

Capturing Genius Loci of Riparian Culture: The Case of Musi River Palembang

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ABSTRACT

Musi River plays a significant role in the history and development of Palembang. Historically, the river had been used for settlement, trading, and transport activities. This phenomenon established the riparian culture that is deeply associated with the native residents who had been attached to the Musi River. However, the essential meaning of the river as a place has begun to fade because of the rapid growth of land transportation. People have shifted their water-based activities to land. This study is intentioned to capture the meaning of Musi riparian culture, which covers 16 Ilir Market area, the oldest trade center in Palembang with significant historic characteristics. By architectural phenomenology approach, this study is aimed to capture the genius loci in the area. Using qualitative research methods through the “genius loci” framework will be traced to the existence of the Musi riparian area. The results show that interactions between humans and rivers generate the spirit of this place, such as various activities, diverse ethnicity, and significant cultural history narration. Thus interaction is essential to maintain the unique characteristics of Musi riparian culture in modern times.

Keywords: *Genius loci, spirit of place, character, riparian culture, 16 ilir market, musu river*

1. INTRODUCTION

Palembang is a city that wholly symbolizes as a waterfront [1]. In 1923, J.L. van Sevenhoven described Musi River as a lifeline of civilization where both banks of the river divide the area into the Ulu (upstream) and the Ilir (downstream) regions [2]. *Batanghari Sembilan* is the term designated to this municipality since there are nine headwaters of the river. Additionally, over a hundred small streams flow through Palembang [3], currently looking more like canals due to normalization efforts. Its geography heavily influenced the city's name, located in the lowlands and regularly inundated by Musi River [4]. This topography embodies the riparian culture [3], in which riparian refers to the area along the riverbanks affected by the tides [5].

The ties of Palembang City residents to the river are expressed as *Venetie van Oost* or *Venice from the East* by J.L. Van Sevenhoven, a Dutch commissary who served in Palembang [1]. In his writings, he recounted the water traffic where there were many Kajang boats and ships that stopped by to trade [6]. At that time, the locals and Arabians lived in the mainland in stilt houses where some areas were submerged. Meanwhile, the Chinese, Malay, and other foreigners lived on the water in raft houses [1]. Djohan Hanafiah, a Palembang cultural figure, revealed that "Musi River gives life and promises hope." Life in the river and its banks, where Kajang boats from the hinterland down the river pulled over to rest, is a picture of life promised by the Musi River [3]. This river-oriented city's identity is

profoundly attached to the resident's riparian culture at that time. The existence of rivers in this city does not merely affect land development today. However, river spaces and banks form the identity and ethnicity of society [7].

The spatial arrangement and development model formed this city, including past government terms, cultural backgrounds, and conditions [8]. In its timeline, Palembang has gone through several government terms that influenced the city's development and changes. It is widely known that the city was born 1300 years ago, when the Srivijaya Kingdom served as the capital [9], until it finally developed into a modern city. However, the modernization that occurred in this city does not necessarily wipe out the riparian culture of its population [6]. Musi River's meaning as a place of living, transportation, recreation, and a livelihood source is still associated today. Musi River is the manifestation of Palembang cultural sovereignty that must be preserved [10-11]. Identifying river culture in this place plays a quintessential role in regional development to accomplish contextual planning [12].

One of these cultural identifications can be traced using the genius loci finding methods. Genius loci is an awareness of the existence of local intelligence in a place; local means the place where people live or move [13]. Several previous studies [13-15], revealed that the meaning of each place could be obtained by observing how the residing communities value that place by utilizing the Genius Loci approach. Taking 16 Ilir Market area (Figure 1) as a place with an influential historical riparian culture in the feudal era, this study aims to capture the genius loci stored within the Musi riparian area. In this case, there will be regional

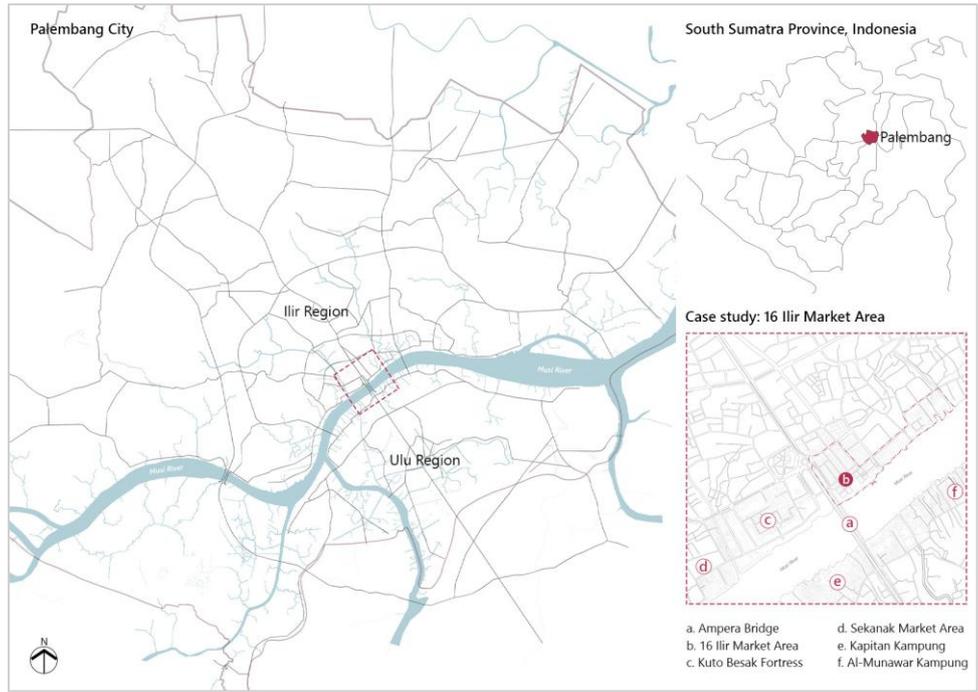


Figure 1 Location of study area

contexts traced from historical studies to current conditions. Findings from this study are expected to be able to enrich knowledge on riparian culture and highlight local cultural treasures.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Case Study

Located in the ilir region of the Musi riverbanks, 16 Ilir Market area (Figure 1) is the oldest trading center in Palembang. Following the footsteps of a traditional market's development in general, this area originated from an expanding market located on the Musi riparian. Economic activities in this area have started since authorities were moved from the 1 Ilir market area. In 1738, along with the Great Mosque construction, this area transformed into a riverside settlement. Tengkuruk, and Rendang River, whose streams end to the Musi River, and Kapuran River, stood as a citadel for the Great Mosque and Kuto Kecik Palace, while trading activity developed at the estuaries. After the conquest of Sultanate of Palembang Darussalam in 1821, the Dutch Colonials started to nurture this area's economic potential [3].

To increase Palembang's tourism interest, potential areas where monumental buildings were located that also boasted appealing riverbank activities are essential in Palembang's heritage preservation plan [16-17]. The 16 Ilir Market area is still the top choice of Palembang residents to fulfill various needs at reasonable prices. Humans pack the river and riverbanks from dawn to dusk. Through waterways, the

trading culture forms ethnic diversity and exciting ventures that will be fascinating to be revealed in this study.

2.2 Methods

This research was conducted using an architectural phenomenology approach based on historical analysis and current regional conditions. Norberg Schulz [18] stated that each place has a distinctive character, an attribute in differentiating one place from another, this is seen as the uniqueness of each place. Furthermore, Jivan & Larkham [19], explained that sense of place has the same meaning as *genius loci*, used in expressing a place's atmosphere. Some places have an attraction that gives us the unutterable friendly feelings, which entices people to return to those places. In this case, the atmosphere means *genius loci*, which closely resembles the meaning of "character" of a place. *Genius loci* reflect that a particular place has a guardian spirit. Therefore, tourists are the most suitable people to experience *genius loci* because they are unfamiliar with it. Martokusumo [20] explained that the preservation of *genius loci* in urban space will keep a city's identity intact; the region's soul contributes the greatest to the aesthetic traits in a historic area.

Diagram 1 shows the finding framework of *genius loci* created by Schulz [18] in revealing the character of a place. This method has been referred by previous studies [13-14,21-22] to capture the *genius loci* at a specific place. As explained before, each place has a different character. A more in-depth analysis from two different market locus, the Legi Market and Balubur Market proved the study [13]. Both places have the same function as a space for economic activities, each exhibiting their distinctive characters.

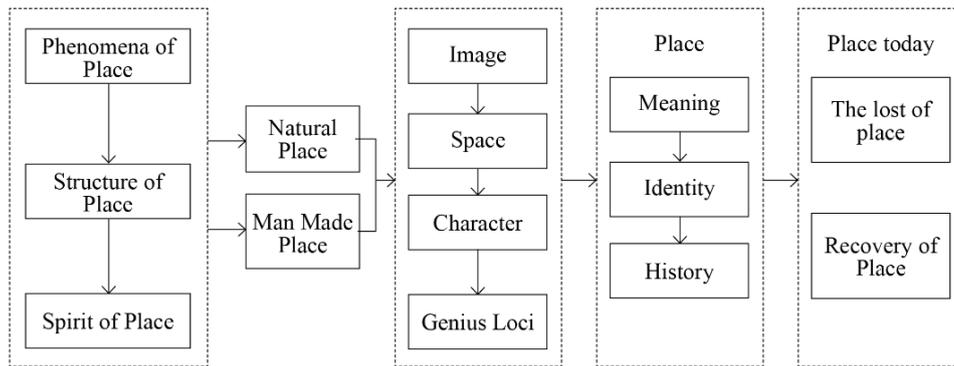


Diagram 1 Genius Loci Framework. Source: Schulz, 1980.

Genius loci in Legi Market revealed women's role as business doers is the guardian spirit of this place, renowned throughout the historical development of Surakarta. On the other hand, genius loci in Balubur Market are reflected in the neighboring community's lifestyle improvement. In conclusion, a genius loci framework can unveil the context of a place's persona.

This study is restricted to the location described previously, considering the author's limited study duration. The 16 Ilir Market area is the focus of this study by keeping in view the regional-scale context from its historical aspects to track the periodization. Data from historical literature research, interviews, and field research of the area's phenomena are analyzed to reveal the historical traces and riparian culture while also aiming to obtain the essence and character of a place. Data are collected from literature reviews and interpretation from historical maps, i.e. documentation of existing city maps for the feudal era [23] and satellite imagery for the modern period [24-25], superimposed to get a better representation. Furthermore, observations were carried out twice in situ on weekdays and weekends, taking locations in the 16 Ilir Market area and its surroundings. Interviews were conducted with subjects who were long-term residents.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Spirit of Natural Place

The Musi River that flows through Palembang is the longest river on Sumatra island and one of Indonesia's most notable rivers. The river's existence affects the culture, civilization, belief practices, religion, activities, perspectives, and ways of thinking of the residents [26]. The topography indicates that riparian areas along the Musi River have a direct influence on society's culture. Schulz stated that people have to understand the nature of the environment before settling down [18]. 16 Ilir Market Area started the city's structural development in the downstream zone, rich in its unique characteristics. It can be observed based on people's

reliance on the river, where the river aids trading activities, transportation, water supply, bathing, washing, and fishing [5].

The most recognizable trait of the riparian culture is how the community adapts to the tides and picks the ideal spot as settlements [27]. Historically, man-made elements in the Musi River area have fully adapted to its natural conditions, specifically on riparian land. Stilt and raft houses are prime examples of human adaptation to river tides. Subsequently, river trading culture is a form of human adaptation to the region's topography. Schulz [18], categorized this sight as a classic landscape, where humans straightforwardly partake in sustaining the environment's character. Humans settle and move while synergizing with nature at the same time. In conclusion human's involvement strengthens the spirit of the natural place in the early days of urban civilization.

3.2 Man Made Place

This section explains man-made elements in the phenomenon of urban land development and the morphology of the place.

3.2.1. Phenomena of Place

Among the greatest civilizations around the world, water plays a crucial role in life. Renowned civilizations, such as cities in Egypt and India, originated from the Nile River and Ganges River [28]. Similarly, in Palembang, the city's civilization stems from the existence of rivers that create the foundation its inhabitants' lives. This city has existed since the reign of the Srivijaya Kingdom – further validated by discovering the Kedudukan Bukit inscription dated 682 AD. Since then, many studies have been conducted to determine the exact location of the kingdom, with the most substantial evidence showing that the central government was located in Palembang [9]. Identified archaeological remains were unearthed along the Musi River, from Ogan Ulu to the east coast and Bangka Island [29].

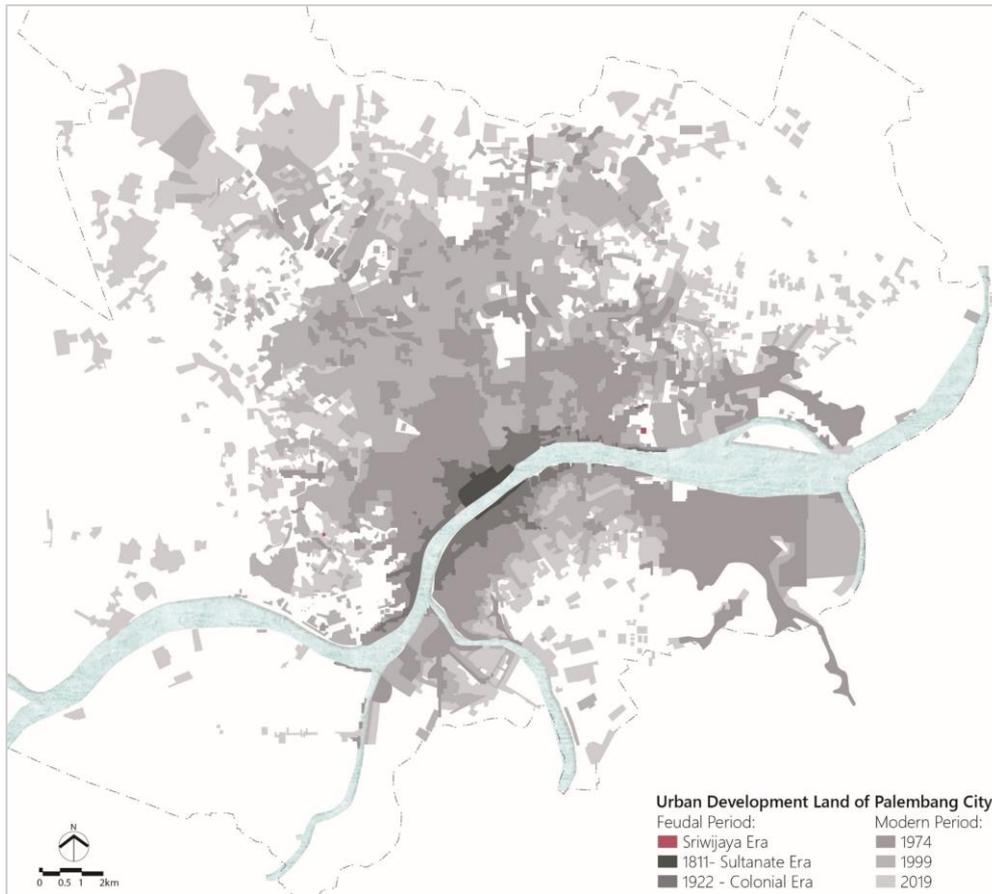


Figure 2 Phenomena of urban development land in Palembang City. Source: Adapted from [23-25]

Researchers believe that boats play an important role in the archipelago as a mode of transportation. Based on these findings, it was acknowledged that there was a trade network linking the archipelago and other nations worldwide during the Srivijaya Kingdom reign. Under the transportation system at that time, the trade center was located around the river's estuaries. The community settled on the edge of the Musi River in their raft houses [30]. Trade became a method of spreading the religion to the archipelago at that time. One physical evidence of the spread of Buddhism in this era is the religious site of Siguntang Hill (Figure 2). Located 3 km from the Musi River, this site sits at an altitude of 26 meters – Palembang's highest landscape. This place's elevation creates a sacred, peaceful atmosphere for devotion [31]. Meanwhile, the Ki Gede Ing Suro funeral complex lies on the east side, which researchers assume to have stood on a temple built in the Srivijaya period [32]. It can be presumed that residential settlements were located on the riverbanks, while the state buildings were in the highlands, which serve as the capital at that time.

Figure 2 shows the Palembang Sultanate era, which arose with the spread of Islamic religion in the archipelago. Initially, the Kuto Gawang Palace stood on the Musi riverbank until 1659 when the VOC burned the palace down

and forced them to move to the Kuto Lamo Palace located in Beringin Janggut in the 16 Ilir Market area [9]. Led by Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin I, the Kuto Besak Palace completed in 1797. This complex was a fortress that also functioned as a central government, bordering Musi River on the south, Tengkuruk River on the east, and Sekanak River on the west [9]. Simultaneously, stilt and raft houses were sighted along the Musi River [3]. This pattern shows that in this period, the river was still a top priority for the dwellers. Interaction between society and the river was established through activities in the riparian areas. During the Colonial period, Palembang went through significant changes. However, the city's developments were mainly carried out on the Musi riverbanks. When the Dutch commenced a revolutionary buildout, they started to take care of the main road. These roads were built over the streams, connecting lands separated by the river [1]. The development of Palembang from this era can also be examined based on the expansion of settlements. The Dutch then divided the city into two regions where they resided on the west side. Concurrently, the locals who lived in stilt and raft houses along the Musi riparian could be found on the east. This era saw the policy implementation where the Chinese living in rafts were allowed to step on land [2].

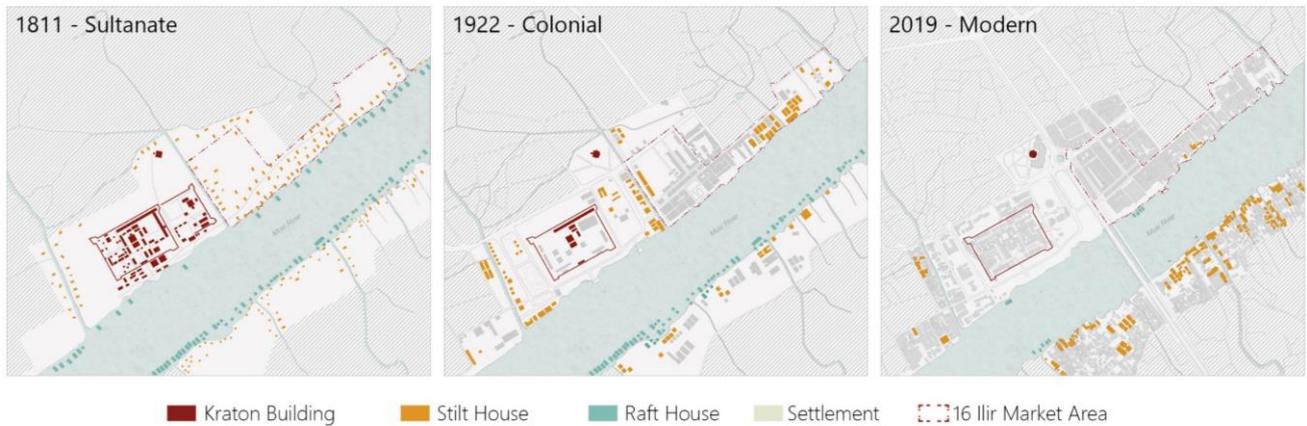


Figure 3 Morphology of structure of 16 Ilir Market area and its surroundings. Source: Adapted from [23-25]

At the same time, oil refinery industries were instigated in the Ulu region, establishing a new growth. Referring to Figure 2, while the pattern of development was still on the riverbanks, it gradually started shifting towards the northern and southern regions that were bare land. It was apparent that the move from water to land had slowly emerged.

Palembang began to evolve into a modern city after Indonesia declared its independence. At this point in history, the government managed to instate the local and national identity by building the Ampera Bridge in 1960. This landmark extends over the Musi River, connecting the Ulu and Ilir region and paving the way for the improvement of land transportation. The erection of Ampera Bridge is an epitome of spatial transformation from water to land. This resulted in the fading image of the city that used to rely on the river heavily [6]. Based on Figure 2, Palembang's development was formed from embedded from trading centers situated on the riverbanks that formed secondary trading activities in the city center. Therefore, developments occurring in this modernized era no longer position the river as the primary means of transportation and trade. Plans to increase tourism interest in Palembang has made the current riparian area around the Ampera Bridge, a strategic site for heritage tourism. Nowadays, the Ulu region has continued to thrive due to the presence of the Jakabaring Sport Centre.

3.2.2. Structure of Place

The 16 Ilir Market area structure cannot be dissociated from the role of the surrounding area. This area marks the rise of city development in Palembang. Based on Figure 3, in the Ilir region, the area experienced a drastic change, especially in the road and transportation network. During Srivijaya's reign, specialized expertise was required to build ships in response to Palembang's topography [30]. At such time, the river was a prime transportation and trade route - these features withstood several governmental reigns until the Sultanate era, where the river remained a reliable transportation network. The palace's location was

pinpointed at the exact spot. The Tengkuruk and Sekanak rivers on the west side and the Rendang river on the east side of the area are the node, where traders gathered from the Ulu region and hinterlands. The Tengkuruk River, which runs north of the ilir region, also passed through The Great Mosque religious site.

Throughout the Colonial period, the 16 Ilir Market area developed with shophouses and stalls, particularly the Sekanak Market area. The shophouses were built facing the Tengkuruk River, connected to the central government district - the Kuto Besar and Sekanak regions. At that time, Thomas Karsten's masterplan of Palembang had begun to be constructed until the Tengkuruk River was converted into land expansion purposefully for building roads and boulevards in 1928 [3]. This street, at present known as Sudirman Road, eventually becomes a trade center. After Indonesia's independence, the Ampera Bridge continued to change the transportation network. The Ulu and Ilir region's integration paved the way to boost the development of the Ulu region. Eventually, traders from the hinterland began to utilize land transportation that was deemed more practical [1]. Nowadays, land infrastructure development persistently grows, proven by constructions of the BRT and LRT networks serving routes around this area.

The growth of land infrastructure reshaped the building typology of each period. It is widely believed that in the Srivijaya era, foreign people flocked to Palembang to conduct trade, where it was once a significant center for the expansion of Buddhism. Poles were set up along the Musi riverbank to enable large bamboo rafts to berth. During this era, houses did not have any importance as it was considered unprofitable. However, stilt houses were thought to have existed in this era. These houses utilized stairs as the entrance and stood on sturdy pillars, protecting them from the tides [30]. Before the 20th century, in the Sultanate era, the 16 Ilir Market area was once a riverside settlement crammed with stilts and raft houses [4]. Afterwards, colonialism caused the development of Palembang's spaces well-planned. The Musi riverbanks were jam-packed with market booths, shophouses,

warehouses, trade offices, and industrial factories, showcasing the European and Chinese architectural styles [1]. Despite the building typology transformation, 16 Ilir Market area retains several buildings with local architectural styles, such as stilt houses facing Musi river. On the other hand, in the ulu riverbank, causeway was built that resulted in the loss of several houses exhibiting local architectural styles. Land use in this area is mainly predominated with settlements that this locality still conserves its physical condition and origins, such as the well-preserved Al-Munawar Kampung featuring the characters of stilt houses.

3.3 Capturing Genius Loci of 16 Ilir Market Area on Musi Riparian

This section explains the Genius Loci of 16 Ilir Market Area as a natural and man-made place by interpreting its images, spaces, and characters.

3.3.1. Image

Image of 16 Ilir Market area as the principal and oldest trading center on the Musi riverbank has appeared since the Colonial era. This image was ingrained in the community that traded by the Kajang boats at the riverbanks. These days, the riverbank area housed multiple shops and warehouses that accommodate sellers' and buyers' activities. Mr. Amir [33], a porter, stated that the supply of goods such as natural products came from the Ulu region, carried on Tongkang boats to the market (Figure 4a).

Goods distribution and passenger ship traffic contribute to emphasize this area's image - a main node on the Musi riverbank. This image is highlighted by the market visitors who also come outside Palembang. Some of them show up from tidal areas such as the Sungsang region - a district isolated from infrastructure development, onboard small-engine Ketek boats to shop every month. While strolling around the area, it is not uncommon to sight plenty of ships and boats stopping by the river (Figure 4b). Furthermore, market depends on commercial activities happening inside the shops and alleys. These activities accentuate the social interactions between traders and buyers. Following the meaning of the market as socio-cultural place [34] its interaction simultaneously represent the personification of the local communities.

3.3.2. Space

Spaces along the riverbanks in 16 Ilir Market area subsequently spark human interaction with the river. It conforms to Musi River's significance as the center of social activities displayed non-stop from dawn to dusk. This place is crowded with porters passing back and forth, carrying goods to ships (Figure 4c). In an interview with the oldest Chinese trader in the district, he mentioned that he used to

trade from a raft by the riverbank. Until finally, by 1923, the Chinese were allowed to embark on the mainland, and they occupied the shophouses built by the colonial government [35]. However, the bustling activities remained in place despite most of the traders had shifted towards the mainland. A handful of floating restaurants remain by the riverbank to this day (Figure 4d). These rafts no longer function only as a house or a shop, but its existence perfectly portrays the memory of the olden days of the trading life scenery around the Musi riverbanks. The existing rafts were modified to accommodate more space in the restaurant, which succeeded in attracting visitors to the market area. Additionally, the pier's bustling activity (Figure 4e), where people ferrying from various regions, denotes interdependence between the rivers and the visitors.

Beyond the liveliness of trading activities, there is a kampung abundant with vernacular house architecture. Studies revealed that this area was once a riverbank settlement since the Sultanate era until it was transformed into a trade center in the Colonial period. These houses were built on sturdy poles embedded on the Musi riverbanks' wetlands to withstand the tides (Figure 4f). Mr. Irvan [36], who owns and lives in one of the stilt houses, stated that his house was built ages ago, and it has been passed down through three generations. The house that faces the Musi River signifies that it used to be the principal means of transportation. On the contrary, Mr. Ali [37] mentioned that in his youth, there used to be countless stilt houses in this proximity, but these houses were then sold in order to be converted to warehouses. Furthermore, several warehousing typologies were also built on wetlands, and they remain up to this time. The Musi riverbanks play an active role in accommodating humans to socialize and carry out daily activities, resulting in the people who occupy these spaces to adjust yet deepen the riparian culture itself gradually.

3.3.3. Character

The character of the 16 Ilir Market area is formed by its cultural diversity. The culture of utilizing the body of water has existed since the Srivijaya era, thus shaping a trader's persona in the community [6]. Consistent with the previous analysis, it is acknowledged that the city was packed with ethnic diversity that arrived for trading purposes since the Sultanate era. These traders came in ships through the water-route [38]. This trading background played a huge role in shaping Palembang's ethnic diversity. The trade framework in Palembang markets always exhibits something in common, where the Chinese usually set up jewelry and grocery stores; the Arabians sell textiles and books; the Indians sell spices and herbs. The locals become small traders who hold stalls and are generally referred to as Cungkukan traders [6].

16 Ilir Market was one of the areas greatly influenced by migrant traders at the time, forming the multi-ethnic character in its market spaces as a result. This area is full of traders of Chinese descent - most of them run grocery or building supply stores. It is not uncommon to find some

Chinese selling food on foot in this area. Indian descents dominate the market share of spices and herbs. People who sell natural products are of Malay descent. These traders occupy shops with diverse architectural styles, such as the European or Chinese. The diversity in this region also

eventually contributes to shaping the character and appearance of the historical market. Meanwhile, the specialization of commodities sold by these traders indicates the rich ethnic diversity in the area (Figure 4g, 4h).

Table 1 The variables of genius loci finding

Variables	Indication
Image	The biggest and oldest public market on Musi riverbanks: (a) goods traffic activity; (b) a Ketek boat that carries passengers to the hinterland
Space	Interactions at the riparian areas: (c) porter activities; (d) floating restaurants; (e) docks; (f) ancient 16 Ilir kampung facing the Musi river
Character	Diverse ethnicity: (g) row of coffee shops with traders of Malay, Chinese, and Arabian descendants; (h) Indian spice trader

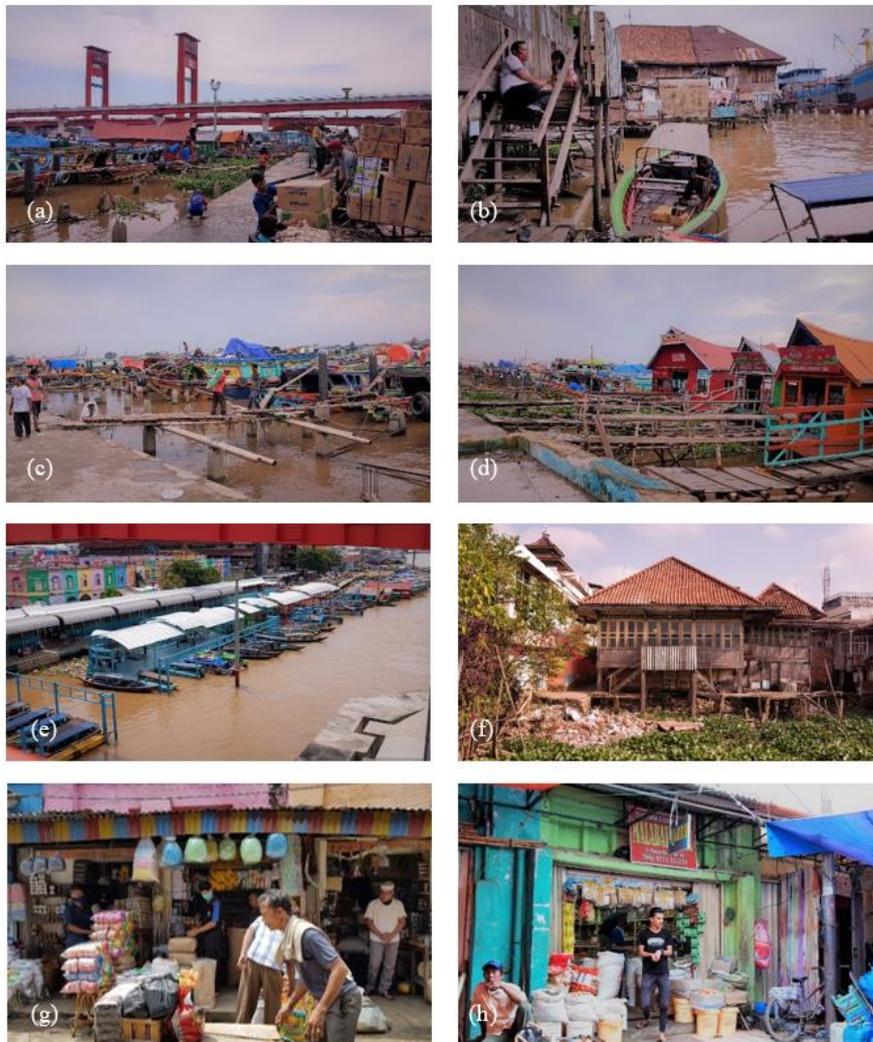


Figure 4 Existing conditions indicating the spirit of place

3.3.4. Genius Loci

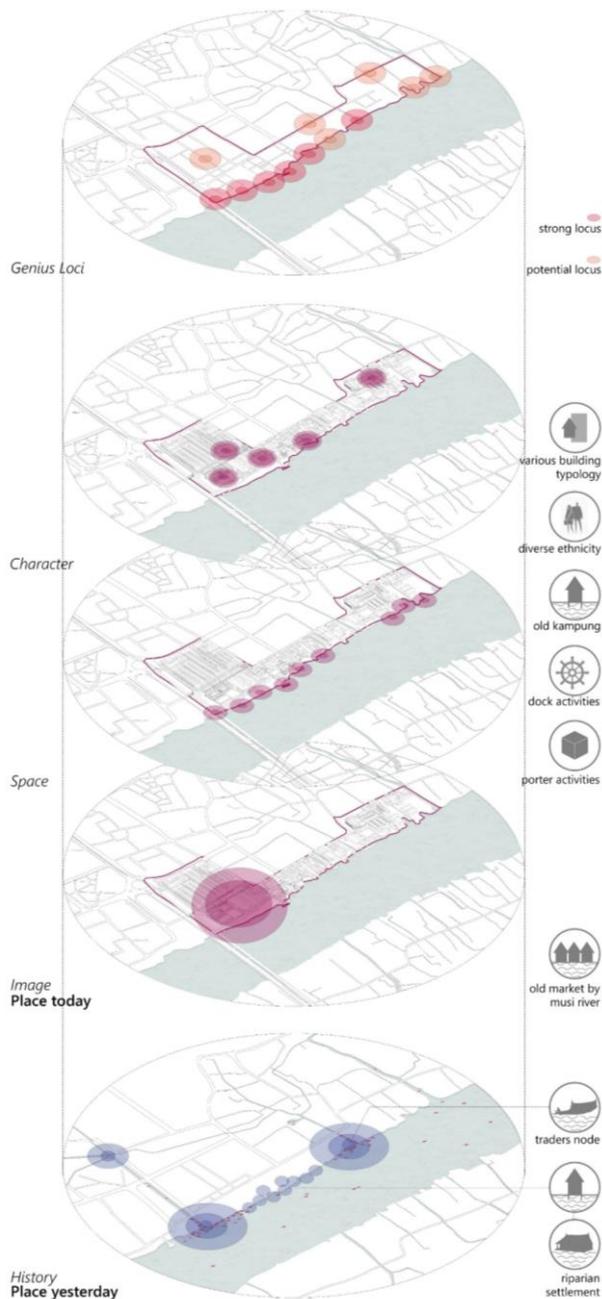


Figure 5 Potential locus of genius loci

16 Ilir Market area has a long record of trading culture in water bodies, especially in its riparian areas. Based on the regional phenomenon, this culture has been long established since the Srivijaya era. It sets up a multi-ethnic population with all the adjustments to the physical elements of its space. The river and its banks are valuable assets to every individual who depends on these places.

Genius loci are the spirit or soul of a place. Therefore, it can be said that genius loci from the 16 Ilir Market area are pictured from the interaction between humans and rivers,

which is still ongoing today. Heavy dock traffic, ongoing trades, and porter's activity exemplify the spirit of this area. All these activities profoundly rely on the Musi River. In compliance with what a Palembang cultural figure said [3] that, "Musi River promises hope for a better life".

Figure 5 illustrates the potential and feasible locus where genius loci can be manifested. The loci spread in various spots in the 16 Ilir Market area. The image of the region as a trading center lies beyond its boundaries. Nevertheless, the node is at the locus closest to the Ampera Bridge. These nodes represent the spaces where interactions happen, formed by trading activities at specific loci. Another potential genius locus lies in the middle of the area - settlements unveiling local architectural styles that imply the region's character. Throughout the time, there is an excellent possibility of a lost genius locus, such as the traders' meeting at the creek onboard ships. This firmly indicates that the area's genius loci are formed based on interactions between traders and the river, which has been ongoing for centuries.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This article explains the phenomenon of riparian culture in the Musi River for a long time, by capturing the genius loci in the 16 Ilir Market area. Norberg Schulz concluded the exploration of phenomenology through "place" with three concepts: meaning, identity, and history. In 16 Ilir Market area, the riparian culture revived by various activities. The diverse activities in this region indicate that river spaces and riverbanks are essential in configuring the place's meaning. Those spaces set off as a place for humans to have a dialogue with nature. The interaction between humans and rivers comes from diverse interests. Porters' activities and ship traffic are the most noticeable interactions with rivers - this natural element has always "given" human a lot. It means the human responsibility for the river life.

Ethnic diversity and riverbank activities of 16 Ilir Market area make up the place's distinct identity. The existence of Vernacular, European, and Chinese architectural building styles are narrating its timeline. However, the primer identity of the area must highlight the story of river space and riverbanks. The existence of stilt houses and boats sailing from various regions are features that have been less prominent in the area. Therefore, it should be made more conspicuous in future city planning development.

Historically, this area has taken a vital role in society's economic capital since the Sultanate era, until it transformed into a modern developing city. This area marked the rise of the development in Palembang and grew along with its extraordinary culture that was established ages ago. The bustle of the marketplace from dawn to dusk continues to this day. This area presents a historical and cultural narrative, that must be a highlight to the current generation.

Area of 16 Ilir Market has its remarkable characteristics that make this place exquisite among other trading areas. Identifying genius loci through regional development is beneficial to accentuate its features. The spirit of this area

must be maintained to sustain the area adapting the modernization pressures. In conclusion, the search for genius loci is necessary to reveal local cultural characters, in line to enrich the planning process for development.

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