

Visual Narratives: Mural Art's Impact on Revitalizing Surabaya's Heritage Sites

Paulina Tjandrawibawa

Department of Visual Communication Design, School of Creative Industry,
Universitas Ciputra Surabaya, Indonesia
paulina.tjandrawibawa@ciputra.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Surabaya, Indonesia's second largest city, boasts a rich historical and cultural history. The paper investigates the transformative role of mural art in regenerating urban heritage sites, with a focus on Peneleh and Tambak Bayan villages. This study investigates how mural painting improves the aesthetic appeal and cultural relevance of urban historical sites using thorough case studies and interviews with persons involved in these projects. Mural painting in Surabaya not only preserves historical narratives and promotes community identity, but it also serves as an agent for economic development and tourism attractiveness. The findings highlight murals' ability to contribute to urban regeneration, implying that more coordinated and comprehensive mural efforts, inspired by successful examples from other places, could maximize their influence. This study emphasizes the need of incorporating creative interventions into heritage conservation techniques in order to foster a greater awareness for Surabaya's diverse cultural tapestry.

Keywords: Mural Art, Urban Heritage, Revitalization, Culture Heritage

INTRODUCTION

Surabaya is Indonesia's second largest city and the capital of Jawa Timur province. The city is a major financial hub in the country. The population is currently estimated at 3,088,748 and the metropolitan area covers 5,925 km² (*Surabaya Population 2024*, 2024). Surabaya was founded in 1293 and is one of Indonesia's oldest cities, with civilization entering through the Kalimas river, resulting in an old harbor. The historic port exists because the Kalimas river plays an important role in the introduction of trade into Surabaya and has been a popular mode of water transportation since the VOC took control of Indonesia. Arab, Chinese, and Colonial cultures entered Surabaya via indirect commerce (Bappeda Provinsi Jatim, 2013)

Surabaya's long history and exposure to diverse cultures have fostered unique communities known locally as "kampung," which possess significant potential for cultural tourism development. A prime example is Peneleh Village in Genteng District. Not only is it the second-oldest settlement in the city (Ramadhan et al., 2021), but it also holds national importance. Residing in Peneleh at various points in history were prominent figures such as Indonesia's first president, Sukarno (Bung Karno), Sunan Ampel, a pivotal figure in the spread of Islam in Indonesia, and HOS Tjokroaminoto, a national hero and reformer of the education system (Fatimatuzzahro et al., 2024). Furthermore, these historical connections

elevate Peneleh, and likely other Surabaya kampungs, to the position of potential focal points for cultural tourism. Within Peneleh itself, the presence of numerous high-value historical remnants serves as further testament to its significance. These include the Jobong Well, a characteristic feature of Majapahit era settlements and the De Begraafplaats Cemetery Complex, the final resting place for Europeans who passed away during the Dutch colonial period in Surabaya (Faizal & Arief, 2021).



Image 1 Jobong Well and De Begraafplaats Cemetery Complex.
(Source: Jawa Pos, 2023 and 2020)

Tambak Bayan Village serves as another notable example. Situated along the banks of the Kalimas River, which bisects Surabaya's city center, this Chinatown has existed since 1275. Chinese immigration began in the 1930s as other areas reached capacity (Cristina Simatupang et al., 2023). Tambak Bayan Village stands as a testament to the historical development of the Chinese community in Indonesia.

These urban heritage sites play a critical role in improving the local economy and therefore warrant ongoing maintenance, preservation, and revitalization efforts (Arimbi et al., 2011). The Surabaya City Government has implemented various strategies to achieve this, including the creation of murals to enhance aesthetics and attract tourists (Fikri, 2020).

Mural art installations can serve as iconic features within Indonesian urban heritage areas. Beyond their visual appeal, murals can also convey deeper meanings, shaping the perception and identity of a place (Alimin et al., 2021).

This study investigates the transformative potential of mural art in the rejuvenation of Surabaya's urban heritage areas. By examining the role of mural decorations in amplifying the aesthetic appeal and cultural significance of these heritage sites, the research explores how such artistic interventions contribute to the preservation of historical identity. Through case studies and interviews with individuals currently involved in urban heritage development projects within Surabaya, this research underscores the potential of mural art as a tool for urban regeneration, fostering a deeper appreciation for the city's rich cultural tapestry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Urban Heritage

Urban heritage encompasses a broad spectrum of valuable resources located within urban environments. These resources can be natural, cultural, indigenous, archaeological, architectural, artistic, social, or technological in nature. Inherited from past generations or communities, they hold value, quality, meaning, and relational significance, prompting their continued preservation for future generations (Mandaka & Ikaputra, 2021).

Surabaya's abundance of historical heritage, particularly concentrated in its old city center, reflects the city's evolution from pre-colonial to colonial times. While some of these urban heritage sites remain extant, others have been lost to development and replaced with modern structures. Several cultural heritage areas, such as Jembatan Merah, Kembang Jepoen, City Hall, Ampel (Arab Village), Tanjung Perak Port, and Kalimas Port, stand as iconic landmarks symbolizing Surabaya's past grandeur (Arimbi et al., 2011). Beyond these iconic sites, Surabaya also boasts distinctive old villages with historical links to the Indonesian independence struggle. Examples include Kampung Peneleh and Tambak Bayan, a centuries-old village that has endured. The government has designated these areas as cultural heritage zones and tourist destinations.

Revitalization efforts for declining urban areas should leverage the potential of the existing environment, including its historical significance, cultural meaning, unique location, and overall image (Azis et al., 2019). This process encompasses improvements across physical, economic, and social aspects of the targeted area.

Mural Art

Murals, a form of public art, primarily refer to large-scale paintings adorning building walls. These artistic expressions may incorporate techniques such as painting, sculpture, or other modeling approaches, and can be created on natural or artificial surfaces. They are further categorized as indoor or outdoor murals (Li & Wang, 2021). Mural art plays a significant role in urban heritage areas by serving as a visual narrative of a city's history and culture. De-Miguel-Molina (2020) emphasizes the accessibility of mural art in conveying a city's historical narrative to both residents and visitors. Murals imbued with rich historical context can further enhance the visitor experience by incorporating an educational element.

The murals of Northern Ireland exemplify this phenomenon. Located in Belfast and Derry, these murals depict the region's past and present political and religious divisions, and are considered some of the most renowned political murals in Europe. Estimates suggest nearly 2,000 murals have been documented since the 1970s (Belfast Murals, 2022).

(Migeon, 2024) argues that Belfast's murals, in particular, serve as memorials to past violence that divided the city along societal lines. They offer visitors a glimpse into a significant chapter of Northern Ireland's history.

Gamcheon Culture Village in Busan provides another compelling example. Historically, the village was part of Busan's turbulent past, having served as a settlement for refugees during the Korean War who cultivated the mountainous terrain for survival (Busan Metropolitan City, n.d.). In 2009, a collaboration between artists, volunteers, and university students transformed the village through the Village Art Project, decorating its structures with murals. This initiative spurred Gamcheon's transformation into a major tourist destination within Busan (Green & Plese, 2014).

These examples illustrate the potency of mural art in urban heritage areas. Murals not only serve as a means to preserve and communicate a city's history and culture, but also contribute to fostering community identity and driving urban regeneration.



Image 2 Gamcheon Village in Busan, South Korea. (Source: Visit Busan, 2024)

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach, leveraging descriptive data, case studies, and in-depth interviews to assess the transformative potential of mural art in Surabaya's urban heritage revitalization efforts. Qualitative research methods prioritize the exploration and description of phenomena through narrative and descriptive data (Titien Saraswati, 2022).

This approach was chosen to glean detailed, narrative insights into the historical, cultural, and artistic significance of murals within the Peneleh and Tambak Bayan communities. In-depth interviews with individuals actively involved in urban heritage projects and mural art documentation will provide firsthand accounts of the murals' role in historical narration, cultural preservation, and community resistance.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

This study focuses on two Surabaya urban heritage areas: Peneleh Village and Tambak Bayan Village. Peneleh Village features several murals, including a prominent 13.5 x 3 meter mural depicting the life story of Sukarno (Indonesia's first president) (Purwanto, 2023). This mural adorns the wall of an alley leading to Sukarno's birthplace and serves as a visual narrative, welcoming visitors with a detailed account of his early life, from before his birth to his school days in Surabaya. Additionally, other murals in Peneleh showcase the struggles of the "arek Suroboyo" (Surabaya youths) during the Indonesian War of Independence, a historical map of the Peneleh area, and depictions of past community activities.

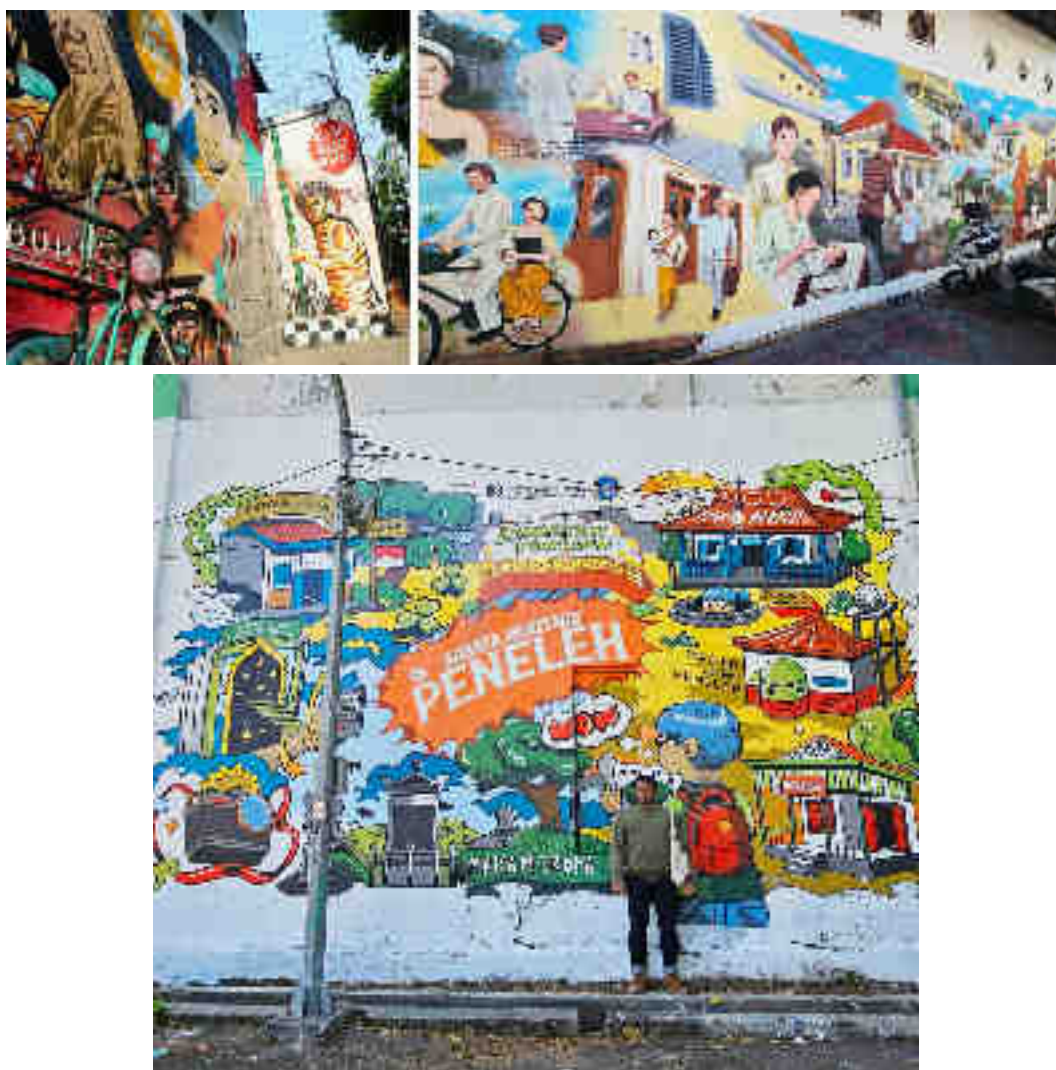


Image 3 Murals in Peneleh Village Surabaya.
(Source: Suryanto, 2014 and Rukmi Utomo, 2023)

Tambak Bayan residents faced a significant threat of eviction due to a land dispute with a private developer planning to construct a hotel named "Veni Vidi Vici". The conflict escalated in 2007, as residents lacked formal ownership documentation for the land they occupied within Chinatown, despite paying property taxes on

their respective dwellings (Widodo, 2023). In an effort to defend their land rights and cultural heritage, residents, in collaboration with Surabaya's art community, embarked on a project to create a series of "resistance murals." This initiative, inspired by the Operation for Habitat Studies (OHS), a research group focused on Surabaya's urban villages, employed art as a non-violent form of protest, aiming to prevent the conflict from escalating (Fadjar, 2011). The murals incorporate symbolic imagery, including a dragon devouring its own tail, a figure adorned with Chinese cultural attributes, and various other ornaments (Widodo, 2023).



Image 4 Chinese Cultural Attributes and A Dragon Devouring Its Own Tail Murals.
(Source: Google, 2023)



Image 5 Latest Murals in Tambak Bayan Village. (Source: Google, 2024)

Interviews with an academic researcher currently conducting public and semi-public road development research in Peneleh Village revealed insights into the potential of murals for urban heritage revitalization. The researcher suggests that murals can enhance the aesthetics of streets within these areas, attracting foot traffic and discouraging the perception of slum-like conditions that can arise with blank walls. However, to achieve optimal revitalization, fostering community activities is equally important to draw visitors to the area.

A separate interview with a former 2011 Tambak Bayan Mural project coordinator highlighted the transformative impact of murals. The coordinator noted that the murals played a key role in propelling Tambak Bayan Village from relative obscurity to a recognized artistic hub. This culminated in the village's selection as an exhibition venue for the December 2023 Bienale Jatim X event.

Finally, an interview with a Surabaya-based interior design consultant who has visited both Peneleh Village and Georgetown Mural Street in Malaysia offered valuable comparative insights. The consultant observed that, unlike the organized and well-mapped murals of Georgetown, Peneleh's murals currently lack a cohesive presentation. They argue that the creation of unique and visually engaging murals would encourage visitors to take photographs and share them on social media, ultimately attracting a wider audience to the village.

CONCLUSION

Mural art emerges as a potent instrument for the rejuvenation of Surabaya's urban heritage spaces. These artistic expressions, adorning walls throughout the city, not only elevate the aesthetic character of these areas but also cultivate a more profound appreciation for Surabaya's heritage amongst residents and visitors alike. The case studies of Peneleh and Tambak Bayan villages exemplify the multifaceted roles murals can play: serving as historical narrators, emblems of community resistance, and catalysts for attracting tourism. However, to maximize their impact, future initiatives should prioritize a more cohesive and comprehensive mural experience, drawing upon the successes observed in established international mural villages.

REFERENCES

- Achmad Faizal, & Teuku Muhammad Valdy Arief. (2021, September 18). *Cerita Makam Peneleh, Bekas Kuburan Mewah Pejabat Belanda di Surabaya*. Kompas. <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2021/09/18/115150078/cerita-makam-peneleh-bekas-kuburan-mewah-pejabat-belanda-di-surabaya?page=all>
- Alimin, N. N., Riyanto, B., Sulistyati, A. N., & Kartikasari, N. N. (2021). *Dialectics Of Surakarta Society Perception Of Murals At Gatot Subroto Street, Surakarta, Indonesia*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.211228.073>
- Bappeda Provinsi Jatim. (2013). *Profil Kota Surabaya*. Bappeda Provinsi Jatim. <http://bappeda.jatimprov.go.id/bappeda/wp-content/uploads/potensi-kab-kota-2013/kota-surabaya-2013.pdf>.
- Belfast Murals*. (2022). <https://belfast-murals.co.uk/>
- Busan Metropolitan City. (n.d.). *Gamcheon Culture Village*. www.visitbusan.net.
- Christopher J Green, & Eric Plese. (2014). Wall mural neighborhoods of Busan: a city's transformation of favelas into prosperity. *2014 World Conference for Public Administration Conference*. https://www.academia.edu/36846388/Wall_mural_neighborhoods_of_Busan_a_citys_transformation_of_favelas_into_prosperity
- Cristina Simatupang, A., Analisis Kekayaan Budaya di Kampung Pecinan Tambak Bayan, etall, Kekayaan Budaya di Kampung Pecinan

- Tambak Bayan Surabaya oleh Mahasiswa Inbound Universitas Negeri Surabaya, A., Syah Putri Situmorang, N., Maruli Panjaitan, S., Kunci, K., Budaya, K., Surabaya, N., Tua, K., Tionghoa, B., & Pecinan Tambak Bayan, K. (2023). Analisis Kekayaan Budaya di Kampung Pecinan Tambak Bayan Surabaya oleh Mahasiswa Inbound Universitas Negeri Surabaya. *Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat Nusantara (JPkMN)* , 4(2), 1141–1148. <https://doi.org/10.55338/jpkmn.v4i2.1026>
- de-Miguel-Molina, M. (2020). Visiting Dark Murals: An Ethnographic Approach to the Sustainability of Heritage. *Sustainability*, 12(2), 677. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12020677>
- Diah Ariani Arimbi, Ph. D., Sarkawi B. Husain, S. S. , M. Hum., Johny Alfian Khusyairi, S. Sos. , M. A., La Ode Rabani, S. S. , M. Hum., & Gayung Kasuma, S. S. , M. Hum. (2011). *PELESTARIAN DAN REVITALISASI KAWASAN BERSEJARAH PERKOTAAN {URBAN HERITAGE} SEBAGAI ALTERNATIF PENGEMBANGAN WISATA PUSAKA (SEJARAH DAN BUDAYA) DI KOTA SURABAYA*.
- Fadjar. (2011, May 5). *Selamatkan Kampung via Mural*. www.ubaya.ac.id.
- Fakhrudin Abdul Azis, Broto Wahyono Sulistyono, & Sukarnen. (2019). Revitalisasi Koridor Bersejarah Kawasan Kembang Jepundi Kota Surabaya. *Seminar Nasional Sains Dan Teknologi Terapan*, 329–334.
- Faza Fatimatuzzahro, Marselina Ayu Lestari, Fadhila Syarifatun Amirah, Wahyuningsi, & Toto Hermawan. (2024). Pendidikan Karakter Bangsa dalam Pandangan HOS Tjokroaminoto. *Asas Wa Tandhim*, 3(1), 1–10.
- Li, S., & Wang, Z. (2021). *Mural Art in the Context of New Media: A New "Crossover" of Mural Art Driven by Artificial Intelligence*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210609.106>
- Mandaka, M., & Ikaputra, I. (2021). URBAN HERITAGE TOURISM SEBUAH KONSEP PELESTARIAN MELALUI PENDEKATAN PARIWISATA. *Jurnal Arsitektur Kolaborasi*, 1(2), 67–75. <https://doi.org/10.54325/kolaborasi.v1i2.13>
- Migeon, M. (2024). Peace and Conflict in Public Space: Gendered Murals Shaping Belfast. *Geopolitics*, 1–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2024.2321164>
- MUHAMMAD FAIZAL FIKRI. (2020). *KONSEP PENGEMBANGAN KAMPUNG WISATA PENELEH: PENDEKATAN FENOMENOLOGI DAN DESIGN THINKING*. INSTITUT TEKNOLOGI SEPULUH NOPEMBER.
- Ramadhan, D., Wibawa, B. M., & Bramanti, G. W. (2021). Perancangan Model Bisnis Berkelanjutan, Elemen Branding dan Instagram

Marketing untuk Kampung Wisata Sejarah Peneleh. *Jurnal Sains Dan Seni ITS*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.12962/j23373520.v10i1.60039>

Rangga Prasetya Aji Widodo. (2023, January 31). *Melawan dengan Seni: Siasat Wisata Kampung Pecinan Tambak Bayan demi Mencegah Perampasan Lahan*. <https://Projectmultatuli.Org/>.
Surabaya Population 2024. (2024). World Population Review. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/surabaya-population>

Titien Saraswati. (2022). *Penelitian Untuk Pemula*. K-Media.

Wiwit Purwanto. (2023, July 4). *Mural Live Story of Bung Karno, Percantik Kampung Lahir Bung Karno Pandean IV*. Surya Tribun News. <https://suryatravel.tribunnews.com/2023/07/04/mural-live-story-of-bung-karno-percantik-kampung-lahir-bung-karno-pandean-iv?page=all>