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INTERVENTIONS FOR STABILITY: PLACEMAKING STRATEGIES FOR UNDERUSED SPACES IN THE HISTORIC MINING DISTRICT OF SAWAHLUNTO, WEST SUMATRA, INDONESIA

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Abstract

COVID-19 pandemic has emerged as a crucial catalyst for a reassessment of the roles of public spaces in urban environments. This transformation is particularly noticeable in sectors such as city regeneration and tourism, both of which have experienced instability. There is a notable lack of research addressing the application of placemaking theory, particularly within historical contexts. This study examines the potential of underutilized spaces in historic mining districts as part of tourism infrastructure. It aims to explore how placemaking theory can be applied to these areas to revitalize them as tourist destinations, with a focus on both the physical characteristics and social dynamics they foster. Qualitative research was employed, utilizing field observations and space mapping as the primary data collection methods. These techniques enabled a comprehensive analysis of the underutilized spaces, focusing on their fundamental features. The data was analysed through contextual and thematic analysis to identify patterns and draw meaningful insights. The study identified seven (7) distinct types of underutilized spaces within the historic mining districts. Three (3) of these spaces are currently in use, while four (4) are underperforming but exhibit significant hidden potential. The findings suggest that revitalizing underutilized spaces in historically significant mining districts requires a holistic approach that integrates placemaking principles with local sociability and activities. Additionally, the study uncovers five (5) thematic emerging placemaking strategies including indigenous, celebratory, diversity, welcoming, and pride. By focusing on the interconnectedness of these attributes, it is possible to achieve urban stability and enhance the tourism infrastructure in these areas, thereby unlocking their full potential as vibrant tourist destinations.

Keywords: Placemaking, Sociability, Creative Strategy, Historic Mining District, Urban Stability, Tourism Infrastructure

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly disrupted the functions of public spaces, particularly outdoor areas that rely on social engagement, proximity, and user diversity. During the pandemic, widespread social distancing and lockdown measures led to a cessation of communal activities, undermining the vibrancy and stability of these spaces. As Kortelainen & Albrecht (2021) note, such disruptions can cause public spaces to lose their connection to people, resulting in underutilized areas that no longer serve their intended social functions. Hansasooksin & Tontisirin (2021) further emphasize that a space's ability to attract people depends on its sociability and the recognition of its broader spatial functions, which were severely impacted during that time.

In the post-pandemic context, restoring the "sense of place" has become crucial for revitalizing these underutilized spaces. Khalaf et al. (2022) argue that fostering a deeper attachment between people and the spaces they occupy is key to restoring their vitality and sociability. Revitalization efforts must go beyond mere physical refurbishment; they must focus on enhancing both the tangible and intangible qualities of spaces, including community engagement, cultural events, and ongoing activities. Wan Ismail et al. (2020) stress that maintaining the identity of these spaces through such practices helps reintegrate them into the fabric of urban life, fostering a vibrant and connected community. Thus, a holistic approach to placemaking—one that blends physical rejuvenation with social and cultural reintegration—is essential for ensuring the long-term stability and success of public spaces in a post-pandemic world.

PROBLEM BACKGROUND

Shifting vision and paradigm in public spaces

The continuity of space functions often depends on the transformation of physical, economic, historical, and socio-cultural attributes that ensure the stability of these spaces. However, many of these attributes have been overlooked or degraded, especially in the face of disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which challenged traditional perceptions and uses of public spaces. The pandemic exposed the vulnerability of public spaces, where functionality has been eroded due to degrading infrastructure and shifting societal needs. As Zhou et al. (2021) note, space utilization is inextricably linked to time and the trajectory of its socio-cultural context, and these influences can significantly affect how people engage with and utilize spaces.

Sawahlunto, a historic mining district inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2019, offers a unique case study in this context. The district's exceptional urban characteristics, historical significance, ethnic diversity, and remarkable landscapes make it a potential hub for tourism (Cheris et al., 2020; Rosa et al., 2023; Cheris & Rosetia, 2022). Despite its inherent potential, the

district has yet to fully capitalize on these attributes, with its public spaces underutilized and disconnected from the broader community. This study aims to explore the fundamental features of public spaces within Sawahlunto's historical district, focusing on the integration of sociability and the typology of public spaces. The research will also propose a checklist of requirements to enhance people's engagement with these spaces, helping to transform them into vibrant tourist destinations that reflect the district's rich heritage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public spaces in historic districts

Public spaces in historic districts play a pivotal role in presenting and embodying cultural identity, as they are often sites where the past and present intersect, creating a tangible sense of place (Widodo, 2012; Kapoor et al., 2022). The complexity of the human-nature relationship contributes to the development of a transactional connection between people and their environment, where the identity of a space becomes evident through interaction and experience (Ogborn, 1996). In these spaces, diverse activities and social interactions occur, which, together with the narrative urban elements and interpretive settings, create a distinct character unique to the area. This character is shaped by a rich historical evolution and the impact of human activity, resulting in a space that reflects the intersection of time, culture, and community (Rosley et al., 2024).

Through public spaces, the past is not only preserved but also actively interpreted, providing an opportunity for current and future generations to engage with the history and identity of a place. The dynamic process of selecting, interpreting, and representing aspects with culture induces identity stories (Rosa et al., 2023). They contest time and space, advertising dominant and imaginative geographies that delve into character inside their urban element and public spaces. Nowadays, heritage objects thrive by community embezzlement along with creative activities (Soedarsono et al., 2021). Dwelling on layers of historicity, the measurement took deeper key factors in making strategic practice on how to keep the space stable (Sills, 2021). Traditional practices may be found to be imbalanced with current progressive impact, and lead to gentrification instead (Lew, 2017). Developing places for commercial and tourism consumption may have fractured their cultural existence and degraded their identity.

Strategy driven by specific space typology

The strategy for enhancing public spaces is often driven by the specific typology of the space, which directly influences its liveability, sense of well-being, and the rootedness of community members within a place (Ellery & Ellery, 2019). The decision-making process that shapes space typology, including the designation of functions, layouts, and spatial distributions, plays a critical role in boosting the

vibrancy and vitality of a place, creating a positive feedback loop that fosters continued engagement. According to Relph (2007), the articulation of space typology encompasses not only the functional aspects of a space but also its layout and distribution, which together define how a space is used and experienced. The intimate relationship between these three elements-space function, layout, and distribution-correlates strongly with individual experiences of activity engagement, mobility, and familiarity with a space's physical properties, social interactions, and cultural presentation (Lanham, 2007). When these elements are thoughtfully integrated, they can enhance the overall experience of the space, making it more meaningful and connected to the community it serves.

Sociability in placemaking strategies for space stability

Sociability plays a crucial role in placemaking strategies, as it helps build a strong sense of connection between people and the places they inhabit, turning the community into a valuable asset for space utilization (Crisman, 2022). In placemaking theory, sociability is recognized as a key factor in enhancing and developing urban design by fostering social interactions that strengthen the overall stability of public spaces (Soedarsono et al., 2021). By promoting friendly and diverse interactions, volunteerism, and a sense of local pride, sociability contributes to creating a vibrant community that is invested in the space's well-being. These attributes encourage engagement and support, nurturing the development of spaces that are not only functional but also meaningful, reinforcing the value of the place to its users (Ellery & Ellery, 2019).

The element of placemaking strategies values people as the asset (PPS, 2016) not only in the quality of the setting, i.e. material, shape, colour, order, harmony-, but also in the spirit that pervades the place (Kortelainen & Albrecht, 2021). There is an auto-correlation between urban function and community preservation (Zhou et al., 2021). The ability of people and community to create a quality in a space is beyond socio-cultural trajectory (Relph, 2007). Through sociability attributes in placemaking, places not only can carry their function but also revive spirit, meaning, experiences, and emotion.

Among the four (4) strategies of placemaking, sociability has the capability to cover the most intangible attributes that a place needs. They are: diversity, stewardship, cooperation, neighbourliness, pride, friendliness, interactivity, and a welcoming. Every one of these elements supports a tangible attribute among women, children, and the elderly, creating a social network, supporting volunteerism, and integrating evening use with street life. As long as the attributes are interconnected with other strategies in placemaking - namely, Uses & Activities, Comfort & Image, as well as Access & Linkages, attributes from Sociability strategies empower the making of a place, enhancing public

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spaces' identity and pride (Frenette, 2017). The degree of public space can be sustained to become successful when it reaches existence flow continuously, coordinating within the socio-cultural axis that strengthens connection to the spirit and emotion of the place.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The site of the study is located in the historical district of Sawahlunto city, West Sumatra, Indonesia. It encompasses a diverse range of characteristics related to rural and urban places with historical value. The study begins with a literature review on public spaces in historic districts and the sociability characteristics in placemaking theory. Site observation and space mapping were used in this study. The old town was easy to navigate, as each landmark was only a 15-minute walk away, and the observation process took only half a day.



Figure 1: Location of Sawahlunto old town

Source: Author

During the observations, areas were designated utilizing the map and images, which aided in our identification of the several sorts of public spaces in the old town. Underutilized spaces, both heavily and minimally used, can be found via the map and analyzed based on their quality according to specified typologies in spatial arrangement, distribution, and function. Additionally, this paper utilizes sociability key metrics from placemaking theory to bolster the context and thematic analysis by leveraging the interconnected tangible and intangible attributes.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

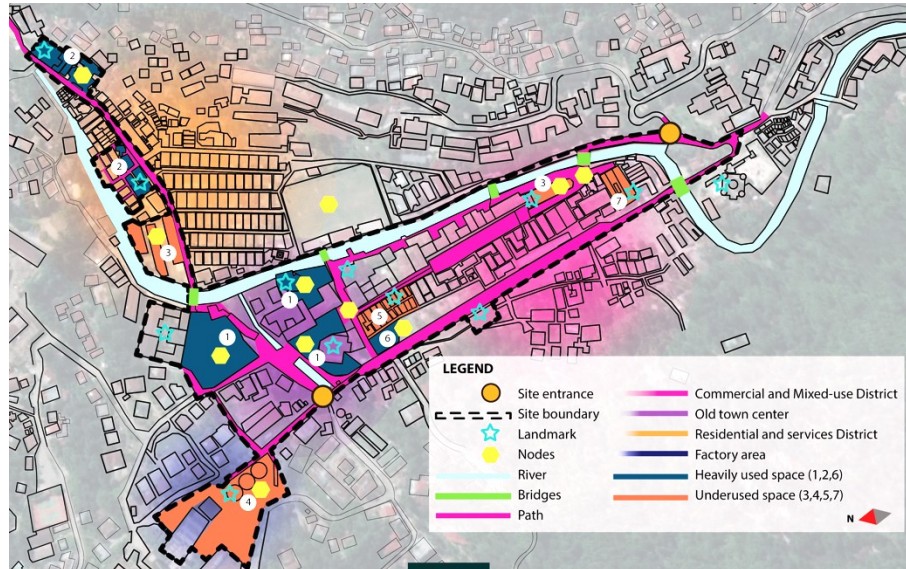


Figure 2: Land use map and 7 Identified spaces

Source: Author

Identified space 1: Plaza

The two plazas (Figure 3), strategically located opposite each other, are framed by significant landmarks that reinforce their distinct identity within the historic town of Sawahlunto. As shown in Figure 2, together, these plazas reflect the strong historical identity of Sawahlunto, with monuments and symbols of its authentic history serving as their backdrop. While these spaces function as lively hubs, enhanced by the surrounding natural environment that provides a serene and comfortable atmosphere, they fail to fully preserve or complement the continuity of the town's historical narrative. Although both plazas symbolize Sawahlunto's liberation, they lack the emotional resonance necessary to foster a deeper connection to the town's heritage. Details of the quality of the spaces are identified in Table 1 below.



Figure 3: Two plazas of two interpretive settings
 (PT. Bukit Asam office and Gedung Pusat Kebudayaan)
Source: Author

Table 1: Quality of the identified space towards specific typology

Space typology	Code	Type	Quality
Plaza	SF	Public	Communal event, Daily activities
	SL	Open Layout	Iconic and vital by interpretive settings Celebratory history Natural settings Lively street life during night
	SD	Dispersed	High accessibility Low continuity

*) Specific typology code: SL=Space Layout; SD=Space Distribution; SF=Space Function

Identified space 2: Inner court

Museum Goedang Ransoem stands out as one of the most notable museums in the historic town of Sawahlunto. The space between the museum's compound (Figure 2, space number 2) creates an inviting and welcoming atmosphere, reflecting the neighborhood's multi-functional character. The museum not only serves as a cultural space but also functions as a gateway to the old industrial area, with its proximity to a historic tofu factory at the back (Figure 4). The significance of the museum's historical narrative, along with the connection to the tofu factory, led the preservation team to ensure the factory's retention as part of the site. This decision highlights the vitality of the space, reinforcing a strong sense of place and deepening the community's attachment to both the museum and its history. By preserving this local landmark, the museum effectively bridges the past with the present, fostering a tangible link between the community and its heritage (Table 2).

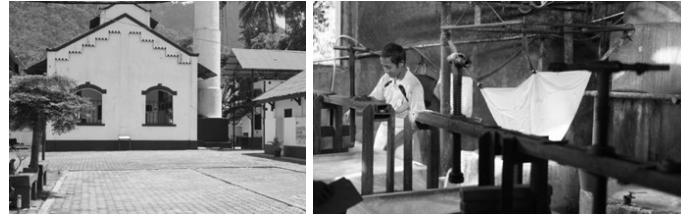


Figure 4: Inner court at *Goedang Ransoem* museum and the handmade tofu factory attached to it
Source: Author

Table 2: Quality of the identified space towards specific typology

Space typology	Code	Type	Quality
Inner court	SF	Public	Special event
		Semi-Public	Museum activity
		Semi-Private	Factory activity, Daily activity
	SL	Compound	Layers of historical events Relevant to community Stewardship
	SD	Clustered	High accessibility

*) Specific typology code: SL=Space Layout; SD=Space Distribution; SF=Space Function

Identified space 3: Terminal

The space possesses essential qualities that contribute to communal well-being, particularly through its integration of artistic and cultural activities. When utilized as a venue for recounting the historical activities of the ancient town, the terminal takes on a more meaningful role (see Figure 5), progressively strengthening its connection to the community. With prime location in the centre of Commercial and Residential district (see Figure 2), this sense of continuity helps foster a communal atmosphere, encouraging a shared spiritual bond among individuals and cultivating a deeper sense of belonging within the space, as detailed in Table 3).



Figure 5: Public transport terminal and communal garage for local residents
Source: Author

Table 3: Quality of the identified space towards specific typology

Space typology	Code	Type	Quality
Terminal	SF	Public	Communal activity, Specific activity
	SL	Semi-Open	Seasonal high mobility Historic gateway
	SD	Clustered	Moderate accessibility

*) Specific typology code: SL=Space Layout; SD=Space Distribution; SF=Space Function

Source: Author

Identified space 4: Playground

The playground (Figure 6), though designed to cater to children, adults, and the elderly, is fully occupied with interactive activities but fails to fully fulfil its intended functions. This failure undermines its role as a societal connector, leading to a general lack of appreciation for the space as a recreational area. While the interpretive settings in the area could serve as a strong symbol of the old town's history, their potential is weakened by poor accessibility. In Table 4, specific typology of space distribution depicts a contradictory quality. To address these issues, the space should be reimagined to prioritize comfort, safety, and a stronger sense of connection.



Figure 6: The Silo Playground only accessed by local residents

Source: Author

Table 4: Quality of the identified space towards specific typology

Space typology	Code	Type	Quality
Playground	SF	Public	Specific activity
	SL	Open Space	Convenient landscape amenities Linked social space Interpretive settings
	SD	Clustered	High visibility Low accessibility

*) Specific typology code: SL=Space Layout; SD=Space Distribution; SF=Space Function

Identified space 5: Intersection

As illustrated in Figure 2, the interspersed rows of shophouses create a network of alleys, pedestrian pathways, stairs, and ramps. These spatial layouts, combined with the heritage facade character, contribute to fostering a convivial and communal atmosphere within the town. The intersections and corners within this area serve as points of engagement, capturing the attention of individuals and

encouraging exploration of the local nuances that define the town's unique identity (Figure 7). The daily activities and interactions that take place in the town's limited spaces reflect the depth of social connections among its residents (Table 5).



Figure 7: Potentials urban element such as path, underpass, alleys, and stairs
Source: Author

Table 5: Quality of the identified space towards specific typology

Space typology	Code	Type	Quality
Intersection	SF	Public	Communal activities
		Semi-Public	Daily activities
	SL	Alley	Associates with interpretive settings
		Stairs	Dynamic street art
			Fun linkages
	SD	Dispersed	High accessibility and continuity

*) Specific typology code: SL=Space Layout; SD=Space Distribution; SF=Space Function

Identified space 6: Park

The park plays an important role in the daily activities of the community, offering a welcoming atmosphere and a comforting sense of belonging when people stroll through the town. Despite its significance, its secluded location means that many individuals do not notice its availability. From images in Figure 8, the park is characterized by mature vegetation and functional landscape features, such as pergolas and benches, contributing to its calm and composed design. By increasing its visibility, the park can further enhance its role in promoting cultural identity and supporting creative endeavours, ultimately elevating its impact on the community (Table 6).



Figure 8: Community park near to residential
Source: Author

Table 6: Quality of the identified space towards specific typology

Space typology	Code	Type	Quality
Park	SF	Public	Daily activities
	SL	Open Space	Convenient landscape amenities Manmade settings Linked social space
	SD	Clustered	Low visibility Moderate accessibility

*) Specific typology code: SL=Space Layout; SD=Space Distribution; SF=Space Function

Source: Author

Identified space 7: Rooftop

Despite its utilitarian function, this rooftop holds significant potential due to its strategic location, which strongly aligns with the visual continuity of the town's environment. It could serve as a dynamic creative platform for the local community. The adjacent spaces, with their multiple functions, contribute to the vibrancy of the area (see Figure 9). Given its low accessibility, introducing art-led initiatives such as creative installations or a progressive cultural tour could help infuse vibrancy into the space, gradually transforming it into a more engaging and culturally rich environment (Table 7).



Figure 9: Rooftop at the market
Source: Author

Table 7: Quality of the identified space towards specific typology

Space typology	Code	Type	Quality
Rooftop	SF	Public	Communal event, Seasonal
	SL	Semi-Open	Dynamic visual relationship to surround old town
	SD	Clustered	High visibility Low accessibility

*) Specific typology code: SL=Space Layout; SD=Space Distribution; SF=Space Function

Specific typology-led special object setting

The identification of underused spaces within the historic district revealed how specific space types intersect with sociability attributes from placemaking, particularly in relation to their uses, linkages, activities, and cultural value. These spaces were then analysed through thematic emerging strategies based on placemaking principles. Drawing from the literature, it is clear that sociability, as an attribute of placemaking, plays a pivotal role in fostering regenerative strategies. Sociability is deeply interconnected with other placemaking attributes, including activities, images, and connections, which collectively inform the development of revitalization methods. While the distinctive typology of each space largely determines its potential and quality, the rising qualities of sociability within placemaking strategies can stimulate the reinvention of these spaces. The following provides a thematic examination of these emerging strategies and outlines their practical contributions to enhancing the space's functionality and relevance in the community.

Table 8: Thematic and Context analysis on underused spaces in historic mining district
(*) Specific typology code: SL=Space Layout; SD=Space Distribution; SF=Space Function

Placemaking attributes interconnected strategy with sociability and activities	Identified 7 underused spaces in historic mining district according to specific typology*)														
	Plaza			Inner court		Park	Playground		Intersection			Terminal		Roof top	
	S D	S L	S F	S F	S L	SF	SL	SF	S L	S D	S F	S L	SF	S L	S F
<i>Pride in historical and spiritual value</i>		√			√										
<i>Multi-ethnic diversity preservation</i>		√			√		√			√			√		
<i>Neighbourly community</i>					√		√			√					√
<i>Celebratory attraction/event</i>		√			√			√					√		√
<i>Indigenous properties and welcoming street life</i>		√			√		√			√					

Source: Author

The revitalization of historic districts through place-making strategies represents a significant intersection of urban planning, community development, and cultural heritage preservation. The findings from the analysis reveal a multifaceted approach that emphasizes the importance of sociability, space

typology, historical narratives, and the preservation of original characteristics in creating vibrant urban environments (Ja'afar & Harun, 2018). This discussion will synthesize these elements into a cohesive framework for understanding the revitalization process in historic districts.

Public spaces such as plazas and inner courts serve as vital arenas for social interaction, fostering community ties and a sense of belonging among residents. The table illustrates that space with all attributes from placemaking emerging strategies construct a higher quality. In this context of study, Inner court serves all the attributes of placemaking, however, its secluded location causes it to be wearisome. Compared to Plaza with its great typology of distribution and layout, even though lacking community engagement, the space appears vibrant and lively.

The work of Gehl (2010) adequately underscores the necessity of designing public spaces that encourage social engagement, which is essential for building resilient communities. By preserving the indigenous character of these spaces, urban planners can enhance their cultural significance, thereby reinforcing local identity. As exhibited in Table 8, the least associated thematic strategy assembles three (3) most underused spaces in a historic mining district, namely: Playground, Terminal and Rooftop. Their space quality and typology validating the underlying emerging strategy of placemaking did not cater to the poor visibility. This is particularly important in historic districts, where the character of the area is often closely tied to its cultural heritage (Ja'afar & Harun, 2018).

The analysis indicates that while certain areas, such as intersections, may lack specific revitalization strategies due to their limited spatial configurations, they still contribute to the overall identity of the district. Rosley et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of diverse uses in urban spaces, arguing that such diversity contributes to the vitality and character of neighbourhoods. The integration of small paths and connections to adjacent parks not only enhances the overall design but also fosters connectivity, which is crucial for urban vitality. Lynch's (1960) concept of legibility in urban design further supports this notion, as easily navigable spaces encourage exploration and interaction.

Incorporating dynamic features, such as historical storytelling, into the design of public spaces can significantly enrich user experiences. Wan Ismail et al. (2018) highlight the importance of place attachment and the narratives that shape our understanding of spaces. By embedding historical narratives into the design, urban planners can create environments that resonate with both residents and visitors, enhancing the cultural richness of the area. This approach not only educates the public about the history of the district but also fosters a deeper emotional connection to the space (Akbar & Edelenbos, 2020).

The potential for development in underutilized spaces, such as parks, playgrounds, terminals, and rooftops, is significant. These areas, while less frequented, can serve as vital components of the urban fabric. Carr et al. (1992) argue that parks and recreational spaces contribute to the quality of urban life and can be designed to reflect historical continuity. The visual connections between these spaces and the overall city atmosphere can enhance the urban experience, as noted by Whyte (1980). By revitalizing these spaces with thoughtful design and programming, planners can create inviting environments that encourage community engagement and recreational activities.

CONCLUSION

Sawahlunto, with its rich historical legacy, diverse identity, industrial aesthetics, and walkable environment, holds significant potential as a tourist destination. By leveraging the city's unique attributes and fostering special and thematic tourism, Sawahlunto can enhance its appeal and ensure the long-term sustainability of its tourism infrastructure. A strategic approach that incorporates sociability, distinctive activities, functional infrastructure, and a dynamic cultural and arts scene will be crucial in ensuring the preservation of the city's historical significance and maintaining its position as a vibrant and sustainable tourist hub. Furthermore, this study highlights the substantial potential of underutilized spaces, particularly those located in less frequented areas, which, if strategically developed, can be as valuable as more heavily trafficked spaces. The findings from this study emphasize the importance of integrating historical land use, cultural events, ethnic diversity, spiritual significance, and community engagement to effectively revitalize public spaces, particularly within historical contexts. This research demonstrates that sustainable urban development in historically significant mining districts can be achieved by focusing on the interconnectedness of placemaking, social interaction, and local activities. Theoretically, this study contributes to the placemaking discourse by emphasizing the need to address both tangible and intangible qualities of public spaces, particularly in historical areas. Practically, it underscores the importance of creating spaces that are not only functional but also socially engaging, thereby fostering community attachment and contributing to urban stability.

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