Despite these hurdles, cities that successfully leverage their architectural heritage within placemaking efforts often witness enriched community engagement, bolstered tourism and a strengthened sense of civic pride (Zhu, 2018).

This paper aims to explore the synergies between placemaking and architectural authenticity within the framework of city branding, arguing for a strategic approach that harmonises these elements to cultivate a distinctive and cohesive urban identity. The novelty of this research lies in its focused exploration of the intersection between placemaking and the preservation of traditional architecture within the context of city branding. Unlike previous studies that may treat these elements in isolation, this research posits that their deliberate integration can significantly enhance the branding and identity of cities. Specifically, this

study emphasises the unique challenges and opportunities associated with such integration in the case of Surakarta, Indonesia. What makes Surakarta's case study particularly unique and revealing is its proactive approach to leveraging its cultural heritage as a cornerstone of its city branding strategy. Unlike other cities that may prioritise modern development at the expense of historical preservation, Surakarta has committed to maintaining its traditional Javanese architecture while simultaneously fostering urban growth. This dual focus not only enhances the city's aesthetic and cultural landscape but also strengthens its brand identity, attracting tourism and investments.

Initiatives in Surakarta, such as the revitalisation of historic districts like Kampung Batik Laweyan and the organisation of cultural festivals, serve as practical examples of how traditional architecture can be seamlessly integrated into modern urban spaces. These efforts underscore the city's dedication to preserving its cultural heritage and offer valuable insights into the potential benefits and challenges of such an approach. The necessity of this research is underscored by the growing recognition of the importance of cultural authenticity in urban development and city branding. As cities around the world grapple with the pressures of globalisation and modernisation, the preservation of cultural heritage becomes increasingly vital in distinguishing one city from another. This research provides a strategic framework for other cities to emulate, highlighting the benefits of integrating placemaking with traditional architecture to create a unique and compelling city narrative.

THEORY FRAMEWORK

Placemaking fundamentals

Placemaking is a multifaceted concept that involves shaping, experiencing and contributing to a locality, with the focus on people and their relationship to the environment (Mateo-Babiano and Lee, 2020). It is a process that aims to create meaningful spaces (Pascucci, 2015) and is closely linked to sustainable community development (Turvey, 2019). Key principles of placemaking include the focus on context, holistic and multidisciplinary approaches, and a human-centred and quality-driven perspective (Jordaan et al., 2008). It is also a strategy for building social capital and empowering local communities (Kelkar and Spinelli, 2016). However, the concept of placemaking is still evolving, and there is a need for a common understanding and theoretical model to guide its application (Ellery et al., 2020).

Placemaking, the process of creating and enhancing public spaces, plays a crucial role in urban development. It is the key driver of sustainable development, promoting social and cultural integration (Duconseille and Saner, 2020). When linked with sustainable community development, placemaking can lead to a better quality of life, prosperous economy and healthy environment (Salzman and Lopez, 2020). The creative city paradigm has further transformed placemaking, emphasising the economic and social benefits of art and design (Sarı and Mengi, 2022). In knowledge-based urban development, planning and branding are essential for successful placemaking (Yigitcanlar et al., 2018). The role of play in placemaking is also significant, particularly in urban art environment (Innocent, 2016). Placemaking is a response to problematic ecological and social conditions, requiring a shift in planning focus and aims (Jordaan et al., 2008). It is a tool for managing urban landscapes, promoting human experience and environmental and human health (Motloch, 1990). Finally, placemaking can generate social value in urban spaces, shaping community attitudes and necessary activities (Alzahrani et al., 2017).

Authenticity in traditional architecture

The concept of authenticity in traditional architecture is complex and multifaceted, with various scholars offering different perspectives. Lambe (2016) and Niskasaari (2008) both emphasise the importance of context and socio-cultural sustainability in defining authenticity (Lambe, 2016, Niskasaari, 2008). Grubbauer (2017) criticise the tendency to fetishise the vernacular and the potential for inauthenticity in the reinvention of traditional architecture (Grubbauer, 2017). Boccardi (2018) explore the role of expertise and skill in the production of authenticity (Boccardi, 2018), while Al-Lahham (2014) highlight the influence of ideology and social constructs in shaping perceptions of authenticity (Al-Lahham, 2014). These studies collectively underscore the need for a nuanced and inclusive understanding of authenticity in traditional architecture.

The preservation of authenticity in urban landscapes is a complex and multifaceted issue, particularly in the Chinese context. Li (2010) emphasises the importance of a culturally sensitive approach that incorporates public history perspectives (Li, 2010). This is further underscored by Gustavsson and Peterson (2003), who argues that authenticity is a key consideration in landscape conservation and management (Gustavsson and Peterson, 2003), and by Rudokas and Grazuleviciute-Vileniske (2020), who introduces the concept of the "permanent pervading authenticity" in the context of the Historic Urban Landscape approach (Rudokas and Grazuleviciute-Vileniske, 2020). However, the challenge of defining and protecting authenticity is evident, as highlighted by Araoz (2008), Martinez (2017), Rey Pérez and González Martínez (2018). Liu et al. (2019) and Chen (2014) explore the public perceptions of authenticity and the methodology for preserving historic urban areas, respectively, in the Chinese context. These studies collectively underscore the significance of preserving authenticity in urban landscapes, while also highlighting the complexities and challenges involved (Liu et al., 2019; Chen, 2014).

City branding concepts

City branding, a key aspect of city marketing, involves the construction, communication, and management of a city's image (Kavaratzis, 2004). It is often confused with the design of a new logo or slogan, but it encompasses a comprehensive brand management framework (Ashworth and Kavaratzis, 2007). The development of a city brand is influenced by various factors, including the city's style, which can be a significant dimension (Sadullaeva and Baizhaksynova, 2021). City branding is a complex, multi-disciplinary concept, incorporating city planning, marketing, architecture and tourism management (Akturan and Oğuztimur 2016). It is a powerful tool for contemporary cities, with essential components including the city's image, identity and reputation (Kavaratzis, 2004). The design of a city brand requires the participatory approach, considering the city's history, culture, economy, and potential development (Torres-Zamudio et al., 2021). City branding is increasingly applied in urban development and regeneration, with a focus on image-reality consistency and flagship developments (Prilenska, 2012).

A range of studies have explored the influence of architecture on city branding. Vernacular architecture, with its sustainable and culturally reflective design, has been found to significantly impact city branding (Elahi, 2022). Iconic buildings, such as Burj Khalifa and Bibliotheca Alexandrina, play a crucial role in city branding, attracting investments and tourists (El Messeidy, 2019). Architectural images are the key tool in city marketing, influencing tourist satisfaction and new investments (Polay, 2018). The role of design in city branding has evolved to encompass multidisciplinary approach, including architecture (Lau and Leung,

2005). The use of green development in city branding, particularly in the case of Dubai, has been examined, with the focus on its authenticity (Patachi, 2015). Architecture is increasingly being used as a strategic tool for economic and cultural transformation, with the potential to differentiate places (Salzman, Lopez, 2020). Branded architecture can serve as a manifesto of organisational identity, influencing customer behaviour (Palaiologou and Penn, 2013). The role of architecture and iconic buildings in city branding has been further emphasised (Murray, 2012).

SYNERGIES BETWEEN PLACEMAKING AND AUTHENTIC ARCHITECTURE

The synergy between Placemaking and Authentic Architecture is a complex and multifaceted concept, as evidenced by a range of studies. Devadas et al. (2022) and Furlan et al. (2019), emphasise the importance of authoritative elements and the socio-spatial process in creating authentic places (Furlan et al., 2019). Knox (2005), Schneekloth and Shibley (2000) further explore the role of urban design and the social construction of place, with the latter advocating for more open and collaborative processes Schneekloth and Shibley (2000), Poon (2019) and Tyrrell (2003) highlight the significance of heritage symbolism, cultural dimensions and climatic conditions in creating authentic architecture (Poon, 2019, Tyrrell, 2003). Wortham-Galvin (2008) and Rendell (2007) add a critical perspective, discussing the role of collective memory and the blurring of boundaries between art and architecture in Placemaking (Rendell, 2007, Wortham-Galvin, 2008). These studies collectively underscore the importance of a holistic approach that considers both, physical and intangible elements, in creating authentic and meaningful places.

The city of Surakarta (or Solo, formerly a village before the establishment of the Surakarta Kingdom in 1745) is one of the cities that leverage the authenticity of the city as a strength in their city branding. Solo itself is a city that has established city branding, carrying the slogan "Solo: the Spirit of Java" and the *Rajamala* mascot. In the puppet story, Rajamala is a character known to possess unrivalled power. He is a powerful figure who is able to reject bala or negative aura. The branding formed by the Solo City Government will become a strategic aspect of Solo in attracting tourists, entrepreneurs and investors. The slogan "Solo: the Spirit of Java" signifies that Solo is the essence of Java. With its various riches, including tourism, culture, traditions, historical sites, culinary delights and the hospitality of its residents, Solo is ready to develop the city to be more creative and innovative.

The city of Surakarta, more commonly known as Solo, is renowned for its slogan "The Spirit of Java," which signifies the essence of Java. This city, traversed by the Bengawan Solo River, is closely associated with its image as a centre of Javanese culture that continues to endure, notably, through the *Kraton* Kasunanan Surakarta and the *Pura* Mangkunegaran. A palace (Javanese: kraton or karaton) is an area where a ruler (king or queen) rules or lives (palace). Pura, in the context of the residence of regional leaders, is the official palace of the Duchy and the residence of the Dukes. For tourists, Solo is also famous for its batik. Its central location in Central Java makes Solo a supportive hub for other cities, such as Semarang and Yogyakarta. This city, covering an area of 44.04 square kilometres, is administratively divided into five districts and 54 villages.

The tourism slogan aimed at elevating Surakarta's image as a centre of Javanese culture is "The Spirit of Java," meaning the essence of Java. This slogan resulted from a competition held by the Surakarta City Government from October 4 to November 14, 2005, won by Dwi Endang Setyorini, a resident of Giriroto, Ngemplak, Boyolali. Solo is a city rich in culture and has been designated as

one of the cultural centres in Central Java. One popular and unique tradition in the city is the Kirab Pusaka Satu Suro, a heritage parade that is usually held by the Kraton Solo and Puro Mangkunegaran on the evening before the 1st of Suro. Furthermore, Solo is often nicknamed the City of Batik, as it is a haven for batik enthusiasts. Batik sellers in Solo can be easily found, from markets and malls to batik centres like Kampung Batik Laweyan. The batik available varies in price, pattern and type, with the Parang Kusumo and Truntum motifs being particularly popular. Two famous batik villages are Kauman and Laweyan, see Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. The atmosphere of the Batik village in Solo (Surakarta), located in Central Java, Indonesia. (Photo: Suryo in Jateng, 2019)

City branding is a vital aspect of promoting a city's identity and attracting tourism, trade and investments. In the case of Solo, also known as Surakarta, consistency and collective action are crucial elements for an effective implementation of the city's branding strategy. As stated by Retno Wulandari, the Chairperson of BPPD Solo, "It requires unity and consistency in implementing the Solo: the Spirit of Java logo and slogan until this city branding effort can proceed smoothly and have a tangible impact on the development of tourism, trade and investment in the area." Consistency in branding efforts ensures that the message conveyed remains coherent across various platforms and interactions. It builds trust and recognition among target audiences, reinforcing the desired image of the city as a vibrant cultural and economic hub. Moreover, consistency helps establish a sense of reliability and professionalism, which are essential in attracting both visitors and investor.

Furthermore, collective action plays a significant role in the success of city branding initiatives. It involves collaboration among

various stakeholders, including local government bodies, businesses, residents and community organisations. By working together towards a common goal, these stakeholders can pool resources, expertise and networks to amplify the impact of branding efforts. In essence, the effectiveness of city branding in Solo hinges on the commitment of all stakeholders to maintain consistency in implementing the city's logo and slogan, as well as their collective efforts in promoting Solo as The Spirit of Java. This concerted approach not only enhances Solo's visibility and appeal but also stimulates growth across key sectors such as tourism, trade and investment, ultimately contributing to the overall development of the city and its surrounding areas.

The interconnection between placemaking and authenticity significantly impacts community engagement and identity. Foth (2017), Kelkar and Spinelli (2016), emphasise the role of peer-to-peer accommodation and creative placemaking in fostering a sense of place and social capital. Furlan et al. (2019) and Webb (2014) further explore the concept of authenticity in placemaking, with Furlan focusing on the urban regeneration of historic districts and Webb proposing an expanded model of creative placemaking that addresses social equity. Main et al. (2017) and Knox (2005) highlight the role of placemaking in shaping identity and agency, particularly in immigrant communities and the Slow City movement. Cameron (2020) and Harrington (2004) look into the complexities of digital placemaking and the role of intangible heritage in community and identity formation. These studies collectively underscore the importance of authentic placemaking in fostering community engagement and shaping identity.

Challenges and considerations

The tension between modern urban development and the preservation of traditional authenticity is a complex issue, as highlighted by a range of studies. Nasser (2003) and Lim (2011) emphasise the need for a sustainable approach that balances conservation, heritage and tourism (Lim, 2011, Nasser, 2003). Martokusumo (2016) and Cortés (2015) further explore the conflict between identity and development strategies, with the former advocating for the creation of enjoyable urban experiences and the latter underscoring the importance of governance and civil society participation (Martokusumo, 2016, Cortés, 2015). Dinçer (2013), Erendil and Ulusoy (2002) discuss the challenges of preserving tangible and intangible heritage in the face of urban modernisation, with the former proposing the "historic urban landscape" concept and the latter examining the changing identity of historic urban areas (Erendil and Ulusoy, 2002). Saleh (1998) and Samani et al. (2012) highlight the role of urban and architectural identity in preserving tradition. The former discusses the integration of tradition and modernity in the capital city of Saudi Arabia and the latter emphasises the need for an erudite understanding of human interests in the conservation of heritage areas (Saleh, 1998, Samani et al., 2012).

The struggle to balance modern city growth with keeping traditional authenticity intact is intricate. Various studies underline the importance of a sustainable method that harmonises the need to conserve heritage, while also fostering tourism. The issue delves into the tug-of-war between maintaining a unique identity and pushing for modern development tactics. Some researchers advocate for the creation of engaging city experience, while others stress the critical role of governance and active community involvement. The challenge also lies in safeguarding both the physical and cultural heritage amidst rapid urban advancements. The concept of a "historic urban landscape" has been suggested to navigate these challenges, focusing on the evolving identity of historic city regions. Moreover, the significance of maintaining

urban and architectural identity in preserving traditions is emphasised, with discussions on blending tradition with modernity and the importance of a deep understanding of human interests in heritage conservation.

To effectively balance commercial interests with cultural heritage, it is crucial to address the challenges of coordinating green development of the tourist experience and commercialisation at cultural heritage sites (Tang et al., 2019). This involves achieving both, profit generation and heritage conservation from a social and cultural perspective, which is a constant balancing act (Stoffelen, 2018). Additionally, it is essential to consider the maximising of profits over time and the internalisation of the social cost of using cultural heritage in the evaluation of cultural heritage project funding (Tišma et al., 2021). Resolving the decline of heritage brands is not only a commercial issue but also a cultural sustainability issue, emphasising the need to consider both aspects in revitalising heritage enterprises (Li et al., 2020).

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the potential inequity gap in benefits distributed to rural communities whose cultural heritages are being appropriated and exploited by multiple commercial entities for tourism purposes and personal gain (Wanda George, 2010). Additionally, the pursuit of tourism development should not compromise the cultural values of the community and the intangible value of the heritage asset for commercial gain (Firth, 2011). Moreover, well-preserved cultural heritage has the potential to become a tourist attraction and contribute to economic development, highlighting the economic significance of cultural heritage preservation (Kudumovic, 2020).

In the context of intangible cultural heritage, it is crucial to address the application of intellectual property rights to prevent the conversion of cultural resources into commercial products for exchange through tourism (Seifi and Soltanabadi, 2020). Furthermore, the development of intangible cultural heritage derivatives requires the observation of their commercial performance, emphasising the need to balance commercial viability with heritage preservation (Deng and Fang, 2022). Additionally, the preservation of Nigerian cultural heritages is essential, despite the challenges, highlighting the importance of consciously preserving cultural heritages (Onyima, 2016).

Balancing commercial interests with cultural heritage requires a multifaceted approach that considers the economic, social, and cultural aspects of heritage preservation and commercialisation. It involves addressing the challenges of coordinating green development, maximising profits, while internalising social costs, and preventing the exploitation of cultural resources for commercial gain. Additionally, it necessitates the conscious preservation of cultural heritages and the consideration of their economic significance in contributing to tourism and economic development. City branding is a critical element connected to architectural identity. The architecture of a city is not just a matter of aesthetics or functionality; it encapsulates a city's spirit and becomes a part of its signature. Iconic buildings, innovative designs, and thoughtful urban planning can elevate a city's status on the world stage, attracting tourists and investors alike. By leveraging unique architectural elements, a city can differentiate itself, crafting an image that resonates with both residents and visitors.

Placemaking and community engagement are two interlinked concepts that emphasise the social aspect of urban design. Placemaking is about more than just creating spaces; it is about fostering environments where communities can thrive. It involves designing public spaces that are not only aesthetically pleasing but also functional, inclusive and rich in meaning. Enhancing community engagement through these spaces is essential, as it ensures

that the needs and wishes of residents are not only heard but actively incorporated into the urban fabric, see Fig. 2 below.
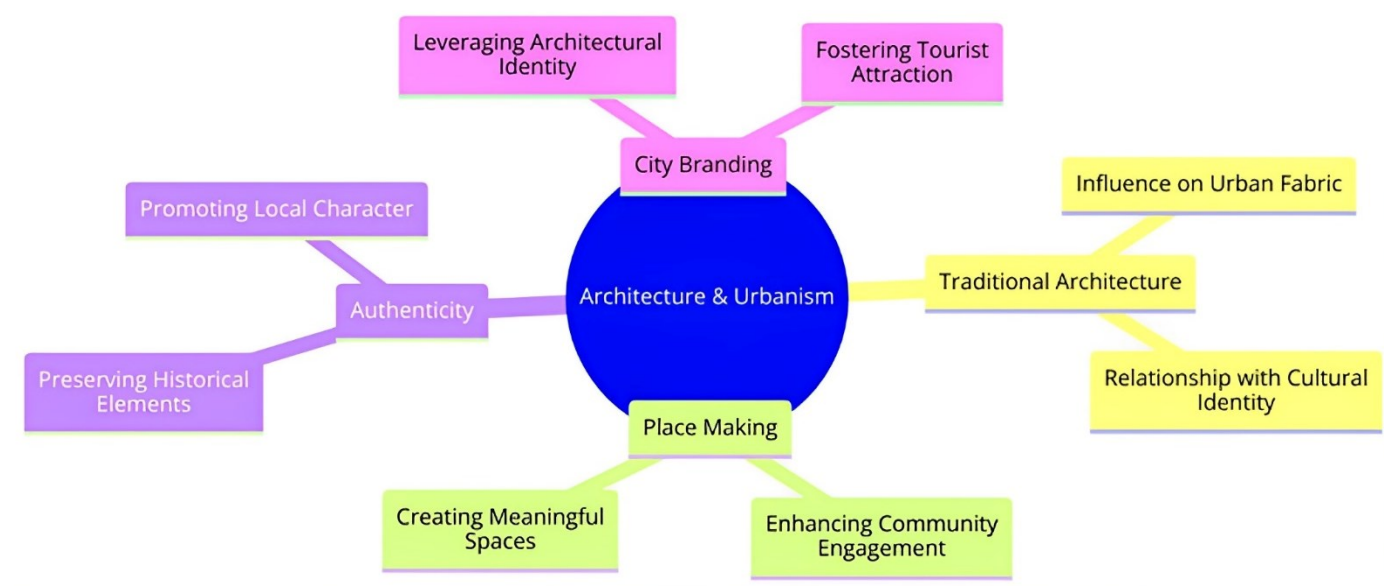

Fig. 2. Diagram connecting City Branding, Authenticity and Place Making. (Source: Authors, 2024)

The diagram in Fig. 2 above illustrates that the essence of city branding stems from a synthesis of architectural innovation, community-centric placemaking and a commitment to authenticity. These elements work together to create an urban environment that is not only physically navigable but also culturally resonant and emotionally engaging. Through this intricate interplay, architecture and urbanism are not merely about the spaces we inhabit but about the narratives and experience they engender. The map also highlights authenticity as a cornerstone of urban planning, connected to the promotion of local character and the preservation of historical elements. In the race to modernise, cities face the challenge of maintaining their unique historical and cultural identities. Authentic urban design respects and incorporates historical elements, celebrates local character, and avoids homogenisation. By doing so, it not only preserves the city's legacy for future generations but also strengthens the connection between the city's past and its present-day identity.

Critical analysis of each initiative's impact on city branding

Revitalisation of Historic Districts: The renovation and preservation of historic buildings in districts like Kampung Batik Laweyan have not only enhanced the visual and cultural landscape of the city but also significantly contributed to its brand "The Spirit of Java." By maintaining and celebrating traditional architectural styles, these initiatives create a unique narrative that differentiates Solo from other cities. This strategic move aligns with the research question of how traditional architecture can be leveraged in modern urban development to bolster city branding.

Cultural Festivals and Events: Events such as the Solo Batik Carnival and Sekaten Festival play a crucial role in reinforcing the city's cultural identity. These festivals not only draw large crowds but also receive extensive media coverage, thereby, amplifying Solo's brand on the national and international scale. The critical analysis of these events shows that they are effective tools for city branding as they provide tangible experience that embodies the city's cultural heritage.

Infrastructure Improvements: Enhancements to public amenities, such as parks, sidewalks and transportation hubs, support the overall aesthetic and functional appeal of the city. While these improvements are modern in nature, their design often incorporates elements of traditional Javanese architecture, creating a cohesive urban environment that respects the past while embracing the future. This approach addresses the research question of how to balance modernisation with the preservation of cultural heritage.

Community Engagement: The involvement of local communities in these initiatives is crucial for their success. Interviews with residents and business owners in revitalised districts reveal a strong sense of pride and ownership over the preservation efforts. This community engagement not only ensures the sustainability of the initiatives but also enhances the city's brand as a place that values and supports its cultural heritage. This finding aligns with the research question on the role of community engagement in placemaking and city branding.

CASE STUDY

The city of Surakarta, commonly known as Solo, has achieved significant success in its city branding efforts through several key initiatives:

Establishing a Strong Identity and Image: The Surakarta city government has effectively established the brand "Solo: The Spirit of Java," which resonates strongly as the city's identity. This branding capitalises on the rich Javanese culture that is inherent in Solo, presenting it not just as a mere geographic location, but as the embodiment of Javanese spirit and traditions.

Revitalising the Old Town Area: This region has been transformed into a cultural and culinary tourism icon for Solo. Historic buildings, such as the Keraton Surakarta and Puro Mangkunegaran, have been cleaned and preserved. This initiative not only honours the architectural and historical heritage of the city but also enhances its aesthetic and touristic appeal.

Developing Cultural Events and Festivals: Events like the Solo Batik Festival and Sekaten serve as major attractions for both domestic and international tourists. These events bolster Solo's image as a hub of culture, drawing visitors with the allure of authentic cultural experiences.

Organising and Preserving the Laweyan and Kauman Batik Village: This area has been developed into a bustling centre for hand-drawn batik and batik tourism. By empowering the batik industry and enterprises, Surakarta has reinforced its status as a city synonymous with high-quality batik, see Fig. 3 below.

Fig. 3. Organising and Preserving the Laweyan and Kauman Batik Village in Solo (Surakarta), located in Central Java, Indonesia. (Photo: Authors, 2024)

Improving Infrastructure and Public Amenities: Enhancements have been made to city parks, sidewalks, bus stops and more. These improvements contribute to the city's comfort and aesthetic, making it more inviting to tourists and residents alike.

Fostering Collaboration and Coordination: Successful cooperation between the government, communities, creative industry players, tourism operators and the public has been pivotal. This collaborative ecosystem is essential for building and sustaining a cohesive city branding strategy.

These are the cornerstones of Surakarta's city branding success. A strong and consistent branding has elevated the city's image and reputation, positioning it as a distinguished centre of culture and tourism.

MATERIALS, DATA, AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the interplay between placemaking, the authenticity of traditional architecture and city branding. By analysing case studies and conducting expert interviews, this research aims to uncover the strategies, challenges, and impacts of integrating authentic traditional architecture into placemaking practices for enhanced city branding. Qualitative research methodologies, as elucidated by scholars like McCaslin and Scott (2003), Camic et al. (2003), Kemparaj and Chavan (2013), and further elaborated by Nicholls (2017), delve into the nuanced exploration of social phenomena, often necessitating extensive field engagement (Nicholls, 2017). These approaches, celebrated for their depth, are instrumental in public health domains, offering nuanced insights and enriching quantitative findings with contextual depth (Namey and Trotter, 2015). The rigour and richness of qualitative inquiry, from ideation to interpretation, are scrutinised by Stiles (2003), ensuring a reflective evaluation of the research's intellectual journey (Stiles, 2003).

Complementing this, case study research, endorsed by Zainal (2007) and Zainal (2007) as a cornerstone in social science for its detailed examination of social behaviours, embodies a comprehensive method for dissecting intricate issues (Zaidal, 2007). This methodology, as Soy (2015) asserts, is particularly adept in educational, sociological and community-centric studies, offering a panoramic, yet, detailed view of the complex phenomena (Soy, 2015). The integrity and methodological diligence in employing case studies for theoretical exploration are emphasised by Westgren and Zerin (1998), highlighting the method's capacity for both theory-building and empirical scrutiny (Westgren and Zering, 1998). Moreover, the case study's potency in capturing human experiences is noted by May (1992), underlining its empathetic and exploratory value (May, 1992). Nevertheless, Espín et al. (2019) calls for more rigorous guides and studies to refine its application, ensuring its efficacy and reliability in scholarly research. By merging these insights, the discourse underscores the symbiotic relationship between qualitative methodologies and case study research in social sciences, advocating for a meticulous, contextually enriched exploration of social constructs and behaviours.

Case study selection

The selection of Surakarta as the primary case study is justified by several criteria. Surakarta, with its deep cultural roots and proactive city branding efforts, provides a rich context for examining the integration of traditional architecture in placemaking. The city's unique approach to preserving Javanese architectural motifs while fostering modern urban development offers valuable lessons in balancing heritage and innovation. Case studies were chosen based on their exemplary use of traditional architecture in placemaking initiatives contributing to city branding. Factors included the historical significance of the architecture, the involvement of the community in placemaking processes and the observable impact on city branding.

The reason for choosing the Solo City as the case study lies in the importance of building city branding, which is recommended for local governments to do by aligning with the region's potential. City branding serves not only as the identity but also as one of alternative sources of income for a region. However, not all regions in Indonesia have city branding. The Solo City itself is one of the cities that already have their city branding, carrying the slogan "Solo: the Spirit of Java" and the mascot Rajamala. The branding formed by the Solo City Government will be a strategic aspect of the Solo City in attracting tourists, entrepreneurs, and investors. The slogan "Solo: the Spirit of Java" conveys that Solo embodies the essence of Java. With its various riches, including tourism, culture, tradition, historical sites, culinary delights and the hospitality of its residents, Solo is ready to develop the city to be more creative and innovative.

Data collection

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to delve into the intricate relationship between placemaking, the authenticity of traditional architecture and city branding. The data collection process involves three primary methods: document analysis, semi-structured interviews and observational studies.

Document Analysis: Review of urban planning documents, architectural records and branding strategy materials from each case study location to understand the planning context and goals.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducting interviews with urban planners, architects, and city branding experts involved in the selected case studies to gain insights into the decision-making processes, challenges faced and outcomes achieved.

Observational Studies: Virtual or in-person visits to selected sites (if possible) to observe the integration of traditional architecture within urban spaces and its influence on placemaking and city branding.

Data analysis

This method involves a comprehensive review of urban planning documents, architectural records and branding strategy materials from Surakarta. These documents provide contextual background and detailed information on the planning and implementation of placemaking initiatives that integrate traditional architecture.

Thematic Analysis: Employing thematic analysis to identify common themes, strategies, and outcomes across the case studies, as well as divergences that may offer unique insights.

Comparative Analysis: Comparing and contrasting approaches and outcomes of the case studies to understand the factors contributing to successful integration of traditional architecture in placemaking and city branding.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Interviews are conducted with stakeholders, including urban planners, architects and city branding experts directly involved in the case study. These interviews aim to gather in-depth insights into the decision-making processes, challenges encountered and the outcomes of the initiatives undertaken in Surakarta.

Observational Studies: Both virtual and in-person visits to key sites in Surakarta are conducted to observe the real-time integration of traditional architectural elements within urban spaces. These observations help to understand the practical impacts of placemaking initiatives on city branding and community engagement.

The data analysis process involves thematic analysis and comparative analysis. Thematic Analysis is used to identify recurring themes, strategies and outcomes across the collected data. Comparative Analysis is employed to compare the approaches and results from Surakarta with other similar case studies, highlighting unique insights and best practices. The selection of interviewees is based on their expertise and involvement in the city's urban planning and branding initiatives. Urban planners and architects provide technical and strategic perspectives, while city branding experts offer insights into the branding process and its impact. This diverse group ensures a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter from multiple angles.

Reliability and validity of the methodology

The reliability and validity of this research methodology are ensured through several measures:

Reliability: Consistency in data collection and analysis is maintained by using standardised procedures for document analysis, interview protocols and observational studies. Triangulation of data sources—cross-verifying information from documents, interviews and observations—enhances the reliability of the findings.

Validity: The validity of the methodology is strengthened by selecting a case study that exemplifies the research focus, ensuring that the findings are directly relevant to the research questions. The use of semi-structured interviews allows for in-depth exploration of stakeholder perspectives, adding depth and context to the data. Observational studies provide empirical evidence to support claims made in interviews and documents.

Limitations: Despite these strengths, the methodology has certain limitations. The reliance on qualitative data may introduce subjectivity, and the specific focus on Surakarta may limit the generalisability of the findings to other contexts. Additionally, practical constraints such as access to certain documents or stakeholders and the feasibility of site visits may impact the comprehensiveness of the data collection. Future research could address these limitations by incorporating quantitative methods, expanding the scope to include multiple case studies and ensuring broader access to data sources.

To avoid broad generalisations, the analysis focuses on specific examples and their measurable impacts. For instance, the revitalisation of Kampung Batik Laweyan is not just an abstract concept but a concrete initiative with documented outcomes such as increased tourism and local business growth. Similarly, the success of cultural events is backed by attendance figures and participant feedback, providing clear evidence of their impact on city branding.

Each finding is directly linked to the research questions posed at the beginning of the study:

1. How can traditional architecture be integrated into modern urban development to enhance city branding?

2. What specific initiatives can effectively balance modernisation with the preservation of cultural heritage?

3. How does community engagement contribute to the success of placemaking and city branding efforts?

By addressing these questions with a detailed, evidence-based analysis, the research offers valuable insights and practical recommendations for urban planners and policymakers. This approach ensures that the findings are relevant, actionable and

firmly grounded in empirical data, thereby, enhancing the overall robustness and credibility of the study.

Results

The success of Surakarta (Solo) in city branding offers several insightful lessons for urban development and cultural promotion. Central to Solo's strategy is the branding of the city as "The Spirit of Java." This phrase encapsulates Solo's deeply rooted identity as a hub of Javanese culture. A strong brand draws from the unique characteristics and the inherent spirit of the city, transcending beyond mere slogans. This inherent identity is what lends Solo's branding its authenticity and makes it a hard act to follow for other cities. Consistency in the execution of this branding is vital. Every developmental and promotional activity undertaken by the city is in harmony with reinforcing Solo's image as a cultural epicentre. This includes careful planning of tourist areas, cultural events and the nurturing of small to medium-sized enterprises in batik and the culinary arts. Without this steadfast consistency, the branding foundation would fail to solidify.

The research findings are grounded in empirical evidence from Surakarta's urban planning documents, expert interviews, and observational studies. The revitalisation of Kampung Batik Laweyan serves as a prime example, where traditional Javanese architecture has been preserved and integrated into modern urban spaces. This initiative has transformed the area into a cultural and economic hub, attracting tourists and fostering local businesses. Data from visitor surveys and economic reports indicate a significant increase in tourist footfall and local economic activity post-revitalisation, thereby supporting the claim that preserving traditional architecture can enhance city branding.

Fig. 4. Top: Palace Kraton Kasunanan; below: Palace Pura Mangkunegaran; both located in Solo (Surakarta), located in Central Java, Indonesia. (Photo: Authors, 2024)

Multi-stakeholder collaboration has proven to be a cornerstone of Solo's branding success. A harmonious partnership among the city government, related agencies, tourism and cultural communities, industry players, academics, and the public cultivate a robust and sustainable city branding ecosystem. Such collaborative efforts are exemplified by the revitalisation of historical landmarks like the Keraton Kasunanan and Pura Mangkunegaran, which not only preserve the cultural heritage but also amplify the city's cultural identity, see Fig. 4 on the left.

Looking towards the future is a defining aspect of Solo's city branding. Adapting to contemporary trends to stay relevant is crucial. The government of Surakarta is continually innovating and evolving its branding to position Solo as a culturally rich city with a forward-looking orientation. This could involve the development of digital content and creative industries, ensuring that Solo's cultural essence thrives in a modern context. These valuable lessons from Surakarta's approach to city branding could serve as a source of inspiration for other Indonesian cities aiming to establish a compelling and resilient place branding.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has illuminated the intricate interplay between placemaking and the authenticity of traditional architecture in city branding, focusing on Surakarta City (also known as Solo) in Indonesia. The case of Surakarta is particularly instructive, given its rich cultural tapestry marked by significant heritage sites such as the Kasunanan and Mangkunegaran palaces and the traditional villages of Kampung Kauman and Kampung Laweyan. These landmarks epitomise the city's dedication to preserving its Javanese architectural heritage, effectively integrating these elements into modern urban development to foster a unique city identity.

The preservation and incorporation of these historical sites in Surakarta's urban landscape underscore the potential of architectural authenticity as a cornerstone in placemaking. These heritage sites not only serve as physical embodiments of the city's history and culture but also as pivotal anchors for community engagement and identity formation. They enhance Surakarta's brand identity by offering an authentic narrative that resonates with both residents and visitors, thereby promoting cultural sustainability and economic growth. However, this research also brings to light the challenges in harmonising the preservation of historical sites with the dynamics of urban development. Future research should delve into strategies for sustaining these heritage sites amidst urbanisation pressures, ensuring that they continue to enrich the city's brand and serve as vibrant centres of community life.

The integration of placemaking with the authenticity of traditional architecture, as exemplified in Surakarta's stewardship of its palaces and traditional villages, emerges as a vital strategy in the city branding. This approach not only honours and leverages the city's heritage but also paves the way for creating distinctive, liveable and sustainable urban spaces. As urban landscapes evolve globally, the insights from Surakarta offer valuable lessons in balancing heritage preservation with contemporary urban needs.

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