

Revealing the Spirit of Place: The Former Campus of the Indonesian Academy of Fine Arts in Yogyakarta

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Abstract

In many urban heritage contexts, adaptive reuse often prioritizes physical and economic transformation while neglecting the intangible dimensions that shape a site's identity. The former campus of the Indonesian Academy of Fine Arts (ASRI) in Yogyakarta, that now revitalized as the Jogja National Museum (JNM) and JNM Bloc, is a compelling case to examine how the spirit of place (*genius loci*) evolves in response to cultural, spatial, and functional shifts. This study aims to analyze the historical transformation and adaptive reuse of the ASRI campus and to explore the persistence or redefinition of its *genius loci* through the dimensions of image, space, and character. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through field observations, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders (including alumni, artists, and museum managers), and archival documentation. Data were analyzed using phenomenological interpretation, focusing on the relationships between tangible heritage, community memory, and symbolic meaning. The results show that despite commercial insertions and spatial reprogramming, the site retains its identity as an arts and cultural landmark. Key findings include the role of community actors in preserving memory, the hybridization of academic and public spaces, and the use of symbolic anchors (e.g., banyan tree, monuments) to sustain continuity. This study contributes conceptually to adaptive reuse discourse by proposing an integrated framework that links spatial adaptation with cultural memory. However, the study is limited by its single-site focus and scope of informants. Future studies are encouraged to explore comparative analyses of other culturally transformed heritage sites to gain deeper insights into experiential authenticity and the construction of place identity.

Keywords: Genius Loci, Spirit of Place, Adaptive Reuse, Cultural Heritage, ASRI Yogyakarta

I. INTRODUCTION

Urban development practices that emphasize economic growth are often not accompanied by a comprehensive understanding of the *spirit of place* in historical areas. This disconnect between urban development and heritage values frequently generates tensions that are difficult to reconcile, even though cultural heritage has the potential to catalyze development strategies that improve the quality of life for communities [1]. The *spirit of place* is increasingly recognized as a vital resource in the sustainable development of historic urban environments [2]. Understanding the *spirit of place* is essential for identifying local identity and establishing meaningful connections between heritage and the dynamic processes of city development. Through the concept of *genius loci*, a place can be interpreted and valued by its community, fostering a shared sense of meaning and place-based identity [3]. In this regard, *genius loci* act as a guarantor of diversity and continuity, especially in the face of homogenizing pressures in a globalized world [4].

Yogyakarta exemplifies a city shaped by accumulated layers of historical, cultural, and natural values, one of which is the contribution of its vibrant art community [5]. The trajectory of fine arts in Yogyakarta began with Raden Saleh's painting of Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono IV in the Keraton and was significantly influenced by the relocation of the Indonesian capital to Yogyakarta in 1946, which attracted prominent artists such as Hendra Gunawan and Affandi [6]. The founding of small art studios and, subsequently, the establishment of the Indonesian Academy of Fine Arts (ASRI) in 1950 marked the institutionalization of art education in Indonesia, positioning Yogyakarta as a national center for fine arts. The life and work of the art community have profoundly shaped the cultural character of the city [5].

The ASRI campus in Gampingan served as a fine arts education hub from 1956 until the relocation of the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) to Sewon in 1995, after which the site was left abandoned. Years of neglect followed until 2006 when the former campus was revitalized and repurposed as the Jogja National Museum (JNM) [7]. The adaptive reuse process was carried out in phases, involving various spatial and functional modifications to accommodate its new role as a public cultural facility. However, not all adaptive reuse projects yield successful outcomes. Many attempts to convert old buildings into museums fail to evoke meaningful

engagement, as evidenced by the underwhelming experiences associated with three museums around Fatahillah Park. These spaces often feel neglected, uninspiring, and disconnected from the public [8]. In contrast, exemplary cases such as the Tate Modern in London and the Bilgi University Campus in Istanbul, both formerly industrial power plants, demonstrate the potential of adaptive reuse to create sustainable, inclusive cultural spaces that integrate economic, ecological, and socio-cultural dimensions [9].

Many adaptive reuse studies tend to emphasize technical, economic, or environmental factors while overlooking cultural-spiritual dimensions such as *genius loci* [10]. This neglect is significant, as *genius loci* and authenticity, though often discussed separately, are intrinsically linked through design, materiality, spatial logic, and historical craftsmanship [11]. Efforts to restore heritage buildings to an imagined “original” state may inadvertently erase past adaptations, thereby compromising contextual authenticity [12]. To remain meaningful, adaptive reuse must not only meet sustainability goals but also preserve intangible heritage values to prevent cultural disconnection [12]. Recent reviews highlight this gap. A 2023 systematic analysis of 731 studies identified socio-cultural and authenticity-related aspects as the least addressed due to their intangibility [13]. Similarly, a 2025 review in *Sustainability* found that although adaptive reuse contributes to nine SDGs, it often fails to integrate *genius loci* into inclusive planning, producing placeless outcomes [14]. Scholars now argue for the interdependence between *genius loci*, defined as the spirit of place shaped by physical and symbolic layers, and authenticity, understood as the integrity of design, materials, setting, and narrative continuity [15]. The adaptive reuse of Iran’s Risbaf Complex illustrates this integration, where preserving industrial elements maintained tangible authenticity, while new uses allowed intangible layers like memory and identity to evolve [16].

Restoration that flattens a site’s history into one period, as in Kashan’s Manochehri House, can diminish its cultural richness [16]. In contrast, Germany’s *Industriekultur* approach views industrial sites as evolving cultural records. Projects such as Berlin’s wartime bunkers repurposed as art venues, preserve “dark heritage” without erasure [12] [17]. Sustainability in adaptive reuse should thus extend beyond carbon reduction, estimated at up to 40% compared to new construction, to include contextual continuity. Inappropriate interventions (e.g., oversized glass façades) may disrupt energy efficiency and visual harmony [18]. Socio-economically, inclusive reuse projects like Bologna’s 1970s housing initiative build cultural resilience, whereas *facadism* severs buildings from their meaning, accelerating the loss of *genius loci* [17]. Every place carries a unique *spirit of place*, shaped by rituals, memories, and interactions with natural or built environments [19], [20], [21]. This spirit can be traced through three components: (1) Image, the visual identity and cultural symbolism of a place [22], [23], [24]; (2) Space, physical voids imbued with function and memory [25], [19], [22]; and (3) Character, the relational attachment of communities to their environment, encompassing emotional, social, and physical dimensions [26], [27].

Prior studies have shown that *genius loci* may emerge from sacredness, historicity, or social memory, influencing conservation strategies as seen in Bhaktapur, Nepal [28], or through landscape dialogue as in Areng Lembang [29]. The interplay between space, narrative, and history also surfaces in New Cinema History studies [30], while crises such as pandemics have reshaped the *genius loci* by shifting economic and tourism patterns [31]. Cultural hybridity, as found in Jakarta’s Pasar Baru [32] or Magelang’s Chinatown [33], reveals how identity, meaning, and memory interact within evolving social-symbolic contexts. Indeed, the absence of a focused study on the *genius loci* or spirit of place of the former ASRI Campus complex represents a significant gap in the discourse on Indonesian cultural heritage, particularly in the context of fine arts. As one of the most historically and symbolically charged sites in Yogyakarta’s artistic development, the ASRI campus has undergone a major transformation from a center of formal arts education into the Jogja National Museum and JNM Bloc. This adaptive reuse presents a compelling case to examine how the site’s identity has evolved. Specifically, it raises critical questions about the extent to which the site’s spirit, that once shaped by academic and artistic traditions, has been preserved, altered, or redefined through its functional shift. To address this, the present study aims to (1) analyze the historical evolution and adaptive reuse of ASRI Campus, and (2) analyze the site’s *spirit of place* through the lenses of image, space, and character.

II. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to investigate how the spirit of place (*genius loci*) has evolved and been preserved through the adaptive reuse of the former ASRI campus. The study focuses on three interrelated dimensions, such as image, space, and character as outlined by Norberg-Schulz [19], to reveal both tangible and intangible transformations across three key periods: 1957–1998 (institutional phase), 1998–2006 (abandonment and community use), and 2006–2023 (revitalization and commercialization). To initiate the research process, primary data were collected through: (1) Field observations, documenting spatial, architectural, and programmatic changes in the ASRI campus area; (2) Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including former ASRI students and faculty, artists (e.g., Taring Padi collective), museum visitors, and current JNM/JNM Bloc managers. In parallel, secondary data were gathered to provide historical and contextual support.

These included archival photographs, institutional records, urban heritage documentation, and prior scholarly literature related to adaptive reuse and *genius loci*.

Following data collection, the materials were analyzed using phenomenological interpretation, following Hasbyansah [34]. This analytical approach proceeded in four stages: (1) descriptive analysis to map physical and symbolic layers; (2) classification of findings based on three variables—image, space, and character; (3) interpretation of emerging patterns connected to memory, transformation, and continuity; and (4) conclusion drawing to articulate the evolution and persistence of *genius loci*. To clarify the analytical process, key variables were operationalized as follows: (1) Image—defined as brand, sense of place, reputation, and symbolic identity [24]; (2) Space—referring to the transitional use of courtyards and open spaces [25]; and (3) Character—encompassing memory, attachment, and socio-cultural and physical elements, including materials, symbols, and community functions [27].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Historical Evolution and Adaptive Reuse of ASRI Campus

Founding Era (1950–1957): Institutional Legacy and Architectural Identity

The establishment of the Akademi Seni Rupa Indonesia (ASRI) in 1950 marked a pivotal moment in Indonesia’s post-colonial cultural resurgence, occurring during a period when the newly independent nation was actively reconstructing its national identity through the arts, education, and intellectual discourse. ASRI’s founding, which was closely aligned with the establishment of Gadjah Mada University, reinforced Yogyakarta’s emerging status as a central hub for both academic excellence and cultural innovation [6], [35]. This strategic co-founding not only emphasized the importance of integrating the arts into higher education but also symbolized a broader national commitment to cultivating a culturally rich and socially conscious generation. Central to ASRI’s foundation was the donation of land in Gampingan, a former lime factory, by Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX. This act of royal patronage was more than a material contribution—it represented the Sultan’s ideological support for the arts and affirmed the Kraton’s (royal palace’s) enduring role in nurturing cultural institutions. The transformation of an industrial site into an academic space further symbolized the shift from colonial exploitation to national self-determination and creativity. ASRI’s physical and symbolic presence thus became deeply embedded in the socio-political and cultural fabric of Yogyakarta, a city known for harmonizing tradition and modernity [6], [Fig. 1].

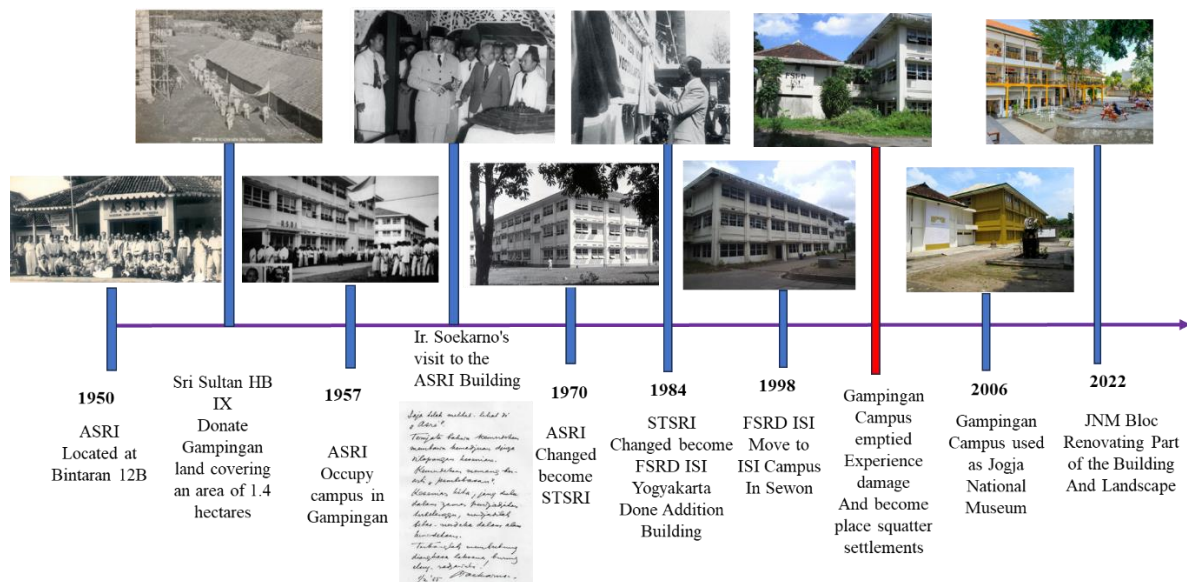


Figure 1 Timeline of the History of the Former ASRI Campus Building

The 1957 prefabricated structures that were donated under the U.S. Marshall Plan exemplified postwar modernist architecture. Identical to buildings at SMAN 1 Yogyakarta and UGM’s dormitory [6], [36], these steel-frame structures symbolized transnational aid yet later became intrinsic to ASRI’s *genius loci* through decades of artistic production [Fig. 2]



Figure 2 The Construction of the ASRI Building in 1957
(Source: Yogyakarta Nusantara Art Foundation)

Decline and Community-Lived Spirit (1998–2006): Resilience Amidst Abandonment

The 1998 relocation to Sewon triggered physical decay and social fragmentation. Squatters, vandalism, and institutional neglect eroded the campus's physical integrity [Fig. 3–4]. Critically, however, the Taring Padi collective's occupation (1998–2005) sustained the site's artistic spirit through underground exhibitions, performances, and political activism [37]. Their resistance to the DEKRANASDA conversion plan (2003) highlighted the community's emotional attachment to ASRI's history [38], reinforcing Jiven & Larkham's (2003) thesis that *character* arises from "integration between society and symbolic meaning" [26]. This era demonstrates how *intangible* heritage (memory, rebellion) preserved *genius loci* despite tangible degradation—a phenomenon noted in studies of industrial heritage revitalization [21].



Figure 3 The ASRI Complex, which experienced damage in 2006
(Source: Jogja National Museum document)

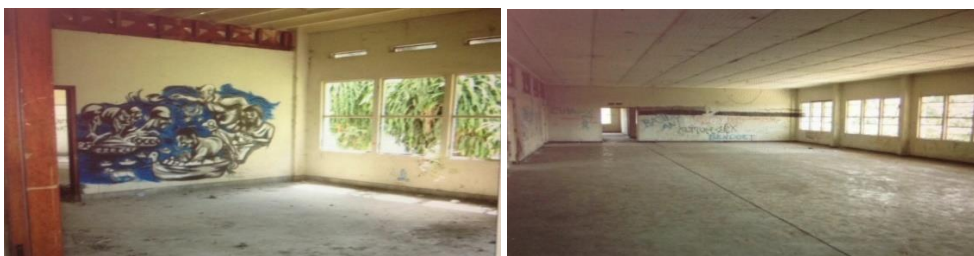


Figure 4 The Interior Condition of the Former ASRI Campus in 2005
(Source: Jogja National Museum documentation)

Revitalization (2006–2022): Adaptive Reuse and Genius Loci Reclamation

The 2006 conversion to Jogja National Museum (JNM) marked a pivotal shift. While initial efforts focused on the main building (retaining its prefab façade but altering interiors for gallery functions), the 2022 JNM Bloc expansion achieved holistic reactivation. Key successes aligned with adaptive reuse best practices: (1) Authenticity in Materiality: Original prefab structures were preserved, while new interventions (e.g., yellow steel platforms) introduced "contrasting yet complementary" industrial aesthetics [Fig. 9, 13]. This balanced Norberg-Schulz's *Romantic Architecture* principles, which honor history while enabling growth [19]. (2) Spatial Reconfiguration: Open spaces transitioned from derelict yards to dynamic hubs (e.g., the banyan tree amphitheater), fostering community engagement [Fig. 11]. This validated Habibullah & Ekomadyo's (2021) finding that public spaces regain social relevance when they embody local spirit [22]. (3) Intangible Heritage

Activation: Annual events like ArtJog reactivated ASRI’s legacy as a “ground zero of Indonesian fine arts.” The RJ Katamsi statue and preserved banyan tree served as *mnemonic anchors*, strengthening place identity [Table 1].

Theoretical Alignment: Why This Adaptive Reuse Succeeded

The ASRI-JNM transformation contrasts sharply with failed museum adaptations (e.g., Jakarta’s Fatahillah Park museums [8]). Critical success factors include: (1) Community-Centric Process: Involvement of alumni and artists ensured interventions respected historical narratives [11], [12]. (2) Layered Authenticity: Unlike reconstructions that erase post-original adaptations (e.g., colonial buildings [39]), JNM retained Taring Padi’s murals beneath new walls, acknowledging the site’s evolution [Fig. 8]. (3) Economic-Cultural Symbiosis: JNM Bloc’s mixed-use model (galleries, cafes) created sustainability while amplifying artistic visibility, aligning with SDG 11 frameworks for heritage resilience [2], [12]. This case underscores that adaptive reuse must prioritize: (1) Pre-intervention *Genius Loci* Assessment: Documenting tangible/intangible layers (e.g., via Norberg-Schulz’s *image-space-character* framework [19]) before redesign. (2) Stakeholder Integration: Collaborative planning with communities prevents cultural displacement [11], [32]. (3) Flexible Authenticity: Allowing heritage to evolve—as seen in JNM’s industrial-modern fusion—sustains relevance without erasing history [39], [21].

B. The Spirit of Place

The spirit of place (*genius loci*) of the former ASRI Campus is analyzed through three interrelated components such as image, space, and character across three distinct periods (1957–1998, 1998–2006, and 2006–2023). This framework, adapted from Norberg-Schulz [19], reveals both dynamic shifts and enduring constants in the site’s cultural essence.



Figure 5 The ASRI Campus in 1962
(Source: dgi.or.id)

Image of the Place

Image encompasses visual identity, cultural symbolism, and collective memory [19], [24]. During ASRI’s operational peak (1957–1998) (Fig. 5), the campus was revered as the “ground zero of Indonesian fine arts” [40], embodying traditionalist values contrasted with ITB Bandung’s Western-oriented approach. Its reputation as the “Gampingan Axis” (paired with Gadjah Mada University’s “Bulaksumur Axis” [35]) and “Sekolah Toekang Reklame” (School of Signage Craftsmen) [41] solidified its identity. The concentration of 41 art spaces nearby (Fig. 6), amplified this image [6].

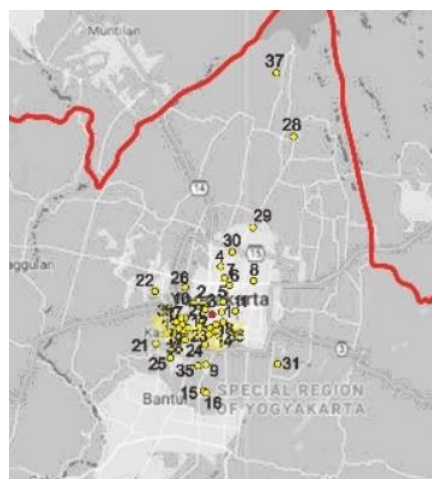


Figure 6 Map of Distribution of Fine Arts Spaces in Yogyakarta (Source: [6])

After abandonment (1998–2006), degradation occurred: vandalism, illegal settlements, and associations with illicit activities eroded its prestige. However, the Taring Padi collective reclaimed the site as an “informal arts campus” (Fig. 7), hosting underground exhibitions that preserved its rebellious artistic spirit [37].



**Figure 7 Taring Padi Arts Community Activities in 1998 at ASRI Camp
(Source: [37])**

Revitalization (2006–2023) reestablished ASRI’s image through the Jogja National Museum (JNM) and JNM Bloc. The annual *ArtJog* festival revived its legacy as a cultural hub, while adaptive reuse interventions, like converting the sculpture building into a vibrant gallery (Fig. 8), rebranded the site as “Arts, Culture, & Entertainment In A Historical Site.” [22]. The industrial-chic yellow steel structures introduced contrast while honoring history, aligning with Romantic Architecture principles that balance preservation and growth [19]. Image resilience stems from *cultural continuity*. Despite functional shifts, the site’s core identity as an “art axis” persisted, reinforced by community-led reactivation of intangible heritage (e.g., Taring Padi’s murals preserved beneath new walls) [12], [37].

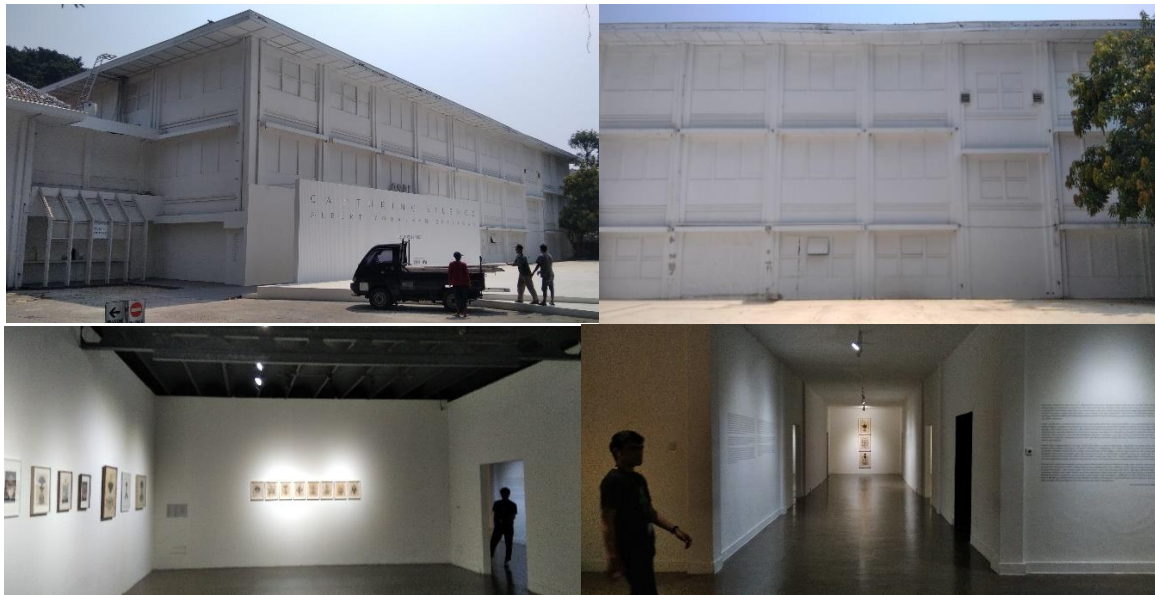


Figure 8 The Condition of the Former ASRI Campus after Becoming the Jogja National Museum



Figure 9 The Sculpture and Craft Building before Revitalization (left) and after Revitalization (right)
(Source: [https://archinesia.com/jnm-bloc/\(2022\)](https://archinesia.com/jnm-bloc/(2022)))

The campus's image transitioned from educational prestige to degraded neglect, then to renewed cultural-commercial hybridity. Key to its successful reimagining was: (1) Symbolic continuity: Retention of ASRI's art-centric legacy (e.g., ArtJog) (Fig.8) [35]; (2) Branding innovation: JNM Bloc's bold visual identity created a new layer of meaning without erasing history (Fig.9) [24]; (3) Community agency: Taring Padi's activism preserved intangible heritage during decline [37]. This aligns with Norberg-Schulz's *Romantic Architecture* theory, where historical forms evolve while retaining essence [19].

The Space of the Place

The spatial transformation of the former ASRI campus reflects a significant shift in both function and spatial experience (Fig. 10). Initially, the campus courtyards functioned as integral components of the academic and social life of the institution, serving as ceremonial fields and garden spaces that supported educational and community-based rituals [25]. However, during its period of abandonment from 1998 to 2006, these same areas lost their structural and symbolic coherence, instead becoming informal venues for performances and political gatherings [37].



Figure 10 Changes in Space in the ASRI Campus Area

Following the revitalization initiated in 2006, through the establishment of the Jogja National Museum (JNM) and later JNM Bloc, these open spaces underwent deliberate reprogramming. The main ceremonial courtyard was transformed into a white-paved outdoor exhibition space, while the banyan tree zone, long regarded as a symbolic and historical marker, was repurposed as an amphitheater for performances, flanked by cafés and lounge areas (Fig. 11). In parallel, several green spaces were sacrificed to accommodate commercial infrastructure, such as kiosks and event stages [25]. These spatial interventions collectively shifted the site's atmosphere from one of formal academic contemplation to that of an informal, commerce-driven cultural venue. Yet, despite these shifts, the banyan tree, which was planted in 1957, was preserved as a central landmark, providing a mnemonic anchor that upheld a sense of historical continuity within the transformed spatial narrative [42].



Figure 11 ASRI Campus Space after Becoming the Jogja National Museum and JNM Bloc

The synthesis of these spatial adaptations reveals three core priorities: (1) functional hybridization repurposed institutional courtyards into flexible, multipurpose zones for art markets and performances; (2) memory anchoring was achieved through the symbolic retention and reinterpretation of the banyan tree, which served as a spatial and historical anchor amidst commercial developments [34]; (3) community reconnection was fostered through recurring public events, reinforcing social engagement and aligning with Habibullah & Ekomadyo's theory of place-making [22]. Nevertheless, these adaptations were not without compromise. The significant reduction of green space underscores a latent tension between heritage preservation and commercial viability raising questions about how far adaptive reuse can go before eroding the very spirit it seeks to preserve.

The Character of the Place

Character emerges from the relational bonds between communities, historical continuity, and the physical environment [19], [26]. In the context of the former ASRI campus, the original architectural character was strongly influenced by prefabricated structures received through the U.S. Marshall Plan in 1957 [36], which symbolized postwar modernism and institutional academicism. Alumni testimonies affirm that this environment fostered a “high artistic spirit” grounded close to galleries and an atmosphere of creative collaboration [6]. However, the site's character began to deteriorate after ASRI vacated the campus in 1998. The absence of academic functions and the rise of physical decay marked a phase of identity crisis. Yet, this void was not entirely devoid of meaning. The arrival of the Taring Padi collective infused the space with new symbolic depth, murals critiquing the New Order regime introduced what is now described as “dark heritage,” embedding the site with a form of counter-narrative memory [17].



Figure 12 Character Activities at the Former ASRI Campus after becoming JNMBloc

Following the 2006 revitalization, the character of the site evolved into a hybrid condition that integrating tangible continuity with intangible renewal. Physically, key heritage markers such as the prefabricated façades were preserved, the statue of RJ Katamsi reinstated, and the banyan tree (Fig. 13) was thoughtfully incorporated into the amphitheater design. Symbolically, the return of ArtJog reasserted the legacy of ASRI as a national arts epicenter, while new architectural insertions, such as steel platforms and commercial infills, introduced contrasting elements that nevertheless respected the site's evolving narrative (Fig.12) [16].



Figure 13 The Banyan Tree in the ASRI Complex

Continuity was maintained through a persistent “spirit of art” (Table 1), revealing that the site’s identity was not tied solely to its architectural program, but rather to a deeper artistic resilience. As Jiven and Larkham argue, the character of a place is shaped by the integration of social memory and spatial symbolism [26]. This was evidenced by alumni participation in the transformation of the site into JNM, ensuring that collective memory endured despite pressures from commercialization.

Table 1 Comparison of ASRI Campus Spirit of Place from Time to Time

Spirit of Place	Period		
	1957-1998	1998-2006	2006-2023
Image	Ground Zero of Indonesian Fine Arts Pole Modern Art Traditionalist Limestone Axis Advertising School	Abandoned Haunted Dirty place Former art campus Place to get drunk Illegal settlements Taring Padi - free to be artistic Informal arts campus	Yogyakarta National Museum ArtJOG Place to hang out Historic sites “Arts, Culture, & Entertainment in a Historical Site Image of cultural arts creation
Space	Campus yard for student educational and social activities Front page for the Ceremony Field Open spaces for gardens	The campus yard becomes a slum The courtyard is used for music performances and informal arts activities. Used for political speeches	The courtyard as a space for art exhibitions and social activities Open space is reduced for cafes, stages and stands Open space becomes commercial space (JNM Bloc) Front page for outdoor exhibition
Character	Academic, Creative Formal-informal Art history memory Great Indonesian artists Marshall Plan aid prefab buildings Campus Buildings Banyan tree as a symbol of the founding of the campus	Informal characters tend to be shabby Physical damage to buildings Paddy fang community The banyan tree is still an icon Loss of academic area character Historical memory of the overthrow of the New Order in murals	Informal educational building character ArtJog event provides character as the Center for Indonesian Arts Events The banyan tree is still an icon RJ Katamsi statue as a landmark Campus Buildings Revitalized Maintaining the Prefab character, but adapted into a museum. The character of the additional building at JNMbloc contrasts with the old building with its industrial character.

The transformation of the ASRI campus into JNM and JNM Bloc illustrates how the *spirit of place* can evolve through layered adaptations (functionally, spatially, and symbolically) while retaining its essential core. Three key insights emerged: (1) community acted as cultural custodians: both the Taring Padi collective (1998–2006) and ASRI alumni played vital roles in preserving intangible heritage through activism, memory, and resistance, sustaining the *genius loci* amid physical neglect [21]; (2) the project demonstrated a model of adaptive authenticity: unlike failed examples of colonial museum conversion [8], JNM embraced a layered approach by preserving politically charged murals and integrating contemporary industrial interventions, rather than attempting to recreate a singular historic period [12], [16]; (3) JNM Bloc’s balanced integration of commerce and culture enabled socio-economic sustainability while maintaining ties to the site’s historical narrative that aligning with SDG 11’s inclusive and participatory heritage frameworks [14].

This case affirms Norberg-Schulz’s triadic framework of image, space, and character [19] as a useful diagnostic lens for assessing *genius loci* prior to intervention. Moreover, it reinforces the argument that stakeholder integration, particularly through alumni and local cultural actors, is crucial in preventing cultural displacement in adaptive reuse processes [15], [32]. Lastly, it supports the notion of flexible authenticity, wherein

heritage is allowed to evolve through dialogue between past and present, rather than being “frozen” in a particular historical aesthetic. Such an approach resists facadism and instead promotes deeper place attachment and resilience [17]. Future adaptive reuse strategies should, therefore, prioritize socio-cultural narratives alongside material conservation to avoid producing placeless, culturally disconnected spaces [14].

IV. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the historical evolution and adaptive reuse of the former ASRI campus and explored its spirit of place through the dimensions of image, space, and character. The transformation of the site occurred in three main phases: academic (1957–1998), abandonment and activist use (1998–2006), and revitalization (2006–present). Adaptive reuse in this context was not a linear process but involved negotiation between preservation, activism, and commercialization. The research found that despite physical alterations and programmatic shifts, key symbolic elements such as the banyan tree, the RJ Katamsi statue, and community memory functioned as anchors of continuity. In terms of image, the campus retained its identity as a national art node through events like ArtJog. Spatially, the site transitioned from ceremonial academic courtyards to multi-use public zones, while still respecting key spatial orientations. In character, alumni engagement and the legacy of Taring Padi’s activism sustained the site’s artistic ethos and cultural meaning even as new commercial functions emerged. These findings demonstrate that the site’s *genius loci* did not disappear but adapted through collective memory, symbolic preservation, and inclusive reuse strategies.

Conceptually, this study contributes to the discourse on adaptive reuse by affirming that the spirit of place is not static, but evolves through physical, social, and symbolic layers. Methodologically, it highlights the strength of a qualitative, phenomenological approach in revealing both tangible and intangible transformations in heritage sites. Theoretically, the research confirms the relevance of Norberg-Schulz’s triadic framework, image, space, character, as a diagnostic lens to understand place identity in the context of transformation. This case also demonstrates the value of stakeholder participation, particularly alumni and local art communities, in safeguarding cultural memory during adaptive reuse. However, the study is limited by its focus on a single case and the scope of interviewees, which may not capture the full diversity of community perception. Future study should adopt a comparative case study approach and integrate broader participatory mapping techniques to critically examine how the *spirit of place* is negotiated within diverse urban heritage contexts undergoing cultural or commercial transformations.

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