

A Poems-Based Analysis of Preserving the Lasem Heritage City Using a Design Thinking Approach

Cherry Dharmawan

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung

Irwan Tarmawan

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung

Martin. L Katoppo

Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang

July Hidayat

Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang

Felia Sinaga

Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang

Ruth Oppusunggu

Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang

ABSTRACT

Conventional Lasem heritage city preservation strategies sometimes fail to encourage active community involvement, usually top-down and physically oriented. The implementation of the Design Thinking methodology aims to provide creative and sustainable solutions. The research was conducted by research team, representatives from the Lasem Heritage Foundation, local cultural activists, historians, local business owners (such as batik artisans), and urban dwellers. This study uses POEMS (People, Objects, Environments, Messages, Services) to develop user personas and How Might We (HMW) statements at the problem discovery stage and formulate the problem. These results show that there are a number of issues and possibilities related to public service rules, environmental conditions, cultural identity messages, the physical layout of goods, and community behavior. By placing communities as active participants, this empathy-based approach has demonstrated the ability to bridge the gap between historical goals and current needs

Keywords: *Lasem, Heritage, Design Thinking*

INTRODUCTION

Lasem, often known as the "little Chinese town" is located in the northern region of Central Java, Indonesia, which has a long history as well as being an area rich in cultural adoption. For centuries, Arab, Chinese, and Javanese groups have coexisted, interacted, and mingled peacefully in this city. Lasem is an important site for the study of history and culture due to its distinctive cultural landscape, which is rare throughout the archipelago due to its unique demographic composition.

Lasem's cultural heritage includes material and non-material that are important for regional identity. Chinatown's unique Indische-Chinese architecture, historic mosques that show the harmony of past civilizations, and ancient sacred temples (temples) are examples of real heritage. Oral traditions, traditional culinary arts, and most famously, hand-painted Lasem Batik, which serves as a medium of communication featuring the beautiful synthesis of many ethnic elements, all contribute to the nation's heritage and identity.

Today, Lasem faces serious threats related to the preservation of Lasem's heritage city, even though the city of Lasem has a great history. Poor maintenance, and environmental conditions are all linked to the physical deterioration of old buildings. In addition, there is a shift in socio-cultural values; The younger generation is less enthusiastic about preserving local traditions such as batik production and is more interested in current jobs in the industrial sector. The heirs were also forced to abandon or even demolish ancient houses to sell parts of the building such as original wood components to third parties due to financial constraints.

In the past, government efforts related to the preservation of the city of Lasem have always been dominated by those who came from top to bottom without consulting and discussing with the local population or considering the state of the existing economic reality, so these efforts often imposed strict conservation restrictions. A phenomenon known as "museumification" occurs when heritage sites are physically restored but stripped of their dynamic social functions, effectively turning them into dead monuments. This is because the approach tends to concentrate only on the physical restoration of the building while ignoring the human element.

Today, the preservation of Lasem City as a cultural heritage city faces serious and complicated threats, although the city has very important historical value. The aging city, poor maintenance, and environmental conditions are all related to the physical damage of old buildings. In addition, there is a shift in socio-cultural values; The younger generation is less enthusiastic about preserving local traditions such as batik production and is more interested in current jobs in the industry. Some heirs in the city of Lasem were also forced to abandon or even demolish ancient houses due to financial constraints by selling components such as historic original wood to third parties.

A human-centered approach that is creative, adaptive, flexible is needed, to address fundamental and complex problems. Design Thinking emerged as a strategic and relevant paradigm. Design Thinking is a human-centered method that emphasizes empathy aimed at understanding the needs, standards, preferences, and limitations of the realities experienced by people who interact with the environment every day.

The focus of this project is to investigate how Design Thinking may be used to address the preservation issues and unearth the creative potential of Lasem Heritage City. The research use the POEMS framework to methodically map the current landscape by concentrating on the first steps of the methodology—Empathize and Define. In the end, our research offers designers, scholars, and legislators a solid basis for creating focused, sustainable, and inclusive tourism and preservation plans.

LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Design Thinking as A Methods Design

Design Thinking is an innovative methodology based on a human-centered approach and is currently widely used to address quite complex challenges in various sectors. Empathy, which is the ability of a person to fully put themselves in the user's shoes to understand their needs and problems, is the basis of design thinking. This approach also relies heavily on teamwork and going through an iterative, regular process of feedback, thus creating a continuous learning loop.

In general, there are five stages of design thinking in the design thinking method, namely

1. Stages of Empathy: Through observation and interviews, we develop a deep understanding of consumers.
2. Definition Stage: Defining and formulating problems based on the priority scale obtained from the empathy stage
3. Ideation Stage: Start with brainstorming to come up with various original ideas to get some solutions
4. Prototype: Make a simple model based on concepts obtained from the perspective of empathy, definition and ideation.
5. Testing: To get direct feedback, the prototype is tested with real users.

In the context of Lasem's cultural heritage preservation, the use of Design Thinking is very important. This approach offers a methodical framework for turning actually technical problems into challenges that are focused on people. Design Thinking ensures that every solution produced is based on actual needs by comprehending the worries of craftspeople, the preferences of the younger generation, or financial limitations. Because the ideas created will be applicable, welcomed, and accepted by the community, this method promotes sustainable innovation.

b. Design Thinking Application

1. Discover
The discovery stage involves listening, observing, and keeping an open mind to the unexpected at this stage involves empathy, by looking at problems based on POEMS (people, object, environment, messages, service)
2. Ideate
How we turn facts into useful and practical concepts is the focus of the defining stage. The resulting design will be built on this idea. This stage is also based on findings from problems related to problems in POEMS (people, object, envirointment, messages, services).
3. Creating a Prototype
How we manifest the concept is the focus of this stage. To test and improve our concept quickly, a prototype was created.

In its implementation, the initial stage, namely the discovery stage, respondents as stakeholders discuss to actively find and formulate problems, by proposing problems that include POEMS (people, objects, envirointment, messages, services), as follows

a. People

In the discover stage, in the people section, the respondents honestly stated what became related to the people involved, such as the character, behavior, and of the people involved.

b. Objects

In the object section, the respondent stated what objects in his environment could be a problem, such as buildings, handicrafts, highways, markets and so on

c. Environments

In the Environments section, respondents stated environmental problems that could be the cause of problems, such as floods, droughts, cleanliness, orderliness and so on

d. Messages

In the Messages section, respondents raised problems related to messages that could be the cause of problems, such as emancipation, cultural tolerance, cultural preservation and so on

e. Services

In the Services section, respondents raised public service problems that could be the cause of problems, such as slow service, dishonesty, illegal levies, dishonesty in serving the community and so on

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The next stage they make a statement with the HMW method (how might we). And translate in the form of a figure that matches the description of the statement. This aims to make it easier to explain the problem visually and easy for everyone to remember

METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative exploratory research, using the Design Thinking method approach as the main operational framework. The scope of this research is specifically limited to two stages out of five stages in the Design Thinking method, namely: the discovery stage and the ideate stage. In these two stages, by actively involving several groups of respondents, namely the research team as facilitators, representatives from the Lasem Heritage Foundation, local cultural activists, historians, business owners (such as batik artisans), and city residents. In the process, the group discussed with the aim of building deep awareness in empathy

Focused group discussions (FGDs), field observations, and in-depth interviews were used to collect data in a cooperative and participatory manner. Various important stakeholders participated in this activity, which was centered at the Nyah Lasem Museum. The main study team consisted of members of the Lasem Heritage Foundation, local cultural activists, historians, local business owners (including batik artisans), and ordinary people living in the heritage city of Lasem. The data collected represents a wide range of viewpoints, from professional analysis to grassroots realities, due to the involvement of various stakeholders.

The researchers used the POEMS (people, objects, environments, message, services) analytical framework at the stage of finding and formulating the problem. The Research Team records and organizes the qualitative data collected during the Empathize phase. People (demographics, roles, behaviors), Objects (tools, devices, physical elements), Environment (architecture, layout, atmosphere), Messages (language, signs, social interactions), and Services (systems, rules, public facilities). Furthermore, develop and create a persona from the statement obtained from the empathy process with the statement "How Might We "(HMW),

DISCUSSION

Comprehensive knowledge into the multifaceted issues of Lasem's preservation were gained by using the Design Thinking process, especially through the Empathize phase. The research identified a significant gap between the government's heritage conservation efforts and the daily realities of the local community, rather than only bringing out structural damage and infrastructure problems. The results showed that, rather than viewing the preservation activities as possibilities for socioeconomic empowerment, the community often feels cut from them. The main obstacle to sustainable conservation in the area is apathy, which has been developed by this disconnect.

Further, the Define phase's data synthesis showed that Lasem's basic challenges are not simply physical but more tightly connected to environmental mismanagement, faded cultural narratives, and limited public service systems. The study substantially translated abstract socio-cultural concerns into structured, relevant problem statements through the use of the POEMS framework to map these complexly interconnected problems. This complete examination offers a clear path for developing focused, human-centered solutions. The ones that follow is an explanation of the detailed analysis based on the five POEMS elements:

a. People

Apathy and a lack of perceived economic advantage from historical preservation were determined to be major barriers from the human and community perspective. Littering and unlawful parking in historically sensitive public areas are examples of behaviors that still raise concerns about public discipline. Heirs of historic buildings are moving to bigger cities, abandoning their ancestral residences, which is another serious problem. The revival of traditional batik and wayang (puppet) artisans among the local labor is faltering because young people would rather work in contemporary enterprises. Despite these difficulties, the Lasem community has a great deal of social capital and is distinguished by a strong, long-standing heritage of upholding religious and ethnic tolerance.

b. Objects

The difference between current physical design efforts and the city's historical background is a clear indication of object-related problems. For example, colonial and traditional buildings' visual qualities are disturbed when contemporary street light poles are installed. Furthermore, the newly constructed Creative Market's badly designed drainage system ironically creates flooding in its basement, and its architectural design clashes with the heritage atmosphere. Lasem's heritage identity is increasingly at odds with the rise of contemporary commercial structures. Repurposing these physical items, however, has a lot of possibilities. For instance, the Creative Market's facade may be renovated to blend in with the nearby Jami Mosque and used expressly as a thriving center for regional batik trade.

c. Environments

The Lasem region's potential for tourism is significantly impacted by serious environmental and spatial issues. Inadequate waste management causes trash to be continuously dumped into the Lasem River, which narrows streams and frequently floods during periods of high precipitation. At the moment, the river is not included in the larger heritage city redevelopment initiatives. Additionally, uncontrolled street sellers frequently relocate to the town plaza (alun-alun), causing extreme traffic congestion and lowering the area's scenic appeal. A "Clean Lasem" campaign and more stringent enforcement of spatial planning are urgently needed, according to solutions generated from the Define stage.

d. Messages

The public is currently not being fully addressed by the narratives, semiotics, and identities of Lasem's heritage of culture. Alongside the emergence of generic modern architectural styles, the city's distinct identity is disappearing. The conveyance of Lasem's historical narrative to visitors is hampered by the stark lack of educational signage, historical plaques, and integrated wayfinding systems. The "Burung Hong" (Phoenix) motif found in Lasem Batik, which reflects deep qualities of pluralism, resiliency, and cultural assimilation, is a stunning representation of Lasem's incredibly powerful internal identity statement.

e. Services

Critical systemic weaknesses in governance, rules, and public services were identified by the analysis. The local government is thought to be insufficient in protecting local craftsmen's intellectual property rights, particularly with regard to Lasem's iconic Tiga Negeri Batik. In addition, there are no fines for new development that compromises the area's aesthetic integrity, nor are there any clear legal frameworks pertaining to property tax (PBB) incentives for individuals who conserve heritage homes. The best and most inclusive governance of the historic ecosystem is hindered by the absence of an established communication platform between the government, citizens, and heritage communities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The physical restoration of ancient buildings is not the only solution to the complicated problem of preserving Lasem Heritage City. This study carefully unravels the complexity of Lasem's problems from a fundamentally human and systemic perspective by utilizing the Design Thinking methodology, with an emphasis on the Empathize and Define phases through the POEMS framework. The results show that top-down service regulations (Services), weaker cultural communication (Messages), poor environmental management (Environments), physical layout dissonance (Objects), and the low emotional and economic engagement of the local community (People) are the primary reasons of Lasem's preservation crisis. Looking forward, cross-sectoral, collaborative designs that provide solutions are not only visually appealing but also highly targeted, socially adaptive, and economically sustainable for the local community has to replace fixed bureaucratic mindsets in the formulation of heritage and tourism governance.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

- Cherry Dharmawan** is a lecturer and researcher from Interior Design Program Study ,Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung. email : cherry.dharmawan@email.unikom.ac.id
- Irwan Tarmawan** is a lecturer and researcher from Communication visual Program Study ,Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung. email : irwan.tarmawan@email.unikom.ac.id
- Martin L. Katoppo**, is a lecturer and researcher from Interior Design Program Study ,Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang. Email : martin.katoppo@UPH.edu
- July Hidayat**, is a lecturer and researcher from Interior Design Program Study ,Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang. Email: july.hidayat@UPH.edu
- Ruth Oppusunggu**, is a lecturer and researcher from Interior Design Program Study ,Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang. Email: ruth.oppusunggu@UPH.lecturer.edu
- Felia Srinaga**, is a lecturer and researcher from Architecture Program Study ,Universitas Pelita Harapan, Tangerang. Email: felia.srinaga@UPH.lecturer.edu