

Public Space Semiotics: Reading Visual Language in City Park Design

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Abstract

This research explores the semiotic dimensions of public space, specifically focusing on visual language in urban park design. The main aim of this research is to understand how visual elements in city parks can be interpreted as signs that create meaning in the context of public space. This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. The results of this research reveal that urban park designs that utilize a semiotic approach in analyzing design elements can create spatial experiences that are rich in meaning for visitors. The use of local and traditional symbols, plants native to the region, as well as modern or innovative architectural elements provide an additional dimension that goes beyond the purely physical aspects. Design that accommodates community diversity, pays attention to functionality, and shows concern for environmental sustainability creates public spaces that are inclusive and relevant to community needs. Thus, a semiotic approach not only helps understand the meaning behind urban park design, but also becomes a valuable guide for designing open spaces that are more meaningful and closely connected to the values and cultural identity of local communities.

Keywords: *Semiotics, Public Space, Visual Language, City Park Design.*



A. INTRODUCTION

Urban landscape design represents a holistic approach in designing cities that aims to have a positive impact on the lives of its residents by providing a livable environment (Nur'aini et al., 2018). By considering aspects such as aesthetics, sustainability and social function, urban landscape design aims to create a harmonious balance between natural elements and urban infrastructure (Sekarlangit, 2019).

One real manifestation of urban landscape design is through the existence of city parks. City parks are not just an addition of greenery in a dense city, but are also open spaces that embrace various activities and social interactions (Joga & Antar, 2007). By providing places for recreation, community activities and relaxation, urban parks become focal points for meeting the physical and psychological needs of urban residents (Mali et al., 2021).

City landscapes, through city parks and other design elements, have an important role in creating a unique city identity and building a sense of togetherness among its citizens (Pramono, 2010). Appropriate design not only improves the quality of life of residents, but can also create emotional bonds between individuals and the surrounding environment (Muspriyono & Muktiono, 2023).

In the era of ever-growing urbanization, urban landscape design is becoming increasingly crucial for creating friendly, sustainable and attractive cities (Widjaja, 2023). Through careful planning and a deep understanding of community needs,

urban landscape design can be a catalyst for positive transformation, creating cities that are not only functionally efficient but also meet the aesthetic and welfare needs of their people (Purwanti, 2022).

City parks play a crucial role in generating a diversity of activities and providing alternative recreation for urban residents (Ayu, 2019). As one of the main facilities provided by the city government, city parks are not just green open spaces, but are also multifunctional containers that facilitate various activities for urban communities (Aminah, 2015). By providing areas for exercising, gathering with family, or simply relaxing with a leisurely walk, city parks become centers of activity that balance the fast-paced rhythm of life in the city (Purwanto, 2014).

Apart from that, city parks also create space for various social and cultural activities. Holding community events, art exhibitions, music concerts or festivals in city parks not only provides entertainment, but also enriches the social life of urban communities. In this way, city parks become inclusive places, bringing together various levels of society in a diversity of activities that can be enjoyed together (Kusumawanto & Astuti, 2018).

In addition to direct benefits for residents, city parks also contribute to improving the quality of the urban environment. As the lungs of the city, these parks play a role in providing oxygen, balancing temperatures, and creating micro ecosystems that support biodiversity (Imansari & Khadiyanta, 2015). Therefore, investment in developing and maintaining city parks is not only an investment in community welfare, but also an investment in sustainable development and better environmental quality (Setiadi et al, 2018).

Urban garden design involves a creative process that is much deeper than simply creating visual beauty. Apart from paying attention to aesthetics that are pleasing to the eye, city park designers also act as visual narrators who bring meaning and stories into every corner of the open space (Mahardi, 2019). The use of local symbols is a key element in infusing local cultural and historical values into the design (Savitri & Sumardiyanto, 2021). For example, the selection of endemic plants or art installations depicting local wisdom can be signs that celebrate a city's identity and present an element of togetherness.

Apart from that, the placement of architectural elements such as bridges, pavilions, or the layout of pedestrian paths also forms a visual narrative. Each of these elements is not only structural, but also carries messages about certain functions and significance in a social and cultural context (Noviana & Hidayati, 2020). In addition, the play of color and texture creates an additional dimension in the interpretation of meaning. The choice of warm colors can bring a sense of warmth and togetherness, while various textures can provide a feel of natural life enriched with various sensory experiences (Masruroh et al, 2015).

In this context, this research attempts to answer key questions: How can the visual language in urban park design be interpreted through a semiotic lens? What particular meanings can be identified in the design elements of urban gardens? Through a semiotic analysis approach, this research hopes to contribute to theoretical

understanding of how visual signs can form meaning in the context of public space. In addition, this research has significant practical implications in helping urban designers and public space developers create more meaningful and attractive environments for their residents.

B. METHOD

This research focuses on a descriptive-qualitative approach, where the researcher analyzes the thinking process inductively and understands the dynamics of the relationship between the observed phenomena. The qualitative approach emphasizes exploring hidden meanings behind reality, and descriptive methods are used to provide systematic, factual and accurate descriptions of the phenomena investigated (Moleong, 2014). Data collection in this research involved primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was obtained from the informants involved and related documentation, while secondary data came from sources such as books, journals and other related research. The data analysis technique used is descriptive analysis, where data obtained from various sources is processed and described in detail. This analysis involves information from various sources, including literature, interviews, and field data, which is ultimately used to formulate conclusions (Sugiyono 2011).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Semiotic Interpretation of the Visual Language of City Park Design

Understanding visual language in urban park design through a semiotic lens involves analyzing the signs or symbols contained in design elements. Semiotics is the study of signs and their meanings, and in the context of urban garden design, these signs include various elements such as shape, color, texture, symbols, and layout.

The architectural forms presented in urban park design form a visual language that enriches the meaning and experience for visitors. For example, the presence of a curved bridge can be interpreted as more than just a physical structure connecting two points. In a semiotic context, a curved bridge can be a symbol of harmony, implying unity and connection between two parts that may have different roles or meanings. This design not only contains a practical function as a physical connector, but also conveys a symbolic message about integration and solidarity in the context of public space (Sutanto, 2020).

On the other hand, a well-structured layout within a city park creates a pattern of signs that guide visitors in interpreting and experiencing the space. A well-organized arrangement can provide visual clues to a particular direction, function, or even meaning that the designer intended. For example, a series of sculptures or architectural elements placed in a particular order can form a visual narrative, creating a walking experience that contains a particular story or theme. Thus, urban park design not only creates a physical structure, but also designs a visual narrative that can be interpreted by visitors to provide a deeper experience in their interactions with the space.

The use of color in urban park design opens up rich expressive dimensions, allowing visitors to experience certain atmospheres and emotions. Bright colors, such as red or yellow, may be interpreted as symbols of joy, vitality, or positive energy. When applied wisely, these colors can enhance the carefree atmosphere of urban parks and provide an uplifting experience for visitors. In contrast, soft colors such as pale green or light blue can express calm and peace, creating an atmosphere suitable for relaxation and reflection. The choice of color palette in urban park design can provide additional meaning that penetrates the psychology of visitors, creating deeper interactions with the space (Arifrahara, 2021).

Plant textures and hardscape materials are also important elements in the semiotics of urban garden design. Plants with soft leaves or colorful flowers can create a natural feel, emphasizing the connection to the natural ecosystem. On the other hand, hardscape materials such as natural stone or metal may provide a sense of modernity or structural beauty. Through this texture, urban garden design can convey messages about humans' relationship with nature or reflect contemporary values in urban aesthetics. By understanding the semiotic language of color and texture, urban garden designers can create rich and meaningful visual experiences for visitors, providing a unique atmosphere that meets a variety of needs and preferences.

The use of local symbols in urban park design adds an important dimension to the visitor experience, creating spaces that celebrate and embrace local cultural identity and history. Traditional fine art motifs applied to design elements, such as buildings or statues, become visual signs that honor the region's artistic heritage and traditional skills. In addition, the integration of flora and fauna that is unique to the local area, whether in the form of ornamental plants or animal statues, may be interpreted as an effort to maintain biodiversity and respect the local ecosystem. All of this creates an urban park design that is not only visually unique but also functions as a visual narrative about history and culture, offering visitors an immersive and engaging experience (Nuraryo, 2018).

Semiotics, as an analytical tool, plays a key role in unlocking the meaning behind these local symbols. By understanding the cultural and historical context in which these symbols appear, semiotics helps researchers and designers to interpret how users of public spaces respond to and interpret these design elements. Whether they are a tribute to cultural heritage or a call to preserve the natural environment, these symbols give identity to urban parks, creating places that are more than just physical spaces but also a reflection of the values and stories cherished by the local community.

Through a semiotic lens, visitors' reactions and interactions with design elements in city parks become important in reading the meaning and significance contained therein. For example, a positive response to a particular statue can be interpreted as appreciation for the artistic value or symbolic meaning contained in the work of art. On the other hand, if visitors take photos at certain locations, this can be considered an attempt to record certain moments that are considered important or interesting. This action is not only a visual documentation activity, but also a form of

visitor interaction with design elements that encourages them to actively participate in the process of creating a spatial experience.

Apart from that, the way visitors move through the garden space can also be interpreted as a semiotic step in reading and absorbing the meaning of the design. Movement patterns, whether explorative, reflective, or social, create semiotic traces that reflect how urban parks are interpreted and experienced by visitors. For example, if visitors move in an organized manner or follow a specific path, this can be interpreted as a response to a well-structured layout, reflecting an understanding and appreciation of the existing design. Semiotics helps unravel the complexity of these interactions, providing insight into the meaning created by each visitor's steps and gestures, and in doing so, makes a significant contribution to the understanding of urban park design as a dynamic, interacting public space.

2. Specific Meanings that Can Be Identified in Urban Park Design Elements

The specific meanings of urban garden design elements can vary depending on the cultural context, history, and purpose of the design. Some meanings that may be identified through semiotic analysis or visitor interpretation include:

a. Cultural Symbolism

The integration of local or traditional symbols in urban park design has an important impact in building and maintaining the cultural identity and history of a community. For example, the presence of statues or fine art motifs that reflect cultural heritage can be interpreted as a form of respect for traditional values and the sustainability of that heritage. This design is not only a physical manifestation of local history, but also a visual narrative that celebrates history and enriches the spatial experience for visitors. Efforts to include elements that reflect local identity in urban park design are not only an artistic expression, but also a positive contribution to preserving and strengthening the cultural ties of local communities. Thus, urban park design is not only a physical place but also a medium that is able to voice and embody cultural heritage values which are an integral part of people's lives.

b. Relationship with Nature

The use of native plants or natural materials in urban garden design not only creates visual beauty, but also carries a deep meaning about connection with nature and environmental sustainability. When plants that grow naturally in the local area are integrated into the design, it provides a more authentic experience and strengthens the sense of identity with the surrounding environment. More than just a decorative element, the use of native plants reflects concern for the local ecosystem and contributes to the preservation of biodiversity. Urban park designs that prioritize sustainability create a nature-friendly environment, provide a strong message about collective responsibility for nature, and encourage awareness of the importance of conserving natural resources for ecosystem balance. Thus, this design not only creates an aesthetic green space, but also becomes a concrete manifestation of efforts to preserve and respect natural beauty and build a harmonious relationship between humans and the environment.

c. Functionality and Utility

A well-structured layout in urban garden design creates a strong meaning regarding the functionality and utility of the space. When pedestrian routes are clearly laid out and recreation areas are conveniently arranged, the message of attention to the visitor experience is felt most strongly. A design that pays attention to functionality conveys the impression that the city park was designed taking into account the practical needs and recreational activities of the community. Directed routes and convenient areas not only make navigation easier, but also create a user-friendly environment, inviting visitors to explore, interact and enjoy the various facilities comfortably. Thus, urban park design that thinks about functionality and utility not only creates efficient open spaces, but also reflects a deep concern for user well-being and satisfaction, establishing urban parks as places that are not only aesthetic, but also practical and friendly for the community.

d. Modernity or Innovation

The use of modern or innovative architectural elements in urban park design can be an important marker that reflects the meaning of contemporary, progress and innovation in the urban context. Contemporary art installations or unique building structures not only attract attention, but also convey a message about the contemporary spirit and enthusiasm for the development of modern architecture. The urban park design that adopts these innovative elements creates a dynamic and challenging space, stimulates visitors' imaginations, and creates an atmosphere full of creativity. In addition, the presence of modern architectural elements can be a symbolic representation of the aspirations and innovative spirit of the local community, providing a deeper meaning of the determination to remain relevant and advance with the times. Thus, urban park designs that incorporate modern architectural elements are not only a manifestation of sophisticated aesthetics, but also an embodiment of the contemporary spirit and determination to achieve sustainable progress.

e. Diversity and Inclusivity

City park designs that take into account the diversity of visitors carry significant meaning regarding inclusivity and social justice in public spaces. When city parks are designed to accommodate a diversity of ages, physical needs, and social backgrounds, it creates a strong message of accessibility and acceptance for all members of society. By providing facilities that are accessible to a variety of groups, such as child-friendly play areas, wheelchair-friendly walkways, or inclusive recreation spaces, the design embraces diversity and strengthens social ties within the community. This inclusive design creates a space that is not only welcoming to all, but also reflects a determination to build an equal and just society. Therefore, urban parks that prioritize inclusivity are not only a form of equality, but also as a concrete step towards social justice, creating shared spaces that value and celebrate diversity as an asset that enriches shared experiences.

Semiotic analysis becomes an essential tool in uncovering layers of meaning and revealing the complexity of urban park design elements and the dynamics of their

interactions. By utilizing a semiotic framework, researchers and designers can explore the signs and symbols contained in every aspect of design, from architectural structures to color and texture choices. This analysis helps identify the cultural context, values, and narratives contained within these elements, providing a deep understanding of how visitors are likely to interpret and experience the space. Additionally, semiotic analysis paves the way for understanding the complex interactions between elements, revealing how the combination of these elements creates unique and diverse spatial experiences. Thus, a semiotic approach not only presents symbolic interpretations, but also opens up space for designing urban park designs that are more informed, closely related to visitor experiences, and respond to changing cultural dynamics.

D. CONCLUSION

Urban park design not only functions as a physical space creator, but also as a visual narrative that brings meaning and deep experiences to visitors. The use of semiotics in analyzing design elements, such as architectural form, color, texture and local symbols, provides rich insight into how each aspect can be interpreted and perceived by society. Design that takes into account the diversity of visitors, utilizes modern or traditional elements, and adapts to the needs and comfort of the community, creates urban parks as inclusive spaces that represent the values of social justice and cultural diversity. Semiotic analysis becomes an important tool in uncovering the meaning contained in urban park design, investigating complex interactions between elements, and helping to create dynamic, diverse, and responsive spatial experiences to cultural changes and community needs. In this way, semiotic-informed city park designs are not only works of visual art, but also become a reflection of cultural identity, social values, and hopes for the future of the community.

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