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Contextual Architecture in Heritage Areas: The Case of Tanatap Heritage Braga

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ABSTRACT

Contextual architecture often focuses only on adjusting physical building elements. However, non-physical aspects such as collective memory, spatial atmosphere, and social interaction play an equally crucial role, especially when designing within historical districts. Nevertheless, research on applying non-physical contextual elements to commercial buildings in heritage areas remains limited. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the application of non-physical contextual architecture at Tanatap Coffee in the historic Braga area, Bandung. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach consisting of three main sequential stages. First, the researchers gathered and filtered data from social media platforms to map the initial public perception. Second, the researchers distributed structured questionnaires to visitors to measure their direct spatial experiences. Third, the researchers performed field validation through direct observation of user activities at the physical location. The results indicate that Tanatap Coffee successfully creates a strong sense of place that resonates with Braga's historical narrative. The design achieves this connection through spatial atmospheric manipulation and effective social circulation patterns, despite having a contrasting physical form compared to surrounding buildings. In conclusion, integrating non-physical contextualism into commercial development in heritage zones is essential. This approach preserves the historical character of the district while accommodating contemporary lifestyle functions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Jalan Braga in Bandung City is a significant colonial urban legacy and social-economic hub since the early 20th century. Dominated by Art Deco architecture, this heritage corridor creates a strong visual identity and city imageability (Lynch, 1960). The area is legally protected by Law No. 11 of 2010 on Cultural Heritage, local regulations, and the Jalan Braga Building and Environmental Management Plan (RTBL). However, heritage encompasses more than physical aspects; the 2003 UNESCO Convention includes intangible elements like social practices and collective memories (UNESCO, 2003). Furthermore, Place Theory (Norberg-Schulz, 1980) emphasizes that a meaningful "place" requires human experiences (*genius loci*), making social value crucial for injecting vitality into urban spaces.

Despite its importance, adaptive reuse in heritage corridors frequently overlooks non-physical elements. Previous Southeast Asian studies on architectural contextualism mostly focus on visual harmony, rarely intersecting social value with modern commercial design. In this study, "contextual architecture" is strictly defined as a building's ability to respond to both its physical historical surroundings and the contemporary social needs of its users. Currently, conservation practices are trapped between rigid preservation and commercial demands, heavily relying on formal-visual imitation like facade copying. While aiming for visual harmony, this approach risks rendering spaces socially dead by failing to accommodate active public life (Gehl, 2011).

Amidst the tension between physical preservation and commercial activation, Tanatap Heritage Braga emerges as a unique architectural phenomenon. Recently established in this historic corridor, it challenges conventional contextualism by implementing a brutalist-tropical style that contrasts sharply with surrounding Art Deco facades. Selected as a single case study, Tanatap Heritage Braga presents a scientifically unique condition: it deliberately breaks visual rules yet successfully revitalizes public space. The building generates high social vitality, measured in this study through user presence, duration of stay, and social interaction intensity. This aligns with the Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS, 1994), which argues that authenticity relies heavily on cultural context, function, and spatial spirit, rather than absolute material integrity.

A noticeable gap persists in evaluating non-physical contexts in heritage areas. This research introduces "new contextualism," shifting the architectural paradigm from strict formal imitation toward socio-performative integration. Clear parameters do not yet exist to assess if a visually contrasting building is "contextual" when it successfully revives social value. To address this, the study asks one main research question: How does Tanatap Heritage Braga build contextual authenticity through the interactions and social experiences of its users to revive the vitality of the cultural heritage corridor?. Employing a mixed-methods approach integrating digital data analysis, questionnaires, and behavioral observations this study aims to redefine contextual architecture parameters, ensuring evaluations measure both facade aesthetics and social performance in sustaining past narratives.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Heritage and Adaptive Reuse: Value Transformation

The paradigm of heritage conservation no longer views historic buildings as static artifacts frozen in time. Through adaptive reuse practices, designers provide old buildings with new functions that suit contemporary needs. Adaptive reuse is increasingly recognized as a holistic strategy that balances environmental, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability (Misırlısoy & Günce, 2016). This practice is not merely physical preservation. Instead, it is a process of

value transformation. This process converts passive historical value into active economic and social values as an urban catalyst without erasing the historical narrative of the building. The integration of circular economy principles in adaptive reuse further minimizes environmental impacts while sustaining local economic development (Foster, 2020). Furthermore, prioritizing underutilized historical assets requires performance-based frameworks that evaluate building adaptability (Aigwi et al., 2020). To ground this concept empirically, similar studies in Southeast Asia such as the revitalization of colonial buildings in Bandung (Kurniawan et al., 2020) or adaptive reuse of heritage shophouses in Penang, Malaysia demonstrate how modern economic functions successfully activate abandoned historical structures while maintaining their core identity.

2.2. Intangible Heritage and Social Value

According to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003), the meaning of heritage areas now extends beyond physical elements. It encompasses the expressions, practices, and collective memories of the community. (Mason, 2002) reinforces this by categorizing heritage dimensions into historical, aesthetic, economic, and social values. Specifically, the Social Value Framework by (English Heritage, 2008) highlights that social value represents the collective attachment and contemporary meaning generated by a community. Modern evaluations emphasize that assessing the social value of adaptive reuse projects directly correlates with community attachment and resilience in historic urban areas (Carmona et al., 2010). In this regard, social value serves as a vital pillar that shapes the spirit of a place, or *genius loci* (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). The Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS, 1994) also confirms that authenticity does not stem solely from material integrity. Instead, it arises from function, use, spirit, and feeling. Therefore, the preservation of social experiences holds equal importance to physical preservation.

2.3. Contextualism in Architecture

The concept of contextualism originally emerged in the 1970s through figures like Scolari and Ungers as a critique against the anti-historical approach of modernism. However, in design interventions within historic districts, designers often reduce the contextual approach to physical harmony alone, which limits the holistic potential of heritage adaptation and adaptive reuse (Plevoets & Cleempoel, 2019). This reduction creates the phenomenon of formal mimicry, which is the imitation of surrounding facades, proportions, or materials for visual uniformity. Scholars like Brolin in *Architecture in Context* strictly differentiate this visual contextualism from deeper cultural contextualism. Comprehensive contextualism demands a response to non-physical aspects. A contextual building must dialogue with social activities, local culture, and surrounding spatial dynamics to successfully integrate into the urban public space (Carmona, 2021), regardless of whether its physical form is harmonious or contrasting, as acknowledged in (ICOMOS, 1994) and English Heritage guidelines. For example, highly contrasting contemporary additions, like the Louvre Pyramid in Paris, prove that a contrast approach can succeed socially if it respects the public function and cultural scale, functioning as a vital node that accommodates human behavioral patterns and anchors the community (Askarizad & Safari, 2020).

2.4. Urban Vitality: From Physical Space to Experience

The success of architectural design in heritage areas is not measured solely by visual aesthetics. If preservation is too rigid, heritage areas often suffer from museumification or become frozen heritage, where districts lose their daily social relevance and fail to contribute to the subjective well-being of the community (Mouratidis, 2021a). Instead, success also

depends on the intensity of life between buildings (Gehl, 2011). To measure this objectively, (Gehl, 2010) in *Cities for People* outlines 12 quality criteria focused on human-scale protection, comfort, and enjoyment. Today, urban vitality indicates a shift in focus from merely providing physical space to creating spatial experiences, which strongly aligns with the concept of placemaking in contemporary urban design (Carmona, 2021). Vital urban spaces possess high porosity, encourage active participation, extend visitor duration, and facilitate natural social interactions, ultimately driving the socio-economic vibrancy of the area (Zeng et al., 2018).

2.5. Digital Urbanism: A New Layer of Space Production

Currently, space production does not occur only in the physical world. As (Lefebvre, 1991) argues in *The Production of Space*, space is continuously produced by society. Today, this socio-spatial production overlaps with digital reality, creating a phenomenon of digital urbanism where physical and virtual environments co-constitute one another. Social media acts as a spatial trigger, where the dissemination of architectural imagery and spatial experiences on digital platforms can actively reassemble urban geography and spark real-world mass movement (Boy & Uitermark, 2017). However, critics question whether this Instagram-driven tourism creates true vitality or merely a temporary spectacle, echoing the early concerns of (Debord, 1967) regarding visual consumption over authentic engagement (Dinhopl & Gretzel, 2016). Despite these critiques, this digital layer undeniably acts as a new infrastructure in shaping social spaces. Consequently, it changes how the current generation discovers, perceives, and uses spaces within cultural heritage areas. In the context of Tanatap Heritage Braga, this digital mechanism plays a critical role; the building uses its contrasting architecture to create a highly mediatized digital spectacle, which successfully drives physical foot traffic and ultimately revives the social vitality of the heritage corridor by functioning as a new urban aesthetic experience (Degen & Rose, 2022).

3. METHODOLOGY

The location of this study is in the commercial and public corridor of Jalan Braga, Sumur Bandung District, Bandung City, West Java. Specifically, the spatial focus of this research centers on the cultural heritage area and a selected contemporary commercial building (Tanatap Heritage Braga) within the corridor.

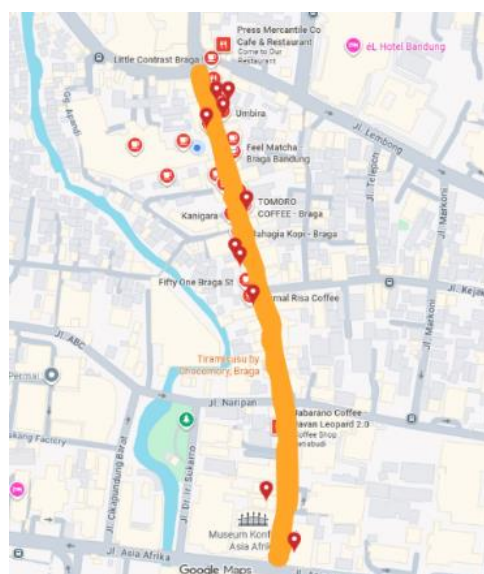


Figure 1. Braga's Corridor
Source: Google Maps edited, 2026

The method used in this study is a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design to analyze and evaluate architectural contextualism and urban vitality in the heritage area. The study is conducted in several stages: digital netnography, comparative questionnaire surveys, field observations, and spatial behavior mapping. Each stage is explained as follows:

3.1. Data Collection Methods

3.1.1 Netnographic Screening and Cafe Selection

The researcher selected 10 cafes along Jalan Braga by analyzing lifestyle recommendation content on Instagram and TikTok. To narrow down the selection from numerous venues in the area, the researcher applied four strict qualification criteria:

- Location: The cafe must sit directly within the historic Jalan Braga corridor.
- Infrastructure: The interior must provide numerous power outlets to support mobile device usage.
- Product Quality: The venue must offer high-quality food and beverage products based on user reviews.
- Spatial Function: The space must feel comfortable and suitable for both working and socializing.

3.1.2 Respondent Criteria and Survey Period

The researcher distributed structured questionnaires to collect explicit user perceptions regarding the space.

- Respondent Target: The sample includes all visitors in Jalan Braga who enter the venue with the specific intention to either work or hang out.
- Data Collection Period: The researcher collected survey data during both weekdays and weekends to capture the full variation of visitor demographics and behavioral shifts.
- Sample Size: Following the Lemeshow framework for unknown populations, the study utilizes a total sample of 100 respondents to ensure statistical validity.

3.1.3 Field Observation and Behavior Mapping

To record physical social interactions, the researcher conducted direct, place-centered behavior mapping on-site.

- Behavioral Flow: The observation protocol tracks a specific, sequential user lifecycle: *Arrival, Activity (Hanging out / Working / Meeting / Sightseeing), Departure*.
- Recording Protocol: The researcher applied a stationary observation method. The researcher stayed in fixed, strategic positions inside the cafe and continuously monitored visitor behavior. This method allowed the researcher to track individual spatial choices and group dynamics from the moment visitors sat down until they completely left the cafe.

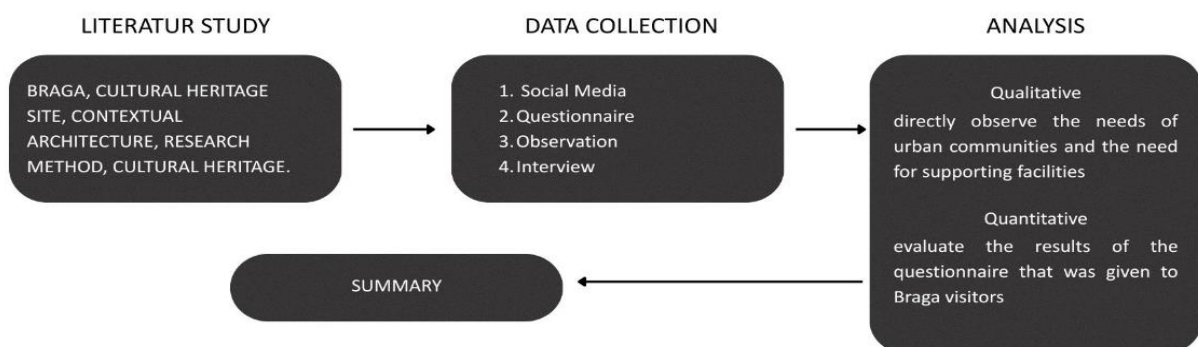


Figure 2. Research methodology workflow
Source: Authors, 2026

3.2 Data Analysis Methods

The researcher analyzes the collected data through three distinct analytical steps to align with the mixed-methods research design.

3.2.1 Netnographic Content Analysis

The researcher analyzes the social media data using quantitative content analysis based on the updated netnography framework by Kozinets (Kozinets, 2019). This method systematically processes digital text and media into measurable data, facilitating a rigorous understanding of how digital discourse shapes physical spatial perceptions (Gambetti & Kozinets, 2022):

- **Metric Calculation:** The researcher calculates the frequency of specific keywords, hashtags, view counts, and comment engagement from Instagram and TikTok.
- **Thematic Coding:** The researcher categorizes user-generated captions and comments into specific thematic codes.

3.3.2. Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Questionnaires

The survey data from the 100 respondents undergoes descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS software. The researcher analyzes the numerical data through basic descriptive parameters:

- **Frequency and Percentage:** The analysis calculates the distribution of responses for each questionnaire item to identify general visitor trends.
- **Mean Score Evaluation:** The researcher computes the mean scores for the three primary variables: perception of contextualism, spatial comfort, and social interaction intensity.
- This descriptive approach summarizes explicit user opinions regarding how the cafe's design supports their *nongkrong* or *nugas* lifestyle.

4. EVALUATION FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

From a survey of 206 respondents, the diagram shows that Tanatap Heritage Braga is the primary choice. Specifically, 111(54%) of respondents chose this location. This percentage far exceeds other coffee shops along Jalan Braga. This high percentage indicates that the research object successfully functions as a catalyst for public activities in the historic area. The dominant preference demonstrates the success of an architectural intervention. This design does not only preserve the physical aspects of the building, but it also optimizes the non-physical context. As a third space, this design successfully meets the psychological and social needs of urban society. The space creates an atmosphere that supports productivity and casual interactions.

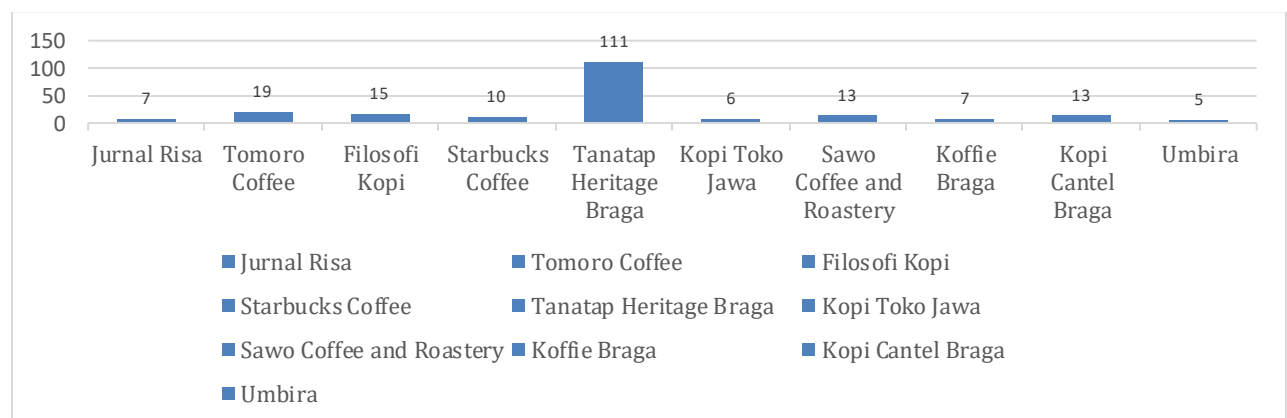


Figure 3. Cafe preferences in Braga
Source : Authors, 2026

These quantitative findings from the questionnaire provide a strong empirical foundation for the next field validation stage. In that stage, the researcher directly observes how spatial layout, natural element integration, and spatial function adaptation shape user behavior and place attachment at Tanatap Heritage Braga. To evaluate the success of the third space in relation to its site context, this study examines the environmental aspects that connect users to their surroundings. The questionnaire data shows that visual and sensory interactions hold greater importance than mere physical presence at the location.

4.1. Research Location Data

4.1.1. Tanatap Heritage Braga Location

This research focuses on Tanatap Heritage Braga, a cafe located at Jalan Braga No. 99-101, Sumur Bandung. Unlike the surrounding buildings that still maintain their grand colonial facades, Tanatap Heritage Braga implements a brutalist-tropical style. The dominant use of exposed concrete and green open spaces creates a clear visual contrast with the historic buildings in its vicinity.

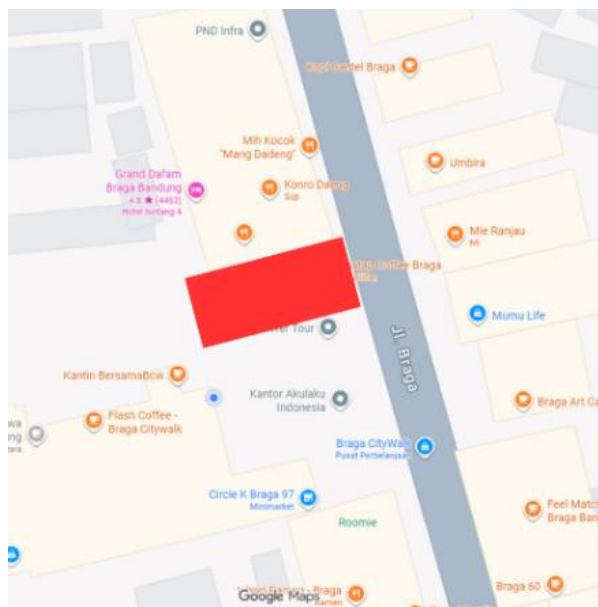


Figure 4. Tanatap Location
Source : Google Maps, edited, 2026

The researcher selected Tanatap Heritage Braga as the research object because of its position as a distinctive design example in the heritage area. Furthermore, the polling results from the questionnaire confirmed this choice, as the location received the highest public preference at 54%. This place demonstrates a shift in the adaptive reuse approach. In this project, the architectural intervention no longer imitates visual forms. Instead, the design focuses more on creating open spaces and encouraging social activities. Therefore, this location is highly suitable to evaluate non-physical contextualism parameters and their relationship with urban vitality based on social experiences.

4.1.2. Tanatap Layout

The ground floor layout of Tanatap Heritage Braga adapts to the elongated shape of the site. The floor plan features a linear sequence of spaces that sit entirely inside the building. The design divides the zones based on user movement patterns. The front areas, such as the Takeaway and Fast Bar, serve the fast-moving pedestrians from Jalan Braga. Then, the layout gradually leads to the communal areas at the back, such as the Sitting Room and Vinyl Room. In these rear spaces, visitors can stay for a longer duration.



Figure 5. First Floor Plan
Source: Archdaily, 2025a

By creating an elongated void in the center of the room. The second-floor seating is arranged around the edges of this void. This method creates optimal vertical porosity and visual connectivity between the floors. Visitors on the upper floor can directly see the Slow Bar and Sitting Room on the ground floor, and vice versa. The spiral stairs in the center of the void serve not only as the primary access but also act as a visual axis and an interaction catalyst.

Through spatial manipulations such as the linear sequence on the ground floor and the vertical porosity on the second floor, this design supports what (Gehl, 2011) calls 'life between buildings'. This building demonstrates that an active interior space experience can preserve social values in a heritage area, even though the exterior facade design appears contrasting.



Figure 6. Second Floor Plan
Source : Archdaily, 2025b

Tanatap Heritage Braga expands its social activation through a specialized area called the Tanatap Hideout. Strategically, the main access to this space sits on the second floor, located near the restroom corridor. This area establishes an important urban connectivity because visitors can also access it directly from the adjacent shopping mall, Braga Citywalk.

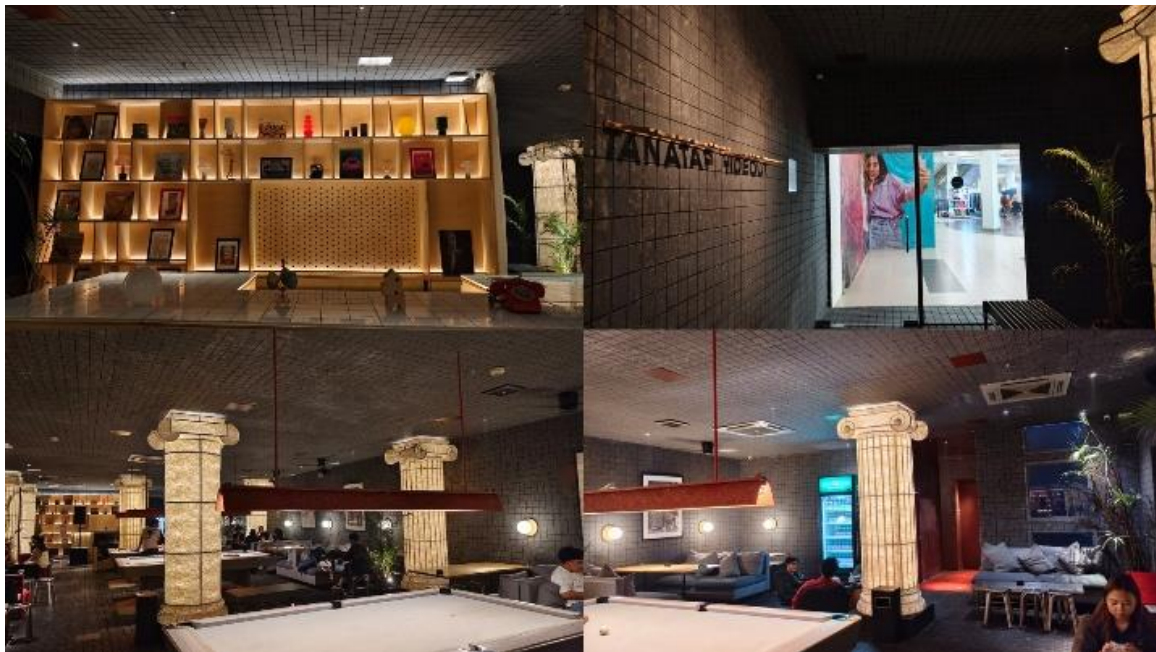


Figure 7. Hide Out Tanatap

Source : Authors,2026

Functionally, the Tanatap Hideout serves as an extension of the third space concept within the building. The interior design integrates a casual hangout lounge with a billiard recreational area. The space features large display shelves for vinyl records and vintage memorabilia, alongside stylized classic columns that act as glowing light installations. By combining a hidden lounge vibe with billiard tables, this sub-zone creates an alternative social layer. This functional variation increases the overall porosity of the building, attracts diverse user groups, and extends the duration of visitor stay within the heritage corridor.



Figure 8. Section

Source: Archdaily, 2025c

The adaptive reuse strategy at Tanatap Heritage Braga does not completely alter the old structure. Instead, the design utilizes an insertion approach. This strategy is clearly visible in the longitudinal and cross-section drawings. Instead of imitating the colonial style for new elements, the architect leaves the heritage elements visible as a historical backdrop. These preserved elements include the wooden roof structure, rustic brick walls,

as well as round and square columns. The visual contrast between the new exposed concrete and the rustic materials defines the boundary between past narratives and contemporary interventions.



Figure 9. Tanatap Stairs & Interior

Source : Authors, 2026

Spatially, both the longitudinal and cross-section drawings highlight the importance of the central void and the spiral staircase. This staircase does not only serve as vertical circulation. The architect also designed it as a visual element that breaks the rigidity of the linear space. Furthermore, these sections illustrate the high vertical porosity of the building. The void, flanked by seating areas on the second floor, enables visual interaction between the levels. Visitors on the upper floor can connect spatially with the activities at the Slow Bar and Sitting Room on the ground floor. This three-dimensional spatial experience embraces the heritage structure and drives vertical social movement. Consequently, this design becomes Tanatap's primary instrument to revitalize the non-physical vitality of the Jalan Braga corridor.



Figure 10. Facade & Interior Tanatap

Source : Authors, 2026

The researcher selected Tanatap Heritage Braga as the research object because of its position as a distinctive design example in the heritage area. In addition to this reason, the location was chosen because it received the highest number of votes in the public polling. This place demonstrates a shift in the adaptive reuse approach. In this project, the architectural intervention no longer imitates visual forms. Instead, the design focuses more on creating open spaces and encouraging social activities. Therefore, this location is highly suitable to evaluate non-physical contextualism parameters and their relationship with urban vitality based on social experiences.

4.2. Aspects that Connect with the surrounding Environment

The survey results reveal that non-physical elements act as the primary drivers anchoring visitors to the surrounding urban context of Jalan Braga. Visible outdoor activities serve as the most dominant factor, influencing 64(57,7%) of the respondents, followed closely by ambient sounds from the environment which affect 51(45,9%) of the participants. Additionally, physical layout choices such as visual openings through windows and open doors connect approximately 45(40,5%) of the visitors to the outside, while the social character of fellow visitors plays an equally significant role for 41(36,9%) of the respondents. Conversely, the disconnected group remains a small minority, as 6(5,40%) of the respondents felt no connection to the surrounding environment, proving that visual permeability and auditory stimuli successfully integrate the indoor experience with the street rhythm.

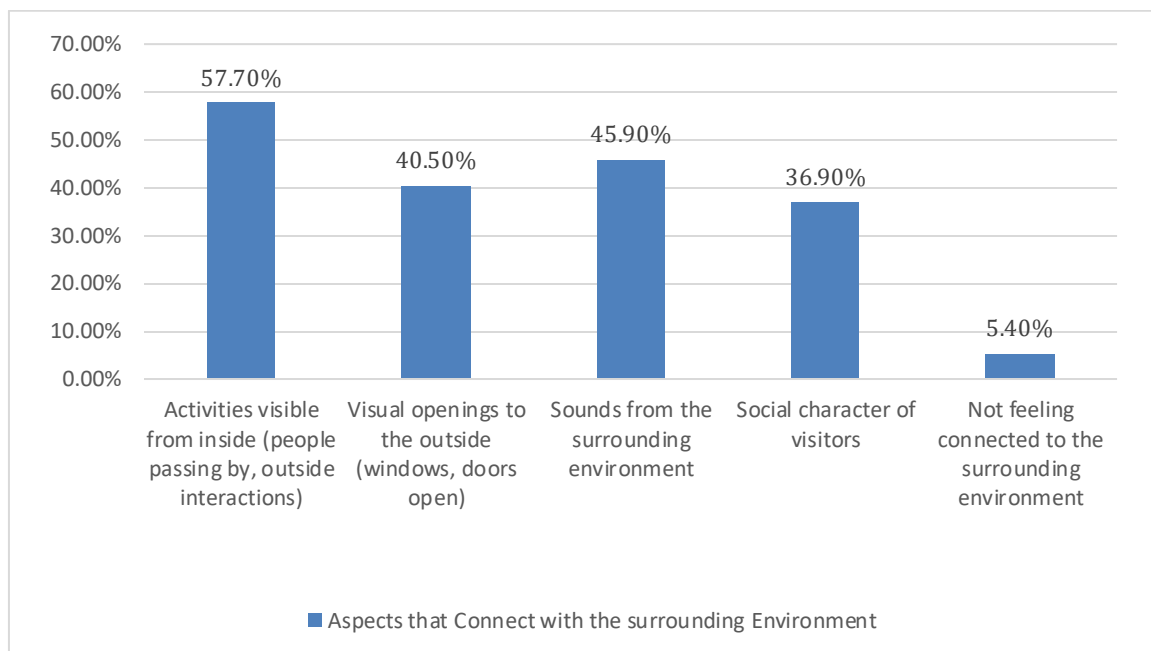


Figure 11. Aspects that Connect with the surrounding Environment

Source : Authors, 2026

4.2.1. Activities Visible from Within

The dominance of the first two aspects proves the critical importance of visual permeability in contextual architecture. This finding aligns with (Gehl, 2010), who asserts that visual connections between interior spaces and public streets are crucial to create responsive transitional boundaries, often referred to as 'soft edges.' A high level of visual permeability allows users inside the building to participate passively in the rhythm of Braga street life. At the same time, this permeability effectively blurs the boundary between indoor and outdoor spaces, creating a seamless transition that enhances the quality of public realm experience (Carmona, 2021).



Figure 12. Tanatap Interior
Source: Author, 2026

4.2.2. Sounds From The Surrounding Environment

Furthermore, the high response to ambient sounds aligns with the principles of multi-sensory architecture advocated by (Pallasmaa, 2012), which emphasizes that authentic spatial experiences are shaped by multi-sensory engagement rather than visual dominance alone. This approach is increasingly critical in contemporary urban environments, where the integration of a bustling commercial soundscape such as that found in the Braga corridor strengthens the user's sense of place (Henshaw et al., 2017). By incorporating these auditory dimensions, the architectural design effectively reinforces the *Genius Loci* of the area without resorting to superficial historical mimicry or artificial elements on the physical facade, a concern consistently echoed in modern discourse on the phenomenology of place (Plevoets & Van Cleempoel, 2019; Seamon, 2018).



Figure 13. Tanatap Areas
Source: Author, 2026

4.2.3. Social character of the visitors

Additionally, the presence of individuals with specific profiles within the space creates a miniature social ecosystem that accurately represents the urban dynamics of Jalan Braga. This phenomenon confirms the 'Third Place' concept by (Oldenburg, 1989), which states that the user profile strongly determines the true character of an alternative public space. In contemporary urban contexts, this is reinforced by the concept of 'social

proximity,' where the diversity of user profiles acts as a catalyst for social inclusion and spatial identity (Mouratidis, 2021b). Passive interaction and the state of co-presence with fellow visitors serve as powerful non-physical contextual elements that transform a physical location into a living social environment (Mehta & Palazzo, 2020; Pesch, 2021).



Figure 14. Type Of Customers
Source: Author, 2026

4.3. Transmission of Local Cultural Values through Non-Physical Architectural Contexts

The survey results reveal that visitors predominantly perceive local cultural values through functional and social dimensions rather than physical ones. Spatial utilization serves as the primary indicator, with 57(51,4%) of respondents recognizing local culture through activities like sitting, gathering, and working, which is closely supported by internal room activities at 48(43,2%) respondents. Social interaction between visitors stands as the second-highest factor at 54(48,6%) respondents, successfully validating the area's performance as an active third place. Furthermore, the cognitive dimension transfers historical awareness to 41(36,9%) of participants through storytelling and background information about the building. Conversely, only a minor fraction of 5(4,5%) felt no connection to the local cultural values, proving that behavior-driven soft architecture effectively sustains the cultural identity of the area.

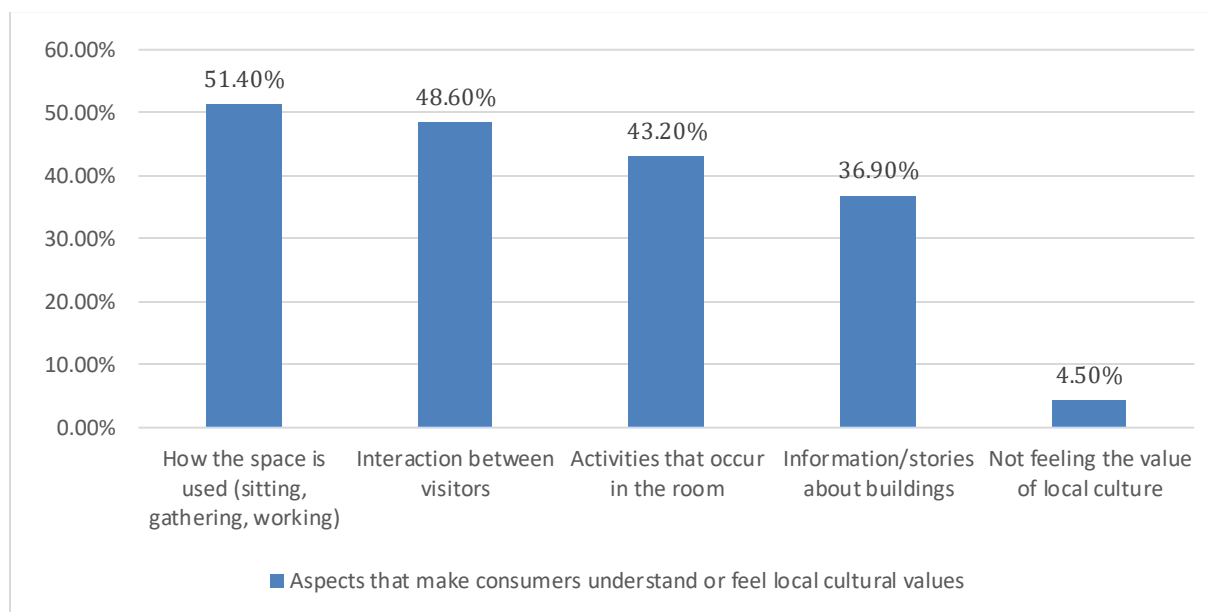


Figure 15. Aspects that make consumers understand or feel local cultural values
Source: Author, 2026

4.3.1. How the Space is Used (Sitting, Gathering, Working)

The dominance of behavioral and functional aspects confirms the theory by (Rapoport, 1969) regarding the intrinsic link between culture and the built environment. This theory posits that the most fundamental manifestation of culture does not lie in architectural form, but rather in how humans adapt to and utilize the space often referred to as the 'behavioral setting.' In contemporary urban design, spatial flexibility that facilitates local communal culture, such as the *nongkrong* culture or casual collaboration, acts as a more authentic anchor for place identity than mere physical symbolism (Mehta & Palazzo, 2020). By prioritizing these socio-spatial practices, the architecture fosters a sense of belonging that is deeply rooted in the daily life of the community (Seamon, 2018), effectively bridging the gap between abstract cultural expression and tangible environmental usage (Pesch, 2021).



Figure 16. Tanatap Interior

Source: Author, 2026

4.3.2. Interactions Between Visitors

Furthermore, the high number of choices for interaction between visitors reinforces the successful application of the 'Third Place' concept (Oldenburg, 1989). In a cultural context, the third space functions as a democratic vessel that fosters social life and communal interaction, serving as an essential anchor for social cohesion in urban settings (Mehta & Palazzo, 2020). The local cultural character of the Braga area, which is closely linked to togetherness and social exchange, is successfully replicated within this architectural space by facilitating diverse human interaction patterns. This success aligns with the criteria for vibrant public space outlined by (Gehl, 2010), and is further validated by contemporary research which posits that the quality of urban space is ultimately measured by its capacity to catalyze subjective well-being through inclusive social activities (Mouratidis, 2021b; Pesch, 2021).

4.3.3. Information or Stories About The Building

In addition to behavioral and interaction factors, the transmission of local values also occurs through the cognitive dimension. This finding underscores the importance of collective memory and historical narrative in maintaining the *Genius Loci* (Norberg-Schulz, 1980). The conservation of heritage values does not always demand rigid facade

preservation. Instead, stakeholders can achieve conservation through storytelling and revived memories within contemporary functions. Consequently, visitors maintain a historical awareness of the site.

4.4. The Function of Space as an Outline of Social Interaction and Strengthening of Third Place

The survey results from Chart 4 reveal that communal activities of a social-recreational nature heavily dominate the spatial utilization of the cafe. Meeting friends or relations stands as the highest recorded activity with 56(50,5%) of respondents, closely followed by casual chatting at 53(47,7%) of respondents, which empirically confirms the building's effective performance as a Third Place. Additionally, contemporary productive activities show significant numbers, where 47(42,3%) of participants use the space for informal meetings and 37(33,3%) respondents utilize it for working together, representing a clear blurring of boundaries between work and leisure. Conversely, solitary users who perform no active social interactions constitute a small minority at just 10 of the total respondents. Overall, this distribution proves that the flexible, non-physical contextual design successfully accommodates a wide plurality of urban behaviors, ranging from casual relaxation to professional collaboration.

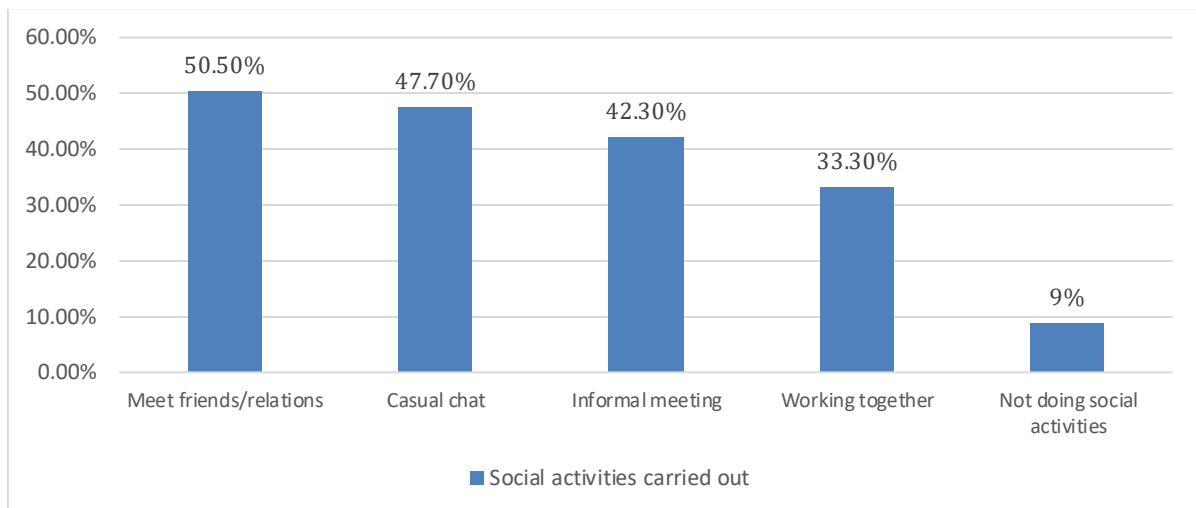


Figure 17. Social activities carried out
Source: Author, 2026

4.4.1. Meeting Friends or Relations

The high percentages in the first two indicators empirically confirm that the architectural space of Tanatap Heritage Braga effectively operates as a Third Place. According to (Oldenburg, 1989), a Third Place functions as a neutral ground outside of home (the First Place) and the workplace or campus (the Second Place). This space specifically accommodates informal social interactions, fosters a sense of community, and acts as an anchor for community life. Architecture, in this context, does not merely provide seating. Instead, the design shapes a human-scale atmosphere that actively encourages conversation and encounters.

4.4.2. Informal Meetings & Casual Chatting

Interestingly, the data also demonstrate a paradigm shift in cafe space utilization within contemporary urban culture. The high responses for informal meetings and working together represent the phenomenon of blurring the boundaries between work and leisure. The offered spatial flexibility allows visitors to adopt commercial spaces as extensions of their workspaces or academic environments. This finding aligns with (Gehl,

2010) activity typologies. An architecture that offers high environmental quality does not only invite optional activities like relaxing. It also triggers more complex social activities, including professional collaborations in a casual atmosphere.

4.4.3. No Social Activity Performed

On the other hand, the presence of the minority group that performs no social activities remains highly relevant in the public space context. Solitary users often still seek passive interaction or simple co-presence, which means being in the middle of a crowd without interacting directly. The dynamic spatial environment provides visual and sensory stimulation for them. Consequently, this design creates a feeling of connection to the city rhythm without forcing active participation.



Figure 18. Social activities carried out
Source: Author, 2026

4.5. The Influence of Spatial Configuration on Social Dynamics and Interactions

The survey results reveal the primary aspects that influence social activities within the space. Spatial layout and table distance serve as a dominant factor, influencing 56(50,5%) of the respondents. Proximity to circulation areas ties for the highest position, affecting an identical 56(50,5%) of the participants. Additionally, the social atmosphere whether busy or quiet occupies the next rank, influencing 48(43,2%) of the visitors. In contrast, user-dependent aspects show lower frequencies; the type of other visitors affects 23(20,7%) of the participants, while specific seating positions within the room influence only 16(14,4%) of the respondents. In summary, micro-spatial configurations and spatial layout choices act as the primary drivers that condition user social behavior inside the building.

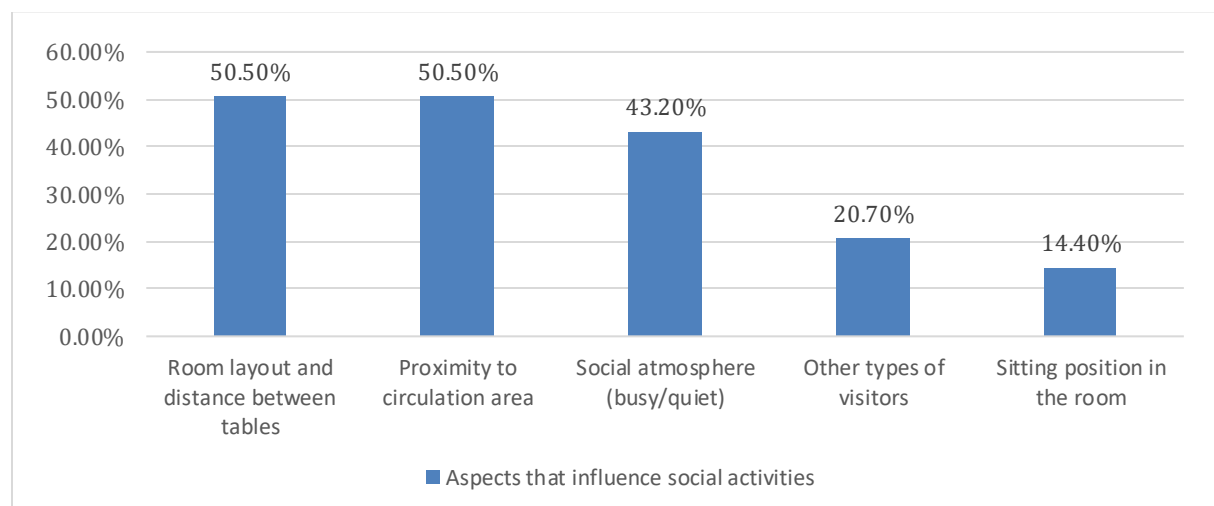


Figure 19. Aspects that influence social activities
Source: Author, 2026

4.5.1. Spatial Layout and Distance Between Tables

The empirical significance of the first two identical factors confirms the Proxemics theory proposed by (Hall, 1966). The layout and distance between furniture pieces operate as invisible boundaries. These boundaries determine the intimate, personal, social, or public scale of a human interaction. In a commercial space context, a layout designed with a *sociopetal* approach which centralizes and encourages interaction according to Humphry Osmond provides flexibility for users to regulate their privacy levels.

4.5.2. Proximity to Circulation Areas

Interestingly, the high preference for proximity to circulation areas validates the classic findings of (Whyte, 1980) in *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Whyte discovered that people naturally prefer to sit or gather near active pedestrian flows, a principle that remains a cornerstone of effective urban design in high-density environments (Speck, 2018). Proximity to circulation paths facilitates passive participation and enhances social surveillance (Mehta & Palazzo, 2020). Consequently, visitors can enjoy "people-watching" activities, which serve as the primary visual entertainment and a key driver of dynamic social life in urban public spaces a core principle emphasized in modern placemaking and public life studies (Zeng et al., 2018)

4.5.3. Social atmosphere

The third dominant factor, social atmosphere, shows that visitors' decisions to stay and interact depend heavily on their psychological perception of the spatial ambience at that moment. The social atmosphere works as a catalyst for prolonged engagement and psychological comfort (Montgomery, 2013). An appropriate level of background noise provides a vital form of acoustic privacy and restorative sensory quality (Liu et al., 2019). This acoustic shield allows small groups to converse comfortably without fearing that adjacent tables will overhear them, while simultaneously preventing the space from feeling dead or awkward, thereby balancing social exposure with personal enclosure (Adams et al., 2009; Whyte, 1980).

4.5.4. Type of Other Visitors

Furthermore, the influence of the type of other visitors relates to the psychological comfort born from demographic similarity or social profile (*homophily*). The presence of other visitors with similar goals or activity rhythms such as fellow creative workers or college students creates a sense of security and social acceptance within this Third Place.

5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that architectural contextualism within heritage areas should not be strictly limited to the physical imitation of historical facades. Tanatap Heritage Braga demonstrates that a contemporary architectural intervention can successfully preserve a district's historical narrative and enhance urban vitality through a non-physical contextual approach, despite employing a visually contrasting brutalist-tropical style.

The success of this design lies in its ability to facilitate urban vitality by prioritizing spatial experiences and social interactions over rigid visual conformity. Through strategic spatial manipulations such as vertical porosity, high visual permeability, and the preservation of original heritage materials as a historical backdrop the building effectively integrates the indoor experience with the dynamic street rhythm of Jalan Braga. Furthermore, sensory connections, particularly visible outdoor activities and ambient urban sounds, act as crucial drivers that anchor users to the area's *Genius Loci* without relying on artificial historical elements.

Ultimately, Tanatap Heritage Braga proves its effectiveness as an active Third Place. Micro-spatial configurations, including strategic table layouts and proximity to circulation paths, actively engineer a flexible environment that accommodates a plurality of contemporary urban behaviors. By blurring the boundaries between casual recreation and professional collaboration, the design responds directly to the psychological and sociological needs of urban society. This research provides strong empirical evidence that the authenticity of a cultural heritage area can be maintained and enlivened not merely through material preservation, but through behavior-driven soft architecture that fosters community interaction and sustains the collective memory of the space.

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