

*Government and Community Strategies in Maintaining the Existence of Yogyakarta
Cosmological Axis as a World Cultural Heritage*

Kurnia, Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia

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Abstract

Yogyakarta, with its cultural elements, has been recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, emphasizing its global cultural significance. The purpose of this research is to examine the government and community strategies in maintaining the existence of Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis as a World Cultural Heritage. This qualitative research employed interviews and documentation as collection data techniques. The collected data was then analyzed through reduction stages, data presentation, and conclusion or verification. The results of the research showed that the strategies taken by the government to maintain the Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta are maintaining & protecting the originality, and collaboration between Kraton and government, provincial special regional regulation, the management plan, and the formation of the cosmological axis of Yogyakarta management unit. In addition, the community strategies are participating in community working groups, cultural events, education and outreach, local business engagement, and sustainable practice.

Keywords: Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis, UNESCO, Cultural Heritage, Preservation Strategy, Collaborative Management, Community Participation

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Introduction

In this era, the uniqueness of every country has shaped its character and identity. Every country in the world has a unique culture that differentiates it from one another. The cultural characteristics vary ranging from language, customs, art, music, architecture, traditional clothing, culinary, and values. This cultural diversity enriches global understanding, offering diverse experiences and insights. Indonesia which is known as one of the countries with the most cultural diversity, presents a rich cultural diversity. According to the Geospatial Information Agency (2024), Indonesia has 17.000 islands with rich and diverse cultural mosaics, from the west of Aceh to the east of Papua, it offers a unique cultural heritage. One of the most popular regions in Indonesia is Yogyakarta which is frequently referred to as the heart of Java culture. Yogyakarta is the center of classical Java art and culture such as batik, ballet, drama, music, poetry, and fiction performances.

There are several cultural diversity that have been recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in Yogyakarta which assert its cultural significance at the international level. This includes the magnificent Borobudur Temple, a 9th-century Mahayana Buddhist temple that stands as one of the world's greatest Buddha monuments. Another important site is the Prambanan Temple. A 9th-century Hindu temple complex dedicated to Trimurti, God's expression as Creator, Keeper, and Destroyer. Besides, the Sangiran Ancient Human Site, an important archaeological site for studying the history of human evolution, is located in Central Java. In representing Indonesia's industrial heritage, there is the Ombilin Coal Mining Heritage in Sawahlunto which has also been recognised by UNESCO.

There are many cultural and historical sites in Yogyakarta that can define the Indonesian culture. The city's Cosmological Axis is identified as a potential World Cultural Heritage, and it has had significant historical importance alongside shaping the identity of the region. The Yogyakarta Provincial Government initiated a regulatory framework that would recognize the Cosmological Axis as a heritage site (Siregar, 2019). This recognition therefore provides an opportunity for considering government and community strategies towards conservation and promotion of this cultural treasure at global level.

The City Government of Yogyakarta together with the Provincial Government have recently been involved in various programs aimed at ensuring enhancement of sustainability and preservation of Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis. Involving various stakeholders and resources to ensure their continuing significance, these efforts were multifaceted. Recognized by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage since 2014, this marked the beginning of an intricate process that involved elaborate scrutiny, reviews, evaluations and strategic planning.

Over the years, a number of evaluations have been conducted over the years to ensure that the Cosmological Axis satisfied the exacting criteria put in place by UNESCO for cultural heritage listing. The efforts stretched for almost ten years and ended up in September 2023 when Yogyakarta cosmological axis was officially designated as a World Cultural Heritage site by UNESCO. This honor is not only testament to the cultural or historical importance these landmarks bear but also shows successful partnership as well as dedication on part of local and provincial governments committed to preserving Yogyakarta's rich legacy for future generations. Thus, this study has the purpose of unveiling the government and community-based strategies aimed at conserving and advertising this World Cultural Heritage.

Methods

This research is qualitative in nature and explains extensively on the strategies taken and being put in place by the government and community toward maintaining and sustaining the existence of the Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis as a World Cultural Heritage site. It explicitly tries to explain the various approaches adopted so that the site, rich in cultural and historical values, can still be preserved and appreciated.

The data collection in this research was extensive, including depth personal interviews and massive documentation. Interviews aimed to capture the key stakeholders of individual preservation activities in government officials and community leadership to get an overall understanding of strategies, actions, and perceptions relevant to the preservation initiatives. Sourced from different document types, policy documents, reports, and historical records of each preservation activity, this will provide a basis for their rounded understanding. The data collected was subjected to a rigorous analysis. First in the line followed the step of data reduction where the data was sorted and sifted in order to separate the more relevant and important elements which were to be gathered from it. Subsequent to this, the structuring and presentation of the data were done in such a form that it coherently and clearly makes these findings understandable. Later on, conclusions were drawn, and the results verification was made to ensure that best results are accurate to guarantee its reliability.

This research aims to explore the initiatives from both parties in sustaining the Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis as a World Cultural Heritage site and define such strategies within the broad context of cultural heritage preservation.

Result

The Concept of Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis

From the data obtained, it turns out that the cosmological axis is a concept that connects important sites in Yogyakarta into one straight line with philosophical and historical dimensions. Second, The Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis is a creation of the genius of The First Sultan Hamengkubuwana in 1755. Third, the concept itself is often used to explain something about the layout and geographical orientation of key landmarks in the city toward the sacred mount of Merapi. It means not only is the axis a physical straight line that connects various places but also it symbolizes the spiritual relationship of human beings with nature and the cosmos—something indispensable to Javanese culture. It materializes in local philosophy over the disharmony and imbalance between humans and the universe. Presented below is the mapping of the inventoried assets onto the cosmological axis of Yogyakarta.

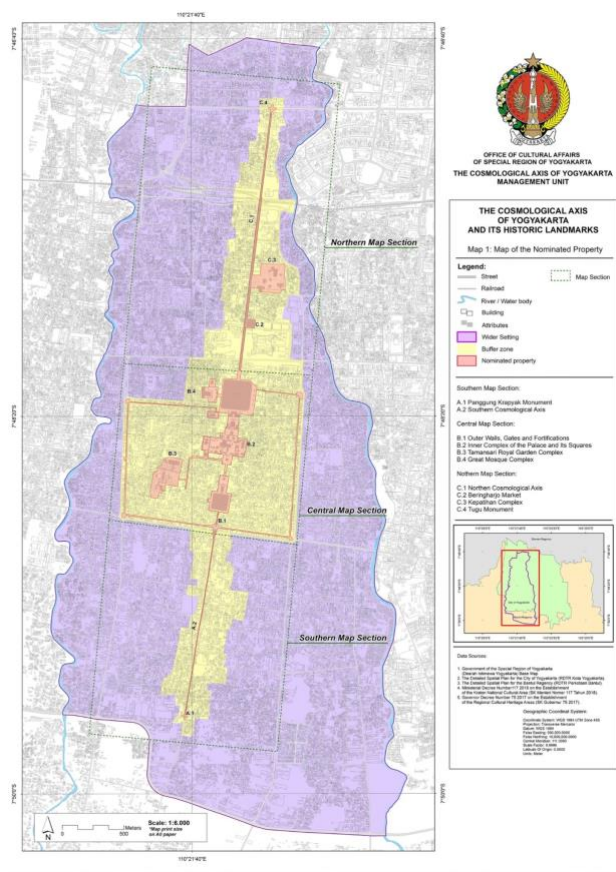


Figure 1: Map of the Inscribed Property

Based on the figure above shows that there are ten landmarks that are attributes along the Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta. They are Tugu monument, Kepatihan complex, Beringharjo market, great Mosque complex, Tamansari royal garden complex, Panggung krapyak monument, Outer walls, inner complex of the palace, northern square, and southern square. These attributes are placed in a straight line along the Axis to embody the Javanese philosophy of life regarding the cycle of life (Sangkan Paraning Dumadi), harmonious and ideal life (Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono) and the relationship between man and God (Manunggaling Kawula Gusti). These landmarks are connected through the design, rituals and management system of traditional and Kraton Yogyakarta.

Government Strategies

Some strategies have been implemented by the government and the community to maintain the existence of cosmological axis of Yogyakarta. On the government side, the strategies are divided into five (5) points. The first is maintaining and protecting the originality, Properties within the Kraton are protected by national and local laws, traditional and modern management systems, and community-based management. The original building still stays the same. For example, Tugu monument in 1910 and the Kota Gedhe Mosque in 1888 are still relatively the same as the building right now. Then, the Kraton area is designated as a National Heritage Area by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, and the core zone, buffer zone, and wider setting have been designated as a Provincial Heritage Area.

The second strategy is Synergy between Kraton and the Government. Kraton is a royal palace that is the residence and centre of government of a Sultan and becomes the centre of culture and customs, while the government is institutions that organise and manage public affairs. In this case, kraton will take in charge of traditional management system (Tata rakating paprentahan and Tata rakating wewangunan). At the same time, the government is responsible for a joint secretariat for the management of the sultanate's strategic areas which includes policy and decision-making levels. So, both The Kraton and the government altogether are responsible for overseeing conservation, construction, and other activities that affect values in the Cultural Heritage area.

The third is Provincial Special Regional Regulation. As a special region, Yogyakarta has a special regulation to maintain the local heritage. For example, regulation No. 5/2019 regulates the height, location, and density of buildings within protected areas. The Governor's Regulation on Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) of 2022 mandates HIA for all projects that impact the property. and more regulations to preserve and maintain the cultural heritage.

The next strategy is the Management Plan, which is the authoritative document that guides all stakeholders in planning and carrying out policies and programs to ensure the protection and preservation of Outstanding Universal Value, integrity, and authenticity of nominated cultural heritage property. The Management Plan for 2022-2025 has been developed, and the property is guided by the traditional system of Tata Rakiting Wewangunan.

The last strategy is the formation of an operational management unit. The Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta Management Unit, established in 2021, is responsible for property management. The unit is responsible for implementing the management plan, including coordinating the Community Working Group and monitoring its implementation in close coordination with all stakeholders.

Community Strategies

Some strategies have been taken by society to participate in maintaining this world cultural heritage. The first, Community Working Group (CWG) is a local organization for those who live along the axis dedicated to heritage conservation. These organisations coordinate efforts and liaise between the community and government. For example, these CWGs would identify the potential in each district and deliver it to the government for further policies. Second, in Cultural Events, the community participates and contributes to a series of cultural festivals organised by the government, especially those held along the cosmological axis road. Third, Education and outreach, Community members organize such activities, including school programs and informal seminars to educate others about the importance of heritage conservation. This can help to build a broader base of support and understanding, particularly among young people. Fourth is local business engagement; communities along the cosmological axis create traditional businesses to maintain and introduce Yogyakarta culture to tourists. This can also be an attractive thing for tourists who want to shop for local crafts and cultural stuff. The last is sustainable practices in which the community voluntarily helps to keep the cosmological axis area clean. Implementing sustainable practices at heritage sites, such as limiting waste, using environmentally friendly materials in maintenance, and controlling visitor access to sensitive areas, can help ensure the existence of these sites.

Discussion

In terms of developing Yogyakarta into another cultural hub, there must be participation from community members and local authorities in sustainable tourism development initiatives (Isdarmanto et al., 2021). Moreover, such an initiative does not just bring tourists but also helps to reveal how culturally abundant and historically deep-rooted the city is. The governance structure in Yogyakarta is characterized by uneven decentralization within an integrated nation state that creates both difficulties and prospects for cultural preservation and development. The unity between government and leadership with regard to cultural heritage is highlighted by Sultan's position as Governor of Special District of Yogyakarta (Asmorojati et al., 2022). Keraton Yogyakarta represents one among several institutions serving as custodians for Java traditions and heritage while practicing cultural diplomacy (Nugraha et al., 2022).

The efforts they make are aimed at enhancing the preservation and development of regional cultural identity on national and international scales. This is further intensified by dynamic interaction in UNESCO selection criteria that gives prominence to Philosophy Equity as a prospective World Cultural Heritage Site for Yogyakarta. It not only acts as an urban icon but also represents philosophical and cultural aspects of Yogyakarta's heritage (Syahdani, 2023). This explains the relevance of knowing the standards set by UNESCO which underscores the importance of upholding authenticity and integrity for various cultural sites like Cosmological Axis.

Different strategies and measures have been used to preserve historical places so as to maintain their significance or even existence, in such fields as cultural heritage conservation or urban development. For instance, there have been attempts in recent times by Yogyakarta City Government working together with Provincial Government to enhance sustainability of Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis. In fact, there has been an undertaking to re-constitute green spaces around axial zone showing commitment towards maintaining both cultural and environmental authenticity of this significant ecosystem (Agathis et al., 2021). There are other methods that save the axis and have an impact on local communities as well as its surroundings. Besides, it is important to note that this city can only be branded as a major tourist attraction through the use of marketing strategy which takes advantage of the unique heritage, culture and cuisine in Yogyakarta. One important character emerging from literature is about adaptive sustainable reuse, stated (Spina, 2020) in her study. Adaptive reuse is a way that extends lifespan of heritage site; it is also an urban strategy to promote economic-cultural-social values hence helping local area growth. The present-day view implies matching between preserving inheritance with modern layout requirements in cities such as these ones.

It is further added that the cultural intersection and urban branding probed by Evans (2003), reflect a new phase where cities are developing as centers of culture and using contemporary art and cultural districts to brand them. This points out the increased transformation of cultural heritage into a tradable commodity, with institutions like museums and art districts as the center of city identity and global attraction. Cultural commodification raises questions to heritage conservation and commercialization in urban environments. Again, it was succinctly put forward by Rahman, when putting forth a case for protection of diversified heritage, in terms of its contribution toward the preservation of cultural identity, promotion of tourism, economic development, environmental conversation, enrichment of education, and public pride. This holistic view further recognizes heritage sites not for their historic value, but

because of the broad contributions they make to society and the objectives of sustainable development. Examples drawn from the case study illustrate ways to manage this complexity and channel tourism into community empowerment. In summary, these scientific works show that interactions between heritage conservation, urban development, and community involvement are complex. It is through the strategies of re-adaptation, embracing digitalization, sophisticated techniques of documentation, and striking a balance between commercial interests and conservation goals that governments and communities can successfully negotiate the challenges of relevance and integrity of cultural heritage amidst a fast-changing world.

Further steps should be initiated to maintain the existence of the Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis as World Cultural Heritage after the declaration. From the government, through exploratory efforts, and the community strategies in preserving its presence, the Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta as a World Cultural Heritage Site demonstrates some initiatives to protect this city's cultural heritages. It is when the multilayered identity of Yogyakarta is explored, the identities of its places and citizens explained, and marketing strategies put in place that the city embarks on a journey for sustainable tourism development and conservation of culture. The active involvement shown by the stakeholders at different levels—from government instrumentalities to public bodies—indicated collective efforts being made in an attempt to sustain the culture of Yogyakarta at the international level.

Conclusion

According to the data analysis, it can be concluded that the Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis is the conceptual axis which links several important sites in Yogyakarta along a straight line, reflecting the spiritual connection between human beings, nature, and the cosmos, and is therefore very significant in Javanese tradition. This reflects the local philosophy pertaining to the balance and harmony between human beings and the universe. Government steps towards the maintenance of Yogyakarta Cosmological Axis are conserving and protecting the originality and synergy between Kraton and the government through the provincial special regional regulation, management plan, and establishment of the management unit for the cosmological axis of Yogyakarta. Other strategies from civilians include participation in community working groups, cultural events, education, and outreach, local business engagement, and work practices.

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Contact email: kurnia1999@mail.ugm.ac.id