

Street Image of Traditional Street: The Case of Pecinan Street, Magelang, Indonesia

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Abstract: Imageability quality is part of the urban design quality indicator related to perceptual dimension. This study aims to assess the imageability quality of a traditional street as part of the assessment of urban spaces in Indonesia through visual observation, physical mapping and in-depth interviews. The result indicated that street image was not only related to the physical elements but also to activities, socio-cultural attributes and meaning. However, some issues arose such as conservation of old buildings. It is important that street revitalisation and development should address the importance of the existence of the street as a public space and as an engine of societal exchange so that the image and identity of Pecinan street can be enhanced for all of its stakeholders in the future.

Key words: Street image, traditional street, enhanced, future, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

The term traditional street as used by scholars refers to the character and nature of streets which have existed in a city for some generations or more (Shamsudin and Sulaiman, 2010; Sulaiman and Shamsuddin, 2001; Jaafar and Usman, 2009). A worrying trend in the design of modern streets in Indonesia is the reduction of the role that traditional urban streets in Indonesia as mixed-use and vibrant public space to become purely channel of movement, especially for car-based traffic. For this reason, this study is conducted to assess the quality of traditional street, especially for its imageability quality.

Street image in urban design dimension: In the past 2 decades, there has been a significant increase in the attempts made by place leaders, urban planners and decision-makers around the world to promote a positive and attractive image of their cities due to the growing competition between them (Avraham, 2004). However, studying a city's image is not only for the benefit of the city's strategic planning and marketing teams but also plays an important part in revealing the citizen's level of satisfaction and pride (Luque-Martinez *et al.*, 2007).

Lynch (1960) described place image as the result of a two-way process between the observer and their environment. Place image and place identity are interrelated and also interchangeable: place image being a combination of place identity and how the place is perceived by the individual (i.e., it includes the person's set of feelings about and impressions of the place) (Carmona *et al.*, 2010).

Lynch concluded that there are five physical elements that form place image: paths (including streets),

edges, districts, nodes and landmarks. While according to place images are not only visual but multi-sensory and they include visual form, socio-cultural attributes visible signs of human activities and people involvement.

This study aims to assess the image ability quality of a traditional street in Indonesia that can be benefitted for the existing urban space as well as for the new and future urban design and planning in Indonesia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Pecinan street as case study: Since 1818, Pecinan street has been the main commercial street of Magelang along side Rejowinangoen Market at the street corner. Pecinan street is situated in the district inhabited by a community originating in the far East (mainly Chinese and Arabic origins). The Chinese were clustered in the southern part of city square surrounding the Chinese temple (Liu and Chen, 2007) whilst the arabs resided around the great mosque area (Fig. 1).

The street space of Pecinan street is approximately 19.35 m wide and 800 m long. As can be in Fig. 3, it is divided into 4 main parts: pavement (5 m); space for trees and benches (2 m); main street space for heavy vehicles and on-street parking (9 m) and pavement (2.25 m). The 'street walls' or façades of Pecinan street are mostly detached shop houses, entrances to small alleyways that connect to the back side of the street, some alley ways to connect to the Chinese Mansion house at the rear of the shop houses and the Liong Hok Bio Temple at the street corner. In 2012, the local authority merged the non-motorised vehicle lane and sidewalk into a more spacious sidewalk (5 m).



Fig. 1: Pecinan street today

Data collection: The discussion in this study is based on in-depth interviews conducted between March and May 2014. There were 14 interviewees representing key stakeholders including representatives of the local authority's urban planning department. The street 'users' include: shop owners/residents of the buildings along the street; visitors to the street and street vendors on the sidewalk. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants in whom they were asked prepared questions and spontaneous follow-up questions. All interviews were conducted in Javanese and Indonesian languages. The interview transcripts were then translated into English before analysed as study result.

The in-depth interviews were organised into several sections: the personal profile of the respondent; the street quality: physical dimension; the street quality: non-physical dimension; street image and quality of

planning and management. The principal mode of analysis was through the verbal responses whether represented in visual displays or through narrative devices (Lynch, 1960).

Visual observation was also conducted simultaneously in order to understand the overall condition of Pecinan street including to record the dimension of sidewalks, building use, facade design and social life of the street.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Two key questions were designed to allow respondents to suggest more than one opinion on Pecinan street's image, first is: "What first comes to your mind and what symbolises the word Pecinan street for you?" and second is: "How would you broadly describe

Table 1: Summary of public perception on Pecinan street's image

Components/Category	Pecinan street image perception based on in-depth interviews		
	Frequency	Values	Total
Physical element			
Buildings	IIII II	7	15
Street as a path	I	1	
Building as a landmark	I	1	
Building as an edge	I	1	
Product diversity	IIII	5	
Activity			
Shopping activity	II	2	13
Vending activity	III	3	
Street carnival	III	3	
Religious culture event in the street	III	3	
Socio-cultural attributes			
Ethnic group living in the street (Chinese community)	III	3	9
Street food	IIII	4	
Trishaw	II	2	
Meaning			
Street as a destination	IIII	5	7
Historical value	II	2	

this street in a physical and non-physical sense?” These main questions were then developed according to the circumstances during each interview in order to discover how Pecinan street was perceived by the individuals, including their set of feelings and impressions of the street. The response given by the respondents were then clustered and categorised into four major components: physical elements (buildings, street as a path, building as a landmark and building as an edge); activity (type of activity, variety of product, street vendor, street carnival and religious/cultural event in the street); socio-cultural attributes (ethnic groups living in the street, street food and trishaw, etc.) and meaning (street as a destination and historical value). A summary can be in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that physical elements appeared to be one of the most noticeable features for respondents. Seven out of the fourteen respondents noted that buildings along Pecinan street were memorable to them. Amongst those buildings were Kelenteng (a Chinese Temple), Chinese shop houses and Rejowinangun Market. Important buildings or landmarks have been recognised as a key component of city image. This is in parallel to Lynch (1960) that concluded landmark as one of the images of the city elements. Landmarks are still used today for the ‘hard branding’ of cities based on reputations and signature styles of global architects as implemented by some contemporary cities, including Bilbao and Sydney. Such practices seem to be ‘unrealised’ by the Magelang local authority, even though the recent restoration efforts on the Chinese Temple by the private sector’s link to the Chinese community can be regarded as an attempt to make

Magelang more attractive. However, the current condition of some Chinese shop houses at Pecinan street is undesirable and some respondents expressed views of how the loss of the old buildings had negatively affected them. Some examples of respondent’s views include: “...most of Chinese-style buildings have been lost, although some have maintained, it is actually new buildings, the only genuine is Pucung store, it’s the only one that can bring the atmosphere of the past...” (P-VIS-001, In-depth Interviews, March in 2014). “(buildings along Pecinan street) are great but the original Chinese model has gone, apart from the Sanitair shop, many memorable events along this street, so when one old building has gone, there is a disappointment...why has it now become like this (modernised)” (P-VIS-009, In-depth Interviews, March in 2014).

Response from one visitor who is also an architect working in a firm near the street, raised an issue regarding the fact that there were no conservation efforts made for example, the provision of incentives for the shop owners to safeguard their old buildings. They noted that: “the old façades have been dismantled, much has been lost, because there is no compensation for the owner to maintain them, so they think, it’s my building, there should be an incentive (for them)” (P-VIS-004, In-depth Interviews, April in 2014) (Fig. 2).

Figure 3 shows the variation of building facade design along Pecinan street. Pucung Store is the example of a building which still retained its original design with Chinese and Colonial influence architectural style. On the other hand, victoria modern bakery (ex. Holland Bakery) is the example of a total rebuilt building with modern style completed with reinforces concrete, glass and steel building material. Barokah shop is intermediate between the 2 mentioned above. According to visual observation, renovated building with retaining Chinese influence as Barokah shop are the most commonly found along Pecinan street.

A respondent from the government stated that the local authority was not able to solve all urban problems, especially with regard to the conservation of old buildings along Pecinan street. He would rather seek an enhancement of public participation on improvements to the quality of the urban environment. Many of the respondents commented on Pecinan street’s deteriorating architectural quality and this is clearly one of the main challenges in attempting to retain its street image.

Shopping activity and products diversity sold were the next most commented up elements in Pecinan street for interviewees. Five respondents stated that shopping experience was the most memorable activity of Pecinan

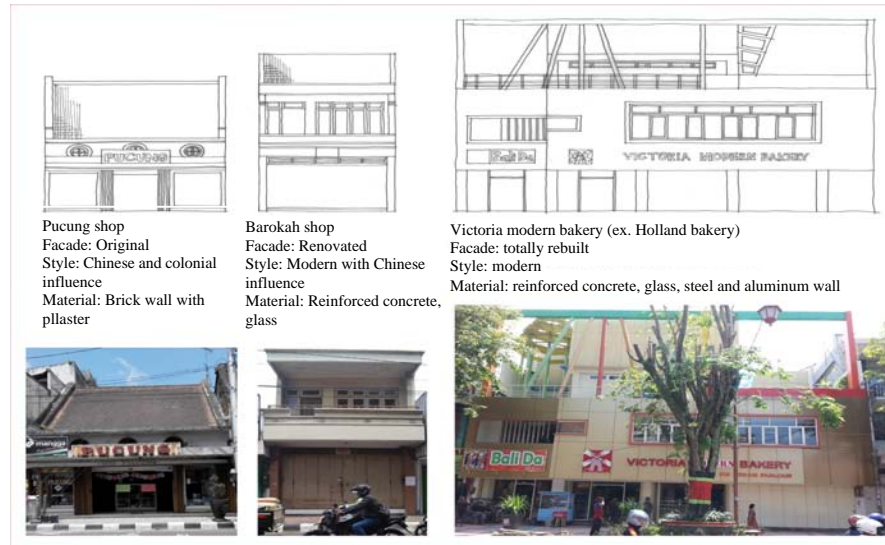


Fig. 2: Facade design at Pecinan street



Fig. 3: Building use of Pecinan street



Fig. 4: Street vendors on Pecinan street

street. As a shopping street a wide variety of products are sold and this was mentioned for example: “Shops along Pecinan street are jumbled there is material building shop and decorative plant shop, any kinds of commodities are there, Gold shops are grouped in the southern part while in the middle are drug stores...” (P-VIS-002, In-depth Interviews, March in 2014).

Figure 4 as a result of visual observation in Pecinan street shows that there were at least 20 categories of shops along Pecinan street. This is in parallel to the findings from the interviews which showed that the products sold along the street were very diverse and particular. Almost all types of merchandise that were required by Magelang and surroundings inhabitants were traded along Pecinan street with the largest percentage being IT and electronics (19%), clothing (18%) and shoes and bag (9%). Commercial diversity was not only within the respondent’s image of the street but also commercial diversity is in itself immensely important for cities, in a social as well as economical capacity.

Street carnivals and religious/cultural street events were the next most prominent activity that symbolised Pecinan street according to respondents. “The Independence Day carnival passes Pecinan street, there are also Chinese New Year and Grebeg Gethuk parades. The buddhist monks are also parade every year along Pecinan street (heading) to Borobudur Temple...” (P-VIS-001, In-depth Interviews March in 2014). “Pecinan street is the city centre for Magelang, whenever there is a carnival, it must be there... parades from Alun-alun to Pecinan...” (P-VIS-006, In-depth Interviews, March 2014).

This finding corresponds with previous observations that cultural events in particular, have emerged as a means of improving the image of cities, adding life to city streets and giving citizens renewed pride in their home city (Richards and Wilson, 2004). Indeed, high culture attractions such as museums, theatres and concert halls, together with popular culture such as pop music, fashion, ethnoscape and also traditional culture have become important sources for the images which are used to

underpin the brand image of cities (Appadurai, 1990). The festivals with their connotations of sociability, playfulness, joviality and community provide a ready-made set of positive images upon which to base a reconstruction of a less than perfect city image (Quinn, 2005). In addition, other study stated that festivals or special events have quite remarkable functions in moulding the image and impelling the construction and development of the host city (Liu and Chen, 2007).

Some respondents specifically mentioned vending activity as a memorable activity when visiting Pecinan street including the street food vendor as shown in Fig. 4. “Oh yes, one more thing why I still always want to go to Pecinan is to buy Martabak, from the time of my grandmother, she is their loyal customer, the owner is an Indian also the serabi seller in front of sumbing pharmacy, since i was a child, I managed to queue until late evening, even though I was already sleepy (I was still) willing to buy...” (P-VIS-008, In-depth Interviews, April in 2014). “[there is] Tahu, Buntil and other street foods, all made by the Chinese, including Mie, Lotek and the famous Tahu Takwa” (P-VIS-007, In-depth Interviews, April in 2014).

For visitors from outside Magelang City, some traditional street foods sold along Pecinan street were a different and an attractive experience. This could be a potential opportunity for Magelang to develop tourism through the promotion of traditional food. As previous study suggested, food images can be utilised to exhibit the cultural aspects of a country where by destinations can use food to represent cultural experience, status, cultural identity and communication (Frochot, 2003).

Significantly, five out of the 14 respondents also called Pecinan street a “destination”. Pecinan means the “storefront for the local community” (P-VIS-007) and for the children, Pecinan street means “where the fun is and they will be able to window shop for toys, buy clothes when going to Eid or Christmas” (P-VIS-008). Pecinan street means the “place to see and be seen” and sometimes they will “see a street carnival along the street but at other times they are the ones who will do parade there” (P-VIS-001) that create a sociable and meaningful street for the social community.

CONCLUSION

The image of Pecinan street formed by the respondents was not only related to the physical elements but also to the non-physical elements such as activities, socio-cultural attributes and meaning. All four of these were mentioned to different degrees during the interviews with users of the street but it was the physical elements

and activities that were at the forefront of the respondent's image. Interestingly, the respondents also noticed the shop's names and even the products sold, especially the street food. Pecinan street was also meant a destination to them, even though there is now strong competition from other shopping centres, especially the new modern shopping malls in the city.

Regarding assessing the quality of the traditional streets of Indonesia, this study indicates that street image contributes to the creation of street identity. However, some issues arose: for example, conservation of old buildings should be addressed by stakeholders, not only the government and shop owners and also through the participation of the general public. It is important therefore that street revitalisation and development should address the importance of the existence of the street as a public space and as an engine of societal exchange. In Pecinan street, in particular, this research has identified that one significant enhancement would be required in the form of street amenities such as a provision of sitting spaces and other amenities in order to allow the users to comfortably spend more time along the street. If this can be realised, then the identity of Pecinan street can be enhanced for all of its stakeholders in the future.

This study filled the gap in the study of Indonesian streets after a worrying trend in the design of modern streets that has been reduced the role of streets as an important public urban place. The scope of the study was limited to traditional street and the result might not apply to other settings. The respondents were street users and representative from local authority's urban planning department, it seems possible that other representative such as expert would react different way. The limitations of the study can be addressed in future studies of Indonesian streets to gain further outcome on characteristics that contribute towards the creation of street identity.

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