
SPIRITUALITY IN URBAN ARCHITECTURE: A STUDY OF SYMBOLISM IN YOGYAKARTA'S URBAN LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT

The development of modern cities over the past few decades tends to overlook the spiritual and symbolic dimensions in urban space design, including in Yogyakarta, which is rich in cultural heritage and spatial philosophy. Rapid urbanization and commercial development have the potential to shift the function of sacred spaces into business and tourism areas, threatening the preservation of spiritual values that form the city's cultural identity. This study aims to investigate how traditional spiritual values and symbolism persist and transform within the dynamics of contemporary urban spaces in Yogyakarta, as well as to provide recommendations for integrating cultural and spiritual values into future urban planning. An exploratory qualitative approach was employed, focusing on symbolic areas such as the Keraton, Alun-Alun, Tugu Jogja, Malioboro, and Taman Sari. Data were collected through field observations, in-depth interviews with cultural experts, architects, and community leaders, as well as visual documentation. The analysis utilized semiotic and spatial methods to map the relationships between symbols, space, and spiritual meanings. The results indicate that Yogyakarta's landscape structure still preserves strong spiritual values, such as the philosophical axis of Merapi–Keraton–Parangtritis and sacred buildings serving as centers for ritual and social activities. However, urbanization and modernization have led to a shift in spatial functions toward economic orientation, eroding the meanings and community connections with their cultural heritage. The recommendations emphasize the necessity of integrating cultural and spiritual values into spatial planning policies through the preservation of symbolic structures and the adaptation of local design principles. Additionally, strengthening community and indigenous stakeholder participation is crucial to ensure the continued transmission of spiritual values. This approach is expected to foster the development of cities that are not only functional but also socially and spiritually meaningful.

KEYWORDS: spirituality, symbolism, urban landscape, urbanization, Yogyakarta

Perkembangan kota modern selama beberapa dekade terakhir cenderung mengabaikan dimensi spiritual dan simbolik dalam perancangan ruang urban, termasuk di Yogyakarta yang kaya akan warisan budaya dan filosofi ruang. Urbanisasi dan pembangunan komersial yang pesat berpotensi menggeser fungsi ruang sakral menjadi area bisnis dan wisata, mengancam kelestarian nilai spiritual yang menjadi identitas budaya kota. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap bagaimana nilai spiritual dan simbolisme tradisional masih hidup dan berubah dalam dinamika ruang kota Yogyakarta kontemporer, serta memberikan rekomendasi pengintegrasian nilai budaya dan spiritual dalam perencanaan kota masa depan. Pendekatan kualitatif eksploratif diterapkan dengan fokus pada kawasan simbolik seperti Keraton, Alun-Alun, Tugu Jogja, Malioboro, dan Taman Sari. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi lapangan, wawancara mendalam dengan budayawan, arsitek, dan tokoh masyarakat, serta dokumentasi visual. Analisis menggunakan metode semiotika dan spasial untuk memetakan relasi simbol, ruang, dan makna spiritual. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa struktur lanskap Yogyakarta masih mempertahankan nilai spiritual kuat, seperti sumbu filosofis Merapi–Keraton–Parangtritis dan bangunan sakral sebagai pusat ritual dan sosial. Namun, urbanisasi dan modernisasi menyebabkan perubahan fungsi ruang yang berorientasi ekonomi, mengikis makna dan keterhubungan masyarakat dengan warisan budaya mereka. Rekomendasi menekankan perlunya integrasi nilai budaya dan spiritual dalam kebijakan tata ruang melalui pelestarian simbolik dan adaptasi desain lokal, serta penguatan partisipasi masyarakat dan pemangku adat agar nilai spiritual terus diwariskan. Pendekatan ini diharapkan menciptakan kota yang fungsional sekaligus bermakna sosial dan spiritual.

KATA KUNCI: spiritualitas, simbolisme, arsitektur, urbanisasi, Yogyakarta

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the development of modern urban architecture has exhibited an increasing tendency toward rationality, functionality, and technocratic approaches (Trikariastoto, 2023). Design approaches oriented toward spatial efficiency, functional optimization, and the fulfillment of practical needs often dominate urban planning processes. This has led to the marginalization of non material dimensions in spatial design particularly spiritual and symbolic values that once formed an integral part of traditional architectural systems. Public spaces are increasingly constructed based on economic considerations and mobility demands (Tondobala, 2015). Meanwhile, the philosophical meanings and the transcendent relationships between humans, nature, and space have gradually faded (Sholehah & Wardana, 2022). In many cases, architectural symbolism that once reflected the noble values of society has been replaced by generic, standardized forms that lack local context. This shift has not only produced increasingly homogeneous urban spaces, but also contributed to a sense of alienation among communities toward their own environment, due to the loss of a sense of place and the spiritual connectedness that was once embedded in urban architecture.

This shift is evident in major global cities such as Jakarta, Singapore, and Dubai, where urban development is heavily influenced by economic logic and functional efficiency. In Jakarta, for instance, the rapid expansion of infrastructure and commercial districts often overlooks continuity with the social and symbolic structures of local communities (Alexander et al., 2024). Urban spaces are increasingly dominated by high-rise buildings and shopping centers that prioritize land capitalization, leaving little room for spaces that accommodate inner peace or spiritual contemplation. In Singapore, highly rational and meticulously organized urban planning has, paradoxically, produced a landscape that is culturally sterile and lacking in deeper meaning (Lin, 2017). Although functionally efficient, such planning often results in environments that lack cultural depth. Meanwhile, Dubai illustrates how modern aesthetics and luxury can overwhelm the urban landscape, obscuring the historical roots and spiritual symbolism that once shaped the identity of the Middle East (Haider, 2008). Collectively, they illustrate how modern urban architecture frequently prioritizes the pursuit of a global image and economic expansion, while sacrificing profound values tied to spirituality, local identity, and the harmonious relationship between humans and space.

Architecture should not be regarded solely as a physical construct designed to fulfill functional human needs; it also serves as a cultural expression and a

symbolic manifestation of the values embraced by a community (Al Fahmawee, 2022). In many civilizations, architecture functions as a medium that reflects worldviews, social structures, and the relationship between humans, nature, and the spiritual dimension. Traditional buildings, public spaces, and urban landscapes were often designed with careful attention to cosmological principles, local beliefs, and the rituals embedded in community life. Thus, architecture becomes part of a community's collective narrative, shaping spatial identity and imparting meaning that transcends visual appearance or functional utility. The presence of spiritual elements in architecture also creates contemplative spaces that provide room for human introspection and inner experience (Renaldi & Sudradjat, 2025) —fostering a deeper connection not only to the physical environment but also to the transcendent values that guide human existence. In the absence of these elements, architecture risks becoming a hollow construct—spaces stripped of meaning—thereby fostering social alienation and contributing to an identity crisis within urban communities.

Yogyakarta stands as one of Indonesia's cities with a deeply rooted cultural and spiritual richness, clearly manifested in its spatial organization and architectural features (Wibisono, Sunarto, & Soewarlan, 2022). Renowned not only as a hub of art and education, Yogyakarta also presents a symbolically charged urban landscape. A striking example of its spiritual expression is the Merapi–Keraton–Parangtritis philosophical axis, embodying a cosmic alignment that signifies the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, and the Divine (Haq, 2023). Beyond its geographical orientation, the axis also embodies the Javanese philosophical concept of Sangkan Paraning Dumadi—the journey from origin to ultimate destiny—serving as a profound reflection of the community's worldview. The spatial organization of the Yogyakarta Palace (Keraton) is intentionally structured upon principles of balance and cosmic harmony (Wardani & Soedarsono, 2011).

The design synthesizes political, spiritual, and cosmological elements into a unified spatial system. Key urban features—such as the alun-alun (royal square), mosque, Taman Sari (water palace), and Tugu Pal Putih (white monument)—are not merely physical constructs; they are imbued with deep spiritual significance and play essential roles in the symbolic fabric of the city (Sari, Munandar, & Fatimah, 2019)—Functioning as settings for ritual practice, contemplation, and as symbolic bridges between the temporal and the transcendent, these spaces reveal that spirituality in Yogyakarta transcends the boundaries of sacred architecture. It is intricately woven into the urban fabric, rendering the city a

spiritually meaningful and symbolically charged living environment in the everyday experience of its people. Nevertheless, in the course of Yogyakarta's contemporary urban development, the spiritual values that historically underpinned its spatial organization are now confronting significant challenges (Triwahyuningsih, Zuliyah, Abdi, & Arif, 2023). The intensification of commercial development in key urban zones has frequently resulted in the displacement of spiritually significant spaces, repurposing them into commercial and touristic areas, thereby diminishing their symbolic value. Sites once intended for contemplation or sacred use have been reconfigured into consumption-driven environments, devoid of their original depth and meaning. Furthermore, contemporary architectural projects often emphasize aesthetics, functionality, and market appeal, with minimal regard for intangible dimensions such as spiritual resonance and cultural rootedness (Picon, 2021). Such tendencies reflect a disregard for cultural meaning and the philosophical coherence of the city's spatial structure. This indicates a broader neglect of intangible dimensions in urban planning—elements that are, in fact, crucial for cultivating a strong sense of identity and imbuing urban spaces with depth and significance.

Conversely, while architectural studies on Yogyakarta are abundant, most tend to concentrate on the tangible, physical characteristics of built structures (Widyakusuma & Arief, 2023). Aesthetic qualities (Mohgny & Raidi, 2024), aesthetic value or the pragmatic function of space (Nisa & Zahra, 2025). Studies that specifically address the dimensions of spirituality and symbolism within the urban landscape—particularly in the context of modernization, changing spatial functions, and contemporary urban planning—remain notably limited. Yet, an understanding of these symbolic and spiritual dimensions is crucial for ensuring continuity between cultural heritage and the future direction of urban development. In this light, the present study is relevant in filling this gap and aims to contribute to a more holistic and value-based approach to urban planning.

METHODS

This research adopts an exploratory qualitative approach (Rahardjo, 2011) to gain a deeper understanding of the spiritual and symbolic dimensions embedded within Yogyakarta's urban landscape. This approach was chosen as it allows the researcher to explore deeper, intangible meanings—particularly those related to cultural and spiritual aspects within urban space. The study focuses on areas with high symbolic and spiritual significance, including the Yogyakarta Palace (Keraton), Malioboro

Street, Taman Sari, historic mosques, and several sacred sites scattered throughout the city. The objects of analysis include architectural elements, spatial organization, and the socio-cultural activities occurring within these spaces. Data were collected through direct observation techniques (Hasanah, 2016.) In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants such as cultural practitioners, architects, and community leaders, alongside visual documentation of spatial elements and symbols encountered in the field. The collected data were then analyzed using semiotic and spatial analysis approaches, aiming to uncover the relationships between symbols, space, and the spiritual meanings embedded in the urban landscape. Through this methodology, the study seeks to map how spiritual values persist—or are being displaced—within the spatial dynamics of contemporary Yogyakarta.

The documentation also included observations of social and cultural activities within each symbolic space, later summarized in a comparative table presented in the results and discussion section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Identifying Spiritual Architectural Elements within Yogyakarta's Urban Landscape

One of the principal elements of spiritual architecture in the city of Yogyakarta is the presence of buildings and public spaces imbued with symbolic meaning, many of which continue to function as centers of social and cultural activity. The Yogyakarta Palace (Keraton) serves not merely as a royal residence (Prabasmara, Wibowo, & Yuniastuti, 2019), but also as the cosmological center of Javanese tradition, reflecting the interconnectedness between humans, nature, and the divine (Widyakusuma & Arief, 2023). Located in front of the palace are the Northern and Southern Alun-Alun (public squares), which function as spaces for ritual and social interaction, embodying the philosophy of openness and balance between the spiritual and material worlds. Meanwhile, the Tugu Jogja monument, situated in the northern part of the city, serves as a symbolic landmark representing the vertical relationship between humans and the divine, and constitutes a significant marker within the city's philosophical axis (Purwantari, 2023). Together, these three elements constitute a cohesive spatial system that transcends mere physical utility, embodying deep spiritual significance embedded in the city's urban fabric.

Furthermore, spirituality is also manifested in the spatial patterns and urban layout, which are grounded in the philosophical cosmology of Javanese thought. The main axis—extending from Mount Merapi through the Tugu, the Keraton, Panggung

Krapyak, and ending at the Southern Sea (Parangtritis)—is known as Yogyakarta's Philosophical Axis (Haryono, 2015), which represents the human journey from origin to ultimate destination.

Philosophical Axis of Yogyakarta (Merapi-Tugu-Keraton-Parangtritis)

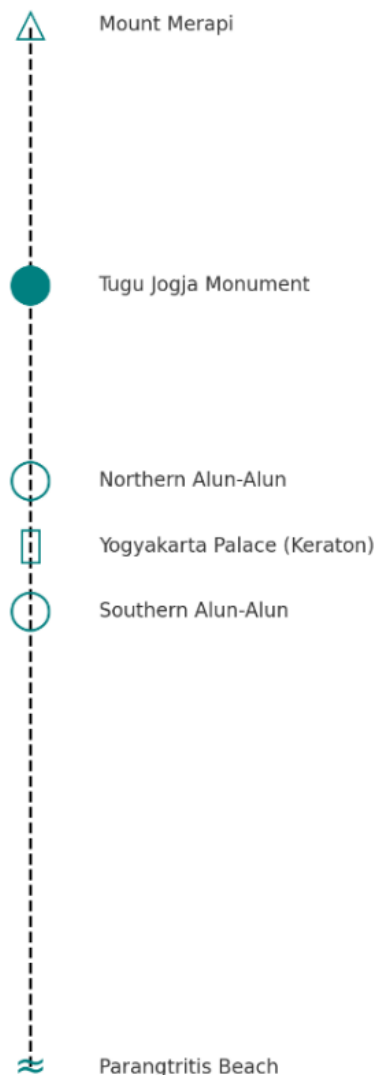


Figure 1. The Yogyakarta Philosophical Axis. This schematic illustrates the sacred north-south cosmological axis connecting Mount Merapi, Tugu Jogja, Keraton Yogyakarta, and the Southern Sea (source: Author's Document, 2025)

Mount Merapi, symbolizing natural power and spirituality, marks the point of origin; it is then symbolically aligned with the Keraton as the center of human life, and culminates at the Southern Sea, believed to be a realm of the supernatural. This spatial pattern did not emerge by chance (Haq, 2023) rather, it was deliberately designed with cosmological awareness to create harmony between nature, humanity, and the divine within the spatial order of the city.

In addition to axial structures and monumental buildings, spirituality in Yogyakarta's architecture is also reflected in the non-material aspects of spatial organization, such as the orientation of buildings, the spatial division within traditional houses (*joglo*), and the presence of public spaces used for ritual and cultural activities (Widayatsari, 2002). Concepts such as the tripartite spatial division (*lor-tengah-kidul* or north-center-south), the alignment with cardinal directions, and the principle of balance (harmony) between the profane and the sacred further reinforce the architectural identity of the city as a living space integrated with spiritual values. Thus, architecture in Yogyakarta does not merely shape the physical environment (Haryono, 2015), but also cultivates a collective consciousness and a sense of connectedness among the community to a greater cosmic order.

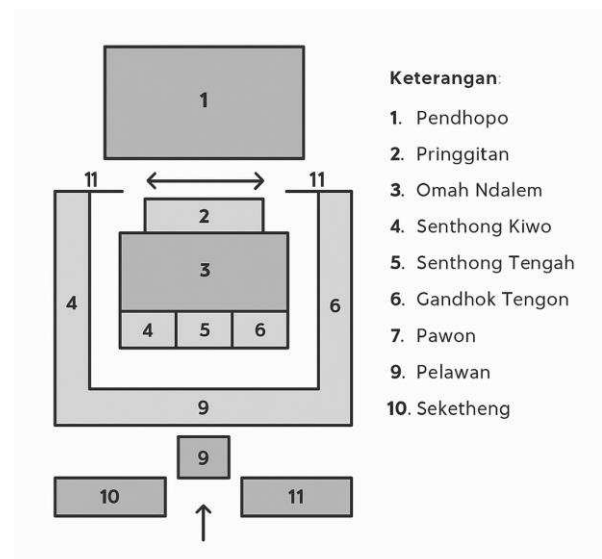


Figure 2. Simplified Schematic of a Joglo House (source: Author's Document, 2025)

This diagram presents a simplified floor plan of a traditional Javanese Joglo house, emphasizing its hierarchical spatial organization and cultural symbolism. The layout consists of several key components: the Pindhapa (1) as the open pavilion for communal gatherings, the Pringgitan (2) as a transitional space often used for shadow puppet performances, and the Omah Ndalem (3) as the main house. Within the core structure are the Senthong Kiwo (4), Senthong Tengah (5), and Gandhok Tengon (6), which serve both domestic and ritual functions. Supporting structures include the Pawon (7) or kitchen, Pelawan (9) as the connecting passage, and the surrounding Seketheng (10, 11) which defines the enclosed boundary. The schematic highlights the symbolic relationship between public and private spaces, as well as the cosmological orientation of the Joglo architecture.

Table 1. Identification of Symbolic Urban Landscape Elements in Yogyakarta

Comp.	Route/ Procession Link	Spatial Distribution	Function
Keraton	Center of the axis: Keraton → Tugu → Merapi; Keraton → Parangtritis	Located at the heart of Yogyakarta	Royal residence, spiritual-political center, cosmological axis hub
Alun-Alun Utara	Connected to Keraton ceremonial routes	North of Keraton, large open square	Ritual & public gatherings (e.g., Grebeg, royal parades)
Alun-Alun Selatan	Connected to Keraton via south gate	South of Keraton, open field with banyan trees	Social-ritual space (e.g., Masangin, folk performances)
Tugu Jogja	Linked via Malioboro corridor to Keraton	Northern landmark of the city	Symbolic axis marker, vertical relation human–Divine
Malioboro	Processional path Keraton ↔ Tugu ↔ Parangkusumo	North–south corridor from Keraton to Tugu	Economic–cultural hub, symbolic journey of life
Taman Sari	Linked west of Keraton via pathways	Southwest of Keraton	Water palace, site of meditation & purification rituals

Urban Landscape Symbolism

In the context of Yogyakarta’s urban landscape, various natural elements and open spaces hold profound symbolic meaning within Javanese spiritual traditions. Water, for instance, functions not only as an ecological component but also embodies notions of purification and inner balance. This is exemplified by the presence of Taman Sari (Sari et al., 2019). Taman Sari, a water garden complex located behind the Keraton, was historically used as a place for royal meditation and ritual. Garden elements were not merely designed as green spaces, but symbolized fertility, cosmic order, and served as sites for contemplation.

This schematic map illustrates the spatial organization of the Taman Sari complex in Yogyakarta. The layout highlights several key architectural and symbolic sites, including the Entrance (1), Parking Area

(2), Gapura Panggung (3), Gedong Sakawan (4), Umbul Binangun (5), Gedong Agung (6), Gedong Carik (7), Sumur Gumuling (8), Pulo Kenanga (9), and the Exit (10). The diagram emphasizes the interconnectedness of sacred and functional spaces, reflecting both the practical and cosmological dimensions of the water palace.

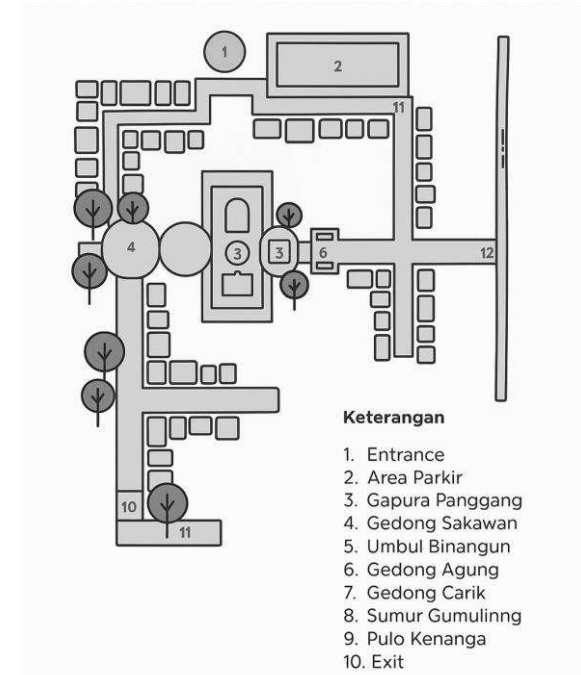


Figure 3. Layout Map of Taman Sari (source: Author’s Document, 2025)

Processional routes—such as the path from the Keraton to Tugu Jogja, or to the Southern Sea via Malioboro and Parangkusumo—also possess deep spiritual dimensions (Widyawati, 2007), serving as symbolic representations of the human life journey—from birth to death—and the vertical relationship between human beings, the king as an intermediary, and the divine as well as the cosmos. These elements constitute a living spiritual landscape, animated through rituals and symbolic meanings that have been transmitted across generations

Table 2. Social and Cultural Activities in Yogyakarta’s Symbolic Spaces

Loc	Type of Activity	Periodicity	Symbolic Meaning
Keraton Yogyakarta	Grebeg Maulud, Grebeg Syawal, Grebeg Besar, royal ceremonies	Annual	Serves as the spiritual and political center; symbolizes the Sultan as khalifatullah mediating between the people and God.

Loc	Type of Activity	Periodicity	Symbolic Meaning
Alun-Alun Utara	Grebeg processions, royal parades, cultural performances	Annual & Occasional	Represents openness of public space; a site of people–king interaction; balance of material and spiritual realms.
Alun-Alun Selatan	Masangin tradition, folk performances, nightly activities	Daily & Weekly	Symbolizes spiritual testing and inner balance; also functions as a social and recreational space for the people.
Tugu Jogja	Independence Day celebrations, communal prayers, cultural gatherings	Annual & Occasional	Marks the cosmological axis (Merapi–Keraton–Parangtritis); symbolizes the vertical relationship between humans and the Divine.
Malioboro	Night markets, street art performances, cultural festivals	Daily, Monthly, Annual	Symbolizes the journey of life; integrates sacred and profane dimensions as an economic–cultural corridor.
Taman Sari	Cultural tourism, water ritual re-enactments, art performances	Daily & Annual	Symbolizes purity and fertility; water as a medium of purification and cosmic harmony.

However, in the development of modern cities, the integration of spiritual elements within urban space faces significant challenges (Prudon, 2017). Although it remains possible to cultivate spiritual integration through contextual and meaningful design approaches, many newly developed spaces are constructed without regard for continuity with existing symbolic structures or historical meanings (Hidayatun, 2018). Nevertheless, several integration efforts have emerged, including the preservation of historically significant public spaces, the spatial organization of urban corridors in alignment with the philosophical axis, and contemporary architectural approaches that seek to adapt and reinterpret local values (Nata & Khamdevi, 2022). The key challenge lies in how to design urban spaces that are not only responsive to economic demands and mobility needs, but also capable of reintroducing spiritual awareness into the life of urban communities. Such integration does not imply a mere replication of traditional forms, but rather a translation of spiritual values—such as

balance, harmony, and contemplation (Huringiin & Yasmin, 2022)—into urban design that is contextual, functional, and culturally meaningful.

Urban Transformations and Their Challenges

The increasingly intensive process of urbanization in Yogyakarta has triggered the transformation of spaces that once held strong spiritual significance into areas oriented toward economic and commercial functions (Haryanto, 2020). Public spaces that were once used for ritual activities, contemplation, or culturally rooted social interaction have increasingly been repurposed into shopping centers, mass tourism areas, or business districts. A notable example is the Malioboro area, which historically served as a sacred ceremonial axis connecting the Keraton and Tugu. Today, it is dominated by consumptive and commercial activities that tend to obscure the philosophical meaning of this symbolic path (Murti & Wijaya, 2012). A similar phenomenon has occurred in several areas surrounding the alun-alun and historic mosques, where spatial configurations have been altered in response to modernization pressures, often without consideration for the non-material values that were once deeply embedded in these spaces (Alhazmi, 2020). Uncontrolled urbanization, when not guided by a culture-based approach, risks eroding the spiritual heritage embedded within the urban landscape and distancing communities from the historical and symbolic ties to the spaces they inhabit.

Within this context, a latent conflict emerges between traditional spiritual values and the demands of modern development, which prioritize spatial efficiency, visual aesthetics, and economic gain. Many recent development projects tend to overlook the established symbolic structures embedded in the urban fabric (Evers & Korff., 2002). In some cases, such developments even interrupt the city’s philosophical axis or displace sacred spaces from their original meanings. When spiritual spaces are treated merely as tourist assets or potential investment zones, a process of desacralization occurs—eroding their function as markers of cultural and spiritual values (Amalia & Agustin, 2022). Reducing them to mere physical locations. This conflict affects not only the physical form of the city but also the social and psychological dimensions of its inhabitants (Prayitno, 2016). As a result, communities face a disconnection from meaning and a loss of cultural orientation. Therefore, it is essential to adopt planning approaches that can balance the dynamics of modernization with the preservation of spiritual values that constitute the city’s identity, as exemplified by Yogyakarta.

This phenomenon was also emphasized by several informants. A cultural practitioner, Lutfi stated: “Malioboro is no longer remembered as a

sacred ceremonial route. For most people, it has become a marketplace, and its symbolic value is fading away from collective memory". An architect interviewed for this study, Gunagama highlighted the disruption in spatial order: "The alignment between Merapi, Tugu, and the Keraton is a cosmological axis that should be preserved. Yet modern development along Malioboro introduces high-rise and commercial buildings that cut this symbolic line, reducing its coherence". Similarly, a community leader, Hadikusumo reflected on how modernization has affected everyday life: "The Alun-Alun used to be a place for ritual and reflection. Now it is crowded with commercial events and night markets. People gather there, but not for the same spiritual reasons as before".

These testimonies indicate that urban transformation has not only altered the physical form of Yogyakarta but also reshaped collective memory and spiritual experience. Many residents now experience these spaces primarily as economic or recreational sites, while their deeper symbolic and cosmological meanings are neglected. This shift illustrates the broader challenge of desacralization, where symbolic spaces are reduced to tourist attractions or business zones. Such findings reinforce the need for a culture-based planning approach. Without deliberate preservation of symbolic structures and their intangible meanings, the identity of Yogyakarta risks being eroded. The interviews confirm that modernization pressures often prioritize spatial efficiency, visual aesthetics, and economic growth, while overlooking the values of spirituality, cultural rootedness, and cosmological harmony that once defined the city's urban fabric.

Relevance and Implications

The conservation of spiritual values in urban planning is crucial, particularly for historic cities such as Yogyakarta, which were founded upon deeply rooted spatial philosophies. These values are not merely symbolic cultural heritage, but also embody local knowledge systems and worldviews that are inherently intertwined with space. When the spiritual dimension of the urban landscape is neglected, what is lost is not only the physical or architectural structure, but also the collective identity, historical narrative, and the community's sense of connectedness to their environment (Haryono, 2015). Therefore, conservation should not be limited to the preservation of buildings or zoning regulations alone, but must also encompass the protection of meaning and spatial function within their cultural and spiritual contexts (Surianti & Wulandari, 2024). In this regard, the involvement of local communities, traditional authorities, and interdisciplinary approaches becomes

essential to maintaining the symbolic integrity of the city in the face of globalization and market-driven pressures.

The conservation of spiritual values in urban planning is crucial, particularly for historic cities such as Yogyakarta. This view is echoed by a cultural practitioner who emphasized: "If the rituals and symbolic spaces of Yogyakarta are not preserved, the younger generation will lose their cultural compass. The city will develop physically, but spiritually it will be empty"(Lutfi, 2025). An architect interviewed during this study highlighted the practical challenge in design: "Urban planning in Yogyakarta must respect the philosophical axis. Without incorporating this principle, new developments risk severing the city from its cosmological roots". Meanwhile, a community leader pointed to the importance of participation: "People must be involved in preserving these spaces. If the community does not use them for meaningful purposes, they will only survive as tourist attractions". These testimonies indicate that the relevance of this study lies not only in academic discourse but also in practical policy-making and community engagement. The implications extend to urban planners, local governments, and cultural stakeholders, who must work collaboratively to maintain the symbolic integrity of Yogyakarta's urban landscape while accommodating modernization.

The implication is that future urban design must shift from a purely technocratic approach toward planning that is grounded in local cultural values and spirituality (Rambe, 2024). Urban planners, architects, and policymakers must recognize that space is not merely a spatial entity filled with practical functions, but also a field of meaning where values and identities are cultivated (Arimbawa & Santhyasa, 2010). By integrating local cosmological principles, sacred spatial arrangements, and traditional symbolism into urban planning, spaces can be created that are not only functional and aesthetically pleasing but also imbued with profound meaning and social vitality. This approach also has the potential to promote more socially and ecologically sustainable development, as spiritual values are generally rooted in principles of balance, harmony, and respect for nature. Thus, the city becomes not merely a place of residence but also a space that fosters awareness, attachment, and inner tranquility for its inhabitants.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the city of Yogyakarta possesses a landscape structure rich in spiritual and symbolic meanings, reflected in elements such as the philosophical axis of Merapi–Keraton–Parangtritis, sacred buildings, procession routes, and traditional public spatial arrangements. However, urbanization

and city development driven by economic and commercial interests have caused a shift in the functions and meanings of these spiritual spaces. Non-material values such as cosmological balance, spatial sanctity, and cultural identity have gradually been displaced by pragmatic and purely visual development narratives. This indicates a crisis in the representation of meaning in contemporary urban design, especially when planning no longer adheres to the local value systems that have long shaped the city's character.

These findings provide a significant contribution to the fields of architecture and urban design, particularly by emphasizing the importance of a value-based approach in city planning and management. Architecture and urban design should be understood not merely as technical or aesthetic practices, but also as instruments for shaping social and spiritual meanings. This study advocates for a paradigm shift in planning—from focusing solely on land use and infrastructure toward creating spaces that also consider symbolic values, cosmological relations, and the cultural identity of the community. Consequently, the discipline of architecture is expected to become more sensitive to social and spiritual contexts and capable of bridging the gap between modern needs and the heritage of local values.

As a recommendation, urban planners and architects need to integrate cultural and spiritual values into spatial planning policies, both through the preservation of existing symbolic structures and the translation of local meanings into contemporary design. Local governments are expected to formulate development policies that ensure continuity between traditional spaces and new development areas, including mechanisms to control the conversion of sacred spaces. Furthermore, the participation of local communities, academics, and traditional stakeholders should be strengthened in the planning process to maintain the living meanings within spaces across generations. By returning urban planning to the roots of spiritual and cultural values, Yogyakarta can preserve its character as a city that not only develops physically but also grows inwardly and meaningfully.

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