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Questioning the traditional narrative over contemporary urban development in the Javanese royal city

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Abstract

The recent spectacularized development in the Gulf cities of the Middle East and North Africa has brought into view its contradictory logic of urban change. The cities in that region are highly entrepreneurial, ambitious, and futuristic (Kanna, 2011), yet this happens in and through the long-standing tradition of monarchical power (Molotch and Ponzini, 2019). Royal authority is expressed in modern and globalized forms. Is this the case in other contexts where urban change proceeds in the context of royal influence? This paper addresses this question by looking at the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Although Indonesia is a democracy, in Yogyakarta, the royal family retains a strong presence in and influence over the city. That influence, however, manifests itself not in a futuristic way, as in the cities of the Gulf, but through traditionalized discourses and forms. Moreover, while urban development in Gulf cities is often legitimized by using a globalized and future-oriented vision, in Yogyakarta, change is legitimized by recourse to traditional narratives set within the symbolic authority of royalty. This paper explores why Yogyakarta's urban change proceeds in and through this royalistic logic. It does so by examining the historical background and current cultural and socio-economic context of urban change, including relevant legal and planning issues. I conclude that the persistence of traditionalized reasoning and expression in Yogyakarta is intensified in inverse proportion to the purchase of monarchical power. Although urban change is framed through royal reasoning, that reasoning is itself shaped by funding opportunities, legal constraints, and global and local forces. Unlike Gulf cities, which benefit from oil wealth and deregulated economic zoning, Yogyakarta has limited funding from the central government and limited opportunity for foreign investment. These economic constraints intensify traditionalism and a specific form of urban royal expression, all through the opportunities offered through the cultural economy of heritage.

Keywords

Monarchy, Royal Agency, Tradition, Urban Development, Indonesia

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Introduction

In January 2022, the provincial government of Yogyakarta issued a sudden notice to the street vendors of Malioboro Street, the bustling main shopping street in Yogyakarta, informing them of their relocation to Teras Malioboro. However, when the street vendors requested a postponement of the relocation, Sultan Hamengku Buwana X, the governor, refused and responded by stating that he had been patiently awaiting the relocation of the street vendors for 18 years (Detik Travel, 2022). This occurrence highlights the existence of a royal agency that influences urban development within Yogyakarta. The Sultan's remark regarding his lengthy wait indicates a personal interest in the relocation process. Moreover, it signifies a dynamic shift in his influence, suggesting that while it may have been unfeasible to relocate the street vendors 18 years prior, it became possible in 2022.

The presence of royal agency in urban development is a topic that receives limited attention in the existing urban studies literature. Most urban studies literature adheres to the conventional framework of the urban actors' triangle, comprising the state, market, and civil society. However, in regions where monarchy still holds sway and wields significant power, this triangular model can be less relevant, as monarchs possess a distinct authority that allows them to simultaneously assume the roles of the state and the market. In such societies, civil society often encompasses the subjects of the king, diminishing the significance of the traditional urban actors' triangle—state, market, and civil society—as all three entities primarily serve the central actor, namely, the king or the royal agency. This aspect has been explored by scholars like Kershaw in the context of Monarchy in Southeast Asia (Kershaw, 2001) and Davidson in Sultanism (Davidson, 2021), wherein they acknowledge the involvement of various stakeholders, including the private sector, bureaucrats, and the general populace, in supporting the monarchy or the sultan.

Literature on the involvement of royal agencies in contemporary cities nowadays is mainly dominated by the cities in the Middle East and North Africa region (MENA), particularly the Gulf cities. These regions have a royal agency to sponsor ambitious urban development. Dubai has been considered the model of Gulf cities, whose influence spread to the whole region (Elsheshtawy, 2008). Some of the characteristics of Dubai are designed to be iconic, involving starchitects, futuristic and legitimized by some narratives associated with culture, 'green' and sustainability (Kanna, 2011). The starchitects involved in the design and development of Dubai usually accept and support the narratives from the royal agencies who

sponsor the development. The existence of royal agencies is identified by Molotch and Ponzini as the main cause for the difference between the cities in the Gulf area and the Western theories (Molotch and Ponzini, 2019). The development of the cities in the Gulf [and MENA] region does not follow the conventional urban theories derived from the cases in the Western world.

However, as the case in Dubai shows a futuristic city form, legitimized with narratives on ‘sustainability’ and ‘green city’, the case in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, shows an opposite form. The recent development of the city of Yogyakarta shows an eagerness to revive the ‘original’ past instead of building futuristic architecture. This happens despite some similarities in the socio-political situation with Dubai. While the Sheikh in Dubai holds absolute power (Kanna, 2011), the sultan of Yogyakarta just gained momentum to gain more power after decentralization in Indonesia that took effect in 2001 (Miller and Bunnell, 2013). After decentralization, the royal court managed to push the central government to pass the Law of Privilege, which warrant the sultan to be automatically appointed governor for life, the acknowledgement of the royal court’s territory and property (Kurniadi, 2019; Purwani, 2014). This law has granted the royal court of Yogyakarta more authority than ever before.

In the case of Dubai, the Sheikh holds control over the government and is also a prominent player in various industries, benefiting from the region's oil wealth and investing in numerous global companies (Hanieh, 2018). Moreover, he is regarded as a visionary by his people. The people of Dubai still hold deep respect for the Sheikh, and all three actors—state, market, and civil society—support the monarchy. In Yogyakarta, on the other hand, the Sultan holds authority at the provincial level and automatically assumes the position of governor, effectively embodying the state. While the royal family has several medium-sized companies, they maintain close relationships and collaborate with national conglomerates.¹ Members of the royal family also hold strategic positions in the government. Moreover, as noted in a recent paper by Budi, the people of Yogyakarta also demonstrate support for the monarchy (Budi, 2023). Hence, Yogyakarta shares similarities with Dubai in terms of enjoying support from all three actors, reaffirming the central role of the monarchy.

The current development in Yogyakarta city centre shows a big plan to bring the city centre to the ‘original’ state², which will then involve a massive displacement of settlements in the city centre. The development of the city centre aims to support the proposal for the city to be listed in the UNESCO World Heritage List as the ‘City of Philosophy’ (Government of

¹ Based on the documents of companies in <https://ahu.go.id>

² Based on an interview with the architect working on the project in 2022.

Special Region of Yogyakarta, 2019; Syahbudin et al., 2018). To legitimize the development in the city centre, the provincial government of Yogyakarta uses a traditional narrative, including the north-south axis. The axis, which has been in the anthropological literature on Yogyakarta and Java (Brongtodiningrat, 1978; Indonesia Marketing Association, 2002; Nas, 2011), is highlighted in the development in the city centre as the ‘cosmological axis’. This traditional urban trajectory, while serving entrepreneurial agenda for tourism, can also serve political agenda like what happened in Bangkok (Rugkhapan, 2022) where the traditional urban development imposed serves the political agenda of the monarchy.

However, urban trajectories not only include agencies as decision-makers. It also includes ‘structure’ as identified by Giddens (Giddens, 1984). While ‘agency’ is usually defined as the ‘actor’ or ‘the capacity to act’, ‘structure’ is defined as any restrictions that influence the agency’s actions, such as regulations and existing conditions. The agencies cannot act beyond the structure embodied by them, even though they have the ability to change the structure. In this paper, I argue that the difference in the urban trajectories of the city of Yogyakarta to that in Dubai can be explained using a structure/agency framework.

This paper aims to explore deeper into the development in Yogyakarta today to see why the development in Yogyakarta, which is similarly sponsored by the royal agency, goes a different way from the cases in the MENA region, particularly Dubai as the main model of the Gulf and MENA region. To do this, I will explore deeper in the case of Yogyakarta in terms of agency/structure and compare it with Dubai. In doing so, this paper will contribute to the existing knowledge of urban studies, particularly of the underrepresented royal city in Southeast Asia. It also contributes to the understanding of urban trajectory based on the theory of structuration, where there is a dominant royal agency which makes the triangle of urban actors irrelevant, but its action is limited by existing structures which are specific and relevant only to its particular area.

Analytical framework

Giddens's theory of structuration delves into the interplay between agency and structure, highlighting how both factors shape and influence various practices. This theory is applicable to urban development trajectories, where agencies make decisions and take actions within the confines of structural limitations. However, agencies also possess the capacity to enact change

and mold the very structures that influence them, leading to what Giddens refers to as the "duality of structure."

As discussed earlier, a royal agency exhibits a unique dynamic whereby other agencies and stakeholders, including the state, private sector, market, and civil society, lend their support to the royal agency. This unity of agency results in a cohesive and uniform approach. Nonetheless, a distinction can be drawn between Yogyakarta and Dubai, particularly in terms of the scope of authority. The Sheikh of Dubai not only holds authority over the city itself but also wields significant influence beyond the city borders, making him the most influential sheikh in the UAE. He also has significant influence over the country's border, which is to the Gulf and MENA region. In contrast, the Sultan of Yogyakarta's authority is confined solely to the Special Region of Yogyakarta, with no control over territories outside his jurisdiction. This difference in the scope of authority and influence, along with other factors, can somehow bring several conditions that restrict the royal agencies' actions or structures.

This brings our attention to the structures that potentially impose limits and constraints on agency actions. As defined by Purkarthofer and Stead (2023), structures are "enduring sets of rules and resources." They can be categorized into three main types: authoritative structures, allocative structures, and knowledge and cultural structures (Callinicos, 1985; Giddens, 1984; Purkarthofer and Stead, 2023). Authoritative structures encompass formal and informal regulations and rules, while allocative structures pertain to the distribution of resources and the functioning of the economy. Knowledge and cultural structures revolve around ideas and their influence.

Authoritative structures encompass both formal and informal regulations that originate internally or externally to the jurisdiction of a royal agency, imposing constraints on its actions. In the case of a provincial royal agency, these structures can include national regulations or global laws, as well as internal rules set forth by the sultan or sheikh. Allocative structures, on the other hand, manifest in various ways, such as access to funding from foreign or domestic investments or through government initiatives. They can also arise from collaborative partnerships between the royal agency and corporations, which may either facilitate or limit the agency's ability to realize its vision. Knowledge and cultural structures are extensive and diverse, taking the form of prevalent academic discourses on the subject, widely accepted myths, collective imaginations, and ideals that circulate globally.

These structural elements play a pivotal role in influencing the actions and decisions of agencies engaged in urban development processes. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize and comprehend these structures in order to grasp the underlying dynamics and unravel the intricate

interplay between agency and structure within the realm of urban development. This paper will adopt the agency and structure framework, comparing the scope of authority and the structures, which include the authoritative, allocative, knowledge and cultural dimensions. By employing this framework, a comparative analysis of Yogyakarta and Dubai will be conducted to shed light on the substantial disparities in their respective urban development trajectories.

Method

In this research, I will compare Yogyakarta to Dubai in terms of agency and structure. I go deeper into the case of Yogyakarta by taking two samples along the axis: Malioboro and the northern alun-alun. The data for Yogyakarta is mainly derived from secondary sources such as previously published journals, news, and documents, on the one hand, and the other, from direct observation and interviews with key stakeholders such as the staff of the cultural board of Yogyakarta, the staff of the Office for Tourism of Yogyakarta, common people, the architect involved in the projects, and the royal courtiers. In total, seven unstructured interviews were conducted in 2022. The number of interviews is kept to a minimum due to its sensitivity. Verification is then needed to check the validation of the interview data by crosscheck with news and governmental online sources. Interview with the royal family was not considered due to the same reason. Instead, the perspective of the royal family, then, is represented by their formal statement in the news and media. All the data about Dubai is from secondary resources.

Urban Trajectories in Dubai

Urban development in the MENA region has been discussed in many literatures as one of the most ambitious and futuristic. This progressive development relates to the wealth of GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Countries, mainly from oil and from their investments in other sectors to diversify (Aydin, 2013; Hanieh, 2018) which spread on an international scale and take form in real estate, power, water and transport infrastructure, and telecommunication (Hanieh, 2018). This accumulation of GCC capital has made it possible for countries to embrace neo-liberal urbanism.

The monarchy, as the most dominant agency in the development in this region, usually plans to build new cities in remote areas far from the existing built environment. As a consequence, the new cities will include the construction of highways and any transport

infrastructure connecting the new cities to the closest inhabited area (Kanna, 2011). The approach to design is mostly starting from the empty desert, and the architects involved -usually starchitects- treat the project as a 'laboratory' for an experiment (Kanna, 2011; Verdeil, 2019). There are usually not many restrictions from the monarch clients as they let the starchitects design as they please (Ponzini, 2014). Those mega projects usually have global urban imagery, futuristic and ambitious. We can see it in mega projects such as NEOM and KAEC, which were built to respond to the post-petroleum era to attract global capital in the non-petroleum sector (Redman, 2020). They are open, 'free-zone', and modern, based on Western progressive urban imagery, and designed as a model for replication elsewhere (Redman, 2020).

Urban development in the MENA region has garnered significant attention in numerous pieces of literature as an ambitious and futuristic endeavor. This forward-looking progress is closely linked to the wealth of GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) Countries, primarily derived from oil revenues and investments in diverse sectors (Aydin, 2013; Hanieh, 2018). Such investments span international boundaries and manifest in real estate, power, water and transport infrastructure, and telecommunications (Hanieh, 2018). The accumulation of GCC capital has facilitated the adoption of neoliberal urbanism by these countries.

In this region, the monarchy often plays a dominant role in development and typically envisions the construction of new cities in remote areas, distinct from existing urban environments (Kanna, 2011). Consequently, these new cities necessitate the establishment of highways and other transportation infrastructure to connect them with nearby inhabited areas (Kanna, 2011). The design approach usually commences from an empty desert, with the involvement of renowned architects who consider the project as a 'laboratory' for experimentation (Kanna, 2011; Verdeil, 2019). Monarch clients generally impose minimal restrictions, granting starchitects the freedom to design as they see fit (Ponzini, 2014). These mega projects often embody a global urban aesthetic characterized by a futuristic and ambitious outlook. Prominent examples include NEOM and KAEC, built to address the post-petroleum era and attract international investments in non-petroleum sectors (Redman, 2020). These projects are envisioned as open, 'free-zone,' and modern spaces, drawing inspiration from Western progressive urban ideals and intended to serve as models for replication elsewhere (Redman, 2020).

In accordance with the New Urban Agenda of 2016, the GCC government actively promotes urban sustainability, despite doubts surrounding their actual commitment to sustainability (Verdeil, 2019). Masdar City, designed by renowned architect Norman Foster in 2008, was among the first cities in the region to claim carbon neutrality. Subsequently, other

cities such as KAEC, NEOM, and Dubai followed suit, adopting a similar 'eco-city' concept (Verdeil, 2019). These cities emulate one another, engaging in a competitive "place war" (Kanna, 2011) as they vie to attract global capital through their urban agendas (Cugurullo, 2016). However, it is worth noting that the narratives surrounding sustainability or green cities serve as a means to legitimize these mega projects, despite the resulting contradictions with the proclaimed ideals (Verdeil, 2019).

Dubai, however, has surpassed other cities by being the most progressive city in the region and becoming the urban model in the region (Elsheshtawy, 2008) with its glamorous appearance and global outreach. The main urban agency in Dubai is Sheikh Muhammed bin Rasheed Al Maktoum who has absolute power in his territory while at the same time holding the position of Prime Minister in UAE (Ulrichsen, 2016). While the urban development in Dubai aims at foreigners instead of the locals and low-paid immigrants, he is considered a 'visionary' (Kanna, 2011). During his reign, Dubai became the urban model whose influence spread beyond the UAE and North Africa (Elsheshtawy, 2008). The urban trajectory of Dubai is futuristic, spectacular, and, just like Masdar, is legitimized by the narratives of sustainability and eco-city (Kanna, 2011). Architects were employed to design the city (Kanna, 2011), who also act as the selling point in which their popularity is being used for marketing (Ponzini,

However, the development model used by Dubai does not merely come from the local. Dubai has been emulating Masdar's agenda (Verdeil, 2019), Singapore and Hong Kong's development model (Hvidt, 2009). The progress also fits the Western idea of global cities and sustainability agenda. However, as identified by Cugurullo (Cugurullo, 2016), this has something to do with economic interest, which is to sell the city to the global market. The status of Dubai as a free zone is very important to attract global capital (Kanna, 2011; Mogielnicki and Mogielnicki, 2021; Shayah and Qifeng, 2015).

Urban trajectories of Yogyakarta

The city of Yogyakarta was established in the 18th century after the division of the Mataram Kingdom, the predominant kingdom in Java, through the Giyanti Treaty of 1755 (Carey, 1997; Ricklefs, 1993). This division resulted in the creation of two separate entities: Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Following the treaty, Sultan Hamengku Buwana I (HB I) took the initiative to design

and construct a royal palace, known as the Kraton, in close proximity to Mataram's ancient capital, Kotagedhe³ (Carey, 1986; Ricklefs, 1993; Saleh et al., 2006).

Subsequently, in 1813, the British colonial government established a minor court called Pakualaman, derived from the royal court of Yogyakarta, in order to address internal conflicts within the royal court. The Pakualaman court was granted a small territory within the city and a narrow strip of land in the Kulon Progo area (Cribb, 2007). Consequently, due to this arrangement, the Pakualaman court has always been subordinate to the royal court of Yogyakarta.

When Sukarno and Hatta declared Indonesian Independence in 1945, the royal court of Yogyakarta and the minor court of Pakualaman were among the first to express their support through a joint declaration. Their support endured throughout the war for independence from 1945 to 1949. One of their significant contributions to the newly founded nation was allowing the central government to use Yogyakarta as a temporary capital and providing financial assistance when Batavia was occupied by the Dutch during that period. Sultan Hamengku Buwana IX played a crucial role in ensuring the survival of the royal courts (Carey, 1986). They were able to retain their territory, property, and political influence, which set them apart from other royal courts in Indonesia that lost either their land, wealth, or political significance after 1946 and became mere cultural symbols (Budi, 2023; Purwani, 2014).

Due to his substantial contribution, Sultan Hamengku Buwana IX was granted important positions in the Indonesian government (Monfries, 2007, 2015). He held the position of governor of the special province, while the prince of Pakualaman was appointed as vice governor. While the sultan mainly operated at the national level, the prince of Pakualaman served as the governor on his behalf. However, when Sultan Hamengku Buwana IX passed away in 1988, the position of governor was not automatically passed down to his descendant, Sultan Hamengku Buwana X. Instead, the central government (in centralized Indonesia) allowed Prince Pakualam VIII to assume the governor's role, leaving the royal court of Yogyakarta in a precarious position.

Prince Pakualam VIII passed away in 1998, the same year the sultan Hamengku Buwana X had a significant contribution at the national level to the *reformasi* movement that disposed of Soeharto. The sultan was then appointed governor, with Prince Pakualam IX as vice governor in 1998. However, as there was no law on the appointment of the sultan as the

³ The capital of Mataram kingdom was moved several times as there was a belief that when something 'bad' happened such as riots, endemic disease, or wars, the capital had to move somewhere else.

governor, this appointment could not be guaranteed for the next sultan. In 2008 the sultan declared himself a presidential candidate for the 2009 Indonesian election (*Raja Jawa Jadi Capres*, n.d.). However, while he had massive support from the people in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, which was reflected in several events in Yogyakarta (Purwani, 2014), he did not have enough support from other parts of Indonesia. As a result, he cannot elevate his political role from the provincial level to the national level.

Furthermore, in the 2000s, the central government embarked on a path of decentralization process in Indonesia. The decentralization policy, established by law in 1999 but implemented in 2001, granted significant autonomy to districts throughout the country, with the exception of three provinces, including the Special Region of Yogyakarta. In those three provinces, autonomy was brought to the level of the province (Miller and Bunnell, 2013).

However, decentralization usually comes with a push for democratization. This push for democratization from the central government led to political tension between the royal court of Yogyakarta and the central government from 2010 to 2012, as the central government wanted the governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta to be democratically elected. The royal court advocated for the central government to enact the Law of Privilege, which would guarantee the automatic appointment of the sultan as governor, recognizing the royal court's contributions to the nation. After a period of tense negotiations, the Law of Privilege of Yogyakarta was finally passed in August 2012. One of the key reasons for its enactment was to acknowledge the "origin" of Yogyakarta and uphold 'local wisdom'.

Some notable provisions of the Law of Privilege (UU no 13 tahun 2012 tentang Keistimewaan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, 2012) include:

1. The Sultan of the royal court will be automatically appointed as the governor, with the prince from the minor court serving as the vice governor.
2. Yogyakarta has the autonomy to establish regulations pertaining to appointment procedures, government institutions, cultural matters, land issues, and spatial planning.
3. The central government will provide funding for the development, known as Dana Keistimewaan or Privilege Fund, in accordance with proposals for projects falling within the aforementioned five areas of focus.

With this law, the sultan is automatically appointed governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, with the prince of Pakualam as the vice governor. Other positions, such as mayor, *bupati* (district head) and *lurah* (village/ neighbourhood head), are democratically elected. However, all candidates have to get permission from the Sultan.

New local regulations were established to imply the Law of Privilege in five aspects. However, the new regulations are centralized in the royal and minor courts. The regulation of institutions, for example, has changed the governmental institutions into the likes of the royal court structure, serving the interest of the royal court to preserve its power (Azizah, 2018). Members of the royal family were also appointed to strategic positions in several governmental institutions. The new regulations on cultural matters, spatial layout and land issues are also centralized in the royal and minor courts.

With the new Law, the provincial government of Yogyakarta has more space for development, as they can propose funding directly from the central government in the form of Privilege Fund. The central government-allocated funds have no certain limit. The provincial government has to propose the central government for each unit of development, which has to be under the five scopes. The central government will then decide how much funding will be given to Yogyakarta. Most of the Privilege Funds were used for cultural development, while others, such as land, institution and spatial layout sectors, receive very little funding if compared to cultural development (Eka, 2017).

The local regulation (*Perdais*) regarding cultural development states that ‘culture’ is defined as the ones that originated from the royal court and the minor court (Perdais No 3 Th 2017 Tentang Pemeliharaan Dan Pengembangan Kebudayaan, 2017). This makes the cultural development to be royal courts centric. While the Law of Privilege of Yogyakarta mentions that the development has to be beneficial for the society, the development of culture then is translated into cultural tourism development, with ‘culture’ as one belonging to the royal court and the minor court only.

The focus of the development in Yogyakarta now is the development in the core area as an effort for the city to be enlisted in the UNESCO World Heritage list as “The City of Philosophy”⁴. The proposal to UNESCO was based on an existing discourse on the urban layout and the palace layout of Yogyakarta, which are claimed to be ‘cosmological’ or, in the present term: ‘philosophical’. The traditional layout consists of hierarchical circles and an axis (see Figure 1). For the proposal, the provincial government used only the axis to highlight.

⁴ The proposal was submitted in 2017, UNESCO visit took place in August 2022. The result has not been decided yet by the time this paper is written.

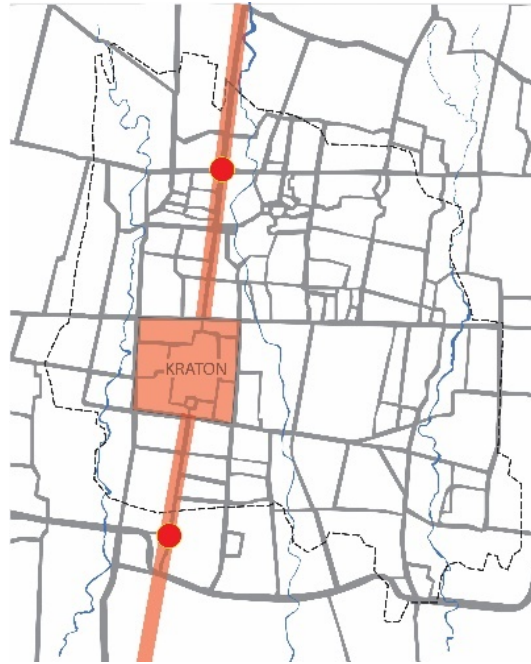


Figure 1. The axis of Yogyakarta, map created by the Author in 2014

The preference to highlight the traditional axis for the proposal to UNESCO is based on the notion that Yogyakarta is the ‘traditional’. Yogyakarta has been popularly acknowledged as the cradle of Javanese culture. Many cultural products have been identified to relate to its courtly culture, such as Batik cloth, *gamelan*, traditional dance, traditional food, *wayang* puppet, and architecture. Those cultural products always relate to the hierarchical structure of Javanese society, where the sultan is at the top of the hierarchy (Purwani, 2014). The cultural practices are still popular now as a part of living heritage. The city layout and the architecture of the royal palace have also been considered to be based on Indic/Buddhist and Islamic cosmology (Brongtodiningrat, 1978; Woodward, 2010). This discourse of the cosmological layout has been the most dominant up to the present (Siregar, 2019).

This distinction has made Yogyakarta recognized in terms of cultural richness and tradition. In Indonesia’s context, the royal court of Yogyakarta has always been the symbol of culture and traditions. The royal palace model is chosen to represent the Special Region of Yogyakarta in the Indonesia Indah project (*TMII - Mengenai TMII*, n.d.), a project initiated by Tien Soeharto to show up the cultural richness of Indonesia by representing each province (Lukito, 2023; Pemberton, 1994). The existence of Yogyakarta, then, cannot be separated from its culture and tradition.

This ‘tradition’ has also made Yogyakarta one of Indonesia’s most popular tourist destinations, only second to Bali (Judisseno, 2015) which dates back to the colonial period.

Cultural tourism has been the main income-generating activity in Yogyakarta. The main tourist destinations in Yogyakarta are the royal palace, Malioboro Street, and the Palace of Pakualaman. Most of those objects are located along the known axis except for the palace of Pakualaman.

The proposal for UNESCO World Heritage Listing uses the existing discourse of Yogyakarta as the traditional, while at the same time hopeful for increasing income from tourism if listed. Highlighting the ‘philosophical axis’, the development related to the proposal tries to strengthen the axis by restoring the existing artefacts along the axis to the ‘original’ state. Some restoration works have been finished, while many others are still on the way. I would focus on two restoration projects along this axis: the Malioboro and northern Alun-alun.

Malioboro street

Malioboro Street (see Figure 2) holds a prominent status as the primary shopping destination in Yogyakarta, known for its vibrant atmosphere and affordable arts and crafts. The street is lined with a shopping arcade where street vendors offer a variety of items such as batik clothes, crafts, paintings, and local delicacies. Budget-conscious tourists often choose to make their purchases from these street vendors, while those with more substantial financial means may opt to explore the shops located along the street.



Figure 2. Malioboro Street after the relocation of street vendors, photograph by the author, October 2022.

However, in 2022, approximately 1700 street vendors were compelled to relocate to a new area called Teras Malioboro. This relocation was justified under the pretense of “*penataan*,” a term used to describe the beautification efforts aimed at securing Yogyakarta’s inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List. The beautification plan was allegedly based on a design competition that took place in 2014. Curiously, the winner of the competition later clarified that the relocation of street vendors was not part of his original plan but was later mandated by the government, albeit on short notice.

Several reasons were cited for the relocation. Firstly, it was intended to create space for painting the shops along the street white, as this was deemed ‘the original’. Secondly, the sultan, who had held the position of governor since 1998, expressed a desire for the relocation. The exact circumstances surrounding an event that occurred 18 years prior and the reason for the delay in the sultan’s involvement remain unclear. The third reason is tied to economic factors, as an increase in the number of street vendors is often observed during times of economic hardship for the local population. Lastly, the municipal government expressed aspirations to transform Malioboro into a destination akin to Singapore’s renowned Orchard Road (*Malioboro Dan Impian Jadi “Orchard Road”* / *Republika Online*, n.d.), exemplifying their admiration for Singapore’s development model. These motivations were further elaborated upon by an architect involved in the design of Malioboro during an interview conducted on 27 June 2022: “..just like Singapore; **clean and orderly**. It’s good, isn’t it? Unlike [*Malioboro*] before..”

The decision to relocate the street vendors from their original location was driven not only by the government but also by the shop owners in Malioboro, who perceived the street vendors as direct competitors. However, this relocation had unintended consequences. Following the move, it became evident that visitors seeking to purchase souvenirs would bypass the shops and instead flock directly to Teras Malioboro, resulting in a significant decline in foot traffic for the shops. Faced with this new reality, the shop owners were compelled to adapt their business strategies by incorporating additional activities within their establishments, indicating a shift towards targeting higher-budget tourists.

Conversely, the relocation presented challenges for the street vendors themselves as they were forced to accommodate their operations within the limited space of Teras Malioboro. The size of their stalls in the new location was reduced to one-third of their previous size, severely limiting their workspace. Consequently, many street vendors were compelled to seek alternative employment elsewhere due to the substantial decrease in their profits (“Setahun Relokasi, Pemerintah Yogyakarta Masih Mengabaikan Nasib PKL Malioboro,” 2023). Legal

Aid organizations attempted to advocate for their rights, but their efforts were hindered by the local government's refusal to engage in meaningful communication.

Northern Alun-alun

The Northern Alun-alun (see Figure 3), a historic square located in front of the royal palace, has played a significant role as a space where people sought justice from the sultan in the past. In modern times, the square has been used for parking, a sport arena for school children, and has hosted the vibrant Sekaten market. However, in 2020, the North Alun-alun underwent a revitalization project, which included changing the ground cover from grass to sand and the addition of a metal fence. The royal court claimed that these changes aimed to restore the square to its original form, based on a debatable interpretation of a picture by Johannes Rach dating back to 1771 (see Figure 4). While the picture can have various interpretations, the royal family insists that their interpretation of Rach's picture is correct.



Figure 3. The North Alun-alun of Yogyakarta, October 2022. The addition of the surrounding fence was claimed to refer to the 'original state'. Photograph by the author, October 2022.

this supposedly public space. One of the members of the royal family, however, replied on social media by stating that Alun-alun is a private, not a public space (*Ungkap Alasan Alun-Alun Utara Dipagari, Twit Putri Keraton Jogja Buat Warganet Ngamuk - Suara Jogja*, n.d.), which caused some debates.

All of those projects were funded by Privilege Fund from the central government under the scope of culture. The north Alun-alun project spent 2.3 billion IDR for the metal fence only (*Proyek Pagar Rp2,3 M Di Alun-Alun Yogyakarta Dikecam | Hukum*, 2020) The Malioboro project spent 15.9 billion IDR (*Telan Anggaran Rp15,9 Miliar, Revitalisasi Pedestrian Jalan Senopati Dimulai Mei 2022 - Tribunjogja.Com*, 2022) while the construction of Teras Malioboro cost around 62 billion IDR (*Teras Malioboro 1 Bocor Karena Hujan, Pembangunan Gedungnya Telan Rp62 Miliar - Harianjogja.Com*, 2022).

While there is a possibility for development in Yogyakarta to be funded through investments, it is important to note that the types of investments available are limited to national and local sources. Thus far, there has been no mention of private-sector investment in the city centre project. Additionally, global funding options are not readily available due to legal constraints regarding property ownership. According to the 1945 Indonesian constitution, foreigners are prohibited from owning land or property in Indonesia. Although regulation number 18/2021 allows a limited number of foreigners to have usage rights with certain restrictions, property ownership remains a challenge. Moreover, local regulations in Yogyakarta specifically restrict property ownership for Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent within the special region of Yogyakarta.

These circumstances make Yogyakarta less attractive for both global and local investments. The region faces difficulties in generating income from property sales to the global market and lacks access to significant global investments. The only potential avenue for accessing global markets and flows lies in obtaining special economic zone status. However, unlike other parts of Indonesia, Yogyakarta is not included in any special free zone arrangements that provide such access. Located inland on Java island, Yogyakarta lacks direct access to trade ports, further limiting its connectivity to global flows.

Discussion

The urban trajectory, which seems ‘traditional’, where the traditional axis is strengthened and justified, is in stark contrast to that of the royal-sponsored Dubai, which is futuristic and

spectacular and justified with ‘green’ and ‘sustainable’ narratives. Several comparisons between them are needed to see the differences. These include the scope of authority, authoritative structures, allocative structures, and knowledge and cultural structures.

The scope of authority

As mentioned before, the sultan of Yogyakarta and his royal court have more power with the Law of Privilege. This law brings many consequences, including changes in governmental institutions to assert the power of the royal court, the authority to define the culture, the spatial layout, the procedure of appointment, and the land, as stated in the Law of Privilege. Meanwhile, in Dubai, the Sheikh has absolute power in his territory (emirate), the United Arab Emirates and beyond, not only through his role as part of the government (sheikh of Dubai, prime minister of UAE) but also through his role in business.

Authoritative structures

While the sultan, as the governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, might have a strong influence in the province, which can be seen from the local regulations that set the royal courts as the centre in all five scopes mentioned in the Law of Privilege, his influence does not go beyond the province. This can be seen in his effort for the Presidential election, where he considerably failed to gain support beyond his own territory. The sultan has to follow national regulations except when stated in the Law of Privilege. Meanwhile, in Dubai, the Sheikh has an important and almost absolute role at the emirati and national levels. He also has influence outside of the UAE. He has a close relationship with the president of UAE, Shaikh Khalifa bin Zayed al Nahyan, which makes his power even stronger.

Foreign investment in Yogyakarta proves to be more difficult because of the property law that prohibits foreigners from owning properties in the country, based on the 1945 Constitution of Indonesia. If permitted, there are strict restrictions, as stated in government regulation number 18/2021. Moreover, the local regulation also restricts Indonesian citizens of Chinese descent from owning property in the special region of Yogyakarta. This condition makes it challenging for Yogyakarta to attract foreign investments, unlike Dubai, which functions as a free economic zone enabling foreigners to purchase properties and invest with greater freedom. This legal issue undoubtedly influences urban development in Yogyakarta, which cannot attract foreign investment or aim for the global market.

Internal authoritative structures within the royal court of Yogyakarta are influenced by the vision of the previous sultan, HB IX. His focus was primarily on accommodating his people

by allowing them to reside on and utilize the royal land. This vision, famously known as 'the throne for the people,' established legitimacy through a managerial approach. However, the current sultan, HB X, presents a contrasting entrepreneurial mindset, prioritizing high-budget tourism over low-budget tourism and distancing the people from royal rituals. In order to assert his agency and navigate the existing structure, the current sultan requires support. This support can be sought through avenues such as UNESCO and traditional axes of reasoning. These external resources aid in shaping the direction and decisions of the royal court, allowing for a balance between the previous vision and the new entrepreneurial approach.

Meanwhile, in Dubai, the city is a free zone, meaning that foreign investors are encouraged. They are freed from taxes, and foreign property is enabled. This means that the city of Dubai can be sold to foreign people and foreign companies, making it part of the global market.

Allocative structures

The main funding for the development of Yogyakarta, particularly in the city center, is from the Privilege Fund. The funding is distributed from the central government by proposals, so the local government has to propose the projects to the central government. As mentioned before, Privilege Fund has some restrictions in which the fund has to be spent in only five sectors: the procedure for governor appointment, governmental institutions, cultural issues, land issues, and spatial layout. The amount of funding depends on the availability of funds.

This is very different from the case in Dubai. Dubai enjoys investments from excessive oil money from GCC countries. Dubai has free zones, meaning it offers investors many benefits and incentives. Yogyakarta is not a free zone and can only depend on the Privilege Fund and national investment. This also means that the city cannot aim for a global market as much as Dubai.

Knowledge and cultural structures

The royal court of Yogyakarta is widely recognized as the birthplace of Javanese culture, with numerous cultural artefacts and practices intimately linked to its courtly traditions. Examples include Batik cloth, gamelan music, traditional dance, culinary delights, wayang puppetry, and distinctive architecture. These cultural practices persist today as living heritage.

Yogyakarta ranks among Indonesia's most popular tourist destinations, second only to Bali (Hampton, 2003), primarily due to its cultural heritage and traditions. Studies centred on Yogyakarta and Java often revolve around history, heritage, culture, and traditions unless they

specifically address contemporary or modern issues. For instance, scholarly investigations explore the city's layout and the royal palace, which are believed to be grounded in cosmological concepts associated with either Indic/Buddhist (Smith and Reynolds, 1987) or Islamic influences (Woodward, 2010) which is also the case in the traditional cities in broader Southeast Asia. The discourse surrounding the cosmological layout remains dominant to this day.

In the Indonesian context, the royal court of Yogyakarta consistently symbolizes culture and traditions. The model of the royal palace was selected to represent the Special Region of Yogyakarta in the Indonesia Indah Project (*Anjungan D.I. Yogyakarta :: Taman Mini Indonesia Indah*, n.d.) that showcases Indonesia's cultural richness by featuring each province (Lukito, 2023; Pemberton, 1994). Thus, the identity of Yogyakarta is inseparable from its culture and traditions. While the royal court of Yogyakarta relies more on tradition than personal charisma, it follows that the court would be inclined to uphold these traditions.

Meanwhile, Dubai, as the main model for cities in the MENA region (Elsheshtawy, 2008) shows “a radical break with Arab traditions” (Kanna, 2011) even though it does include the narrative of Bedouin culture in broad terms. Its strategic location makes it possible to orient toward the global market. Its recent independence in the 1970s also contributes to its eagerness to be ‘modern’, which means following the global standard set by the West. Unlike Yogyakarta, which depends mostly on tradition, Dubai does not depend on ‘traditions’ much.

Moreover, the relative position of Yogyakarta to the world also matters. Its position in the inland of Java, further away from the trade port, makes it quite isolated in terms of global flows and ideas. On the other hand, Dubai is strategically located, and its relatively recent Independence makes it open to modern and contemporary ideas from the West. Global ideas accepted and practised in Dubai are the new urban imaginaries as defined by Lindner and Meissner (Lindner and Meissner, 2018), while the ones accepted in Yogyakarta are the traditional urban imaginaries and Singapore model, which is considered ‘clean’ and ‘orderly’. Cities are where global and local forces meet and contribute to the city-shaping process. From the previous sections, we can see that Yogyakarta has fewer global forces than Dubai. The location in the inland of Java and the legal issue on property and foreign investment gave Yogyakarta less exposure to foreign investment and global ideas. Yogyakarta cannot sell properties in the global market, and tourism is the most that Yogyakarta can sell to the global market. The condition of funding also shows that Yogyakarta relies on the central government for funding. The dominant urban discourse is still the one that is local and traditional. This is

also possible because of the existing image of Yogyakarta as the traditional one and as the object of cultural tourism.

However, looking up to Singapore as an urban model is very popular in Indonesia and many other Asian countries. Singapore has been considered a successful model with cleanliness, orderliness, high technology, and 'green', which are categorized as the 'new' urban imaginaries (Lindner and Meissner, 2018). It should be noted, too, that Dubai also looked up to Singapore and copied the Singapore development model (Hvidt, 2009). However, to go further in copying Singapore, such as having high-tech buildings, seems risky for Yogyakarta as the people of Yogyakarta still think of the city as 'traditional'. It happened before when the sultan planned to make underground parking under the north Alun-Alun. The plan faced society's resistance as they worried it would disrupt the axis. Being futuristic and visionary in the Dubai case might be preferred, but not in the Yogyakarta case. Yogyakarta still prefers traditional urban imaginaries.

When exploring the question of why Yogyakarta prioritizes traditional over futuristic development, the answer lies within a complex interplay of various factors. These factors include geographic positioning, legal considerations enabling or hindering exposure to global ideas, available funding, and the accumulation of history. Yogyakarta's approach to development is characterized by a return to traditional urban imaginaries embodied in the concept of the 'philosophical axis' while also incorporating certain aspects of Singapore's urban model, particularly in terms of cleanliness and orderliness. To legitimise the traditional trajectory, they use the reasoning of UNESCO and the traditional axis.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, I questioned why the urban development in Yogyakarta takes form in a different direction from those in the MENA region, where royal agencies also exist. The previous sections has shown us that there are several possible reasons by focusing on differences in scope of authority, authoritative structures, allocative structures, and knowledge and cultural structures. In Yogyakarta, the sultan and the royal court have authority through the Law of Privilege, shaping culture, land, and governance. However, their influence is limited to the province. On the other hand, Dubai benefits from excessive oil money and functions as a free economic zone, attracting foreign investments. Yogyakarta faces legal restrictions on foreign ownership and struggles to compete globally. The royal court of Yogyakarta

emphasizes tradition and cultural heritage, while Dubai seeks a futuristic and global image. Funding in Yogyakarta primarily comes from the Privilege Fund, while Dubai benefits from investments and incentives. Yogyakarta's development is influenced by its cultural practices, while Dubai breaks with tradition and aims for a global market. The location, legal constraints, funding sources, and dominant discourse contribute to the differing urban approaches. Yogyakarta leans towards traditional imaginaries, while Dubai embraces modern and global ideas. The preference for tradition in Yogyakarta is supported by the reasoning of UNESCO and the axis.

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