



# Symbolic Strategies in Contemporary Public Space: Unpacking Design Intentions at Alun-Alun Surabaya

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**Abstract.** Public space in contemporary cities is never neutral, and Alun-Alun Surabaya exemplifies how architectural meaning becomes a site of tension between official narratives and everyday interpretation. Positioned as a flagship civic project, the space carries governmental ambitions of cultural revival and urban modernity, yet its symbolic intentions do not seamlessly align with how people understand and inhabit it. To examine this gap, the study employs a qualitative-discursive approach grounded in Norberg-Schulz's *Intentions in Architecture* and Markus & Cameron's conceptualization of architecture as discourse. Institutional media releases and official social platforms were compared with user-generated Google Maps reviews and coded through Miles and Huberman's analytic framework to trace how meaning is produced and negotiated. The analysis reveals a pronounced dissonance: while the government frames the site as a monument of heritage and civic pride, users predominantly experience it as a social and affective environment oriented toward leisure, encounter, and atmospheric comfort. This divergence demonstrates that architectural meaning is not secured by design intention but continually reshaped by lived practice. The findings underscore the broader implication that public architecture functions as a contested symbolic field, one in which authority attempts to speak through space, yet the public persistently re-authors what that space ultimately signifies.

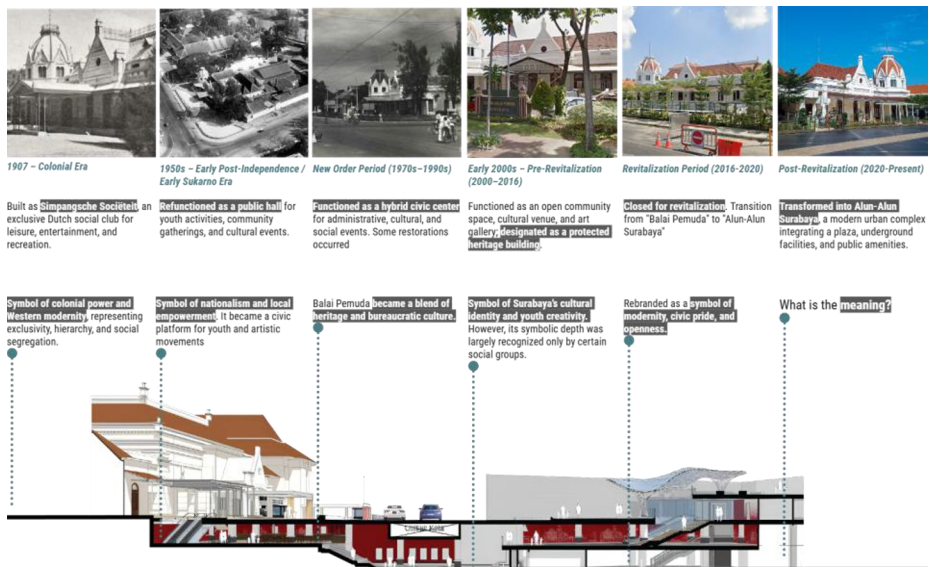
**Keywords:** Discourse, Intention, Meaning, Public Space, Symbolic Strategy.

## 1 Introduction

The meaning of *Alun-Alun Surabaya* is not anchored in its architectural form alone but emerges through an ongoing negotiation between institutional narratives and the lived interpretations of its users. Public space in contemporary cities is never neutral; it speaks, persuades, and performs through its material presence and symbolic gestures. As Markus and Cameron (2002) argue, architecture is a form of discourse, an instrument through which institutions communicate intentions via spatial hierarchies, controlled access, and coded representations. Yet what architecture intends to "say" often

diverges from what people actually "hear," and this tension is vividly embodied in the evolving identity of Alun-Alun Surabaya.

The site itself is layered with shifting ideological meanings. Constructed in 1907 as the *Simpangsche Sociëteit*, it once projected colonial exclusivity and European modernity. After independence, its transformation into *Balai Pemuda* in the 1950s reframed it as a civic symbol of nationalism and youth empowerment. During the New Order, it functioned as a hybrid cultural-bureaucratic facility, part heritage monument, part administrative apparatus. In the early 2000s, it became a locus of creative identity, before undergoing a major revitalization between 2016 and 2020 that rebranded it as *Alun-Alun Surabaya*: an urban showcase of civic openness, cultural performance, and contemporary public identity. This temporal sequence (see Figure 1) illustrates how architectural meaning is not fixed but produced through discursive strategies that continually reinterpret the past to legitimize present-day agendas.



**Fig. 1.** The development of the meaning of Alun-Alun Surabaya across time. Demonstrates the influence of institutions on the development of meaning and raises questions about contemporary conditions related to its meaning.

Against this backdrop, the study investigates a central question: How does Alun-Alun Surabaya produce and represent meaning, and to what extent do these narratives reflect the relationship between form, institution, and symbolic strategies in contemporary public space?

To address this, institutional narratives drawn from municipal press releases, social media statements, and heritage revitalization discourse are examined alongside user-generated reception from Google Maps reviews, which offer a rich, unsolicited archive

of everyday interpretations. This dual perspective positions architecture as a site of negotiation, where meaning is authored not only by institutional intention but also re-shaped through public experience.

Methodologically, the research draws on qualitative interpretive criticism (Attoe, 1978) and employs Miles & Huberman's (1994) model of data reduction, display, and conclusion-drawing, enabling a triangulated reading of discourse, spatial representation, and user perception. If, as Unwin (2009) provocatively asserts, architecture "speaks," then the fundamental question becomes: whose voice truly constructs public meaning at Alun-Alun Surabaya, the institution that designs it or the people who inhabit it?

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Construction Meaning in Architecture

Architecture, as Geoffrey Broadbent (1973) and Simon Unwin (2009) emphasize, is not only a matter of what a building looks like but *what it means*. Meaning in architecture emerges through the interplay between physical form, human perception, and cultural discourse. This relational understanding of meaning underpins the epistemological foundation of this study: architecture is a communicative act situated within social, institutional, and symbolic contexts.

Christian Norberg-Schulz's *Intentions in Architecture* (1965) introduced the notion of architectural intention as the conscious effort of designers to embody existential meaning through spatial and formal articulation. In his view, design is not an autonomous aesthetic process but a manifestation of human intentionality, an act of translating values, functions, and symbols into built form. Meaning, therefore, is not inherent in the object itself but emerges when the form interacts with human experience and interpretation.

Yet, while Norberg-Schulz successfully framed the idea of *intentional form*, his theory largely assumes a unidirectional flow, from designer to user where intention determines meaning. Contemporary urban spaces, however, complicate this assumption. Public architecture operates not as a fixed symbol, but as a site of negotiation between institutional narratives, civic behavior, and media representation.

### 2.2 Architecture as Discourse: Marcus and Cameron

To address this complexity, *The Words Between the Spaces* by Thomas Markus and Deborah Cameron (2002) offers a more dynamic and discursive perspective. Their framework treats architecture as a form of discourse, where spatial organization, classification, and design language operate as systems of communication and control. Buildings, in this sense, "speak" not through verbal expression, but through spatial codes, access hierarchies, and symbolic orderings that reflect power and ideology.

Markus and Cameron identify several analytical domains that structure how meaning is produced and communicated within architecture:

- Discourse: the overarching system that links architecture with ideology and institutional narratives.
- Language: the material and symbolic syntax of architecture: form, code, and expression.
- Classification: spatial hierarchies that separate or unite social actors.
- Power: mechanisms through which built form regulates behavior and constructs identity.
- Intent: the institutional or professional purpose underlying spatial decisions.

Through this discursive lens, public spaces such as *Alun-Alun Surabaya* are not neutral settings but rhetorical constructions, physical manifestations of social and political meaning. Revitalization projects, heritage narratives, and branding strategies thus become part of a broader semiotic economy where form, power, and representation intersect.

### 2.3 Bridging Intention and Discourse

Integrating Norberg-Schulz and Markus & Cameron allows this study to bridge two theoretical paradigms:

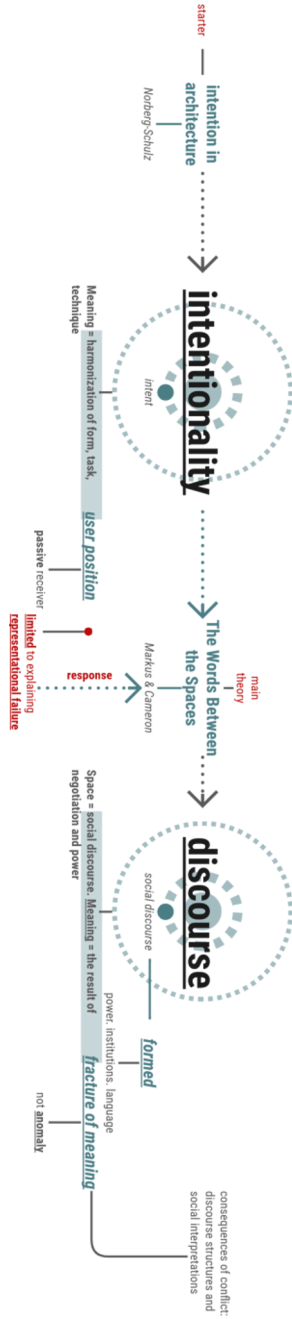
1. Intentional Paradigm - emphasizes design authorship, symbolic articulation, and existential meaning (Norberg-Schulz, 1965).
2. Discursive Paradigm - emphasizes the social production of meaning, institutional power, and user interpretation (Markus & Cameron, 2002).

The following image (see figure 2) is used to understand the relationship between the intentional paradigm and the discursive paradigm as complementary theoretical paradigms.

This synthesis generates a theoretical tension that becomes the core analytical question of the study:

*How does architectural intention operate within a discursive field where meaning is negotiated, reinterpreted, and sometimes contested?*

In the case of *Alun-Alun Surabaya*, this framework allows the analysis of how design intentions, heritage preservation, civic identity, and modern openness are encoded through spatial form and symbolic strategies, and how these meanings are rearticulated through user experience and public narratives (e.g., Google Maps reviews, media discourse).



**Fig. 2.** A diagram showing the integration between the intentionality and discourse frameworks in reading the meaning of an architectural object.

Within this study, the integration of these theoretical strands is operationalized through three analytic codes that serve as lenses for interpreting how meaning is produced at Alun-Alun Surabaya:

1. Discourse of Design Intentions.
2. Institutional Framing and Control
3. Language and Representation

Together, these three analytic dimensions provide the conceptual bridge between intention and discourse. They make explicit the mechanisms through which architectural meaning is formulated, circulated, stabilized, or contested. In this framework, architectural representation is not viewed as a static expression authored by designers, but as a discursive field shaped simultaneously by institutional ambition and social interpretation. By structuring analysis around these codes, the study is able to reveal both the strategic production of meaning envisioned by institutions and the fragmented, negotiated, or resistant interpretations generated by users thus making the relationship between design intention and lived discourse analytically traceable.

#### **2.4 Positioning the Study within Architectural Discourse Research**

To validate this positioning, a review of recent architectural discourse studies (2019-2025) reveals that most focus on *discourse*, *value*, and *language*, with fewer addressing the dimension of intent (see Figure 3).

This gap indicates the absence of integrated research connecting design intention with discursive construction in contemporary public space. The visualization of prior research themes demonstrates the theoretical relevance of situating this study at the intersection of *intentionality* and *discourse*.

This mapping confirms that architectural meaning today is understood less as fixed symbolism and more as an evolving negotiation shaped by institutional power, media representation, and civic engagement. Thus, exploring *symbolic strategies* within a real public space such as the *Alun-Alun Surabaya*, offers both theoretical novelty and practical significance.

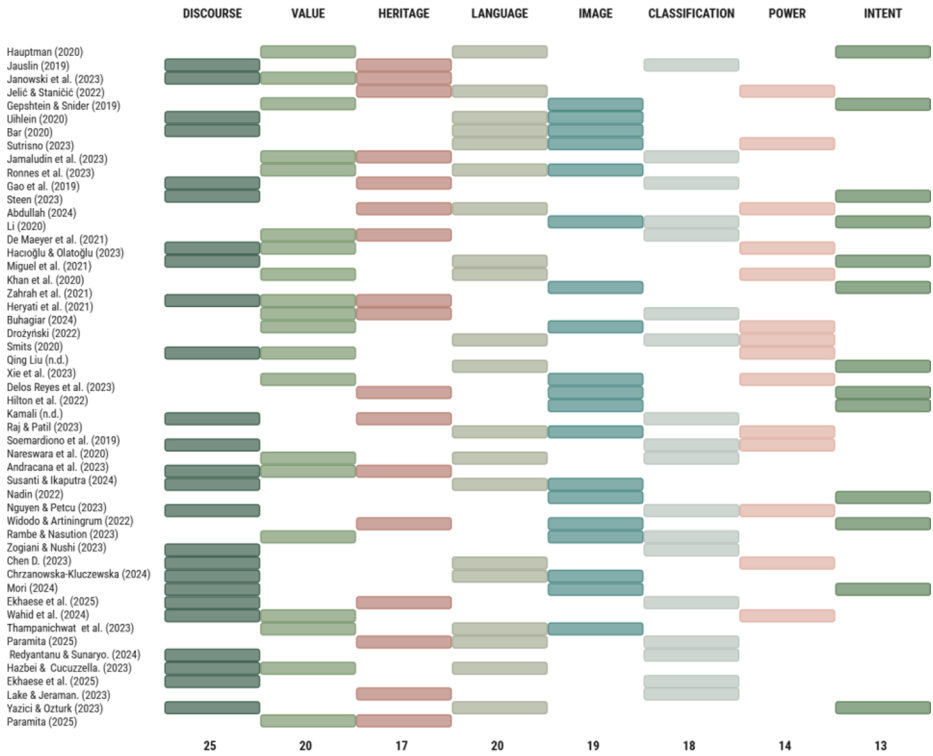
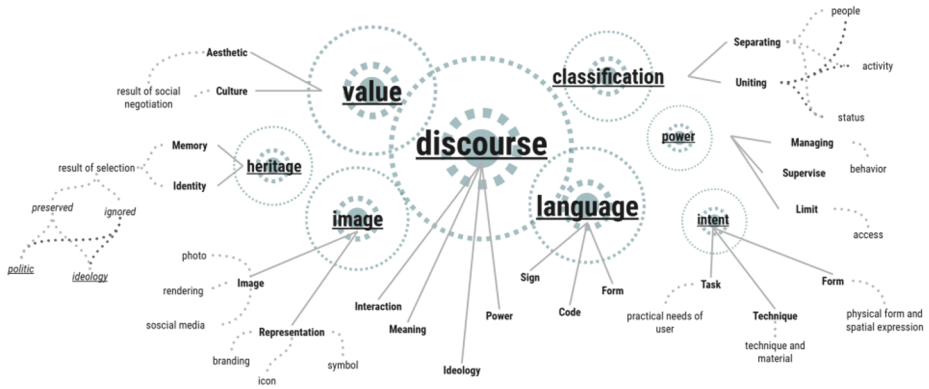


Fig. 3. Mapping of research themes in architectural discourse (2019-2025) to show the suitability of theme validation to research and show the state of the art for further exploration.

### 2.5 Discursive Analytical Framework

Building upon the above synthesis, this study operationalizes a Discursive Analytical Framework (see Figure 4) consisting of seven interrelated domains derived from Markus & Cameron (2002) and adapted for interpretive criticism:

- Discourse: the macro-structure connecting architecture, institution, and ideology.
- Language: the representational code (form, sign, expression).
- Value: aesthetic and cultural judgments negotiated within space.
- Heritage: selective memory and identity construction.
- Image: representation and branding in media and perception.
- Power: mechanisms of control, inclusion, or exclusion.
- Intent: design rationale embodied in spatial and material choices.



**Fig. 4.** Conceptual model related to previous studies and their discussion related to meaning in architecture through main keywords.

This framework enables a layered reading of *Alun-Alun Surabaya* to tracing how institutional narratives (e.g., government revitalization discourse), architectural form, and public perception intertwine to produce a living discourse of meaning.

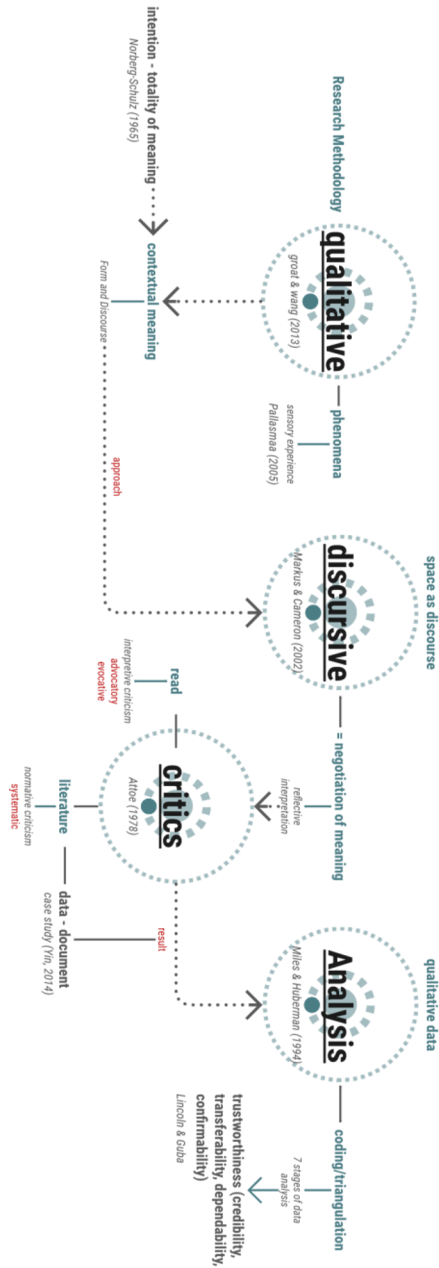
### 3 Research Methodology

The research is framed within a constructivist-interpretative paradigm (Groat & Wang, 2013), emphasizing that architectural meaning is shaped through human experience and social discourse rather than intrinsic form. The study employs a single-case qualitative design (Yin, 2014) to explore how *Alun-Alun Surabaya* produces and represents symbolic meanings through institutional narratives and user experiences.

This study adopts a qualitative interpretative approach, drawing upon the methodological framework visualized in Figure 5. The research integrates three complementary layers:

1. The contextual meaning of design intention (Norberg-Schulz, 1965),
2. The discursive nature of architectural space (Markus & Cameron, 2002), and
3. The interpretative-critical process of analysis (Attoe, 1978; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Together, these layers position *Alun-Alun Surabaya* not as a fixed architectural object but as a discursive field where meaning is constructed, negotiated, and reflected through symbolic and social interactions.



**Fig. 5.** The figure depicts how the research progresses from intention (architectural totality of meaning) to contextual meaning (qualitative inquiry) to discourse negotiation (interpretative reading) and to critical synthesis (reflective criticism and data analysis).

### 3.1 Data Sources

The study uses two primary data types that reflect the *top-down* and *bottom-up* layers of architectural meaning:

1. Institutional Narratives. Derived from official news releases, municipal policy documents, and cultural media. These sources articulate how the city government and planning institutions frame the symbolic narrative of revitalization, often invoking terms like "heritage continuity," "modern openness," and "civic identity."
2. User Reviews (Google Maps, last 10 months). Public reviews serve as spontaneous reflections of visitors' lived experiences. These texts reveal users' interpretations of the site's atmosphere, accessibility, and meaning. Approximately 100 reviews are collected to represent diverse social perceptions.
3. Field Observations. Conducted to verify how spatial configuration, circulation, and activity patterns reflect or contrast institutional intentions. Observations focus on visual symbolism, use of space, and behavioral adaptation.

### 3.2 Data Processing and Analysis

Data are analyzed through an interactive qualitative cycle adapted from *Miles & Huberman (1994)*, consisting of three iterative stages:

1. Condensation. Textual data (media narratives and user reviews) are organized and coded using thematic categories derived from *Markus & Cameron's (2002)* discourse framework: *Discourse of Design Intentions, Institutional Framing and Control, and Language and Representation*.
2. Display. Relationships between institutional framing and user perception are visualized through discourse mapping and diagrammatic representation. This step identifies alignment or tension between design intentions and lived meanings.
3. Interpretation and Synthesis. Using *Attoe's (1978)* interpretive *criticism*, data are re-read reflectively to uncover underlying symbolic and ideological structures. The process integrates findings from both institutional and experiential layers to reveal how *Alun-Alun Surabaya* performs as a symbolic strategy in the city's cultural discourse.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

### 4.1 Institutional Discourse: Constructing the Symbolic Intention

Media narratives from 2014-2022 reveal a deliberate institutional strategy to frame *Alun-Alun Surabaya* not merely as a physical revitalization project but as a discursive construct of civic morality. Through public statements, ceremonial inaugurations, and symbolic acts (such as the Independence Day opening), architecture becomes the *language of governance*, a medium through which leadership ideals and urban identity are articulated.

Risma's statements such as "*a space for children to dream and perform*" or "*a cradle for future artists*" exhibit what *Markus & Cameron (2002)* call performative discourse,

the state's attempt to script how citizens should perceive and use space. The project's focus on *inclusivity*, *heritage*, and *civic pride* aligns with the intentional totality proposed by Norberg-Schulz (1965): architecture as the embodiment of a moral and existential order.

However, these discourses also contain internal contradictions-between symbolic participation and institutional control, between democratization of culture and curation of acceptable expressions that can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Matrix of Institutional Discourse

Source & Actor	Discursive Statement	Underlying Intent	Semiotic Function	Interpretive Reading
Wali Kota Risma (2020)	"I want to create a platform for arts and culture activists."	Democratization of culture	<i>Expressive-symbolic</i>	Architecture as nurturing medium
Wali Kota Risma (2020)	"This building will give birth to great artists from Surabaya."	Moral vision of progress	<i>Mythic-symbolic</i>	Civic narrative of future talent
Wali Kota Eri Cahyadi (2022)	"Balai Pemuda must be alive with performances, not just an empty building."	Activation of civic life	<i>Functional-discursive</i>	Architecture as performance infrastructure
DPRD (2014)	"The renovation of the Balai Pemuda must be faithful to its original form; it must not be changed in the slightest."	Conservation of authenticity	<i>Regulative-symbolic</i>	Institutional control over meaning
Media Framing (Surabaya.go.id, Surabaya Today)	"A cultural platform that unites the city's residents."	Unity and identity politics	<i>Integrative-discursive</i>	Heritage as legitimization of governance

The matrix shows how the discourse of intention forms a multi-layered narrative structure:

- Civic Idealism: Representing the project as a moral endeavor.
- Cultural Legitimacy: Anchoring design in heritage to gain symbolic authority.
- Institutional Control: Ensuring aesthetic and historical conformity.

Together, these layers produce a hierarchical semiotic order where architecture becomes a state discourse rather than an open cultural platform.

The institutional discourse surrounding Alun-Alun Surabaya reflects a deliberate symbolic strategy in which the municipal government relies on European-derived heritage aesthetics to project civic pride and cultural legitimacy, revealing a persistent postcolonial tension in the city's spatial narrative. Rather than functioning merely as

stylistic choices, the polished revival of the Balai Pemuda façade and the celebration of its "historic character" operate as discursive instruments that position the site within a lineage of colonial civic order forms long associated with authority, refinement, and urban modernity in Indonesian cities. This aligns with Markus and Cameron's framing of architecture as institutional communication, where spatial representation is used to regulate behaviour and stabilize meaning. In Alun-Alun Surabaya, the adoption of European visual language becomes a strategic performance of "world-class" identity, even as the official narrative emphasizes inclusivity, cultural expression, and public openness. The result is a layered representational tension: the government deploys a colonial aesthetic to articulate a postcolonial claim of civic inclusiveness, producing a symbolic contradiction that resonates across the design intentions, institutional framing, and representational discourse documented in this study.

#### 4.2 User Discourses: Negotiating and Re-signifying Meaning

User narratives reveal that the meanings embedded in *Alun-Alun Surabaya* are not simply absorbed but actively reinterpreted through everyday encounters. The civic symbolism envisioned by the government, intended as a stage for cultural expression and public participation transforms in users' perception into an aesthetic and emotional experience. The discourse of design intentions that emphasizes heritage, civic pride, and inclusivity is often reframed as *visual pleasure* and *urban leisure*, reflected in reviews describing the "beautiful Dutch-style building" and "European architecture.". the discourse can be understand as a empirical evidence, interpretation, and implication in Table 2. Yet, the same users also recognize subtle forms of institutional framing and control that shape spatial behavior, evident in their remarks on crowd management, parking congestion, and uneven activity between the upper plaza and the basement.

These spatial dynamics reveal how the design mediates freedom and order simultaneously. Affirming Markus and Cameron's idea of architecture as a mechanism of social regulation. Meanwhile, a new layer of language and representation emerges from public discourse, where expressions like "*tempat healing*," "*wisata murah meriah*," and "*spot foto wisuda*" construct a vernacular semiotic system that redefines the space from a civic landmark into a site of social identity and everyday performance. Thus, meaning at *Alun-Alun Surabaya* evolves through negotiation between institutional intention and public interpretation, producing an open discursive field where architecture becomes a living text continuously rewritten by its users.

**Table 2.** Matrix of User Discourses

Code	Empirical Evidence (Review & Observation)	Interpretation of Meaning	Discursive Implication
Discourse of Design Intentions	"The European architecture is stunning," "Dutch buildings are very aesthetic."	Users translate heritage into aesthetic experience.	Institutional symbolism becomes visual pleasure.

Institutional Framing and Control	“The basement is crowded, it’s difficult to get out of the parking lot,” “The upper area is livelier than the lower area.”	Spatial control and zoning shape participation.	Architecture as instrument of order.
Language and Representation	“A place for healing,” “A cheap and cheerful vacation.”	Public constructs new vernacular meanings.	Shift from civic narrative to popular experience.

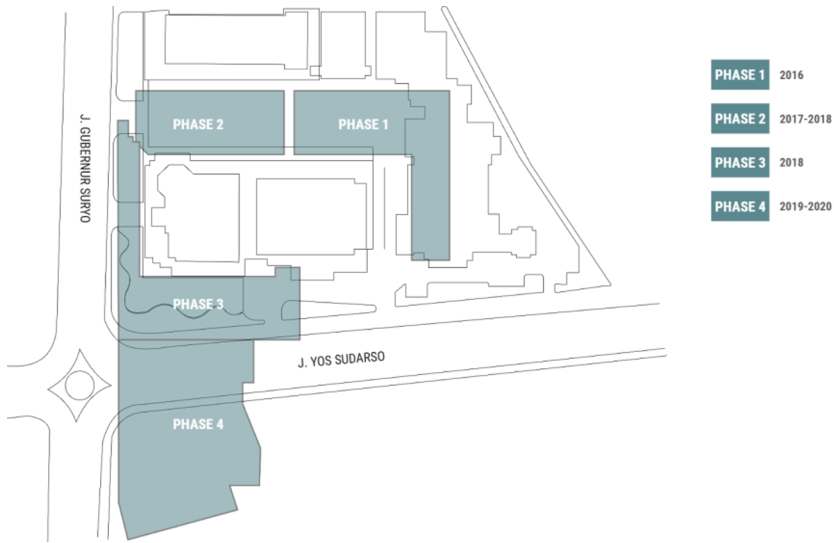
Overall, these interpretations illustrate that *Alun-Alun Surabaya* functions not merely as a realized design project but as a site of discursive negotiation, where institutional ideals and lived practices converge to generate plural meanings. The architectural space becomes a medium of dialogue between what is intended, what is experienced, and what is ultimately redefined by society itself.

### 4.3 Spatial Observation: The Architecture as Lived System

Spatial analysis, supported by field observation and diagrammatic interpretation, reveals that the basement area (40%) functions as the *de facto* social and experiential core of Alun-Alun Surabaya.



**Fig. 6.** This image shows the spatial layout. Within the theoretical framework of *The Words Between the Spaces* (Markus & Cameron, 2002), this layout can be read as a “discursive structure,” a form that communicates institutional ideology through spatial arrangement.



**Fig. 7.** This image indicates the revitalization timeline (2016–2020), where the design investment and activity density progressively concentrated toward the basement. In the context of interpretive criticism, this demonstrates the negotiation of meaning between heritage preservation and the representation of modernity, two issues that often create discursive tension in cultural revitalization projects (Zukin, 1995; Markus & Cameron, 2002).



**Fig. 8.** This image shows the highest proportion of public activity in the basement (40%) and upper plaza (30%), indicating that the most "hidden" spaces are actually the most active.

Within the spatial observations, from Figure 6, 7, and 8, the basement emerges as the most intensively occupied zone, accounting for approximately 40% of all recorded user activity because its physical configuration materially enables behaviours that the ground-level plaza does not. Unlike the upper courtyard, which is highly visible, surveilled, and symbolically charged by the monumental heritage façade, the basement's semi-enclosed, subterranean character provides a form of spatial "cover" that weakens institutional visibility and reduces the pressure of formalized behaviour. Its controlled indoor climate (air conditioning), absence of monumental cues, and neutralized architectural language create an environment that is experientially less ceremonial and more permissive. This aligns with Markus and Cameron's proposition that architecture regulates conduct through visibility, framing, and symbolic cues: in Alun-Alun Surabaya, the basement's hiddenness being physically below ground, visually shielded from authority encounters, and acoustically insulated functions as an architectural mechanism that redistributes social freedom. The result is a concentration of informal practices such as resting, gathering, photo-taking, skateboarding, and browsing exhibitions, which are consistently reflected in the Google Maps reviews and observation frames. Thus, the 40% activity concentration is not incidental but emerges from the spatial logic of the basement itself: a discursively "loosened" environment where institutional intention is less performative, allowing users to reclaim the space through lived, improvisational, and expressive forms of public behaviour.

From a phenomenological reading (Pallasmaa, 2005), this inversion of spatial hierarchy where the "underground" becomes the most vibrant social space reflects a *reorientation of meaning through lived experience*. The *intentional depth* (Norberg-Schulz, 1965) thus shifts from symbolic totality to contextual vitality from form to inhabitation.

The matrix of spatial observation below (see Table 3) synthesizes how each area translates design intention into lived practice:

**Table 3.** Matrix of Spatial Observation

Spatial Zone	Intended Function	Observed Use	Interpretive Outcome
Merah Putih Building	Civic exhibition, heritage education	Occasional use, photo backdrop	Symbolic presence, minimal experiential depth
Basement Gallery	Cultural immersion, art encounter	High-frequency leisure use	Transformation into social commons
Upper Plaza	Gathering, performances, ceremonies	Informal recreation, skateboarding	Democratization of formal space
Commercial Zone	Economic support	Low intensity, peripheral activity	Functional support without symbolic weight

The empirical data illustrate a symbolic displacement: design intentions oriented toward civic formality have been reappropriated into spaces of everyday leisure and sociality. The *most "controlled" area* (the basement) paradoxically becomes the most spontaneous and democratic.

This condition aligns with Attoe's (1978) *systematic criticism*, where built form can be both a *manifestation of order* and a *host for resistance*. In this sense, Alun-Alun Surabaya operates as a living semiotic system, constantly rewritten by its users.

#### 4.4 Synthesis: From Designed Symbolism to Lived Meaning

Bringing the three strands of data together, which consists of media discourse, user narrative, and spatial reality, produces the following integrative flow of interpretation in the Figure 9.

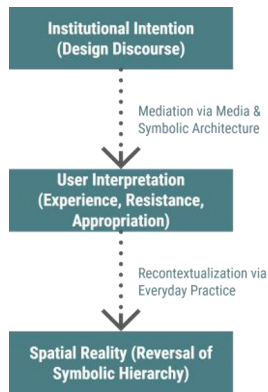


Fig. 9. Discursive Interaction Flow

This flow demonstrates how *meaning migrates* from designed rhetoric to lived interpretation, forming a feedback loop between power, perception, and practice. From these three data sources, it is clear that Surabaya Square forms layers of meaning. These layers of meaning are visualized in Figure 10 and explain in Table 4 as a Discursive Interaction.

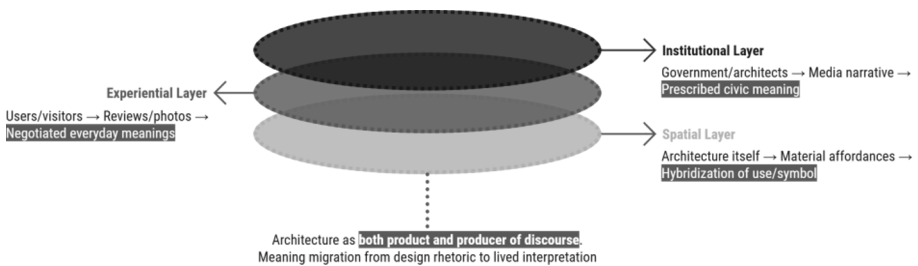


Fig. 10. Meaning Layers in Alun-Alun Surabaya

**Table 4.** Matrix of Discursive Interaction

Discursive Layer	Dominant Actor	Medium of Meaning	Outcome
Institutional	Government, architect	Media narrative, symbolism	Prescribed civic meaning
Experiential	Users, visitors	Reviews, photos, bodily movement	Negotiated everyday meanings
Spatial	Architecture itself	Material and spatial affordances	Hybridization of use and symbol

In this dynamic, architecture becomes both a product and a producer of discourse. It communicates not only what is intended but also what emerges through its inhabitation.

**4.5 Reflexive Interpretation: The Semiotic Tension of Public Space**

The findings collectively uncover what Norberg-Schulz (1965) describes as *the failure of total meaning*, a state where the architectural whole cannot fully contain the multiplicity of human experience. The discursive meaning of *Alun-Alun Surabaya* thus lies in its tensions: between order and improvisation, symbolism and utility, design and life.

Rather than diagnosing success or failure, this research exposes how architectural meaning survives through its contradictions. The project's civic idealism (top-down) and public appropriation (bottom-up) coexist as a productive conflict like what Markus & Cameron (2002) call *the living discourse of architecture*.

In this light, *Alun-Alun Surabaya* stands not as a monument to urban design, but as a narrative of negotiation, a space where meaning is continuously performed, contested, and redefined.

**Table 5.** Thematic Integration (Cross-Source Matrix)

Source	Primary Theme	Dominant Meaning	Analytical Outcome
Institutional Narratives	Civic empowerment, symbolic authority	Architecture as moral discourse	Discursive construction of intention
Google Maps Reviews	Aesthetic pleasure, leisure appropriation	Architecture as social media landscape	Negotiation of symbolic identity
Spatial Observation	Activity concentration, inversion of hierarchy	Architecture as lived experience	Reversal of intended semiotic order

The interplay of these three layers; design, discourse, and lived practice illustrates that public architecture in contemporary Indonesia operates within a field of negotiated semiotics (see Table 5). *The Alun-Alun Surabaya*, as both space and symbol, embodies this dialectic: a civic ideal transformed into a social reality that simultaneously affirms and resists its original intention.

## 5 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the meaning of Alun-Alun Surabaya is produced through a dynamic negotiation between institutional narratives, spatial form, and everyday public interpretation. First, the city government's discourse talk about emphasizing heritage, civic pride, and modern urban identity, reveals a deliberate symbolic strategy that frames European colonial aesthetics as markers of progress, a choice that exposes underlying postcolonial aspirations embedded within the revitalization agenda. Second, user discourse, drawn from Google Maps reviews, consistently reframes the site away from its official representational script: instead of reading it as a monument of civic symbolism, visitors experience it as a space for leisure, atmospheric enjoyment, and social encounter, revealing an interpretive shift that challenges institutional authorship of meaning. Third, spatial observations show that patterns of use particularly the concentration of activities in the basement where visibility, regulation, and monumentality diminish, underscore how architectural form itself affords alternative modes of occupation and expression that subtly resist institutional framing. Together, these findings affirm that meaning in contemporary public architecture is neither predetermined nor singular; it is dialogic, contested, and continuously rewritten through the interplay of design intention, institutional control, and lived experience.

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