Reinforcing identity: Bringing the new face of Malioboro Historic Place, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract. The significant character of architecture for the majority places in the world will shape unique identity of place. Malioboro Street is a main commercial, historic and cultural corridor in the historic city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. For couple of years, because of the modern development and economic reasons, the unique characters of buildings in Malioboro was going to fade away, covered mostly by commercial signboard, and some others had a different appearance from street walls pattern. This paper aims to examine to what extent the changes in the character of Malioboro street facades before and after the interference from the local government and how far the commercial signboard ‘hides’ the uniqueness of the building facades before and after the government initiatives was published. A qualitative method is carried out to examine to what extent the modernity and commercial interests influence the continuity of typical building facades in Malioboro Street. This method attempts to measure the degree of continuity in facade of significant buildings through calculation of the coverage percentage and placement of commercial signboard. The result shows there are significant positive change in bringing back the identity of Malioboro regarding the type, size, and placement of building façade commercial signboard.

Keywords: Building character, building façade, commercial signboard, cultural corridor

1. Introduction

The meaning of culture could be seen in several aspects: a kind of lifestyle that represents a kind of group, a structure of symbols, meanings, and cognitive schemata as well as a set of strategies adapting for survival that is related to ecology and resources [1]. Architecture could be said as a product of socio-cultural factors. Architecture is an expression of culture and a kind of tangible shape of culture. On the other word, culture shapes architecture. From past to present, architecture has recorded the impact and influences of culture of its time and place. Culture is evolving and it provides inspiration to architecture to evolve to its higher creative expression.

Malioboro Street is a main commercial, historic and cultural corridor in the historic city of Yogyakarta. The street actually superimposed on the city historical axis which linked the palace toward the north (see Figure 1): the Tugu (city tower) and the Mount Merapi. As a part of the old city of Yogyakarta, Malioboro Street was laid on the heart of the city, enhancing the city axis and becomes the icon of the city. Socio-cultural activities have appeared in Malioboro Street since 1765 [2]. Much kind facilities such as housing and public facilities emerged along the street. Generally, buildings in Malioboro Street are commercial based. Pasar Beringharjo (the biggest market in the city) is an important element in the function of Malioboro Street as a commercial street; it existed as early as...
1756. During the period of Dutch colonization, there were many developments along the street such as government offices, military buildings, as well as some commercial and entertainment facilities. These buildings have changed the morphology of Malioboro and created identity for Malioboro Street.

Nowadays, Malioboro Street has been developed not only for accommodating the community need but also visitors’ need that came for sightseeing, enjoying the atmosphere as well as seeking information about historical and cultural heritage of Yogyakarta. Eventually, Malioboro Street emerges as a major attraction centre for domestic and foreign visitors for many years due to its unique character with a rich blend of historic entities, building facades and colorful scenery of street cultures and public lifestyles.

After Indonesian independence, Malioboro Street became mixed-use area of urban commercial strip and governmental offices. In the period of 1970s, Malioboro Street was dominated by small scale commercial activities in local commercial network. There was also informal sector grew along the street. Informal street activities in Malioboro Street grew to be much importance with the emergence
of the street as a cultural stage of the city. The pedestrian arcade establishment along Malioboro Street in 1975 followed by physical restructuring of Malioboro street space in 1982 has brought increasing number of visitors to Malioboro Street. It attracted more hawkers occupy the space along the street. Large lots which are left had also been commercialized. As a result, the specific rhythm of the shop-houses - which serves as a showpiece for visitors and gives the specific townscape of the city historic axis - has been broken down by super block and the living function is possibly being removed from the district [3].

The incessant development as well as the dynamic changes of culture caused many alterations to the Malioboro Street character (see Figure 3). The function transformation from cultural street into commercial street has contributed to the change of place character. The commercialization of this street function has brought the visual appearance of buildings along the street into modern form. The large-scale commercial activities have gradually replaced pattern of shop-houses. The rows of small grain building massing have been changed into large blocks of buildings.

Figure 3. The alteration of land use along Malioboro Street [3]
The existence of Malioboro Mall, as the first mall in Yogyakarta in 1998, has accelerated the growth of building façade commercial signboard coverage along the street in line with building facade modernization [4]. There are dramatic changes in buildings appearance for competing with the mall through displaying signboards to attract customers and not be shadowed by the mall. The building facades that should talk about the history have been changed to pursue commercial need. All could be significantly seen on the new development or new building facades adjusted to new function that is, sometimes, far different from the character of place (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4.** The building commercialization and modernization.

How far is the impact of the commercialization on building facades of Malioboro street before and after the intervention from the local government and how far the commercial signboard ‘hides’ the uniqueness of the building facades before and after the government initiatives was implemented? How far is the effectiveness of government regulations in an effort to strengthen the city identity? Based on above introduction, this paper elaborates the impact of the commercialization on building facades of Malioboro street wall and compare the change within more than 10 yr.

2. **Place identity: Connecting the new to the old of building appearance**

Character is kind of architectural element, when it is combined with space element could create a place [5]. Meanwhile, a place is made up of concrete things having material substance, shape, texture and color [6]. While these things bounded together they could give the meaning of environmental character, which is the essence of place. In the context of built environment, place identity emerged from continuity and distinctive characteristics [7]. It involves the meaning and significance of places for inhabitants and users.

There is another important aspect or dimension of identity that is less tangible and should be the attribute of identity [8]. It could be said as sense of place, genius loci or the spirit of place that refer to the character of place. Character could be defined as atmosphere that would be easily identified by the user or as space enclosure. Place that could generate significant or specific atmosphere for the users means it has the spirit of place. The spirit of place could be created by the arrangement of physical features and appearance (place structure, buildings and landscapes, climates, aesthetic quality), observable activities and functions as well as meanings or symbols. Each place has its own individual special uniqueness, character, identity and spirit, which is different from all other places. The spirit gives value and meaning to a city’s inhabitants and without this spirit their quality of life would be diminished. The careless development or spontaneous change of way of life could threat the existence of the spirit of place specifically places that represented the image of the city [9].

Building façade could be representation of local cultural, social, climatic, political and economic circumstances of the city [10]. A harmonized and meaningful building facade is important to enhance identity of the city even though there are multiple factors impacting the change of façades. Street that is shaped by row of buildings as street wall is one of the main elements in shaping the face of cities. The quality of a streetscape visually expressed is an essential determinant of its characters. It will
express attractive, memorable or distinctive identity of the place. Place identity of the city take place from continuity and “unique characteristics” [7]. The link between modernity (new) and locality (old) is partly due to the increased mutual knowledge of place identity and ties to place that arises when “sense of place is threatened”.

3. Methodology
In this research, qualitative method is carried out to examine to what extent the modernity and commercial interests influence the continuity of typical building facades in Malioboro Street. This method attempts to measure the degree of continuity in facade of significant buildings through calculation of the percentage of commercial signboard coverage as well as the setting of signboard on building façade regarding the significant façade elements coverage. For the purpose of the study, field observation is conducted to compile the data of building façade, signboard size and placement. The data collection has been conducted in two significant period of times, before implementation of government regulation (2005) and after Malioboro street revitalization program (2019).

The step-by-step improvement of government regulation has been reviewed in data analysis due to elaboration of regulation effectiveness in the improvement of building facade character and place identity that is represented by the street-wall façade series.

4. Results and discussion
Growing to be an urban commercial strip will bring some consequences to the physical and visual appearance of place. It should be attractive, modern and up to date look as well as informative and eye-catcher. Buildings with old-fashioned style appearance may not appropriate for commercial purpose. As a result, in many cases, old appearance buildings – although it was categorized as heritage building – was going to be demolished or renovated or covered by signboard in order to achieve commercial purpose. Unfortunately, arrangement of signboard as well as placement of unarranged advertisement has disrupted the building facades visual appearance (see Figure 6).

The local government already had an awareness to control the placement of commercial signboard Malioboro street façade since 2005, although it had significantly realized gradually in 2011. In the last few years, triggered by public design competition for Malioboro pedestrian-friendly district in 2014, the government's effort to improve the quality of Malioboro streetscape is getting stronger.
In the year of 2005, there were around 40 % buildings along Malioboro Street still kept the unique character. The majority of buildings in Malioboro Street utilized building facade as a media for attracting people to come in. At that time, around 30 % from total buildings number in Malioboro Street have more than 50 % part of their façade covered by signboard or advertisement where more than 50 % of those buildings are old buildings with significant character. The elaboration of this condition shows that there are several types of significant building façade coverage, as follows:

i. More than 50 % part of building façade was covered; directed to elimination of building character;

ii. Around 30 % part of building façade was covered on the significant façade’s elements; directed to elimination of building character;

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**Figure 6.** Significant Buildings Signboard Facade Coverage in 2005.

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**Figure 7.** Timeline of government policies for improving streetscape quality

In the year of 2005, there were around 40 % buildings along Malioboro Street still kept the unique character. The majority of buildings in Malioboro Street utilized building facade as a media for attracting people to come in. At that time, around 30 % from total buildings number in Malioboro Street have more than 50 % part of their façade covered by signboard or advertisement where more than 50 % of those buildings are old buildings with significant character. The elaboration of this condition shows that there are several types of significant building façade coverage, as follows:

i. More than 50 % part of building façade was covered; directed to elimination of building character;

ii. Around 30 % part of building façade was covered on the significant façade’s elements; directed to elimination of building character;
iii. Less than 15 % part of building façade was covered on the significant façade’s elements; directed to elimination of building character;
iv. Around 30 % part of building façade was covered on the insignificant façade’s elements; directed to continuity of the building character;
v. Less than 15 % part of building façade was covered on the insignificant façade’s elements; directed to continuity of the building character.

Majority buildings with significant character - around 60 % – have 30 % up to more than 50 % part of their building façades covered by signboard and advertisement on significant façade’s elements. Meanwhile, only around 40 % of total significant building numbers – although covered by sign board and advertisement – still kept and maintained the original character of the building. At that time, although the Yogyakarta Municipality Government Regulation 29/2005 has been published, there were not implemented strictly. On the other hand, the regulation has concerned on outdoor commercial signboard arrangement, it was not specifically focusing on façade coverage and tended to generalize the regulation for signboard placement on building façade.

The other regulation concern on visual quality of Malioboro street has been published by Yogyakarta Municipality Government in 2011. It specifically regulated building commercial signboard, but, similar to previous regulation, it also tended to generalize the regulation for signboard placement except for the buildings that is categorized as heritage. In 2013, the Yogyakarta Municipality Government published new regulation for land use planning and intensity for the city of Yogyakarta with specific rules for Malioboro district. Although this policy does not regulate signboard façade coverage, it regulated the new building development that should be synchronized with the existing buildings.

Stimulated by public design competition for Malioboro pedestrian-friendly street in 2014, today, there are more than 50 % of buildings with significant character can easily be identified. Only less than 15 % from total buildings number in Malioboro Street still have more than 50 % part of their façade covered by signboard or advertisement. Numbers of buildings with significant character have unwrapped signboard coverage so that the original building façade appears.

Figure 8. Signboard facade coverage in 2019

The government’s role to improve the quality of Malioboro as a historic street in the frame of Malioboro revitalization program has significantly affected the new visual appearance to strengthen identity of the historic place. Followed by the refinement of regulation for arrangement of commercial signboard for the city of Yogyakarta in 2015 and 2016, the gradual implementation of Malioboro Street as pedestrian-friendly district that was started in 2016, has positive impact on the ideas of signboard arrangement and building façade revitalization. The regulation not only concerned on percentage and size of façade coverage but also pay attention to the setting of signboard on building
façade regarding the significant façade elements coverage. Moreover, the previous regulation has also regulated the new building development that respected to existing buildings and streetscape character.

Figure 9. The improvement of building facades quality regarding the coverage of commercial signboard

Some new development, in a precise way, refers to the old building context as well as their arrangement of façade commercial board. Overall, it can be said that the building facades coverage in Malioboro Street should be concern on two aspects: proportion of building facades coverage to the whole building facades and the placement position of the building facades coverage – covered significant or insignificant façade elements. As building façade covered more than 50 %, the building character will be eliminated. Meanwhile, if building façade covered only less than 15 % up to 30 % but it covered on the significant façade elements, the building character will be eliminated as well. All
of those conditions have contributed to Malioboro Street identity. In order to keep sense of place of Malioboro Street, based on above discussion and current observation, there are some ideas focusing on building facade signboard coverage problem

The proportion of building façade coverage on significant building is not more than 30%. The signboard should not cover significant elements of building façade so the building character is still kept. Meanwhile, the proportion of building façade coverage on new building or insignificant building can be up to 40%. Besides building façade, signboard could be placed on the roof top of two or three stories building and hanging on the pedestrian.

![Guideline for signboard placement on building façade.](image)

**Figure 10.** Guideline for signboard placement on building façade.

5. Conclusion and lesson learned: Redefining new face of Malioboro historic street
Malioboro Street is a main commercial, historic and cultural corridor in the historic city of Yogyakarta. Although today the street is getting urbanized through its alteration to be main urban commercial strip, it has still to be historic and cultural corridor. The row of building facades should strengthen the existence of corridor. The visual character of buildings along the street has still to be people collective memory and attraction for visitors. The sense of place has still to be kept, so the appearance of new buildings in the future has to be adapted to the existing visual character. For this reason, an urban design and conservation guidelines are proposed to reinforce the identity of Malioboro Street.

What should be done today is maintaining the sense of place of Malioboro Street in line with modern urban living. In brief, the unique character of Malioboro Street supposed to be adjusted to accommodate commercial purpose through synchronization between old style of buildings and modern function. The local government regulation that implemented today is basically has the content for regulating and controlling the development along Malioboro street already. However, it has to be implemented strictly through detailed urban design guideline. The frame of Malioboro revitalization program that involves all stakeholders under management of local government is proven to be an effective way to activate and stimulate many efforts for improving quality of Malioboro as a historic street. In this point of view, the importance of solid coordination between Office of Public Works that is responsible for urban context revitalization and Office of Tourism and Culture that is responsible for historic building context revitalization has successfully ensured the effectiveness of the regulation implementation.

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