
Finding Genius Loci of Kauman Yogyakarta

Indra Tri Saputra*, Putu Ayu P. Agustiananda, Bryan Putra Parsada Sinaga

Department of Architecture, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Planning, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia 55584

Corresponding e-mail*: 20512144@students.uui.ac.id

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Abstract. Kauman Yogyakarta is a village in Ngupasan, Gondomanan, Yogyakarta, situated to the north of Palace Ngayogyakarta. This village boasts unique cultural and historical attributes, making it an intriguing subject for exploration using the Genius Loci theory. The author employs qualitative descriptive methods and architectural phenomenology. Architectural phenomenology can provide a framework for discovering the Genius Loci present in Kauman Yogyakarta. By examining the specific characteristics and context of Kauman Yogyakarta, the goal is to identify and describe its Genius Loci. Despite the village's proximity to the Yogyakarta Palace and its significant historical value, discussions about the Genius Loci, particularly in Kauman Yogyakarta, have been limited. This research seeks to unveil the findings from documenting the Genius Loci of Kauman Yogyakarta, serving as a reference for future studies and emphasizing the importance of preserving the unique spirit of this culturally rich area.

Keywords: kauman yogyakarta, yogyakarta palace, genius loci, architectural phenomenology

1. Introduction

Kauman village is a village located in the Palace area and is occupied by *abdi dalem* and religious experts. Kauman village is an area for Islamic students believed to have developed since the time of the Demak and Mataram Islamic kingdoms (Wijayakarta, 2000:26). Besides religious factors, the spatial arrangement pattern in Kauman village is also influenced by the political policies of the sultanate. The area of Kauman village is usually located within the Palace area or areas inhabited by Palace *abdi dalem* and religious experts. The name Kauman itself is derived from the "Kaum" which refers to religious circles, including the sultan's religious advisors, scholars, imams, mosque officials, and Islamic students.

Kauman Yogyakarta is a village located in Ngupasan, Gondomanan, Yogyakarta. Precisely to the west of the Ngayogyakarta Palace. Kauman Yogyakarta is bounded by the fortress wall of the Yogyakarta Palace, which is located on the southern side. Kauman Yogyakarta is known as one of the ancient villages in Yogyakarta that has a close connection with the history of Islamic development in Yogyakarta. This village is the birthplace of the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization, initiated by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan was the pioneer who initiated the establishment of the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization (Suwarno, 2016). The Kauman Yogyakarta area has interesting Javanese Islamic characteristics to explore, although the dominant residents in the Kauman Yogyakarta area are of the Muhammadiyah Islamic faith, residents do not forget Javanese culture by incorporating Islamic elements into it.

Palace servants, also known as *abdi dalem* can be recognized as Palace attendants who serve the Palace by carrying out various tasks related to preserving Palace traditions, rituals, and culture. They play a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of culture and traditions within the Palace environment. Additionally, Palace servants also actively participate in various social and religious activities in the community around the Kauman area.

Genius Loci is the Spirit of Place, referring to the atmosphere of a location that gives it special meaning, distinguishing it from other places, and leading to specific activities related to religious, social, and cultural rituals of the people who live there (Stepanchuk A, 2022). Genius Loci is a theory that explores the unique soul of a place. To understand the Genius Loci of a place, (Kaffah, Ekomadyo, 2022) discusses the Image, Space, and Character prominent in that place. These aspects are then linked with the historical values of the place to identify the Genius Loci present there.

Image is the first aspect in the process of identifying Genius Loci. It refers to the distinct visual features that stand out in a place (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). To explore an image, it is necessary to identify the unique visual elements that can be perceived and then describe the unique aspects observed in that visual context. The uniqueness of space is the second aspect that can be explored to identify Genius Loci (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Exploring the spatial aspect involves describing the unique features of a place in terms of its location relative to its surroundings and the positions of various physical elements that form the place itself. The spatial aspect is further explored by examining the connectivity created by the various elements that shape the space within a place. Character is the third aspect that must be explored to identify Genius Loci. According to Norberg-Schulz (1980), character is described by exploring the atmosphere created by the physical elements of the place. The character of a place can also be understood by considering its natural environment (Norberg-Schulz, 1980).

What is the Genius Loci in Kauman Yogyakarta? How does Genius Loci influence Kauman Yogyakarta from the past to the present? As described by the theory of Genius Loci, which is the Spirit of Place shaping the atmosphere of a place and giving it special meaning. Kauman Yogyakarta is chosen as the research subject due to its unique history and culture, with intriguing characteristics worth exploring. There is limited information discussing Genius Loci, especially in the Kauman Yogyakarta village. The discussion on Genius Loci in Kauman Yogyakarta serves as a reference material for future research.

2. Methods

This study will be conducted by the author using the Genius Loci theory, applying a phenomenological approach in architecture. The phenomenological method helps define the unique essence of a specific place, understood through human senses like sight and smell (Kasus, 2019). By exploring the Genius Loci in Kauman Yogyakarta, the aim is to gain a better understanding compared to previous studies, using research methods. Additionally, the author employs a qualitative descriptive method to gather more insights into the Genius Loci, particularly in Kauman Yogyakarta. This involves field observations, taking photos, and interviewing 5 residents of Kauman Yogyakarta.

In the theory of Genius Loci, the relationship between spaces in the Kauman area of Yogyakarta has distinctive characteristics. Genius Loci is a theory that can be used to discover the spirit or essence of a place. It involves exploring a place to see, assess, and understand its identity and meaning (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). Genius Loci in terms of natural places and man-made places. A natural place consists of natural elements that give a place its unique atmosphere, while a man-made place is a space created by humans to meet their needs (Regina, Ekomadyo, 2022). There are four aspects that can be used as a reference in exploring Genius Loci: image, space, character, and Genius Loci (Santri, Ekomadyo, 2019).

The phenomenological approach is one method that can be used to analyze a place (Habibullah, Ekomadyo, 2021). The method brought by phenomenology, which places humans or places at the center of attention, is highly compatible with the spirit of place, which also focuses on the power of a place through human experiences. By using the phenomenological

method, a deeper examination of the soul can be done from an architectural perspective, uncovering the local experiences present in a place (Kurniawaty, Ekomadyo, 2022).

The analysis stages are conducted according to the steps outlined in the Genius Loci theory. This theory can be used for analyzing through direct observations repeatedly carried out by researchers at the research site. Then, researchers elaborate on the human experiences found at the research site by referring to the theoretical framework of the Genius Loci theory.

The tool used for analyzing the spirit of place or Genius Loci is a camera, which records the physical conditions at the location being analyzed. The Genius Loci theory relies on direct observations to capture human experiences at the location being studied (Jiang Z, 2022). Therefore, the descriptive explanations are qualitative, reflecting what is observed and felt by the researchers.

3. Finding Genius Loci

Kauman Yogyakarta is an old residential area in the central part of Yogyakarta city, known for its distinctive character, especially its history and Islamic religious significance. It has its own unique character compared to Kauman in other cities. In 1912, during the reign of Sultan Hamengku Buwono VII, the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization was established in the village of Kauman. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan was the pioneering founder of Muhammadiyah in Kauman Yogyakarta. He was one of the *khatib* (*khatib* meaning someone who frequently delivers religious lectures and is an important figure in mosque affairs) (Suwarno, 2016). The goal of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan in establishing the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization was to reform Islam in Indonesia, purifying Islamic teachings according to the perspectives of the Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad, away from the traditional or mixed Islamic views with Hindu, Buddhist, and animistic cultures towards a pure Islam as taught by Prophet Muhammad (Suwarno, 2016). During its formation, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan faced opposition from certain segments of society, leading to accusations of attempting to establish a new religion and being falsely labeled as a pseudo-religious leader. *Langgar*, known as a place of worship in Javanese culture, was used by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan spent time planning the declaration of the establishment of the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization in Kauman Yogyakarta. The *Langgar* K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, also known as *Langgar kidoel* (northern *Langgar*) (Figure 3.1).



Figure Left 3.1. *Langgar kidoel* or *Langgar* Hadji Ahmad Dahlan (Author, 2023)



Figure Right 3.2. Kauman Yogyakarta Gate on The West Side (Author, 2023)

Currently, Kauman Yogyakarta covers an area of approximately 192,000 square meters, making it a densely populated village in the city center. As a landmark, Kauman Yogyakarta has a gate adorned with the symbol of the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization and the name Kauman itself. The gate's triangular architecture features Muhammadiyah ornaments,

including the sun symbol, symbolizing enlightenment of hearts and minds with the true teachings of Islam based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah (Figure 3.2).

The presence of Muhammadiyah elements on the gate indicates Kauman Yogyakarta as an area closely associated with the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization. Kauman Yogyakarta serves as a hub for Islamic education and as a residential area for Palace servants with political ties to the Yogyakarta Palace. The strong relationship between the residents of Kauman Yogyakarta and the Palace is evident in the preservation of buildings closely linked to the Palace, such as the Muhammadiyah kindergarten school in the Kauman area (Figure 3.3), and the continued assignment of Kauman residents as Palace servants in the Yogyakarta Palace.



Figure Left 3.3. Aisyiyah Kindergarten in Kauman, Yogyakarta (Author, 2023)

Figure Right 3.4. Ramadan Bazaar in Kauman Yogyakarta (Source by Tirto.id, 2023)

The Kauman community is a devout community, marking their religious activities with the times of prayer. When the call to prayer (adzan) resounds from the mosque, it is mandatory for them to lower the volume of radios, TVs, or any devices emitting noise. Similarly, from the time of Maghrib until Isha, no one in the Kauman community turns on radios or TVs, as this time is usually dedicated to reciting the Quran or engaging in religious studies. When the call to prayer is heard from the main mosque, signaling the congregational prayer, Kauman residents without other obligations promptly head to the mosque for congregational prayer. Most men head to the main mosque, while women go to the nearest prayer room (*Langgar*).

In addition to being devout and obedient to their religious obligations, the Kauman community is also active and participates in preserving Javanese traditions. One of these traditions is the celebration of the Prophet's birthday, known in Javanese tradition as *sekaten* (*sekaten* is a tradition to celebrate the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, a concept introduced by the wali songo in their efforts to spread Islam). Furthermore, the Kauman community often joins in major events such as opening the Ramadan bazaar during the fasting month (Figure 3.4). The Ramadan bazaar, located in the Kauman area, specifically in Tiban alley, serves as the venue for this event. The bazaar is often filled with local and international visitors, aiming to buy *takjil* (snacks for breaking the fast) and traditional cakes that are the signature of the Kauman Ramadan bazaar (Dwi, C, 2014).

In addition to Tiban alley, which serves as an additional source of income during the month of Ramadan, there is also Rukunan road, a space based on the concept of charity, created when landowners willingly donate a portion of their land. The land given, about 30-50 cm, is used to create a road (Dwi, C, 2014). As a symbol of the importance of harmony for the Kauman residents, the Rukunan road provides nearby communities and the public with easier access to the spaces at the end of the road. This accessibility provides direct social benefits to the community, making the strip of land on privately owned property a charitable space from the landowners to the community or public using the road.

3.1. Image

Entering the Kauman Yogyakarta area, you are greeted by a gate marking the entrance to Kauman Yogyakarta. This gate not only functions as the entrance to Kauman but also signifies the area with symbols and ornaments of Muhammadiyah Islam.



Figure Left 3.5. Ventilation in Kauman Yogyakarta (Author, 2023)



Figure Right 3.6. Batik Pattern *Kawung Parang Tuding* Yogyakarta (Source: <https://www.jnjbatic.com/blog/ragam-batik-yogyakarta-beserta-maknanya-part-1/>)

In addition to the gate that can be visually observed, several residences in Kauman Yogyakarta feature ornamental patterns found in the batik designs of Yogyakarta. These ornaments resemble the *kawung parang tuding* batik patterns, which is one of the batik patterns in Yogyakarta (Figure 3.5 and Figure 3.6). Additionally, the ornaments that decorate the residential complex in Kauman Yogyakarta serve to preserve the elements of Javanese architecture. This indicates that the residential complex in Kauman Yogyakarta is part of the Yogyakarta Palace area.

In the Kauman Yogyakarta area, there is a space that represents the image of Muhammadiyah Islam, consisting of a *muktamar* building (*muktamar* is a meeting area for Muhammadiyah leaders) (Figure 3.7). The *muktamar* building is typically used by the leaders of the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization in the Kauman Yogyakarta area for deliberative meetings. One common activity held there is determining the month of Syawal to set the date for celebrating Eid al-Fitr for the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization.



Figure Left 3.7. Muktamar Building in Kauman Yogyakarta (Author, 2023)



Figure Right 3.8. The events were held by the *abdi dalem pengulon* in the porch of Gedhe Kauman mosque. (Author, 2023)

In addition to the *muktamar* building, there is also a kindergarten established by Nyai Dahlan (Nyai Dahlan is the wife of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan). This kindergarten was created out of the Aisyiyah organization's concern for early childhood education. The curriculum at TK ABA (Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten) includes basic Islamic teachings through songs and stories. The continued presence of the *muktamar* building and the kindergarten in Kauman Yogyakarta demonstrates that the Kauman community still upholds and preserves religious values by instilling Islamic teachings from an early age.

Kauman Yogyakarta is a residential complex for the *abdi dalem pengulon* who are tasked with managing the mosque and leading religious ceremonies within the Palace area. Religious ceremonies typically take place in the porch area of the Gedhe Kauman mosque (Surya G, 2018) (Figure 3.8) and are held on specific days such as during the month of Shawwal or on major Islamic holidays. The relationship between the Kauman community and the Yogyakarta Palace remains strong to this day, as evidenced by the ongoing appointment of Kauman residents as *abdi dalem pengulon*.

3.2. Space

In Kauman Yogyakarta, the space is created by the connectivity between alleys that foster intimate and personal social interactions, while the main roads provide broader social interactions. These alleys also connect to the Gedhe Yogyakarta Mosque and nearby Langgar, such as the Langgar Aisyah. The proximity of the Kauman Yogyakarta neighborhood to the Gedhe Yogyakarta Mosque establishes a strong identity in the relationship between the Palace and the Kauman community, marking it as a Muhammadiyah Islamic environment with residents serving as *abdi dalem pengulon* (royal court servants).



Figure 3.9. Mapping Maps in Kauman Yogyakarta. (Author, 2023)

Additionally, the interconnected alleys within the complex make it easier for residents from different areas of Kauman to access public facilities such as mosques, *Langgar*, schools, and commercial buildings along the main road (Figure 3.9). Activities often occur, such as during Ramadan when Gang Tiban is used as a Ramadan bazaar to foster social interaction between Kauman residents and visitors by selling various foods for breaking the fast. This connectivity, which facilitates both intimate social interactions and broader interactions with people from outside Kauman Yogyakarta, creates a unique character that strengthens the community's identity and attachment to their environment. Thus, the space created reflects distinct characteristics and uniqueness.

3.3. Character

The character of Kauman Yogyakarta, which still upholds Javanese customs and manners, is demonstrated by the presence of banners reminding motorcyclists to turn off their engines and push their bikes when entering the area (Figure 4). The atmosphere of mutual respect among Kauman Yogyakarta residents is palpable and has been maintained to this day, creating a unique aspect of preserving Javanese customs and manners. Additionally, the presence of Muhammadiyah Islam in the area strengthens its distinctive character. The Javanese custom of mutual respect and the Islamic principle of *ukhuwah islamiyah* (close relationship among Muslims) combine to create a unique character in Kauman Yogyakarta.



Figure Left 4. Reminder Banner to Turn Off the Engine (2023)

Figure Right 4.1. Example of a House That Has Three Doors in Kauman Yogyakarta (2023)

The buildings in Kauman Yogyakarta still retain the form and significance of their ancestral structures. One example is the use of three doors (Figure 4.1). According to Mr Ardi, who serves as a guide for visitors to the Kauman complex, the philosophy behind these doors is that when the host is receiving guests in the living room, others who wish to enter the house can use a different door, ensuring that activities in the living room are not disturbed.



Figure 4.1. *Langgar* Aisyiyah in Kauman Yogyakarta (2023)

In Kauman Yogyakarta, places of worship are separated between the women's *Langgar* and the men's *Langgar*. The women's place of worship is typically located at *Langgar* Aisyiyah, which is exclusively used by women (Figure 4.2). Apart from *Langgar* Aisyiyah, there is also

another *Langgar* specifically for girls, namely *Langgar Ar-Rosyad*, but most of the Kauman community, especially women, prefer to use *Langgar Aisyiyah* for worship. As for men, they usually use *Langgar kidoel*, but currently, *Langgar kidoel* is not actively used. Therefore, most male residents of Kauman Yogyakarta use Gedhe Mosque Yogyakarta or other *Langgars* such as *Langgar Ad-Dzakiri*.

3.4. Genius Loci of Kauman

Based on the current aspects of Kauman Yogyakarta, it can be concluded that the Genius Loci of Kauman Yogyakarta is Kauman itself. Kauman Yogyakarta serves as the soul of the Muhammadiyah Islamic organization and as its central hub, given that the birthplace of the Muhammadiyah organization located in Kauman Yogyakarta. Additionally, there are several ornaments of Muhammadiyah Islamic symbols in the area, such as a gate adorned with the symbol of the Muhammadiyah organization.

All local experiences within Kauman Yogyakarta are intertwined with the presence of Muhammadiyah Islam blended with Javanese customs. This relationship is reflected in the spatial arrangements of the alleys within Kauman, connecting the entire Kauman Yogyakarta area. This interconnectedness creates new spaces within Kauman utilized for social interactions and various activities, especially during significant Islamic months, such as the Tiban alley during Shawwal for Ramadan bazaar, and the alleys linking to Gedhe Mosque Yogyakarta and *Langgars* in the Kauman area.

The character of Kauman Yogyakarta is shaped by the activities of the Muhammadiyah community and specific worship practices separated for women and men. Beyond these activities, the architectural elements of Kauman dwellings, such as doors and ventilation adorned with batik motifs, also contribute to its distinct identity. The people of Kauman continue to uphold the history and culture of their ancestors, maintaining unique features in their places of worship and preserving Javanese customs. Neglecting activities in Kauman Yogyakarta could result in the loss of its local uniqueness.

4. Conclusion

Through the exploration of Genius Loci in Kauman Yogyakarta, it is found that the Genius Loci resides within Kauman itself. Kauman Yogyakarta, with its historical, religious, and cultural values preserved to this day, embodies the essence of a place that holds its own uniqueness. Moreover, the ornaments on residences in Kauman depict the richness of Javanese art and culture, such as the *kawung parang* batik pattern found on ventilation ornaments in Yogyakarta homes. Significant buildings like the *muktamar* used for meetings of Muhammadiyah Islamic leaders and the Aisyiyah kindergarten garden demonstrate Kauman Yogyakarta's enduring commitment to religious and educational values over time.

The spatial aspects of Kauman Yogyakarta highlight a close connectivity between its alleys, fostering intimate social interactions, alongside main roads that facilitate broader interactions. This environment not only creates a strong identity for its residents as part of the Yogyakarta Palace community but also showcases traditional activities like the Ramadan bazaar during the holy month, strengthening relationships among residents and visitors alike.

The character of Kauman Yogyakarta is reflected in its respect for tradition and religion, upheld through practices such as the use of *Langgar Aisyiyah* and the layout of houses that respect personal life. Philosophies in architectural design, such as the three-door entrance, reflect the values of hospitality and honor in Javanese culture, while the separation of worship spaces demonstrates respect for gender differences in religious practices.

Overall, the Genius Loci of Kauman Yogyakarta is defined by its visual uniqueness, interconnected spaces, and a character deeply ingrained in the daily lives of its community. By preserving its cultural and spiritual heritage, Kauman Yogyakarta serves not only as a place of residence but also as a symbol of the ongoing preservation of traditional values in a constantly evolving modern context.

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