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## IDENTIFICATION OF GENIUS LOCI IN HISTORICAL DISTRICT WITH THE CASE STUDY OF TWO ALLEYS IN PURBAYAN, KOTAGEDE, YOGYAKARTA

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### ABSTRACT

Exploring the concept of "genius loci," which refers to the spirit or essence of a place shaped by human interactions and the surrounding environment, this study focuses on the historical district of Kotagede in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. It examines how the unique architectural and cultural characteristics of two alleys, Gang Rukunan RW 07 Purbayan and Gang Rukunan RW 09 Purbayan, contribute to their distinct identities. Gang Rukunan RW 09, also known as Between Two Gates, is particularly renowned for its well-preserved traditional Javanese architecture and communal spaces. Using a phenomenological qualitative research method, including observations and interviews, the research identifies three key aspects of genius loci: image, space, and character. The findings reveal that while Gang Rukunan RW 09 is celebrated for its traditional architecture, Gang Rukunan RW 07, despite undergoing modern transformations, retains significant elements of its cultural identity through active social interactions among residents. The study highlights the challenges posed by modernization, which often threatens the preservation of traditional values and architectural integrity. Ultimately, the paper underscores the importance of understanding and maintaining the genius loci of historical areas to foster community identity and cultural heritage amid the pressures of urban development.

**KEYWORDS:** between two gates, genius loci, Kotagede, rukunan alleys rw 07, rukunan alleys rw 09, traditional Javanese architecture, Yogyakarta

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*Studi ini mengeksplorasi konsep genius loci, yang merujuk pada roh atau esensi suatu tempat yang dibentuk oleh interaksi manusia dengan lingkungannya. Penelitian difokuskan pada kawasan bersejarah Kotagede di Yogyakarta, Indonesia, dengan menelaah bagaimana karakteristik arsitektural dan kultural yang khas dari dua gang yaitu Gang Rukunan RW 07 Purbayan dan Gang Rukunan RW 09 Purbayan yang membentuk identitasnya masing-masing. Gang Rukunan RW 09, yang juga dikenal dengan sebutan Between Two Gates, terkenal karena kelestarian arsitektur tradisional Jawa dan ruang komunalnya. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif fenomenologis melalui observasi dan wawancara, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi tiga aspek utama genius loci: citra, ruang, dan karakter. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Gang Rukunan RW 09 menonjol dengan arsitektur tradisionalnya, Gang Rukunan RW 07 yang mengalami transformasi modern tetap mempertahankan elemen penting identitas budaya melalui interaksi sosial warganya. Studi ini juga menyoroti tantangan modernisasi yang kerap mengancam kelestarian nilai tradisi dan integritas arsitektur. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya memahami dan menjaga genius loci kawasan bersejarah untuk memperkuat identitas komunitas dan warisan budaya di tengah tekanan perkembangan kota.*

**KATA KUNCI:** between two gates, genius loci, gang rukunan rw 07, gang rukunan rw 09, Kotagede, arsitektur tradisional jawa, Yogyakarta

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### INTRODUCTION

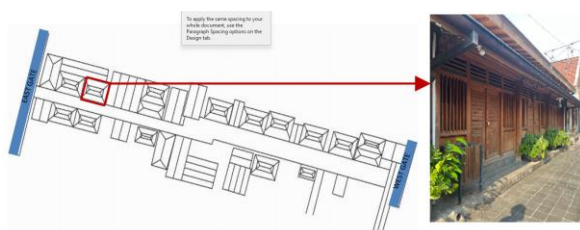
In recent decades, historic urban areas across the globe have faced the twin pressures of modernization and urban growth. While these developments often generate new opportunities, they also pose serious threats to the preservation of cultural identity and place-specific heritage (Veldpaus, 2023). Indonesian

historic cities such as Yogyakarta are no exception. Kotagede, once the capital of the Mataram Kingdom and a locus of Javanese cultural identity, has undergone significant urban transformation. Yet, despite the encroachment of modernization, certain neighborhoods in Kotagede continue to embody the essence of traditional settlement patterns and cultural

memory. Among these are the alleys of Gang Rukunan RW 07 and RW 09, which provide rare examples of how urban communities preserve heritage values within a changing urban fabric.

This study draws upon the concept of *genius loci*, or the “spirit of place,” as its theoretical foundation. Modern scholarship emphasizes that *genius loci* emerges from the dynamic interplay of tangible built environments and intangible communal practices. For instance, (Stepanchuk et al., 2020) advance this perspective, arguing that a place’s atmosphere emerges from the interplay between its physical form and collective memory, a view that aligns with the broader scholarly discourse. Additionally, heritage frameworks like the HUL (Ginzarly et al., 2019) guide (Veldpaus, 2023) underscore how sustaining heritage requires acknowledging both material and immaterial dimensions. This integrative understanding of *genius loci* is particularly relevant to analyzing how the Kotagede community maintains cultural identity amid modernization.

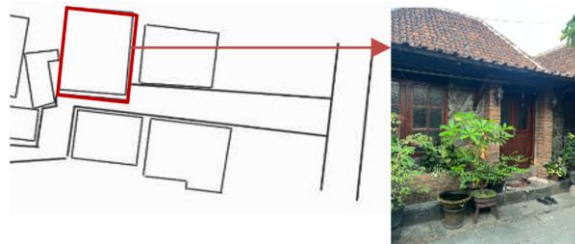
Within Kotagede, academic and heritage interest has largely concentrated on Gang Rukunan RW 09, or Between Two Gates (BTG), renowned for its preserved joglo architecture, iconic gate alignments, and communal courtyards. Situated in Purbayan Village, the term BTG was introduced in 1986 by a research team from Gadjah Mada University (UGM) to describe the two facing gates that frame rows of traditional Javanese houses and nurture a close-knit community atmosphere. These architectural and spatial elements have reinforced social harmony and cultural identity, making RW 09 a focal point of study and heritage promotion. By contrast, Gang Rukunan RW 07 has received less scholarly attention, even though its more modernized and altered built environment continues to accommodate communal practices and spatial rhythms reflective of traditional values. Taken together, RW 07 and RW 09 represent key destinations in Kotagede, where residential alleys continue to embody enduring traditions that safeguard moral and communal values.



**Figure 1.** Layout of Gang Rukunan RW 09  
(Source: Information Board, Redrawn by Author, 2024)

Each building reflects the harmony of its community. This is evident in the use of a shared *pendopo* as a venue for religious gatherings and collective activities. The continuity of architectural

form allows these spaces to preserve their original atmosphere, maintaining a sense of cultural continuity despite the pressures of modernization. By sustaining this architectural tradition, Gang Rukunan RW 07 and RW 09 not only safeguard the visual and spatial qualities of Kotagede but also its cultural memory and identity.



**Figure 2.** Layout of Gang Rukunan RW 07  
(Source: Google Map, Redrawn by Author, 2024)

The concept of *genius loci* is used in this study because it offers a comprehensive way to interpret the uniqueness of place. Originating from ancient Rome, the term refers to the spirit or essence of a place shaped by the interaction between people and their environment. (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) describes *genius loci* as comprising three interrelated aspects: image, space, and character. Image informs recognition and memory through visual and sensory qualities; space structures social interaction through physical arrangements; and character integrates these with cultural narratives and values, generating emotional resonance and belonging. Collectively, these aspects highlight how physical form and social life intertwine to shape the spirit of place. In this vein, (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) emphasizes that *genius loci* encompasses both material and immaterial elements influencing perception and emotional connection, while (Stepanchuk et al., 2020) note that the 2008 ICECOS Quebec declaration defines it as the unity of tangible and intangible components of the urban environment that constitute a place’s uniqueness. Ultimately, *genius loci* signifies the atmosphere of a place, an identity that cannot be replicated elsewhere emerging from the dynamic relationship between physical environment and the community inhabiting it.

1. How do the physical and social elements of the Gang Rukunan RW 07 and Gang Rukunan RW 09 shape *genius loci*?
2. How do modern changes affect each Gang Rukunan RW 07 and Gang Rukunan RW 09 in terms of *genius loci*?

However, physical features alone cannot fully account for the preservation or strengthening of a place’s *genius loci*. While the meaning of *genius loci* is still evident in Gang Rukunan RW 09, most existing studies have focused exclusively on this site. There is limited research examining Gang Rukunan RW 07 and

how its *genius loci* compares with that of Gang Rukunan RW 09.

This uneven focus reveals a research gap. Existing studies frequently showcase preservation efforts centered on RW 09 and lean toward single-case, architecture-focused narratives (Putri & Pawestri, 2019). However, such an approach risks idealizing intact environments while overlooking more adaptive heritage expressions in neighboring alleys.

This study addresses this gap via a comparative analysis of Gang Rukunan RW 07 and RW 09 through the lens of *genius loci*. It examines how physical attributes (i.e., architectural imagery and spatial layout) and social dynamics (i.e., shared rituals and communal spaces) shape the spirit of place in each alley and how modernization has differentially impacted them. Using the *genius loci* framework, this study explores how the physical and social environment contributes to a sense of community identity in Kotagede while advocating for heritage preservation in the context of modernization.

Preserving the cultural heritage of Gang Rukunan RW 09 and RW 07 is essential, as these alleys embody significant historical and cultural values that have been integral to the community's identity. The traditional architecture, layout, and practices in these areas are living testaments to their rich heritage. However, modernization and changing lifestyles pose serious threats to these cultural assets, putting them at risk of being lost forever.

It is crucial to act urgently to protect and sustain these historical values. This involves preserving the unique physical elements of the alleys, promoting traditional practices, and fostering community participation in heritage conservation efforts. By doing so, Gang Rukunan RW 09 and RW 07 can serve as exemplary models for other regions, showcasing how cultural heritage can be preserved and integrated into modern life while maintaining its authenticity and relevance.

The concept of *genius loci* can be understood through three key aspects identified by Norberg-Schulz: image, space, and character. The image of a place encompasses its visual and sensory qualities, shaping how it is perceived and remembered. Space refers to the physical organization and arrangement of elements that influence social interactions and the experience of the environment. Character is defined by cultural and historical narratives, contributing to collective identity and the emotional connection of inhabitants.

In Kotagede, the historical and cultural heart of Yogyakarta, the concept of *genius loci* is particularly relevant, as its rich heritage continues to shape local identity. Once a hub of political, economic, and socio-cultural activity, Kotagede shares similarities with other Javanese cities, reflecting the Javanese-Islamic

cosmological concept of harmony between the microcosm (the built environment) and the macrocosm (the universe). Architecture in Kotagede functions not only as a physical dwelling but also as a social medium fostering community interaction. Traditional elements such as the joglo and pendapa embody Javanese values, reinforcing balance between social and spiritual life and strengthening the area's unique identity.

### Image

The image of a place is a crucial aspect of *genius loci*, shaping both perception and emotional connection. Architectural styles, landscapes, and urban design strongly influence how a location is recognized and remembered. Wiratama et al. (2024) demonstrate this in Kotagede, where the contrasting architectural styles of Mondorakan and Kemasari Streets are Indische and Jengki designs on Mondorakan and lower-middle-class Javanese houses on Kemasari, together form a cohesive visual identity that reinforces Kotagede's reputation as a silver industry center and reflects its craftsmanship.

In Javanese villages, spatial planning and architecture are deeply tied to cultural values. Liana & Albertus, (2023) emphasize that architecture extends beyond aesthetics and function to mediate the relationship between humans and their environment, shaping everyday experiences. In this sense, Gang Rukunan RW 07 and RW 09 demonstrate how cultural values are embedded in spatial design, sustaining daily life.

The *kampung* context further strengthens this dimension. As Sullivan (1992) notes, *kampung* communities emphasize rukun (harmony), with strong expectations of neighborliness to maintain social cohesion. Alleys such as RW 07 and RW 09 embody these principles: while serving as circulation routes, they also facilitate social interaction, sustain cultural practices, and reflect local identity. Nur (2020a) similarly argues that alleyways represent not only mobility but also the socio-cultural background and progress of urban communities.

### Space

The spatial aspect of *genius loci* concerns the physical layout and organization of elements within a place, including the arrangement of buildings, streets, and communal areas, and how these elements shape interactions. Spatial configurations are at the heart of human experience, serving as architectural containers shaped by the social activities that occur within them. In Kauman, Yogyakarta, for example, narrow lanes encourage intimate encounters and strengthen neighborhood connections, in contrast to the main thoroughfares that support broader urban participation. Many residents serve as *abdi dalem*

mengulon (court servants), and the area's Muhammadiyah Islamic identity is reinforced by its proximity to the Grand Mosque (Saputra et al., 2024). Similarly, Regina & Ekomadyo (2022) show how the spatial organization of Kemiren Village in Banyumas reflects cultural practices and communal life. Micro-spaces such as the bale (terrace) and pawon (kitchen) support daily traditions, while the macro-space of Kemiren Street encourages interaction among residents. The openness of these spaces is achieved with minimal partitions and shared areas for play and conversation contrasting with urban environments that often emphasize exclusivity through fences. This openness strengthens the village's social cohesion, sense of belonging, and cultural identity, all of which contribute to its genius loci.

### Characters

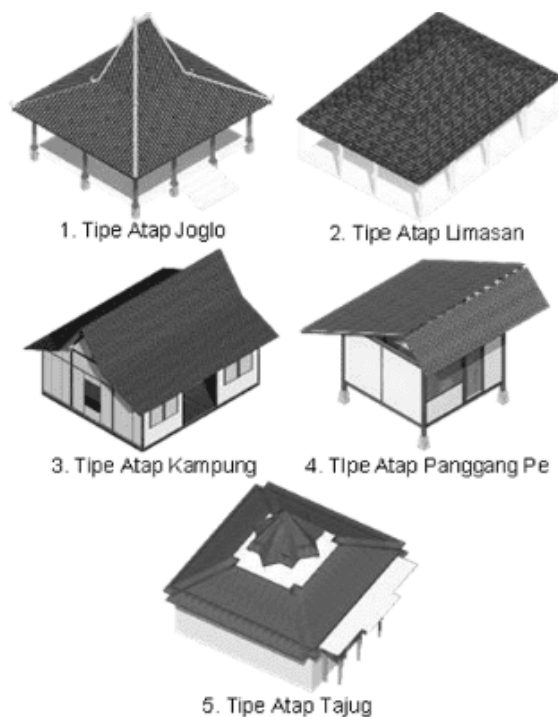
The character aspect of genius loci reflects the atmosphere created by both natural and man-made elements in a place. It encompasses sensory experiences such as sounds, smells, and emotional responses tied to the environment. Norberg-Schulz (1980) argues that character emerges through the interaction between physical attributes and the surrounding natural context.

Regina & Ekomadyo (2022) emphasize the distinctive character of Kemiren Village, rooted in strong social ties and traditional ceremonies. Village streets function as communal spaces that foster interaction, respect for elders, and social cohesion. Animist beliefs further enrich the village's identity, embedding spiritual meaning into its shared spaces and practices. These elements collectively create a unique atmosphere that defines both character and community identity.

This perspective is also relevant to Gang Rukunan, where the character of place is shaped by community bonds and cultural heritage. Both Kemiren Village and Gang Rukunan illustrate how social ties, traditions, and communal spaces cultivate identity and belonging.

In the Javanese context, architectural typology further contributes to character formation. Traditional houses are classified by room partitions and roof forms, which signify social hierarchy: Joglo (noble class), Limasan (middle class), and Kampung or Panggang Pe (common people). Roof styles not only mark architectural identity but also reflect the homeowner's social and economic standing. However, challenges emerge when traditional architectural elements are applied in new developments. Many contemporary areas attempt to adopt traditional styles but often fail to preserve their deeper meanings and social contexts. Tarigan et al. (2022) emphasize the symbolic richness embedded in traditional Javanese house designs, which reflect vertical

(spiritual), internal (personal), and horizontal (social) relationships through spatial arrangements, activities, and architectural forms.



**Figure 3.** Typology of Javanese Vernacular House Roof  
(Source: Hamka and Winarni, 2022)

Over time, however, traditional architecture has frequently been reduced to its physical appearance, neglecting the symbolic values embedded within it. Modern modifications have altered not only the physical characteristics of traditional Javanese homes but also their symbolic significance, as seen in the introduction of non-domestic functions and shifts in residents' perspectives.

### METHODS

#### Data Collection Method

This study adopts a comparative qualitative design to analyze the genius loci of Gang Rukunan RW 07 and RW 09 in Kotagede. A qualitative approach is well suited to interpreting cultural meanings and lived experiences within historic neighborhoods (Creswell, 2012). The comparative case study design highlights similarities and differences between the two alleys, clarifying how modernization shapes heritage preservation in different contexts. Guided by the genius loci framework, focusing on image, space, and character. The research applies a grounded theory orientation to allow theoretical insights to emerge from the data.

Observations documented architectural features such as joglo roofs, bahu danyang beams, and tadah alas terraces (transitional roofed terraces that extend

from the main structure), along with spatial patterns like alley width, gates, and shared courtyards. These were recorded through sketches, field notes, and photographs. Interviews with two long-term residents which are Pak Joko (RW 09) and Pak Erwito (RW 07), provided insights into architectural preservation, community practices, and the challenges posed by modernization and tourism. Each interview lasted 60–90 minutes, was audio-recorded, and transcribed.

The scope of the research is limited to two alleys as representative microcosms of Kotagede's heritage environment. While the sample size is small, the depth of engagement captures both tangible and intangible dimensions, offering contextualized insights. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the study seeks to generate transferable lessons for heritage-sensitive urban studies by showing how unique identities and the spirit of place are sustained in everyday practice.

### Data Analysis Method

The data were analyzed to explore the genius loci of Gang Rukunan RW 07 and RW 09, aiming to reveal the distinct identities of each alley. A mixed-method approach combined observations, interviews, image comparisons, and resident accounts, enabling a holistic interpretation of both tangible and intangible characteristics while reducing subjectivity.

Analysis followed several steps. Interview transcripts and field notes were open-coded to identify recurring themes, which were grouped under the three parameters of genius loci: image (visual cues), space (spatial organization and interaction), and character (cultural narratives). Comparative analysis then highlighted differences, for instance, RW 09's stronger architectural preservation versus RW 07's adaptive modifications. To ensure validity, findings were triangulated across multiple data sources and cross-checked with participants. This process uncovered meaningful relationships between physical form, social practice, and cultural identity, clarifying how the spirit of place endures amid modernization.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examines the genius loci of Gang Rukunan RW 07 and RW 09 in Kotagede by focusing on three dimensions: image, space, and character. The comparison reveals that while both alleys embody aspects of Javanese tradition, they do so in different ways that highlight the varied expressions of cultural identity under modernization.

Field observations and interviews show that RW 09 retains many architectural elements associated with the Javanese style of the Mataram Kingdom era, including joglo structures and preserved gates. These features strongly reinforce the image of a historic

settlement, making the alley visually legible as a cultural heritage site. However, despite this physical continuity, interviews suggest that social interactions in RW 09 have declined, partly due to the influence of heritage tourism and preservation policies that prioritize architectural conservation over everyday practices. This echoes findings from other Indonesian heritage areas, such as Kauman in Yogyakarta and Lasem in Central Java, where architectural preservation sometimes leads to the "museumification" of neighborhoods, reducing the spontaneity of community life.

By contrast, RW 07 is less visually prominent and shows signs of architectural modification, which weakens its traditional image. Yet the alley remains vibrant in terms of daily use: residents gather on terraces, laundry is displayed openly, and small gardens are maintained, all of which sustain a lived atmosphere of intimacy and familiarity. This suggests that while RW 07 may lack monumental architectural forms, its space and character continue to reflect the essence of communal Javanese life. The persistence of social practices in RW 07 demonstrates that the spirit of place can be maintained even when physical heritage is altered, aligning with recent scholarship that emphasizes the integration of tangible and intangible heritage in sustaining urban identity.

This contrast illustrates how modernization reshapes genius loci in different ways. RW 09 embodies preservation of form but risks a loss of social vitality, whereas RW 07 shows adaptive change in architecture but resilience in community interaction. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for heritage management, as it suggests that protecting cultural identity requires more than conserving buildings, it also requires safeguarding everyday practices and social networks. Lessons from Kotagede, therefore resonate with broader debates on urban heritage in Southeast Asia, where communities must balance architectural conservation with the vitality of lived culture.

### Image in Gang Rukunan: The Physical Features and Visual Elements

Kotagede's historical position as the former capital of the Mataram Sultanate gives its urban fabric a unique cultural significance. Following the relocation of the capital to Kartasura, the former royal square evolved into Kampung Alun-Alun, with residential settlements structured around narrow alleys (Dinas Kebudayaan Kota Yogyakarta, 2021). Within this context, Gang Rukunan RW 07 and RW 09 stand out because of their distinct gateways and spatial organization, which serve not only as physical thresholds but also as cultural markers of identity.

The architectural image of RW 09 is strongly defined by its preserved gates and traditional layout.

The eastern gate, inscribed with the year 1840, embodies both historical significance and an enduring symbol of place identity. The presence of dual gates further reinforces RW 09's visibility as a cultural landmark, in contrast to RW 07, which features only a single, modest western entrance. While RW 07 reflects the pragmatic adaptations of residents who did not initially intend for their *pringgitan* to serve as a formal alley, RW 09 presents a carefully preserved image of heritage. This comparison demonstrates that gateways in both alleys serve not only as points of access but also as visual and symbolic markers of community values.



**Figure 4.** Gate of Gang Rukunan RW 07 is more ordinary than gate in Gang Rukunan RW 09  
(Source: Author Documentation, 2024)



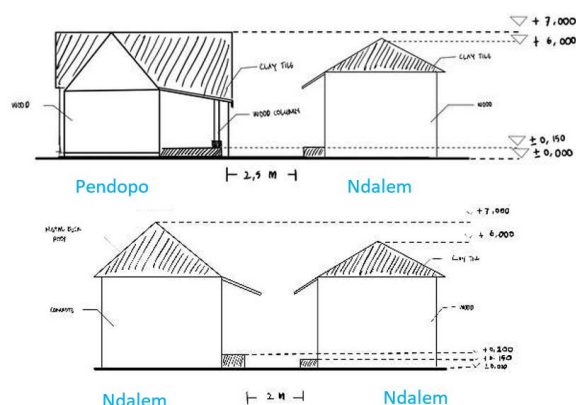
**Figure 5.** Traditional housing layout with the *ndalem* facing the *pendopo*. The *pendopo* in Gang Rukunan RW 09 is used as a shared space.

(Source: Author's Documentation, 2024)

In RW 09, the architectural image is reinforced by communal practices linked to built forms. Shared *pendopo* spaces, *pringgitan* used as collective pathways, and interconnected back doors exemplify the fusion of spatial form and social interaction. These design choices materialize the Javanese principle of *rukun* (harmony), embedding cultural meaning in physical form. However, functional adaptations have occurred: some *pendopo* have been converted into

workshops, housing units, or even a café. While these changes alter the use-value of the structures, the persistence of their architectural form maintains continuity in the visual identity of the alley.

RW 07 presents a different trajectory. While its residential layout originally adhered to Javanese principles which is *Ndalem* facing the *pendopo*, economic pressures have reshaped its physical image. Many *pendopo* have been sold or repurposed, resulting in the gradual erosion of the architectural landscape. As Erwito Wibowo (EW), a long-term resident, observed: "Many *pendopo* structures have disappeared, often sold for economic reasons." This highlights how modernization and livelihood needs contribute to the diminishing visibility of traditional forms. Nevertheless, everyday life practices, such as neighborly interactions on terraces and shared domestic routines, sustain a sense of continuity and atmosphere even as the physical image shifts.



**Figure 6.** Section of houses in Gang Rukunan RW 09 and houses in Gang Rukunan RW 07.  
(Source: Sketched by Author, 2024)



**Figure 7.** The change in function of the *pendopo* in RW 09 to a café and in RW 07 to a house.  
(Source: Author's Documentation, 2024)

From the perspective of *genius loci*, RW 09 demonstrates how preserved architectural features strengthen the image dimension of place, but risks transforming heritage into a static display when community practices decline. RW 07, by contrast,

shows how social life can sustain the spirit of place despite architectural loss. This finding resonates with comparative cases such as Kauman in Yogyakarta and Lasem in Central Java, where architectural conservation is uneven, yet the atmosphere of everyday life continues to embody cultural values. These comparisons suggest that heritage management should not privilege physical preservation alone; instead, it should recognize how community adaptation and social use also produce a meaningful urban image.

### Space in Gang Rukunan: Spatial Dynamics and Community Interaction



**Figure 8.** The informal atmosphere in RW 09 feels quiet, while RW 07 still appears lively, with residents making use of the space for activities.

(Source: Author's Documentation, 2024)

The spatial dimension of *genius loci* emphasizes how physical organization influences human experience and social life (Alifa et al., 2022rd) In Kotagede, the comparison between RW 07 and RW 09 reveals how modernization and tourism reshape these spatial dynamics in contrasting ways.

In RW 09, spaces once central to communal life such as *pendopo* and *tadah alas* have been repurposed or diminished. Similarly, while *tadah alas* structures still exist, they are now used mostly for symbolic or performative purposes during cultural events or for tourists, rather than as active hubs of daily interaction. This reflects a broader trend observed in other Indonesian heritage areas, such as Kauman in Yogyakarta or Kesawan in Medan, where the commercialization of space for heritage tourism reduces opportunities for residents' spontaneous interaction and alters the lived character of place. In RW 09, modernization and tourism have preserved spatial form but weakened its social vitality.

In contrast, RW 07 continues to sustain strong traditions of everyday interaction. Here, *tadah alas* remains an actively used element of social life, functioning as a semi-open platform where residents gather to rest, chat, or share news. Its placement in shaded areas and along pathways makes it a natural

meeting point, reinforcing its role as a living part of the neighborhood's social fabric. The refusal of residents to open RW 07 to tourism further highlights their desire to protect communal privacy and intimacy. As one resident (EW) stated: "Social activities in Gang Rukunan RW 07 are still present, but residents resist turning the alley into a tourist destination, prioritizing their privacy and comfort." This stance underlines how space is not only a physical arrangement but also a collective negotiation of values, where community well-being is prioritized over economic gain.



**Figure 9.** Social activities in RW 09 become more for tourism, while in RW 07, the community enjoys engaging in activities and chatting with neighbors in *tadah alas* (Source: Sketched by Author, 2024)

From a theoretical perspective, the comparison demonstrates that the space aspect of *genius loci* can be preserved either through the continuity of social practices (RW 07) or through symbolic representations of tradition (RW 09). However, the latter risks becoming "staged authenticity," where spaces lose their everyday function and serve primarily as heritage displays. This resonates with critiques in heritage studies that warn against the commodification of cultural spaces under tourism pressure, which may erode the lived meaning of place even when architectural forms are maintained.

The divergent trajectories of RW 07 and RW 09 thus illustrate two models of spatial adaptation: one oriented toward external audiences (tourists, heritage observers) and the other toward internal cohesion (residents, community life). For heritage management, this suggests that protecting the spirit of place requires more than conserving spatial layouts, it must also safeguard the social interactions that animate those spaces.

### Characters in Gang Rukunan: The Cultural Essence and Building Materials

Characters refer to the defining qualities or features of a place that contribute to its identity and spirit. According to Norberg-Schulz (1980) character can be understood through the interplay of physical

attributes and the natural environment surrounding a space. This character is constructed through the interplay of architectural style, building materials, cultural practices, and collective memory, which together create a sense of continuity between past and present.



**Figure 10.** Bahu Danyang In RW 09 still maintain its engraving while In RW 07 it become more simple (Source: Author’s Documentation, 2024)



**Figure 11.** The materials used in RW 09 are still traditional, such as wood and clay, while in RW 07, they have been modernized to concrete and steel. (Source: Author’s Documentation, 2024)

In RW 09, the character of Kotagede remains strongly tied to Javanese tradition. Residents actively preserve features such as joglo-style roofs, pringgitan, and a symbolic details like the bahu danyang. Although modern interpretations sometimes simplify these carvings, their persistence highlights the community’s commitment to retaining visual and symbolic continuity. Traditional materials such as wood also remain in use, reinforcing a direct link to cultural roots. This architectural character supports a strong sense of place identity, while also making RW 09 a visible showcase for cultural tourism. The risk here lies in heritage becoming more performative than lived, echoing critiques of “heritage staging” in places like Kauman in Yogyakarta and Lasem in Central Java, where commercial reuse has reshaped cultural meaning.

RW 07, by contrast, reflects a different trajectory. Here, economic pressures have driven significant

transformations, with traditional structures replaced by modern materials such as concrete and steel. The physical markers of Javanese character are less visible, resulting in an environment that feels more urban and contemporary. Yet, interviews reveal that social interactions and community bonds still reflect traditional values of rukun (harmony) and mutual aid. This suggests that cultural character is not only embedded in materials and form but also enacted through everyday practices.

**Table 1.** Genius Loci Analysis on Location of Study

Variable	Identification	
	Rukunan RW 09	Rukunan RW 07
Image	It has two gates on the west and east sides, both well-maintained and elegantly designed. Not all houses have a <i>pendopo</i> , and still utilize <i>tadah alas</i> .	It only has one gate on the west side, which is unremarkable and resembles a regular door. Not all houses have a <i>pendopo</i> , but still use <i>tadah alas</i> for shared activities.
Space	Residents' daily activities are becoming less visible in communal spaces, pendopos in Rukunan RW 09 repurposed into workshops or café.	It maintains a traditional atmosphere, promoting relaxed social activities and connecting residents.
Characters	The structure showcases traditional Javanese features, including the intricate carvings of the traditional " <i>bahu danyang</i> ." The use of wood preserves the area's cultural roots.	The structure showcases traditional Javanese features, including the " <i>bahu danyang</i> ," with a simpler and more urban design.

The contrast between RW 07 and RW 09 illustrates two pathways of character under modernization, one emphasizes architectural preservation as cultural continuity, while the other relies on social resilience despite physical transformation. Both approaches reveal that the character of genius loci is not static but negotiated, shaped by residents’ responses to tourism, economy, and modernization. Comparative cases from heritage districts in Medan and Lasem show similar tensions, where modernization introduces new materials and functions, but cultural identity is sustained through selective practices and symbolic reinterpretations.

For heritage management, these findings underscore the need to move beyond a focus on material conservation alone. Preserving character requires attention to both tangible features, such as

traditional architectural forms, and intangible elements, such as community practices and values. In this light, Kotagede's alleys demonstrate that cultural resilience can manifest either through architectural fidelity (RW 09) or through the persistence of social life amid architectural change (RW 07). Both models offer lessons for sustaining cultural identity in historic urban areas facing rapid modernization.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the importance of preserving Genius Loci in urban areas facing the pressures of modernization. In the case of Gang Rukunan RW 07 and RW 09 Kotagede, the unique identities of these alleys have been shaped by the balance between cultural heritage and adaptation to contemporary needs.

Through the lens of Norberg-Schulz's framework, image, space, and character, this study highlights the elements that underpin the Genius Loci of these two alleys:

1. Image: Gang Rukunan RW 09 is renowned for its well-preserved traditional Javanese architecture, including joglo-style roofs, wooden structures, and open courtyards. This careful attention to maintenance allows both visitors and residents to easily recognize and appreciate the area's rich cultural and architectural heritage. In contrast, Gang Rukunan RW 07, while retaining some traditional elements, has undergone modern alterations that make its original Javanese architectural identity less prominent, though still noticeable.
2. Space: The spatial configuration of these alleys significantly influences human experiences and interactions. Gang Rukunan RW 09 has transformed into a tourist destination, with communal spaces like the pendopo now serving tourists rather than local residents. On the other hand, Gang Rukunan RW 07 maintains a more traditional atmosphere, with residents engaging in relaxed social activities, such as chatting and playing, preserving the essence of local social life.
3. Character: The character of these alleys is defined by their cultural and historical narratives. Gang Rukunan RW 09 showcases traditional Javanese features, including the traditional "bahu danyang," a pillar resembling a human shoulder carrying a burden. The predominant use of wood preserves the area's cultural roots. In contrast, Gang Rukunan RW 07 has transformed from its traditional Javanese aesthetic to a more urban and contemporary look, incorporating modern materials like concrete.

Despite the challenges posed by urbanization, such as the conversion of cultural buildings into

modern facilities, both alleys of Gang Rukunan RW 07 and RW 09 provide important insights into preserving cultural identity in an ever-evolving urban landscape.

This study highlights that the genius loci of Purbayan's alleys is sustained through a balance of three aspects: image, space, and character. The image, reflected in traditional architectural elements such as joglo roofs, bahu danyang beams, and tadah alas terraces, provides a strong visual identity that anchors memory and recognition. The space, structured through narrow alleys, gates, and shared courtyards, facilitates social interaction and strengthens neighborhood bonds. The character, embodied in communal traditions and collective values, generates a sense of belonging that connects residents to their cultural roots.

At present, Gang Rukunan RW 09 retains much of its traditional image and communal character, whereas Gang Rukunan RW 07, despite modern alterations, continues to preserve its social vitality through active interaction. Looking ahead, the increasing pressures of modernization may threaten both the physical integrity and social character of these spaces. If not consciously protected, their atmosphere could shift from living cultural environments to generic urban passages. Therefore, sustaining the genius loci of Purbayan's alleys requires proactive preservation strategies that safeguard architectural identity, nurture social traditions, and anticipate future urban transformations, ensuring that these alleys remain vital testaments to Kotagede's heritage.

Future research could expand on these findings by exploring how similar principles of cultural preservation can be applied to other urban heritage areas facing modernization, further contributing to the broader discourse on sustainable urban development and heritage preservation.

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