

# The Genius Loci of Glagah Beach: An Examination of Tourism Space and Place Following the Establishment of Yogyakarta International Airport

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## Abstract

The construction of Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA) has triggered rapid, large-scale development in Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta, posing significant risks to the local identity of the adjacent Glagah Beach Tourism Area. This study evaluates the area's genius loci, or spirit of place, to support sustainable, place-based planning. A qualitative approach, including systematic observation and in-depth interviews, was employed. The Genius Loci Model was used to identify the elements that define Glagah's character. Findings reveal that Glagah's genius loci is fragmented, with the lagoon exhibiting a tranquil, positive identity and the coastline reflecting neglect and a negative image. The research also highlights spatial layering, as a contemporary commercial landscape interacts with a historical, sacred space linked to Pakualaman heritage. Glagah's unique physical features, especially its lagoon and breakwater, distinguish it from other regional beaches. The results indicate that a generic, top-down tourism strategy is insufficient. Instead, the complexity of Glagah's identity requires a dual management strategy: one to preserve and enhance the lagoon's positive attributes and sacred heritage, and another to address coastline degradation. This study provides a place-based framework for managing development pressures and protecting a distinctive cultural landscape.

**Keywords:** genius loci, place identity, sacred space, tourism planning, coastal development, glagah beach, kulon progo.

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## Introduction

An emerging economic geography is developing on the southern coast of Yogyakarta. The 2019 opening of the Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA) represents a major state-led action to develop Kulon Progo, which had previously been disadvantaged in terms of provincial tourism development (Fitriantoro, 2020). At the heart of this undertaking is the proposed aerotropolis, a model of airport-focused development aimed at an international market and investment through hotel and resort clusters, commercial areas, and mass tourism (Kasarda & Lindsay, 2011). This top-down globally oriented development model has the potential to remove local character and identity from the surrounding regions. It is in Glagah Beach where these global and local factors meet.

The Glagah Beach is located right next to the YIA aerotropolis separation, meaning it is well-positioned for growth and development. However, the current airport masterplan fails to adequately engage or leverage the community, history, and spatial context of Glagah (Edita, 2019; Luthfi, 2023). The failure of integration is indicative of a potential development trend of establishing standalone economic enclaves without a sense of place and identity (Habib et al, 2022). The essential argument is that without immediate and widespread efforts to know and include the area character, Glagah Beach faces serious threats of deteriorating culture and space.

This study used the framework of *genius loci* or the spirit of a place, as a diagnostic and preventative means. Christou et al (2019); Rudnicka-Bogusz (2022); Vecco (2020), have shown *genius loci* analysis to be the best means of providing planners with evidence to retain and enhance local character, in instances of chief development pressure. This is not an exercise in nostalgic preservation, but instead proposes that a strategic, and timely, proactive approach to addressing the complex layering of Glagah's identity is crucial if we are to appreciate and deepen our understanding of the place, which is often neglected by traditional forms of development. The research presents a significant spatial dilemma; YIA's construction has already begun considerable transformation, however it remains largely unknown what the impacts will be on the identity and character of the landscapes which currently surround it. The aim of the study is to record and investigate the ongoing transformations. It aims to achieve its objectives by identifying those emerging spatial clashes, cultural tensions, and fundamental alterations in the character of the destination since the establishment of the airport. Understanding these changes will inform approaches for guiding, developing, shaping and reshaping development but more importantly protecting the identity of place, or *genius loci*, of a place under environmental pressure from a variety of external factors. The primary research question is: The main research question is: What is the character of Glagah Beach during this period of change? The main aim is to preserve and enhance this character during the change.

This paper details an in-depth analysis of tourism space in regard to the image, spatial characteristics and identity of Glagah Beach at a critical time through an analysis of its fragmented identity and its historical and cultural contexts in order to provide essential guidance for a sustainable and authentic product development. The aim is to assist Glagah Beach in being an important and unique part of Kulon Progo identity instead of being lost in the wake of airports and development.

## Deconstructing the *Genius Loci*

*Genius loci*, or "spirit of place," originated in classical Roman antiquity as the guardian of a specific place or location; here the idea is that places have their own likeness or essence that delineates them from one another and gives them their own identity (Norberg-Schulz,

1980). In present-day literature *genius loci* has morphed from its mythological roots to an analytical construct and framework for describing the relation between man and environment. It denotes a method of analysis into both tangible and intangible elements of what makes place unique or characteristic of its identity.

The earlier phenomenological literature examined the experiential character of place. Critically, it highlighted the *genius loci* as an embodied, multi-sensory experience as opposed to an abstract spirit. Lee (1906) was the first to demonstrate that we perceive the "spirit of a place" through human senses, in her book, *The Spirit of Rome*. Lee delineated the visual, auditory, and olfactory aspects as tangible elements of the spirit of state of belonging, defining the *genius loci* as a conversation between habitat and person. More recently, Wanitzek (2016) has revived Lee's sensory-based approach to examine modern leisure environments. In Wanitzek's study, the sensory aspects were still a key contribution to the characters and the user experiences of recreational places. Effectively this indicates that making sense of a place, and the role of the senses associated with this process, still matters in forming, perceiving and experiencing the unique attribute of destination.

The most influential systematisation of *genius loci* in modern architectural and spatial theory was developed by Norberg-Schulz (1980) in his book, *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*. He put forth the idea that the meaning of a place cannot be fully accounted for solely through objective, scientific inquiry and resides in an informal "soul" that a place provides a "niche" for human life. Norberg-Schulz explained that the spirit was composed of three interacting levels of meaning: topography (the physical structure and form of the site), cosmology (the spatial orientation and worldview of the community as a collective group), and meaning of culture. It is the framework for culture that produces activities that together create forms, including religious ceremonies, gatherings, and expressions through the arts, among many others. These activities bring together the physical and metaphysical embedded in place.

Although Lee's sensory dimension and the phenomenological framework developed by Norberg-Schulz may seem distinct, they still share significant connections. The auditory, visual, and olfactory nature of a site often relates to the cultural and topological structures evident likelihood rather immediately. In tourism and place studies, this blend becomes important. Closely associated with the blend of dimensions brought forth in a locality is sense of place (Tuan, 1977). Often a sense of place creates a part of visitor experience, destination attachment, or perceived authenticity. The perspective of the destination's *genius loci* (i.e., the unique and authentic character of a place) is intertwined with the tourism experience. Tourists tend to seek experiences that are different and core to local culture, often without conscious awareness.

The *genius loci* of a place is dynamic and susceptible to globalisation, commercialisation, and increasing infrastructural development. This is true in Glagah Beach, as there are new projects, such as YIA, that present opportunities but also threaten its character. Thus, we need to understand and examine what elements make up its *genius loci* before it is permanently altered. In this study, we employed the *genius loci* frame as a reference to assess the authentic spatial identity of Glagah Beach, as a basis for understanding sustainable place-making and preparing for future tourism development during a time of change.

### **Space and Place**

Norberg-Schulz (1980) identifies the spirit of a place as an environment that offers a particular destination and differentiates itself from other locations. Literature on *genius loci*

typically treats place as a singular unit of analysis, which corresponds with this study's focus on the genius loci implications which are rooted in the context of place. Duarte (2017) stipulates that 'place' offers tangible material aspects, such as materials, shape, texture, and color, in addition to intangible cultural and territorial identity. Norberg-Schulz goes on to differentiate between 'space' and 'character' and will frequently refer to clients as different but often acts as counter figures. A place is a collection of spaces that have unique "characteristics". Madanipour (2015) distinguishes two aspects of place and space: the clustering of buildings and artefacts, as well as the demarcated area for social relations. At the regional level, local places act and interact with each other. The identity and character of a place appears from the behaviours of people and the activity, which ultimately builds the genius loci.

This study applies Norberg-Schulz's genius loci model, which conceptualizes place identity through topographical, cosmological, and cultural dimensions. Contemporary spatial and tourism theory suggests that the genius loci is primarily influenced by spatial reconfigurations that introduce new uses, values, and contestations, particularly during rapid, top-down development. Existing literature (e.g. Norberg-Schulz, Tuan, Vecco, Christou et al.) indicates that spatial change frequently results in shifts in character and image, positioning physical transformation as a primary diagnostic indicator in contested landscapes. In Glagah, the development of new recreational micro-zones such as camping areas, breakwaters, and lagoons, the diminishing significance of the coastline as a tourism asset, and persistent tensions between sacred and secular uses correspond with these theoretical frameworks.

## Research Area

The Glagah Zone runs west-east along the Indian Ocean, lying between the mouth of the Bogowonto River and Adikarto Harbour, as well the Glagah Pier at the mouth of the Serang River. The Glagah Zone is administratively a part of Glagah Village in Temon District, Kulon Progo Regency. Glagah Village is located 12 kilometres from the Kulon Progo Regency government centre, and 42 kilometres away from Yogyakarta Special Region government centre. The geographical location of Glagah Village is between 110° 03' 194" - 110° 05' 121" east longitude, and 7° 53' 29" - 7° 55' 021" south latitude. Glagah Village covers an area of 603.94 hectares, accounting for 16.64% of Temon District area, and has eight hamlets: Glagah, Sangkretan, Logede, Bebekan, Macanan, Kretek, Bapangan, and Kepek. Their altitude is 5 to 7 meters above sea level with a slope of 0 to 1 per cent. The Glagah Village average air temperature is around 30°C; average annual rainfall is 2,342 millimetres. Land ownership in Glagah zoned area is divided between either the village community and the Pakualam Duchy, also known as Pakualaman Land or Pakualam Ground. The Pakualam Ground is a vacant land, but maintained as farmland by the people, however, cannot be bought or sold.

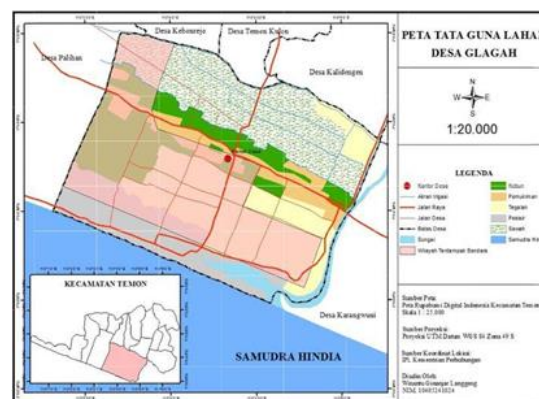


Figure 1. Glagah Village Landuse

## Research Method

In this study, a qualitative case study approach (Yin, 2018) was used to gain an understanding of the phenomenon. The study is focused on the Glagah Beach Tourism Area as one case to analyse the spatial characteristics of the site. The conceptual framework is based on the genius loci theory (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) which acts as an interpretive lens to identify and analyse the physical and non-physical elements of the places' unique character.

Primary data was collected during a three-month period from July to September 2024 in the Glagah Beach Tourism Area, Kulon Progo Regency. The primary data collection involved three techniques. The first technique was systematic observation to record the area's physical characteristics, landscapes, tourism activities, and socio-economic interactions in different geographical zones from the lagoon to the coastline. The second technique was a documentary study to obtain secondary data on things like demographics, periods of tourism activity, and economic statistics from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) to better contextualize the primary data. The third technique, and the most significant, was in-depth interviews with four key informants. The informants were selected using purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) to obtain a variety of stakeholders' perspectives relevant to the historical development and current situation of Glagah Beach tourism. The four informants were a tourism entrepreneur (male, 45) who had commercial experience, an ex-village head (male, 57) who had historical and policy experience, a food vendor (female, 32) who offered insight into local economic actors, and a village official (female, 30) who had knowledge of current administrative and social conditions. The selection of informants was completed using purposive sampling to find individuals based on their roles and knowledge of relevant perspectives to provide further insight into the research questions. The table shown below describes the four key informants' profiles.

**Table 1. Matrix of Research Informants**

Informant Code	Gender	Age	Profession / Role	Justification for Selection
I-1	Male	45	Tourism Entrepreneur	Represents the economic and business perspective; understands commercial dynamics and tourist preferences.
I-2	Male	57	Former Village Head	Provides historical insights into the area's development, past policies, and socio-political dynamics (institutional memory).
I-3	Female	32	Food Vendor	Offers a grassroots economic perspective; understands the daily socio-economic interactions and community-level dynamics within the tourism area.
I-4	Female	30	Active Village Official	Provides information on current administrative conditions, recent regulations, official development programs, and the relationship between the village government and the tourism community.

In addition to traditional data collection methods, systematic analysis of social media content was conducted using publicly available user-generated content to capture the digital aspects of tourism promotion and destination image formation. This digital ethnographic approach (Kozinets, 2015) facilitated an examination of the representation and perception of Glagah Beach within the digital tourism landscape. Instagram was selected as the primary platform for its visual focus and key role in tourism destination marketing. Content analysis covered 2018 to 2024 to capture pre-YIA, early YIA, and post-YIA/post-COVID tourism

development phases. Posts were identified using Instagram's location tagging feature with geotags for Glagah Beach and its sub-zones. Posts were categorized by geographical zones within Glagah Beach (Breakwater Zone, Lagoon Zone, Coastline Zone, and Agrotourism Zone) based on visual content and location tags. Data collection included engagement metrics (number of posts, likes, shares, comments) to assess the popularity and growth trends of different zones over time.

The study used triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) because it is necessary to overcome the limitations of one single method of study. The triangulation of sources means looking at the information provided by four informants from different backgrounds. Method triangulation meant checking the information provided in interviews with field observations. It is important to note, data collection and analysis concluded when no new meaningful information emerged. At this point, we felt the data were rich enough and complete enough to answer the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## Results

This study examines the Genius Loci of the Glagah Zone by obtaining social phenomena during fieldwork. The methodology uses Norberg-Schulz's (1980) study with emphasis on the area image, space, and character. An examination of the experience of the environment was combined with systematic observations of residents' everyday activities.

### 1. Image

The Glagah Zone is a coastal agrarian settlement bordering the Indian Ocean, which has come to consist of two segments of tourism. The lagoon has agrotourism features, such as dragon fruit farms, while the coast and breakwater are being developed for mass tourism. Each of these sectors has contrasting conditions. Tourists often describe the agrotourism and lagoon as pleasant, while the mass tourism beach area is described as dirty and a source of noxious odors. Visitors to the lagoon feature widely report a pleasant atmosphere. In the northern sector, the Kusumo Wanadri Agrotourism area includes a dragon fruit farm. Visitors learn about growing dragon fruit, post-harvest management, and processing derivative products. Visitors also have educational opportunities to learn about the medicinal plants used in traditional medicine. Kusumo Wanadri Agrotourism has recreational facilities such as a flying fox enclosure, canoeing in the lagoon, beach volleyball, beach futsal, and a camp site. The area is intended to create a calm site for visitors to relax and rejuvenate. The surroundings of the vendor stalls along the beach are where smells of fish from beaches and residual oil from frying fish is intimately mixed. The mud on the roads and the unevenness of the roads further deteriorate vehicles during the rainy season. At the pier, visitors are met with the unpleasant odour of fish that have been discarded into the estuary's end and the immediate area between the concrete breakwaters. These successively worse conditions are often exacerbated when visitation peaks, especially during weekends and national holidays, when visiting tourists arrive in large chartered coaches, increasing the amount of rubbish placed on the beach. This combination creates the impression of a beach that has been left to rot.

### 2. Space

The spatial identity of Glagah Beach is characterized by a duality of sacred and profane aspects. Rather than existing as posed zones, the area showcases a superimposed reality of modern commercial subsistence, based on the sacredness of a traditional site. The historic structure is fundamental to understanding the area's complex sense of place.

#### a. The Sacred Space: A Legacy of the Pakualaman Ground

Due to its historical background, Glagah holds value beyond its recreational use and is considered an essential part of intangible cultural heritage. Visitors' interactions with historical sites are influenced by this heritage. This historical land tenure endows the landscape with a significance that surpasses its recreational or commercial functions, constituting the category of intangible cultural heritage (UNWTO, 2013) that is pivotal to engendering a memorable visitor experience in historical landscapes (Jiang & Lin, 2022). An example of this holiness is the Pesanggrahan Glagah, a royal mansion built by Sri Paku Alam V between 1878 and 1900. Significant development was sparked by the Pesanggrahan, a notable landmark within the royal landscape. For example, the local people benefited greatly from the 1909 construction of the Glagah Dam, which enabled the irrigation of 827 hectares of rice crops. As Pak Fauzan, an elder from the community, recalls, "*The Pesanggrahan and the dam are not just historical sites to us; they are symbols of our resilience and connection to the past.*" This sentiment, echoed by others in the community, illustrates Laurajane Smith's idea that heritage value lies in present-day meaning-making. The region has become a centre of authority and lasting cultural memory as a result of these events.

The region's identity is actively shaped by Glagah's perceived sacredness, which is most prominently demonstrated during the annual Hajad Dalem Labuhan Kadipaten Pakualaman ceremony. This event temporarily designates the seashore as a sacred space on the 10th of Suro, the first day of the Javanese calendar. Traditional gamelan music and the attire of participants mark the occasion, while commercial activities are suspended. Offerings (*ubarampe*) of agricultural goods are transported from Pesanggrahan to the sea, symbolically restoring the area's spiritual function. The ceremony includes prayers to God and requests for protection from Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, the legendary monarch of the Southern Sea. These ritual practices reinforce the historical and spiritual legacy of the land, strengthening local spiritual beliefs and cultural identity.

The Pakualaman legacy is physically evident in the landscape despite ongoing modern development. In addition to the Pesanggrahan, historical records and community interviews identify specific sites that were integral to the royal presence. For example, the former royal pier, whose remains are still recognised by local fishermen, functioned as a landing site for royal visits and for managing the local fishing economy under the Kadipaten's patronage. Early in the morning, as the sun casts golden reflections, the Pakualaman legacy remains evident in the landscape despite ongoing modern development. In addition to the Pesanggrahan, historical records and community interviews identify sites integral to the royal presence, such as the former royal pier, which served as a landing site for royal visits and facilitated management of the local fishing economy under Kadipaten patronage. The land distribution system, known as *tanah lungguh*, allocated coastal plots to officials responsible for maintaining the Pesanggrahan and its surroundings. Descendants of these officials, many of whom still reside in the area, continue to preserve the memory of this historical responsibility. This enduring social structure, closely tied to the land's heritage, imbues the region with a cultural significance that is often overlooked by tourists but remains central to its authentic character.

b. The Profane Space: The Landscape of Modern Tourism

The profane space, shaped by contemporary tourism and commerce, overlays the sacred foundation. This includes all tourism zones analysed in this study: the lagoon, coastline, breakwater, piers, and culinary centre. These areas are characterised by economic activity, transactional interactions, and leisure activities. The negative impacts of mass tourism, such as waste accumulation and site neglect, are also evident.

This study demonstrates that sacred and profane spaces at Glagah Beach are inextricably linked and exist in a state of continual tension. Daily tourism activities occupy land with historical and sacred significance. The annual Labuhan ceremony temporarily resolves this tension by allowing the community to reassert the primacy of the sacred. This recurring transformation suggests that Glagah's sacred identity, although often overshadowed by modern tourism, remains a significant underlying force within the landscape. The interaction between these layers defines Glagah's distinctive spatial character. The profane space is organised into five zones for tourist activities and one general amenity zone.

### **1) The Recreation Zone: A Concentrated Expansion of Restfulness and the Creation of Spaces through the Application of Natural Principles**

The Glagah area's defining sense of place is rooted in the pronounced serenity of its recreation zone. Literature reviews and stakeholder interviews consistently identify tranquillity as a key characteristic. In contrast to the dynamic main coastline, this region serves as a tranquil oasis. This distinct atmosphere facilitated the rise of camping as a tourism trend in the early 2020s. Initially informal and popular among nature enthusiasts, camping at Laguna Barat gained widespread recognition through social media, where images of peaceful sunrises drew significant attention (based on observation of social media trends, 2023-2025). This development underscores the zone's transformation from a passive scenic backdrop to an active, experiential micro-destination.

This organic, bottom-up approach to place-making stands in contrast to the adjacent, formally planned Tourist Pier Zone. Despite substantial government investment in infrastructure, including a viewing tower, multipurpose building, and playgrounds, the area remains underutilised. This outcome highlights a disconnect between top-down development and the organic formation of place identity, resulting in the area's use primarily as a transit hub rather than a destination (based on observations from 2022 to 2024). The facilities lack a cohesive theme and the sensory qualities necessary to engage visitors. This finding aligns with tourism research that suggests infrastructure alone does not establish a sense of place (Tuan, 1977).

However, the powerful spirit of the recreation zone's camping culture has recently begun to colonise and revitalise this underperforming space. In the midst of the village-led development of Taman Nambangan, the serene, experiential character of the recreation zone is now being actively imprinted onto the old Pier Zone. This grassroots initiative, which includes novel features such as "floating camps" on the Serang River, has been successful in fostering a sense of place in areas where conventional planning has been unsuccessful. This phenomenon exemplifies the capacity of an authentic *genius loci* to expand, redefine, and infuse vitality into adjacent spaces. Consequently, the entire expanded recreation zone



serves as a critical case study, highlighting the efficacy of organic, community-driven tourism development.

Glagah Lagoon functions as a key recreational destination, particularly for families with children. The site provides watercraft rentals, primarily pedal boats, opportunities for swimming in calm waters, and designated areas for picnicking. Historically, visitor numbers reached their highest levels during national holidays and weekends. However, following the establishment of YIA, visitation patterns have shifted, illustrating the influence of an aerotropolis on local leisure economies (Kasarda & Lindsay, 2011). Local vendors and boat operators now experience a more consistent flow of visitors throughout the week, especially in the late afternoons. These visitors frequently include transit passengers and airport staff seeking short-term recreational activities, a phenomenon also documented in other airport-adjacent tourism zones such as Ekurhuleni in South Africa (Rogerson, 2018). Recent data from the local tourism management office indicate a substantial increase in weekday visitors to the lagoon since 2019. This growth, estimated at 40-50%, represents a significant rise in foot traffic compared to pre-2019 levels and underscores the airport's role in establishing a new daily pattern of local tourism.

**2) Table 2. Year-on-Year Dynamics of Weekday Visitor Traffic to Glagah Lagoon Zone (2018-2024)**

Metric	Pre-YIA (2018)	Early YIA / Pre- COVID (2019)	COVID-19 Impact (2020-2021)	Post-COVID Recovery (2022-2023)	Current State (2024)
Average Weekday Visitors	150-200	180-230 (Slight increase)	30-50 (Drastic decline)	220-280 (Strong rebound)	250-300 (Sustained Growth)
Visitor Profile	Almost exclusively local residents and scheduled school groups.	Locals remain dominant, with a small but noticeable emergence of domestic tourists and airport construction staff.	Hyper-local; limited to residents from the immediate vicinity seeking open-air relief from lockdowns.	A surge of "revenge tourists" from across Java. The airport-driven audience (transit passengers, staff) becomes a significant, consistent segment for the first time.	A stable mix of local residents and a now- established, consistent flow of airport- related visitors.
Peak Weekday Times	Morning (schools) and late afternoon (locals).	Pattern largely unchanged, with slightly more activity throughout the day.	Irregular; brief peaks in the late afternoon as PPKM restrictions allowed.	A strong, sustained peak from 2 PM to 6 PM emerges, driven by both tourist arrivals and airport shift schedules.	The late afternoon peak (3-6 PM) has solidified as the new primary weekday business period.
Visitor Motivation	Planned local recreation.	Primarily planned recreation, with some curiosity- driven visits due to YIA construction.	"Breathing space"; one of the few accessible open- air locations during travel restrictions.	Revenge travel; a strong desire for leisure after lockdowns. Convenience for YIA travelers becomes a major new driver.	A dual motivation: planned local leisure and convenient, high-quality recreation for the airport ecosystem.

Overall Dynamic	Stable, predictable, and highly localized tourism pattern.	A period of transition with early signs of change.	A period of survival, with the lagoon functioning as a community social safety valve rather than a tourist destination.	A period of rapid recovery and realignment. The lagoon's role as an airport-adjacent amenity becomes clear.	The "new normal"; a higher, more stable baseline of activity where the airport is a core, integrated driver of visitor traffic.
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Following the opening of YIA in 2019, visitor numbers increased steadily until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021, which resulted in a decline of over 75%. During this period, the lagoon primarily served local residents. In 2022-2023, as travel resumed and the airport became fully operational, visitor numbers rebounded, and the lagoon became a frequent destination for individuals associated with the airport. By 2024, weekday visitation had increased by 40-50% compared to pre-YIA levels, demonstrating the lagoon's transformation from an occasional destination to a key daily recreational site for the airport community. These trends highlight the lagoon's evolving role and underscore the need for strategic planning to accommodate both local and transient visitors.

The lagoon's seclusion, due to its distance from the main beach and the sound of the waves, is its primary advantage. This separation has fostered a reputation for serenity and family-oriented leisure. In contrast to the main coastline's busier atmosphere, the Lagoon Zone functions as a micro-destination within the broader Glagah tourism area. Visitors frequently cite this tranquil environment as their main reason for choosing this zone.

## 2) The Coastline Zone: An Arena of Degradation and Neglect

The Coastline Zone, intended as Glagah's primary tourism asset, exemplifies systemic management challenges and the development of a negative place image. The deterioration of physical infrastructure, such as the access road, indicates insufficient investment and maintenance. Environmental factors, including seasonal water discolouration from the Serang Watershed, further contribute to this negative perception. However, the most significant concern remains the region's ongoing and worsening waste management crisis. During periods of peak tourism, a significant accumulation of refuse is observed along the coastline. This phenomenon is consistent with findings from previous studies of Indonesian coastal destinations, which demonstrate a direct correlation between increases in visitor numbers and surges in solid waste (Pandey et al., 2022). The establishment of YIA has exerted a significant stress on this already fragile system, potentially exacerbating its instability. Although precise official figures are not published, local sanitation estimates suggest a significant increase in waste volume. In the period preceding the implementation of the YIA (2018), a peak holiday weekend had the potential to generate 0.5 to 0.7 tons of waste. By 2024, it is estimated that this figure will have more than tripled, reaching between 2.0 and 2.5 tons.

The tripling of waste represents not only a quantitative increase but also indicates that the system has exceeded its capacity. The data demonstrate a direct negative impact of airport-driven tourism growth, as the increase in visitor numbers has not been accompanied by a corresponding enhancement in management capacity. This observation is consistent with national-level reports on the effects of tourism on marine environments (Kementerian Kelautan dan Perikanan/KKP, 2020). The presence of visible trash, including plastics and food containers, contributes to a negative perception of the area and diminishes both the visitor experience and the site's environmental value. This outcome is attributed to several factors, including inadequate personnel, insufficient visitor education, and the absence of enforceable littering regulations (Pranowo & Puspitasari, 2021). Consequently, the Coastline Zone is the primary contributor to Glagah's negative sense of place. The area now presents conditions that discourage tourism, contrasting sharply with the well-managed lagoon.

3) The Breakwater Zone: An Iconic Landmark Riddled with Risk

The breakwater is arguably the most powerful, character-defining element of Glagah Beach. This prominent man-made feature distinguishes the area from other beaches in Yogyakarta and serves as one of its primary attractions. Its popularity is rooted in its function as a prime location for viewing sunsets and recreational fishing, drawing visitors to its concrete arms that stretch into the sea.

Since YIA's establishment, the breakwater's role as Glagah's iconic symbol has intensified dramatically. Its visual appeal has made it a focal point for user-generated content, effectively making it the "face" of the destination in the digital sphere. This phenomenon aligns with research on how social media transforms physical locations into iconic landmarks, where the volume of shared images directly shapes a destination's perceived image and popularity (Li et al., 2022). A review of social media location tags for Glagah Beach reveals that posts featuring the breakwater increased by over 200% between 2019 and 2024, establishing it as the most photographed and shared landmark in the area.

Table 3. Analysis of User-Generated Social Media Content by Zone (2018-2024)

Zone / Landmark	Pre-YIA (2018)	Early YIA (2019)	Post-YIA / Post-COVID (2024)	Growth (2019-2024)	Key Finding
Breakwater Zone	850 posts	1,100 posts	3,500 posts	+218%	Dominant and Accelerating Growth: The breakwater has become the overwhelmingly dominant visual symbol of Glagah Beach, with its growth far outpacing all other zones. It is the primary subject of content focused on aesthetics (sunsets, dramatic waves).
Lagoon Zone	600 posts	750 posts	1,200 posts	+60%	Steady Niche Growth: The lagoon shows healthy growth but remains a niche attraction. Content typically features family

					activities (boats, swimming) and has a more personal, less "iconic" feel.
Coastline Zone	400 posts	350 posts	200 posts	-43%	Significant Decline: The coastline has seen a sharp decline in positive visual representation. Posts that do feature this zone are increasingly accompanied by captions complaining about trash or neglect, indicating a deteriorating public image.
Agrotourism Zone	150 posts	200 posts	450 posts	+125%	Emerging Attraction: The dragon fruit plantations are a rising star, showing strong growth. However, they remain a secondary attraction compared to the breakwater.

However, the increase in digital popularity underscores significant infrastructural and managerial shortcomings in the zone. The landmark exhibits clear signs of neglect and presents notable safety risks. Security and safety measures are insufficient, with only a single warning sign for potential hazards that is frequently disregarded. This concern is heightened by visible structural deterioration. Damaged concrete at the end of the road may collapse under increased foot traffic. Furthermore, the persistent odour of decaying fish, resulting from frequent angling activity, negatively affects the visitor experience.

The Breakwater Zone exemplifies Glagah's dual image. While it is widely celebrated online and serves as a primary attraction for visitors, the physical site is characterised by deterioration and safety concerns. This contrast between its favourable digital representation and its deteriorating physical condition highlights a central challenge for Glagah Beach in the post-YIA era: the most prominent assets are also the most neglected.

#### 4) The Adikarto Harbour Zone: A Space of Latent and Informal Identity

The Adikarto Harbour Zone in Glagah represents a significant piece of infrastructure that has been repurposed by the public prior to its official operation. Despite its unfinished state, the pier has become a prominent site for recreational fishing, attracting a consistent community of anglers throughout the day and night. The opening of YIA has enhanced the pier's visibility and expanded its user demographic. Before 2019, local recreational fishermen were the primary users. Increased traffic to Glagah has introduced the pier to a broader audience. During the post-COVID recovery period (2022–2024), visitor numbers from outside the region have risen, including domestic tourists and airport employees seeking leisure activities. This shift is reflected in the growth of informal, small-scale businesses, such as mobile coffee carts and food stalls, which now operate throughout the night to serve the steady influx of visitors.

This zone is a compelling example of an informal, user-generated genius loci. The harbour exists in a liminal state, neither a natural landscape nor a functioning, formal facility. Its identity has been shaped organically,

not by planners, but by the community that uses it. The area's round-the-clock, informal activity has imbued it with a unique character of raw authenticity and quiet communion. Recreational fishing spaces like this one significantly contribute to the local microeconomy and diversify a region's tourism offerings beyond conventional attractions. The Adikarto Harbour presents both latent potential and inherent risk. Its informal identity currently enhances Glagah's distinctiveness. Upon official completion, management must decide whether to integrate the existing angling community or prioritise a standardised commercial function. The preservation of the pier's authentic character will depend on this decision.

#### **5) The Seafood and Souvenir Centre Zone: A Stagnant Local Economy**

The Seafood and Souvenir Centre in Glagah serves as the primary hub for local small-scale commercial activities. The zone contains 47 souvenir kiosks, 18 food stalls, and one restaurant, collectively catering to tourist demand for local products. The culinary offerings are distinguished by their specificity, with regional traders primarily offering affordable fried seafood, such as shrimp and sea antlers, with pre-packaged portions available for a set price.

Although visitor numbers to Glagah have increased significantly since the opening of YIA, the Seafood and Souvenir Centre shows persistent stagnation. A core group of established vendors remains active, but systematic observation indicates that approximately 20 to 25 per cent of stalls are vacant or visibly deteriorated, reflecting prolonged inactivity. This pattern suggests that the economic gains from tourism are unevenly distributed, with newer or less established entrepreneurs struggling to sustain their businesses. The centre's physical environment appears aged, and its product offerings are largely uniform, lacking the innovation needed to attract a broader post-YIA tourist demographic.

The discussion of this zone underscores the precarious state of the local tourism economy and the challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in adapting to rapid change. The current state of the zone mirrors a prevalent phenomenon observed in tourism destinations: an increase in visitor volume does not inherently translate into prosperity for all local businesses, particularly if the supporting infrastructure and business environment remain unimproved (Jeyacheya & Hampton, 2020). The planned redevelopment of the area as the "Glagah Culinary Plaza" introduces an additional layer of uncertainty. While the plan aims to modernise the facilities, it also poses a significant risk of displacing the very local traders it is meant to support if they cannot afford the new rental costs or adapt to the new business model.

The Seafood and Souvenir Centre embodies a distinctive sense of place defined by stagnant authenticity. This condition reflects the broader regional economy, which, despite its authenticity, is struggling to adapt to evolving market demands. The centre's current state serves as a key indicator of the health of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. Without targeted support and inclusive development strategies, the recent increase in tourism may bypass rather than benefit the existing community of small traders.

### 3. The Spatial Character

There is a strong correlation between the unique character of Glagah Beach and its spatial elements. In contrast to other Yogyakarta beaches, which are primarily associated with sand, sunsets, and seafood, Glagah Beach is distinguished by its lagoon and breakwater. According to informants, these features are the main attractions for tourists and are the most frequently photographed and documented landmarks, particularly in the afternoon. The character of Glagah Beach is periodically transformed by socio-cultural activities that occur within the same space. While the beach typically functions as a commercial area, it assumes a sacred role during specific events. The persistence of ancestral traditions, notably the Javanese sea almsgiving ritual known as the Hajad Dalem Labuhan Kadipaten Pakualaman Ceremony, exemplifies this transformation. This annual ceremony intentionally cultivates a sacred atmosphere and reinforces the cultural genius loci (Volgger, 2019). Held on the 10th of Suro or Muharram, the ceremony includes offerings such as rice, textiles, vegetables, and fruit, which symbolise the region's agricultural abundance and highlight the diversity and economic significance of local produce and crafts.

The ceremony is initiated with a procession from Pesanggrahan Glagah to Joglo Labuhan. Upon arrival, officials perform a ritual weighing of the rice and cloth mountains before releasing them into the sea by swimming. Conversely, the vegetable and fruit mountains serve as the focal point of a communal competition. These mountains, composed of agricultural products and vegetables, symbolise blessings. Following the ritual of floating the mountains in the ocean, community members engage in a competition for the contents of the two mountains. The Hajad Dalem Labuhan ceremony is a ritual that functions as a means of expressing gratitude to the Creator for the community's bountiful sustenance. It also serves as a request for divine protection for the people of Glagah Village and the Puro Pakualaman Regency.

In summary, Glagah's spatial character is shaped by the interaction between its permanent physical landmarks and its periodic cultural transformations. The lagoon and breakwater distinguish Glagah from other coastal destinations in the region. Simultaneously, the annual Labuhan ceremony imbues a significant layer of sacred meaning in the area, temporarily transforming its commercial character. The combination of enduring physical features and dynamic cultural rituals forms the core of Glagah's genius loci, resulting in a character that is both physically unique and culturally meaningful.

### Discussion

Glagah Beach sits at the intersection of global infrastructural development and local cultural identity, shaped by the recent establishment of Yogyakarta International Airport (YIA). The airport has spurred rapid growth but also risks Glagah's unique character (Fitriantoro, 2020; Kasarda & Lindsay, 2011). Immediately adjacent to the aerotropolis, Glagah faces tension between top-down development agendas and bottom-up place identity rooted in its sacred heritage and spatial layering (Edita, 2019; Habib et al, 2022). Recent studies highlight the challenges of integrating large-scale infrastructure with community participation and sensitive land-use planning. This dynamic is clear in Glagah's fragmented genius loci, where the tranquil lagoon and sacred Pakualaman ground contrast with the degraded coastline and commercialized zones. These dynamics align with research on tourism development in Kulon Progo, which emphasizes the complexity of balancing growth with cultural and environmental preservation (Christou et al., 2019; Rudnicka-Bogusz, 2022).

Addressing spatial and social contradictions through place-based strategies is essential to safeguard Glagah's distinct identity while meeting evolving tourism demands.

The findings indicate that the genius loci of Glagah is not a singular, unified identity but rather exhibits fragmentation. This perspective aligns with the findings of Christou et al. (2019), who argue that the proliferation of intensive tourism development often leads to a contested sense of place, where traditional and modern identities coexist in a state of tension. At Glagah, the serene genius loci of the Recreation Zone, a product of its unique physical features, contrasts sharply with the negative image of the coastline, which reflects the well-documented consequences of unmanaged mass tourism, such as coastal degradation and waste management failures (Wahyudi & Puspitasari, 2021). This fragmentation reinforces the understanding of genius loci as a dynamic and contested meta-concept, as described by Vecco (2020). Management strategies that depend exclusively on top-down approaches and ignore internal contradictions are often ineffective. Planning processes should instead acknowledge and address the distinct micro-identities within the destination. The results underscore the importance of adopting a granular, place-based management approach.

The development of the Recreation Zone serves as a paradigm of organic, bottom-up place-making. The advent of camping culture, influenced by the region's unique attributes, corroborates Tuan's (1977) hypothesis that experiential immersion modifies the perception of spatial environment, thereby transforming it into a distinct "place." Jiang and Lin (2022) provides a contemporary framework for analysing this phenomenon, as the popularity of camping reflects visitors' engagement with experiential dimensions such as a pronounced "earthbound atmosphere" and a sense of "spiritual belonging." While the process at Glagah was largely organic, Volgger's (2019) concept of staging genius loci offers a useful lens for understanding later intentional interventions. The village-led development of Taman Nambangan demonstrates a community-driven effort to enhance and showcase the authentic atmosphere already valued by visitors. Rather than generating a new environment, this grassroots strategy curated and amplified the existing sense of place. This example questions the efficacy of traditional state-led infrastructure projects, aligning with Jeyacheya and Hampton (2020), who found that sustainable tourism growth in Indonesia often results from community-driven approaches. The Glagah case suggests that investment should prioritise organic development and community-led staging over constructing new facilities.

Quantitative data on visitor patterns indicate that YIA is a significant catalyst for functional transformation, consistent with the core principles of the aerotropolis concept. The increase in weekday visitation, which ranges from 40% to 50%, marks Glagah's shift from a traditional holiday destination to a daily recreational hub serving a transient population. This trend is not unique to Glagah. Rogerson (2018) identified a similar pattern in the Ekurhuleni aerotropolis in South Africa. Just as OR Tambo International Airport stimulated the development of urban tourism activities targeting airport-linked visitors, YIA is fostering a new, localized leisure economy in Glagah. However, Rogerson's research indicates that successful development requires intentional local economic planning. The Glagah community must adjust its social and economic practices to accommodate these changes, as observed by Habib et al. (2022). The primary management challenge is to address the needs of new users while maintaining the unique sense of place that attracts them. This necessitates a transition from a growth-oriented model to one focused on capacity management and the preservation of place identity. Such an approach enables the local community to derive sustainable benefits from its proximity to the new airport.

The findings, when considered collectively, argue against the imposition of a generic, "aerotropolis" development model on Glagah Beach. A model that prioritises standardisation is ill-suited to the complex and fragmented nature of Glagah's genius loci. The extant research provides substantial support for a dual management strategy that is both place-based and adaptive. This approach is consistent with the principles of sustainable tourism, which advocate for development that respects the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities and conserves both natural and cultural heritage (UNWTO, 2013). Moreover, this approach resonates with the transformative strategies employed in revitalising challenging landscapes, where uncovering a site's original character is key to nurturing a vibrant new sense of place (Rudnicka-Bogusz, 2022). Enhancing the organic character of the Recreation Zone and addressing coastline degradation enables stakeholders to utilise Glagah's distinctive assets. This strategy aims to align future development with the area's unique identity, supporting sustainable progress amid ongoing environmental and social changes.

## Conclusion

The construction of YIA has placed Glagah Beach at a critical juncture, exposing it to the homogenizing pressures of top-down, global aerotropolis development. This study used the concept of genius loci as a critical diagnostic tool to analyse the authentic identity of this unique coastal area before it is altered beyond recognition. The research concludes that the genius loci of Glagah Beach is profoundly fractured and not a monolithic entity. This fracture is defined by three core findings:

1. A dual image pitting the serene, positive character of the lagoon against the neglected, negative character of the coastline.
2. A layered space where a modern, profane commercial landscape is superimposed upon the historical, sacred Pakualaman Ground.
3. A unique physical character defined by the iconic breakwater and lagoon that distinguishes Glagah Beach from all other regional beaches.

This study advances knowledge by empirically applying the concept of genius loci to Indonesian tourism, demonstrating its relevance beyond European architectural contexts. The research establishes genius loci as a diagnostic framework for analysing the complex and contradictory identities of places undergoing rapid, externally driven development. By identifying fractures in place identity, this framework offers a transferable model for researchers and planners. The paper presents a case study highlighting tensions between state-led megaprojects and culturally embedded local landscapes, providing qualitative evidence for the necessity of place-based, historically informed planning in the Global South.

The main implications are directed at the regional government and tourism planners of Kulon Progo. The findings suggest that a uniform mass tourism strategy will likely be ineffective. Instead, a dual management approach is required: one component should focus on preserving and enhancing the lagoon zone's unique qualities, while the other should address the rehabilitation of the degraded coastline and breakwater areas. Future development must formally acknowledge and respect sacred sites and rituals to prevent community conflict and safeguard intangible heritage. This study enriches the theory of genius loci by showing that the "spirit of a place" is not always harmonious. It can be fractured, contested, and layered with competing meanings, particularly in postcolonial contexts where historical, sacred, and commercial landscapes collide. The research suggests that the concept can be powerfully applied to understand the politics of placemaking by revealing which identities are promoted and which are marginalised in the development



process. In conclusion, this research provides essential place-based knowledge to inform the future development of Glagah Beach. The study recommends a culturally sensitive and sustainable approach to development, ensuring that the area's unique identity is preserved.

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