

Daftar Isi

Studi Metaforis Lingkungan "Sakral" Konsumerisme, Kasus Mal Panakkukang Makassar: Evaluasi Terhadap Paradigma Katedral Konsumsi	
Tommy Eisenring	1-8
The Role of International Environmental Norms in Promoting the Global Environmental Movement in the Post-Cold War Period	
Siti R. Susanto	9-17
Public Process of Designing City and Inquiry Paradigm Approach	
Dedes N. Gandarum	18-24
Upaya Menanamkan Ideologi Lingkungan pada Masyarakat di Wilayah Resapan Melalui Diseminasi Kultur Teknis Wanatani Kopi Menggunakan Media Hiburan Buku Cergam	
Ida Nurhaida.....	25-35
Konflik Industrial: Tarik-Ulur antara Kepentingan Negara, Pengusaha dan Buruh	
Sutinah.....	36-42
Aspek Finansial Pengembangan Pariwisata di Kawasan Taman Nasional	
M. Nurdin.....	43-49
Relasi Kekuasaan Suami dan Isteri Pada Masyarakat Nelayan	
Retno Andriati.....	50-58
Eksplorasi Simbol-Simbol Seksualitas Perempuan dalam Iklan Majalah Playboy Indonesia	
Moh. Jalal.....	59-65
"<i>Bukan Perempuan Biasa</i>" (Not Ordinary Women): The Identity Construction of Female Celebrity in Indonesian Media	
Rachmah Ida	66-76
Mengukur Probabilitas Keterlibatan Indonesia dalam Resolusi Konflik di Thailand Selatan	
B. L. S. W. Wardhani	77-84
The Progress of Theories on Democracy	
Ulla Fiona.....	85-92

Public Process of Designing City and Inquiry Paradigm Approach

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ABSTRACT

Design of a city is a result of the decisions and actions of many people which determine the future shape of cities. One major urban design issue has always been how to synthesize these many interests into meaningful physical form. In this context, the public process of designing cities is of high importance since a city represents an urban social (cultural) diversity. Public process of designing city does not start on the drawing board but starts with a commitment by people.

The most important single element in public process designing cities is the concept of urban self-image. This element represents the very real but intangible perceptions of people about the essential qualities of their city. To improve city design, this self-image must be explored, articulated, communicated and made the theme and focus for all development and revitalization activity. It is essential guide by which all change will be judged.

On the other hand, there is a need to create science based city, rather than merely commercial and economical considerations. Then the question is, how to explore and articulate the urban self image scientifically, which represent the factual urban social diversity, to develop the city design guidance. The main purpose of this paper is to discuss the inquiry option among the paradigms, such as positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism, for exploring and articulating the urban self image, as well as the role of design educational institution and architect (professional) in society.

Key words: *inquiry paradigm, public process, urban design, urban self image.*

Design of a city is a result of the decisions and actions of many people which determine the future shape of cities. One major urban design issue has always been how to synthesize these many interests into meaningful physical form. Therefore the focus here is on the public process of designing city. In the public process of designing city, the design of cities does not start on the drawing board but start with a commitment by people. In this context, the public process of designing cities is of high importance since a city represents an urban social or cultural diversity.

The most important single element in public process designing cities is the concept of urban self image. This element represents the very real but intangible perceptions of people about the essential qualities of their city. This image comes from cultural and historical antecedents. This image should represent urban social diversity or cultural diversity, which has actually become an important part of the urban identity. Cultural diversity can be seen as a

trademark that makes the city more attractive to international investments, tourism, etc. in a global economy. To improve city design, this self image must be explored, articulated, communicated and made the theme and focus for all development and revitalization activity. It is essential guide by which all change will be judged.

On the other hand, there is a need to create science based city, rather than merely commercial and economical considerations. So, the question is how to explore and articulate the urban self image scientifically, which represent the factual urban social diversity, to develop the essential city design guidance. Which inquiry paradigm could be the most suitable scientific approach for exploring and articulating the urban self image. The main purpose of this paper is to discuss the inquiry option among the paradigms, for exploring and articulating the urban self image, as well as the role of design educational institution and architect (professional) in society.

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Incorporating Urban Social (Cultural) Diversity into Urban Development Strategy

Today most people live in cities and larger urban areas. In other words, today cities constitute a mix of people, cultural and social life, and different important societal functions such as trade, investments, education, etc. Consequently, cities are the primary ‘destinations of globalization’ and it, especially in the cities that demand and supply with respect to know-how, investments, labor, cross- and intercultural communications, etc. have increased - across national borders.

In some of the world’s mega-cities, the diversity of cultures has actually become an important part of the urban identity. Cultural diversity can be seen as a trademark that makes the city more attractive to international investments, tourism, etc. Cultural diversity and mutual respect for cultural differences in cities has become an important trademark in a global economy.

In time of globalization and economization of all spheres of life, human beings feel the need to identify themselves. Cultural self awareness and conscious decision in favor of values which are not based on economic consideration are of great influential importance in the behavior of people within their habitat as well as on their individual perception of the quality of life. With this in mind, in 2002 the UNESCO approved a “universal declaration on cultural diversity”. This declaration reaffirms “That culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs” (Trialog, 2005).

At the same time, the city as a phenomenon is an excellent platform for integration in society. Contrary to society as an abstract phenomenon composed by general cultural and political norms, the city is very concrete, physical, and visible. You live in the city, meet people in different settings, hear and speak the language and are confronted with different ways of behavior all the time. In other words, everyday life in local urban areas encompasses the full range of day-to-day activities and the areas constitute meeting points for face-to-face contact and cultural exchange with other groups in society.

This highlights the importance of continuing the efforts to incorporate cultural diversity into urban policy and urban strategies, including city design. The question is how to incorporate cultural diversity into city design.

Public Process of Designing Cities

Who design our cities? Perhaps every one of us does. If people live, work, do business there or are active in civic affairs, chances they do, although they may never sit down at a drawing board. The design of cities is resulted from fluid, complex process of decision-making and opinion-making that spans many years and responds to a variety of incremental changes outside the professional designer’s purview. Everyday many people make decisions which contribute more to design the city than the efforts of most design professionals in city planning, landscape architecture and architecture (Thomas, 1984).

Urban design is a result of the decisions and actions of many people which determine the future shape of cities and their community. Many people, in fact, participate daily in shaping the city by virtue of their decisions, actions, and influences. The focus here is on the public process of designing

Table 1.
The Possible Urban Design Decision Makers (Thomas, 1984)

Public Sectors	Private Sector	Nonprofit Sector
Mayor	Developers	Neighborhood Organization
City Council	Bankers	Public Interest Groups
City Manager	Corporations	Development Corporations
City Agencies	Local Business	Preservation Groups
City Departments	Economic Consultants	Community Organization
Government Council	Engineering Consultants	Design Centers
State Agencies	Urban Design Consultants	Arts Organizations
Federal Programs	Architects	Service Organizations
	Landscape Architects	Foundations
	Interior Designers	Universities
	Communication Consultants	Environmental Organizations

city. Successful city design happens most frequently as an open public process, which includes a wide range of people who make decisions and take actions to determine the physical quality of the city or contribute to urban development. The design of cities does not start on the drawing board; it starts with a commitment by people. Public process of designing cities is a coordinating activity to integrate a concern for design quality into all of these processes which relate to urban and community development.

Urban Self Image

Perhaps the most important single element in public process of designing cities is the concept of urban self image. This element represents the very real but intangible perceptions of people about the essential qualities of their city. This self image is portrayed through the policies of city's leadership, communicated in the press and media, promoted by public interest groups, and most important exists in the consciousness of a city's public. This image comes from cultural and historical antecedents that go deeper than local boosters (Thomas, 1984). This image should represent urban social diversity or cultural diversity, which has actually become an important part of the urban identity and can be seen as a trademark that makes the city more attractive to international investments, tourism, etc. in a global economy.

To improve city design, this self image must be explored, articulate, communicated and made the theme and focus for all development and revitalization activity. It is essential guide by which all change will be judged (Thomas, 1984).

The first step in public process of designing city is harnessing the commitment and self image needed to go forward (because development and revitalization should grow from a recognized, positive self image of the city at large). This is one way citizens can contribute to the design of the cities.

The Image of the Environment and Building the Image

At every instant, there is more than the eye can see, more than ear can hear, a setting or a view waiting to be explored. Nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to its surroundings, the sequences of events leading up to it, the memory of past experiences. Every citizen has had long associations with some part of his city, and his image is soaked

in memories and meanings (Lynch, 1960). We must consider not just the city as a thing in itself, but the city being perceived (and perhaps enjoyed) by its inhabitants, by million of people of widely diverse class and character.

Image is the product both of immediate sensation and the memory of past experience, and it is used to interpret information and to guide action. The need to recognize and pattern our surroundings is so crucial, and has such long roots in the past, that this image has wide practical and emotional importance to the individual (Lynch, 1960).

A good environmental image gives its possessor an important sense of emotional security. He can establish a harmonious relationship between himself and the outside world. A distinctive and legible environment not only offers security but also heightens the potential depth and intensity of human experience. Potentially, the city is in itself the powerful symbol of a complex society. If visually well set forth, it can also have strong expressive meaning. The observer himself should play an active role in perceiving the world and have a creative part in developing his image. He should have the power to change that image to fit changing needs (Lynch, 1960). Environmental images are the result of a two-way process between the observer and his environment. The environment suggests distinctions and relations, and the observer –with great adaptability and in the light of his own purpose–selects, organizes, and endows with meaning what he sees. The image of a given reality may vary significantly between different observers.

In context of creating knowledge based city, which also means research based or science based city design, the question is how to explore and articulate the urban self image scientifically, which represent the factual urban social diversity.

Urban Self Image Inquiry Approach

Inquiry Paradigm

Research is careful, systematic, patient study and investigation of information in some field of knowledge undertaken to establish facts or principles. The facts discovered by research are never absolute certainties. They are at best, statements of probabilities for certain effects, given certain situations.

Where there are complex operations to be performed or a large body of information to be presented, the use of models often proves useful.

Models or paradigms provide a way of understanding information or operations and their relationships and so also serve as means for organizing and presenting ideas about both.

There are many paradigms that we use in guiding our actions. Our concern here, however, is with those paradigms that guide disciplined inquiry. All these paradigms can be characterized by the way they respond to three basic questions, which can be characterized as the ontological, the epistemological, and the methodological questions (Guba, 1990). The questions are: 1) Ontological: What is the nature of the “knowable”? Or, what is the nature of “reality”, 2) Epistemological: What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)? 3) Methodological: How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?

The answers that are given to these questions may be termed, as sets, the basic belief systems or paradigms that might be adopted. They are the starting points or givens that determine what inquiry is and how it is to be practiced.

This paper is about options for inquiry: option among the paradigms –basic belief systems–namely: conventional positivism and the other three paradigms, which have emerged as successor to conventional positivism (post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism).

Exploring Urban Self Image Based on Positivism

The phrases “how things really are” and “how things really work” are ontological matters. The basic belief system of positivism is rooted in a realist ontology, that is, the belief that there exists a reality out there, driven by immutable natural laws. The business of science is to discover the “true” nature reality and how it “truly” works. Knowledge of these entities, laws, and mechanisms is conventionally summarized in the form of time and context or value free generalizations. Some of these latter generalizations take the form of cause-effect laws. The ultimate aim of science is to predict and control natural phenomena (Guba, 1990).

Once committed to realist ontology, the positivist is constrained to practice an objectivist epistemology. If there is a real world operating according to natural laws, then the inquirer must behave in ways that put questions directly to nature and allow nature to answer back directly. That can be done through the use of a manipulative methodology and empirical methods that place the point of decision with nature

rather than with the inquirer (value free). The most appropriate methodology is thus empirical experimentalism (Guba, 1990).

In the context of public process of designing city, where exploring and articulating urban self image are of high importance, positivism believes that although each individual creates and bears his own image, there seems to be substantial agreement among members of the same group (group images, which exhibiting consensus among significant numbers). This group image interest city planners who aspire to model an environment that will be used by many people. The first order of business will be what might be called the “public images”, the common mental pictures carried by large numbers of a city’s inhabitants.

The question is, is there really one objective (value free) public image, the common mental pictures carried by large numbers of a city’s inhabitants, which might be expected to appear in the interaction of a single physical reality, a common culture, and a basic physiological nature. Could this public image be predicted and controlled?

Exploring Urban Self Image Based on Post-positivism

Post-positivism is best characterized as a modified version of positivism. Prediction and control continue to be the aim. Ontologically, post-positivism believes in critical realism, which means that although a real world driven by real natural causes exists, it is impossible for humans truly to perceive it with their imperfect sensory and intellectual mechanisms. Inquirers need to be critical about their works precisely because of those human frailties. But, although one can never be sure that ultimate truth has been uncovered, there can be no doubt that reality is “out there”. Realism remains the central concept (Guba, 1990)

Epistemologically, post-positivism recognizes the absurdity of assuming that it is possible for human inquirer to step outside the pale of humanness while conducting inquiry. Work in the sciences has aptly demonstrated that “findings” emerge from the interaction of inquirer and inquired into. To overcome these problems, post-positivists counsel a modified objectivity, hewing to objectivity as a “regulatory ideal” but recognizing that it cannot be achieved in any absolute sense. It can be achieved reasonably closely, by striving to be as neutral as possible; by “coming clean” about one’s own predispositions so that the reader can make whatever adjustments to

the proffered interpretations of findings that seems appropriate; by relying on “critical tradition”, that is, requiring the reports of any inquiry to be consistent with the existing scholarly tradition of the field; and by subjecting every inquiry to the judgment of peers in the “critical community”, that is, the editors and referees of journals as well as the readers (Guba, 1990).

Methodologically, post-positivism provides two responses to emergent challenges. First, in the interest of conforming to the commitment to critical realism and modified subjectivity, emphasis is placed on critical multiplicity, which might most usefully be thought of as a form of elaborated triangulation. If human sensory and intellectual mechanisms can not be relied upon, it is essential that the finding of an inquiry be based on as many sources -of data, investigators, theories, and methods- as possible. Further, if objectivity can never be entirely attained, relying on many different sources makes less likely that distorted interpretations will be made (Guba, 1990).

Second, and perhaps more important, post-positivism recognizes that many imbalances have been allowed to emerge in the zeal for achieving realistic, objective inquiry. A major part of the post-positivist agenda has been devoted to identifying these imbalances and proposing ways of redressing them. Post-positivism redress imbalances by doing inquiry in more natural setting, using more qualitative methods, depending more on grounded theory, and reintroducing discovery into the inquiry process (Guba, 1990).

If post-positivism believes that findings emerge from the interaction of inquirer and inquired in to, so the question is, who holds the most important role as inquirer or interpreter in exploring and articulating urban self image in public process of designing city. Could professional designer and educational institution (universities), who are in public process of designing city just one voice in a crowd of various city design decision makers, hold the role as inquirer?

Further, relying on many different sources makes less likely that distorted interpretations will be made, then the question is who and what should be the reliable sources?

Exploring Urban Self Image Based on Critical Theory

A more appropriate label for critical theory would

be “ideologically oriented inquiry”, including neo-marxism, materialism, feminism, freireism, participatory inquiry, and other similar movements as well as critical theory itself. These perspectives are properly placed together, however, because they converge in rejecting the claim of value freedom made by positivists (and largely continuing to be made by post-positivists) (Guba, 1990).

Because they are human constructions, paradigms inevitably reflect the values of their human constructors. They enter into inquiry at choice points such as the problem selected for study, the paradigm within which to study it, the instruments and the analytic modes used, and the interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations made. Nature cannot be seen as it “really is” or “really works” except through a value window (Guba, 1990).

Critical theorist (ideologists) have elected to believe in an objective reality – as the phrase commonly used by them, “false consciousness” some where “out there”, or, more likely, possessed by the inquirer or some better-informed elite. The task of inquiry is, by definition, to raise people (the oppressed) to a level of “true consciousness”. Once they appreciate how oppressed they are, they can act to transform the world. The close parallel between transforming the world and predicting and controlling it should not be lost (Guba, 1990)

Thus, there appears to be a logical disjunction: a critical realist ontology coupled with a subjectivists epistemology. Subjectivists because inquiry acts are intimately related to the values of the inquirer (Guba, 1990)

If the aim of inquiry is to transform the (real) world by raising the consciousness of participants so that they are energized and facilitated toward transformation, then something other than a manipulative, interventionist methodology is required. Critical theorist (ideologists) takes a dialogic approach that seeks to eliminate false consciousness and rally participants around a common (true?) point of view. In this process, features of the real world are apprehended and judgments are made about which of them can be altered. The result of effective, concerted action is transformation (Guba, 1990)

If values do enter into every inquiry, then the question immediately arises as to what values and whose values shall govern. Could it be the value of professional designers or educational institution (university), and based on what reason? If the findings of studies can vary depending on the values chosen, then the choice of a particular value system

tends to empower and enfranchise certain persons while disempowering and disenfranchising others. Inquiry thereby becomes a political act.

Exploring Urban Self Image Based on of Constructivism

It is my belief that proponents of both the post-positivist and the critical theory (ideological) paradigms feel that there can be an accommodation between their positions and, indeed, with conventional positivism. Constructivists, on the other hand, feel that the positivist (and post-positivist) paradigms are badly flawed and must be entirely replaced. Constructivists feel that an entirely new paradigm is needed.

Ontologically, if there are always many interpretations that can be made in any inquiry, and if there is no foundational process by which the ultimate truth or falsity of these several constructions can be determined, there is no alternative but to take a position of relativism. Relativism is the key to openness and the continuing search for ever more informed and sophisticated constructions. Realities are multiple and they exist in people's minds.

Epistemologically, the constructivist chooses to take a subjectivist position. Subjectivity is not only forced on us by the human condition (as the post-positivists might admit) but because it is the only means of unlocking the constructions held by individuals. If realities exist only in respondents' minds, subjective interaction seems to be the only way to access them.

Methodologically, the constructivist proceeds in ways that aim to identify the variety of constructions that exist and bring them into as much consensus as possible. This process has two aspects: hermeneutic and dialectics. The hermeneutic aspects consists in depicting individual constructions as accurately as possible, while the dialectic aspect consists of comparing and contrasting these existing individual (including the inquirer's) constructions so that each respondent must confront the constructions of others and come to terms with them. The hermeneutic/dialectic methodology aims to produce as informed and sophisticated a construction (or more likely, constructions) as possible. Simultaneously the methodology aims to keep channels of communication open so that information and sophistication can be continuously improved. Constructivism thus intends neither to predict nor control the 'real' world nor to transform it but to reconstruct the world at the only

point at which it exists: in the minds of constructors. It is the mind that is to be transformed, not the real world.

May this paradigm be the most appropriate approach in exploring and articulating urban self image representing urban social/cultural diversity in public process of designing city? Inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single (monistic) entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two. Hermeneutic, dialectic individual constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically, and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one (or a few) constructions on which there is substantial consensus.

Conclusion

Models or paradigms provide a way of understanding information or operations and their relationships and so also serve as means for organizing and presenting ideas about both. There are many paradigms that we use in guiding our actions, namely conventional positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism.

In designing science based city, there are five important questions should be answered. First, based on which paradigm should science based city be developed? Second, is there any paradigm, which is considered to be the most appropriate one? Three, is it possible, that none of those four (positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism) is the paradigm of choice, because each is an alternative that deserve, on its merit, to be considered? Four, could it be, that we need a new paradigm, that will not be a closer approximation to truth, it will simply be more informed and sophisticated than those four paradigms? Rich (1979) said that there is no "the truth" nor "a truth". Truth is not one thing or even a system. It is an increasing complexity. Knowledge is socially constituted, historically embedded, and valuationally based. Five, could it be that cities, because of their natural design/development process, are the real knowledge cities?

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