

THE ROLE OF INFORMAL STREET ACTIVITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF  
CONSERVING URBAN CULTURAL ENTITY  
CASE STUDY: MALIOBORO STREET, YOGYAKARTA INDONESIA

ARIF BUDI SHOLIAH

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*For*

**Mother**

*Whose lessons and advices have been guiding me through the way  
matur sembah nuwun bu,...*

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## ABSTRACT

As an important element of urban form, street functions as social space, commercial space, cultural space, as well as channels of movement and symbolic representation of local tradition and culture. Since street spaces comprise not only physical element but also the people who are moving, using, acting, and dancing within and around them, informal street activities emerge as an integral part of street life. This characteristic is endemic to most urban streets in South-east Asia and Malioboro Street in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, is without exception one of these streets. The aim of this study is to demonstrate the significant role of informal street activities (street culture) as an integral part of urban culture and image and to provide guidelines to conserve these significant attributes in enhancing the richness and the complexity of Malioboro Street as the main commercial-historic-cultural corridor in the historic city of Yogyakarta. The study focuses on the contextual relationship and interaction between people and the built environment, to emphasise this significant ambience and the role of informal street activities in the current urban design approach. The study intend to prove that informal street activities have a significant role on enhancing diversity in the use of street, activating public life and increasing attractiveness. Despite these positive attributes, these informal activities are seen to be one major obstacle in the process of managing urban spaces by the local authorities because of the inherent issues of conflicting occupation of public urban spaces that result in the hindering of pedestrian and vehicular movements, decreasing sidewalks space and more often, general cleanliness of the urban environment. Urban design solutions are formulated to exploit all possibilities to conserve the informal street activities as significant attributes in enhancing the richness and the complexity of the street and at the same time try to resolve the problems that arose in managing the conflicts and issues pertaining to these activities and the spaces they occupied.

## ABSTRAK

Sebagai salah satu elemen penting dalam ruang bandar, jalan memiliki pelbagai fungsi termasuk sebagai ruang sosial, ruang komersial, ruang budaya, sekaligus sebagai lorong pergerakan dan lambang simbolik dari tradisi dan budaya tempatan. Ruang jalan bukan hanya terbentuk dari elemen fizikal tetapi juga dari manusia yang bergerak, bergiat, dan malah berhibur di dalam dan di antara ruang-ruang fizikal tersebut. Aktiviti informal jalan menjadi sebahagian yang tidak dipisahkan dalam konteks kehidupan ruang jalan. Ciri-ciri semacam ini lazimnya ditemui di pelbagai jalan di bandar-bandar Asia Tenggara termasuk di Jalan Malioboro, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Tujuan dari kajian ini adalah untuk menunjukkan peranan penting aktiviti informal jalan sebagai salah satu konteks utama ciri budaya dan imej bandar serta menyediakan garis panduan untuk memelihara ciri-ciri yang penting ini untuk meningkatkan kekayaan dan keragaman yang ada Jalan Malioboro sebagai koridor utama budaya-sejarah-komersial di bandar bersejarah Yogyakarta. Kajian ini menitikberatkan hubungan kontekstual dan interaksi antara manusia dan persekitaran binaan, untuk menegaskan kepentingan suasana persekitaran dan peranan aktiviti informal jalan dalam pendekatan reka bentuk bandar terkini. Kajian ini bermaksud untuk membuktikan bahawa aktiviti informal jalan memiliki peranan yang penting untuk meningkatkan keragaman penggunaan jalan, mengaktifkan kehidupan awam dan meningkatkan daya tarikan tempat. Selain dari sifat-sifat yang positif tersebut di atas, aktiviti informal jalan seringkali dilihat sebagai ganjalan utama dalam proses mengelola ruang bandar kerana beberapa isu seperti konflik penggunaan dengan pejalan kaki dan kebersihan persekitaran bandar. Kaedah reka bentuk bandar disusun untuk memelihara aktiviti informal jalan, pada masa yang sama, kaedah ini berusaha untuk menyelesaikan masalah yang timbul dalam mengelolakan konflik dan isu aktiviti-aktiviti informal dan ruang-ruang bandar yang mendokong aktiviti-aktiviti tersebut.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This research is carried out on the subject of street culture, informal street activities and urban conservation. The study will concentrate on the role of informal street activities in a historical street in the context of conserving urban cultural entity. The case study takes place in Malioboro Street as a main commercial-historic-cultural corridor of the historical city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Throughout history, built environment has framed everyday life of human beings. Human activities take place in cities, streets, plazas, buildings, cluster of rooms, under trees and lamps, etc. The people move, act, or even dance within and around them. It can be stated that there is a relationship between human activities and physical environment. Human beings bring life to the urban spaces through their activities. On the contrary, urban spaces structure and shape human activities through their physical forms and boundaries.

Urban streets are one of the important physical elements of the cities. The street is a place where human activities are concentrated. It mainly functions as a channel of movement that connects one place to the other. The multi-functions of a street have been stated by various scholars including Jacobs (1961), Rykwert (1986), Czaenowsky (1986), Moughtin (1992), Rapoport (1987) and Jacobs (1993). The roles of streets in an urban life can be summarised as follows: street is a channel of movement, a communication space, a public space, a place of social and commercial encounter and exchange, a place to do business, a political space and also a symbolic and ceremonial space in the city.

Streets of Asian cities have specialities and significance in the context of urban public life. Asian streets have culturally and traditionally served the city as a public space, a place where people come together to do commerce, to eat and to socialize. Similarly, Poerbo (2004) argues that the urban realm of many Asian cities is not attributed to great parks, squares, or even boulevards, as that in many European cities. On the contrary, the urban life takes place on the streets and along its corridors. This narrow tunnel in the front of buildings and corridor has become a suitable space to move and to interact with each other.

The streets are places where informal activities also take place along with the formal ones. Formal activities take place within the buildings of both side of the street space; meanwhile informal activities take place in between the buildings. As a manifestation of street culture, informal human activities have taken most part of the street spaces in between the physical street walls on both sides. These informal activities refer to all human activities in street spaces which are economic-based, social-based, cultural-based and the combination amongst them. The existence of this 'informal' aspect is complementing with the 'formal' one in the context of the public life of a street.

As many studies, mainly for European and American streets, (Jacobs, 1961; Whyte, 1980; Gehl, 1987, etc) indicate that informal street activities are significant features of a street, however, review shows that study on Southeast Asian streets is scarcely conducted. Heng (2000) points out that the study of our regional urban environment (Southeast Asia) has been, do date, largely neglected. Since most of

Asian cities are in the face of rapid development in the middle of continuity of traditional way of living, the study on understanding the significant context of Asian streets' cultural entity is urgently required, and for this purpose this study is conducted. This study investigates the role of informal street activities in Malioboro Street, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in the context of conserving urban cultural entity.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem and Related Issues**

“What are the roles of informal street activities in Malioboro Street and why is it worth conserving them in the context of promoting the cultural entity of the place?”

Informal street activities are explained through various terms, such as “life between buildings” (Gehl, 1987), “informal sector” (Bromley, 1979; Pena, 1999; Korff, 2000), “street activities” (Rapoport, 1987) and “street culture” (Idid, 2004). It can be defined as activities that people have performed for years and have deep cultural roots amongst them. The existence of informal activities in a street can be traced back since the “organic” establishment of medieval cities in Europe. According to Gehl (1987), many medieval cities have exquisite qualities to offer for life between buildings. It is not only the streets and squares arranged with concern for people moving about and staying outdoors, but the city builders appear to have had remarkable insight concerning the fundamental of city planning.

In Asia, informal street activities are regarded as a common phenomenon. Kurokawa (1992) emphasises how Eastern culture defines urban space in contrast to Western concept. There is a symbiosis of interior (inside the street wall) and exterior (street space) activities and street is considered as an “intermediary zone” between the boundaries.

Current global urban planning trends show that the streets are mainly used as channel of movement rather than place to stay or act. Jacobs (1961) has observed the disappearance of informal activities in many American streets and replaced by the

presence of automobiles and other modern gadgets to transfer people from one point to another. Throughout the world, automobiles have started to dominate the street space and have slowly pushed out the street culture, including walking, resting, gathering and trading. This phenomena has striven many cities all over the world to regain a reasonable balance between the traffic and informal activities in a street. Many streets have been transformed into the pedestrian street systems. This effort is similar the ones stated by Gehl (2002) that the cities all over the world are rediscovering their public spaces and a general awareness has been awakened regarding the need for dignified, high quality city environments for people.

Since its establishment in 1756, Malioboro Street has become a prominent setting for informal street activities in Yogyakarta. It grows naturally and traditionally in line with the transformation of the street. Up to present, various informal street activities occur and become integral part of the life of the street. As found in many streets of the world, the domination of automobiles in the street space is an unbearable phenomenon in Malioboro Street as well. The street being inundated with car traffic to such an extent that the pedestrian and the public life have almost been squeezed out.

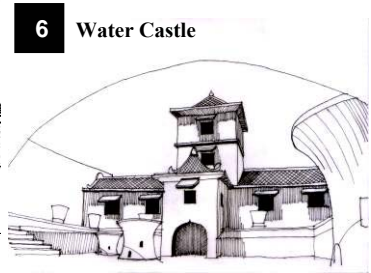
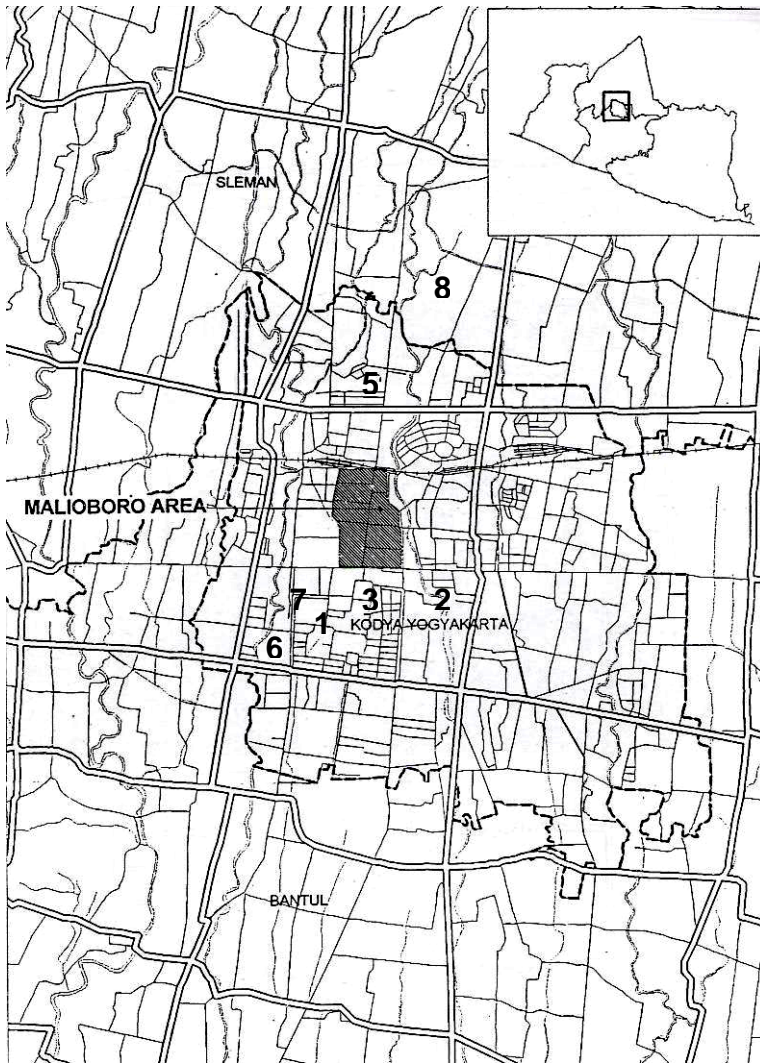
In spite of the fact that Malioboro Street space is dominated by the presence of vehicles, the existence of informal street activities continues to activate the street's public life. In almost twenty hours per day, informal street activities take place in many segments of the Malioboro Street including sidewalks and major street lane. The sidewalks not only function as a channel of movement, but at the same time act as a cultural stage and a place to do commerce and social interaction.

However, acknowledgement of the role of informal street activities seems to be neglected as compared to the formal activities inside the buildings of street walls of Malioboro Street. The contributions of these significant attributes are still less acknowledged by the public including urban planners and the local authority.

### **1.3 Background of the Case Study**

Yogyakarta is a city in Indonesia, which has managed to maintain its tradition and its Javanese tradition and culture. It is a city where people remain courteous in an increasingly pressured society, and it is proudly conscious of its artistic traditions which are maintained and which still dominate the life of the city. Present day, Yogyakarta is acknowledged as the cultural heart of Indonesia (Smithies, 1986), publicly known as the city of education and second biggest tourist city of the country after Bali Island.

Yogyakarta was founded in 1755. However, since the eight century it was considered as the centre of the old Javanese Kingdom of Mataram or known as Hindu Mataram Kingdom in the heartland of Java Island. It is the civilization of Hindu Mataram Kingdom which has produced many world heritage monuments such as Borobudur Buddhist Temple and Prambanan Hindu Temple. In the mid of 18<sup>th</sup> century Mataram is flourished once again under the new dynasty acknowledged as Islamic Mataram Kingdom or Mataram Sultanate (1755-present), with Yogyakarta as the capital city.



**Figure 1.1**  
Historic City of Yogyakarta

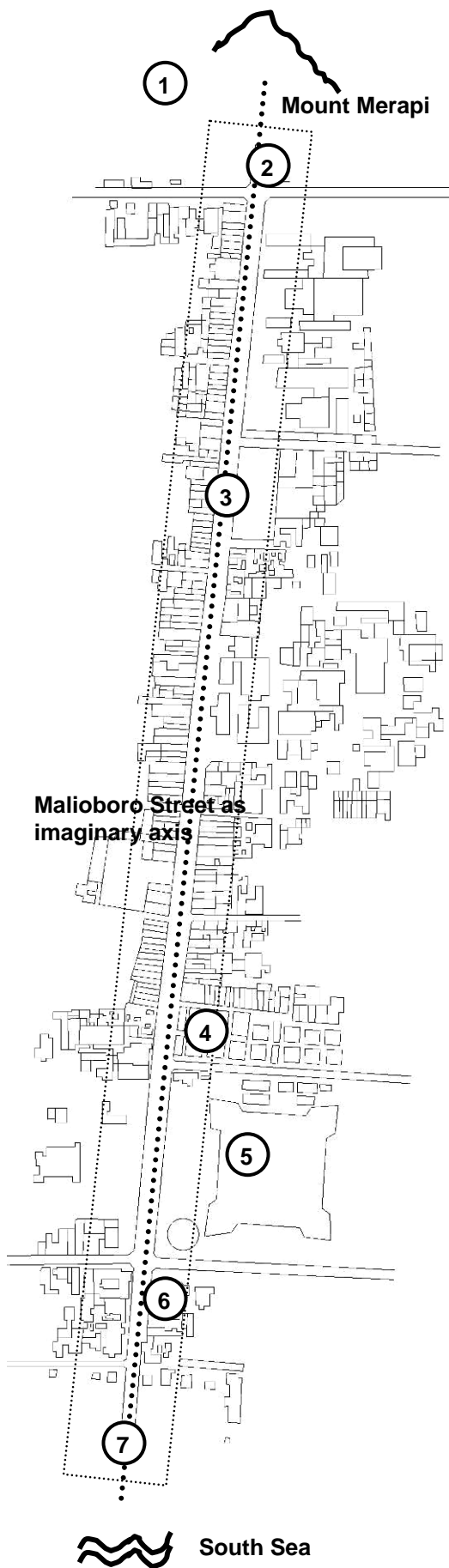


Malioboro Street is situated in the centre of north-south axis of Yogyakarta. The establishment of Malioboro Street was started together with the establishment of Kraton (Palace) Yogyakarta in 1755. As a main street of the city, Malioboro Street has experienced the ups and downs of the city history. The history of Malioboro Street can be divided into three main periods, first is Mataram Sultanate as an independent kingdom (1755-1790), second is Mataram Sultanate under Dutch colonial hegemony (1790-1945) and third is the independence era (1945-present).

Present day, Malioboro Street is the centre of commerce of the city. Most of the buildings in Malioboro functions as commercial facilities. The street space of Malioboro Street is found to have various informal street activities. These activities comprise clothes stalls, handicraft stalls, food stalls and sidewalks restaurants, which operate almost 24 hours per day. The dynamics of life of Malioboro in the context of Yogyakarta is exceptional; Malioboro is the only street in the city that never sleeps.

Malioboro Street is a major attraction for domestic and foreign visitors in Yogyakarta. Historical sites and buildings form a unique character of the historical Malioboro Street. Moreover, colourful scenery of street culture presented by art merchandises along the sidewalks, attract visitors to come and enjoy the nuances. Public life of Malioboro Street created by public gathering, resembling the performing arts in the street, is one of the attractions of the street. Malioboro Street has emerged as a symbol of the city. As a proverb states: 'visiting Malioboro Street means visiting Yogyakarta'.

The outstanding features of Malioboro Street are valuable and need to be revealed and exposed even more. A study on understanding the special attributes of Malioboro Street and the role of informal street activities in the context of its rich cultural entity will enlarge the vocabulary of the Asian streets' uniqueness. As an example of a historic street in Asia, a study on public life in Malioboro Street will enhance the concern for the future Malioboro Street in the face of global cultures without replacing the local features.



1  
Malioboro Street as Yogyakarta **imaginary axis** slices the city correlates Mount Merapi in the north and South Sea in the south



2  
**Tugu (White Statue)** situated in the northern edge of Malioboro Street, serves as one of the city landmark



3  
**Malioboro Street**, located in the center of Yogyakarta, serves as main commercial-historic-cultural corridor of the city



4  
**Beringharjo Market**, one of the key elements of Yogyakarta urban pattern serves as main market of the city



5  
**Vredeburg Fort**, interrupted Yogyakarta urban pattern, situated in the south edge of Malioboro Street



6  
Some **colonial buildings** including Javasche Bank are situated in the southern edge of Malioboro Street demonstrate the richness of architectural style in the street



7  
**Kraton Yogyakarta** (Palace) situated in the centre of the city serves as symbol of power of the Mataram Sultanate

Figure 1.2 Map of Malioboro Street in the context of Historic City of Yogyakarta

## **1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

### **1.4.1 Aim of the Study**

The primary aim of the study is to demonstrate the significant role of informal street activities (street culture) as an integral part of urban culture and image and providing guidelines to conserve these significant attributes in enhancing the richness and the complexity of Malioboro Street as the main commercial-historic-cultural corridor in the historical city of Yogyakarta.

### **1.4.2 Objectives of the Study**

In order to effectively achieve the primary aim, the following objectives were established:

1. To demonstrate the context and the relationship between informal street activities and its physical settings through critically examining the physical, social and cultural profile of informal street activities in Malioboro Street.
2. To establish the role and the significance of informal street activities in Malioboro Street as an integral part of urban cultural entity.
3. To propose urban design and conservation guidelines for the maintenance of this cultural context in enhancing the richness and the complexity of Malioboro Street as the main commercial-historic-cultural corridor in the historical city of Yogyakarta.

## **1.5 Scope of the Study**

The study is limited to investigate the role of informal street activities in Malioboro Street in the context of conserving urban cultural entity. The discussion is mainly in the context of public realm of Malioboro Street, focusing on the street

space between the street walls on both sides of the area. The area inside the buildings, yards, etc, which is private in nature is not included in the scope of this study.

The primary concern of this study is the informal street activities as a manifestation of urban culture and significant feature of urban heritage. The conservation effort to maintain these features will be proposed at the end of the study. At the same time, it is not under the scope of the study to propose the conservation of built form in Malioboro Street such as historical buildings, sites, or spatial arrangement. However, since there is a strong relationship between the two aspects, informal street activities and built forms, the physical elements of Malioboro Street are seen as a setting for human behaviour that is also important to maintain and conserve in the broader context of urban conservation.

## **1.6 Research Methodology**

The research will apply **Environment-Behaviour Research** method to make better design decision and to develop knowledge on the character of Malioboro Street. In other terms, the research methodology, also commonly called **Man-Environment Studies**, which is concerned with the systematic study of the mutual interaction of people and their built environment, is applied. According to Zeisel (1981), environment refers to the physical, administrative and social attributes of settings in which people live, work and play. Behaviour refers to things people do, including thinking, feeling and seeing, as well as talking with others and moving around. This focuses also on how people behave in reaction to the environment.

In line with Rapoport (1977) in being concerned with what to design and why, with arriving at a human criteria for proposing urban design guidelines in Malioboro Street based on an understanding of man-environment interaction, one is dealing with some specific aspect of three general questions:

- (1) How do people shape the environment of Malioboro Street– which characteristic of people, as individuals or groups of different sizes are relevant to the shaping of particular environments?
- (2) How and to what extent does the physical environment in Malioboro Street affect people, i.e., how important is the designed environment and in which context?
- (3) What are the mechanisms, which link people and environments in this two-way interaction?

The research design of this study is a **case study** design, intended to understand and to develop intensive knowledge of a street as an object in a whole (Zeisel, 1981). This study is concerned mainly with information specific to the particular study object and context, rather than information easily generalized to a large number of objects. In line to the requirements of the case study research (Yin, 1994), the uses of Malioboro Street as a single case study meet three major conditions: (i) Malioboro Street as case has a set of critical conditions which can meet the requirement to test a well-formulated theory, (ii) Malioboro Street as case is an extreme or unique case and the study of it can provide specific findings which cannot be derived from other cases, and, (iii) Malioboro Street provides the researcher with an opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon/event/incident previously inaccessible to other studies.

The procedure of this study is carried out by **Rational-Deductive Method**, which conducts by connecting the theoretical and literature review and other secondary data with the primary data before analysing the findings. Analysis of findings will be carried out to produce proposal, conclusion and also recommendation of the study.

### **1.6.1 Subjects or Data Sources**

To conduct the investigation, the data sources will be developed as follows:

### 1.6.1.1 Primary data

#### A. Field Survey

Data collection will comprise physical and non-physical information based on the field survey of (i) physical elements of urban environment, in this case the physical street environment of Malioboro Street. The types of data will be based on plans, activity distribution and building use in Malioboro Street and vicinity. (ii) non-physical information will be based on the kinds of informal street activities, forms of the activity, stakeholders of the activity, duration of the activity, etc. The types of data will be based on records, words and also numbers.

The method of the field survey is on measurement, documentation, observation and interview using questionnaire form conducted in October to November 2004, which can be described as follows:

#### (1) Physical Mapping

Measurement of the physical element of streetscape is extremely useful in the analysis stage and final reports because it can help precisely imaging the condition of the street. This measurement is based on base-map, block plan map and land-use map of the street gained from the local authority. It is conducted to find basic data and understanding the site context and configuration of the informal street activities in one-day period along the street.

#### (2) Inventory of Informal Street Activities

The device to document each unit of informal street activities is an **Inventory Form**. This form is used to record the setting of unit activity and configuration of unit, kinds of activity and also the time period of operation.

In order to capture all the informal street activities in Malioboro Street, **Time Budget Method** is used to observe the street in several time periods. Based on a preliminary survey, time period of observation is found out in 24 hours and divided

into several time periods to gain maximum outcome. This time period is used to determine next stage of field survey. Pre-observation led to conclude that informal street activities is divided in the range of 9 am to 5 pm, 5 pm to 9 pm and 9 pm to 6 am.

#### B. Interview through Questionnaire

Interviews are conducted to reveal the role of informal street activities in Malioboro Street. A number of questions is asked from three categories of respondents: the operator of the street (street vendor and other operator), the user of the street (local inhabitants and Yogyanese), and the tourist, including foreign tourist. In-depth interviews are taken from the local inhabitants, local government officials, and professional/academician in order to gain public opinions and aspirations. Method of the interview is semi-structured interview, in which several questions would already be prepared by the interviewer and further questions are formulated spontaneously during the interviews.

##### **1.6.1.2 Secondary data**

The secondary data is gained from the reference studies of related matter such as, literatures (books, journals, research paper, newspaper and magazine articles, etc), local plans and other relevant physical plans and information.

##### **1.6.2 Instrumentation**

To provide data collection, the following instruments are used:

- i. Maps, aerial view and block plan maps to understand Malioboro Street in the context of Yogyakarta and to gain information on the usage of buildings and urban vehicular circulation.
- ii. Camera; to capture subtleties that other methods may not record, to capture physical settings and behaviours at certain times, the atmosphere, kinds of

informal street activities at certain times and places. Camera will be used throughout the research process. At the beginning of the research, still photographs will be used to provide initial overview of the area study. The examination of photographs will help generating hypothesis about the possible issues for further study.

- iii. Inventory Form; to record the setting of a unit, the dimension and configuration, and other information such as kinds of activity and goods, time period of operation, etc.
- iv. Questionnaire Form; to guide the researcher during an interview.
- v. Notebook and sketchbook; to record and produce sketches on the spot during the observation.
- vi. Measurement tools; to measure the dimension of an inspected object, such as dimension of a unit of a street vendor, dimension of the sidewalks, etc.

### **1.6.3 Sampling Method**

The **Stratified Random Sampling Method** is used in the stage of gaining primary data using questionnaire device. In line with Kamarul (2004), this sampling method involves the division of population into homogenous subgroups and then taking a simple random sample in each subgroup. Population of this study will be divided into 3 categories i.e. operators of the activities (shop owner, street vendor owner, hotel manager, and other street actor), users of the street and tourists (local and foreign tourist). These categories are based on the variety of stakeholders in Malioboro Street. The range of respondent is taken to ensure complexity of respondent and to gain minimum bias of the research. In-depth interviews from the local resident, local authority and local expert/academician are conducted to gain further opinions on the contribution of human activities in Malioboro Street.

### **1.7 Expected Result**

The expected result of the study is that the result could answer the research question regarding the role of informal street activities in Malioboro Street. It is



expected that the result of the research can be used as base to propose urban design and conservation guidelines for the maintenance of street activities in enhancing the richness of street culture and the complexity of Malioboro Street as the main commercial-historic-cultural corridor in the historical city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

## **1.8 Structure of the Study**

The organisation of the thesis is divided into three main parts. Part one will be the introduction of the study, part two is about the findings and analysis, and finally the proposal and conclusion are presented in part three.

*Part One, Introduction:* It begins providing the conceptual framework of the study, the importance of the study and the assembled of the appropriate approach of the study to answer the research problem (**Chapter 1**); this is followed by a discussion on streets as a part of urban element. The conception of street, street in urban physical context and the uses of streets are reviewed to develop a greater understanding of street before discussing identity of place and human activities, and urban culture in the next stage. A review on informal street activities as part of urban culture is given to provide the specific definition and understanding of the streets' features. Urban conservation in the context of promoting historical street and human activities is reviewed before theoretical framework of the methodology is presented as a base to conduct the study (**Chapter 2**). An overview to understand the characteristic of the case study is presented starts by understanding historical layers of the street in the context of Yogyakarta city, continued by the transformation of the street morphology and the street character, role, and function as a whole. Physical condition of the street space and surroundings are examined to gain greater perception of the area of study. Building usage of Malioboro Street and surroundings, Malioboro Street in urban circulation context, social profile and stakeholders of Malioboro Street are reported before reviewing a number of urban development and conservation projects in Malioboro Street over the last twenty years (1984-2004). A summary of part one of the study is presented in the end of the chapter (**Chapter 3**).

*Part Two, Findings and Analysis:* This part presents findings and analysis of the study: first is inventory of informal street activities in Malioboro Street and second is on public perceptions regarding the role of informal street activities in Malioboro Street and its discussions (**Chapter 4**).

*Part Three, Implication, Proposal and Conclusion:* This part offers the implication of the role of informal street activities in the context of urban cultural entity. It follows by proposing an urban design recommendation to conserve informal street activities as significant attributes in enhancing the richness and the complexity of the street. It is mainly to emphasize street image and character, and regeneration plan under urban conservation approach (**Chapter 5**). This part will be followed by conclusion of the study and suggestions for further study (**Chapter 6**).

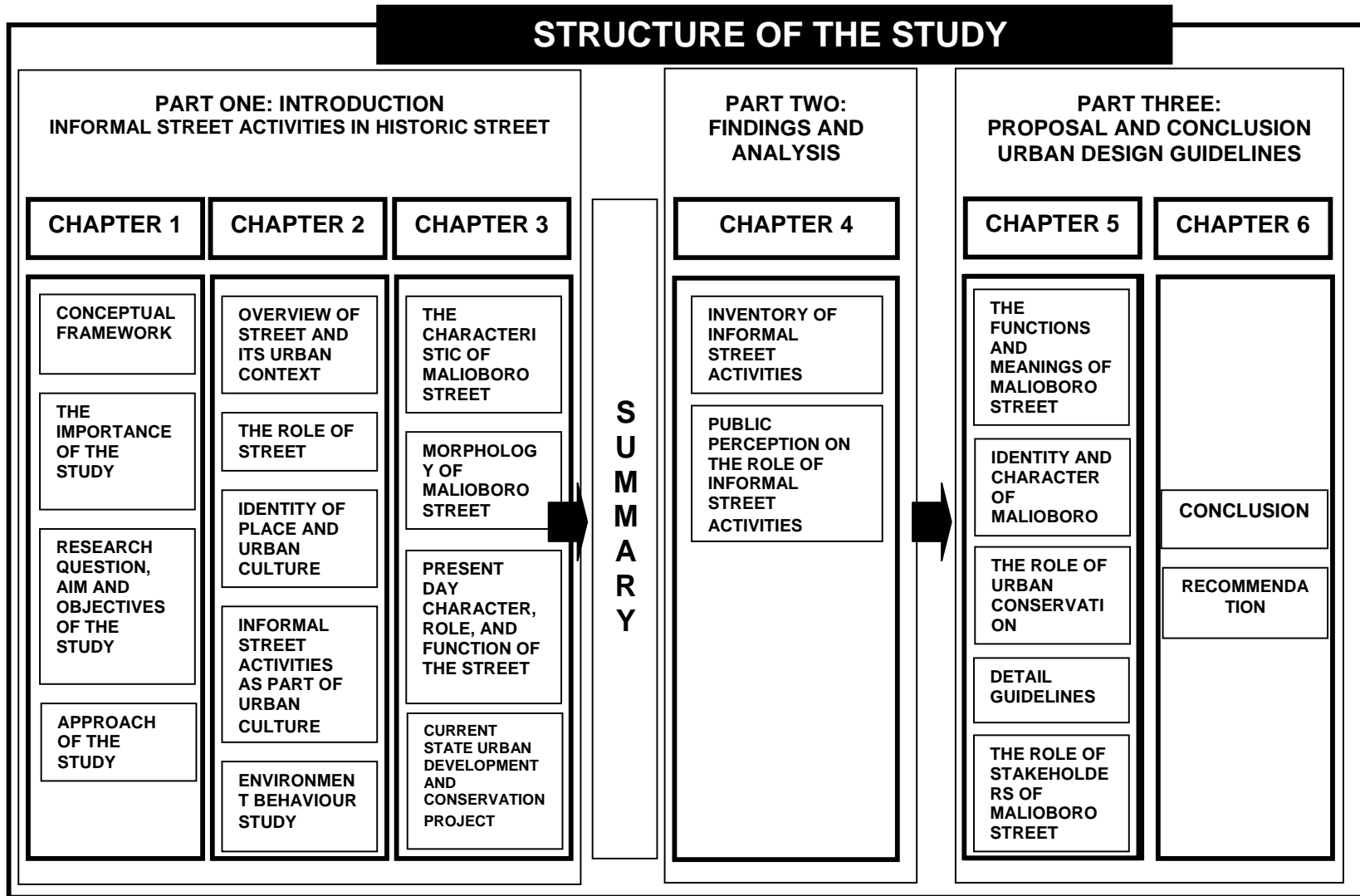


Figure 1.3: The Structure of the Study

- iv. In many parts of Yogyakarta's city centre automobiles have started to dominate the street space and have slowly pushed out the street culture. Traffic management in a fragment of the city's network is not sufficient to gain a better urban space as a whole, hence, a study on the traffic management of the Yogyakarta city centre would become crucial.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

The study has accomplished to reveal the role of informal street activities in Malioboro Street as a significant element, which contribute to the street character in particular, and urban image in general. The existence of informal street activities which often seen as "common" and "replaceable" to some of locals but a "unique" and "un-replaceable" to visitors and tourists is parallel to other memorable features including landmark, historical buildings, and other physical elements which contribute to the urban image. Thus, through demonstrating the role of informal street activities in Malioboro Street, this study has proved the significance of the existence of informal street activities in Malioboro Street as endemic to the city. In fact, these features are made Malioboro Street the most vibrant place in the city and indeed has made Yogyakarta a more memorable place. Through the study it had provided a critical overview of a special street which may have remained obscured, its potentials have now been highlighted and given the recognition in the quest for a better city image and identity for Yogyakarta.

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