Designing Sign System in Sirah Kencong Blitar as A Tourists Information Media

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Abstract

Blitar Regency, which is located in East Java Province, offers interesting natural and cultural riches. According to Detik Travel, as of April 2023, there are 35 tourist attractions that attract the attention of visitors, making Blitar a popular destination. One of them is Sirah Kencong, a tourist area with unique advantages. However, the current sign system is still traditional and less effective in providing clear guidance to visitors. By applying visual communication design and semiotic theory, this redesign is expected to improve navigation, provide more complete information, and increase a satisfying tourist experience. Significant visit data shows the need to improve information infrastructure to support sustainable tourism growth. It is hoped that the implementation of an innovative, consistent and inclusive sign system can optimize the natural tourism potential of Sirah Kencong by presenting clear information and supporting the overall visitor experience.

1. Introduction

Blitar Regency, located in East Java Province, is renowned for its captivating natural and cultural wealth. In April 2023, the Detik Travel website reported 35 noteworthy tourist attractions within the region. The diverse range of natural and recreational destinations has made Blitar Regency a popular choice for many visitors. Data from the Department of Culture and Tourism of Blitar Regency revealed that during the first quarter of 2023, the region welcomed a total of 531,156 visitors, with 239,251 in January, 178,004 in February, and 113,901 in March. In addition to local tourists from cities such as Malang, Tulungagung, Kediri, and Surabaya, the region also attracted international visitors, although their numbers were relatively modest at approximately 85 individuals.

One of the prominent tourist destinations in Blitar Regency is Sirah Kencong, a tea plantation located in Ngadirenggo Village, Wlingi District. Covering an area of approximately 219 hectares, it stands as the largest tea plantation in the region. Situated 36 km from the Blitar Regency center and at an altitude of 1,075 meters above sea level, this area offers a variety of attractions, including tea gardens, ancient temples, waterfalls, photo spots, and the "Puncak Pecel Blitar" food court. The breathtaking natural scenery, ranging from lush, terraced tea plantations to refreshing waterfalls, makes Sirah Kencong a noteworthy recreational destination. However, the sign system in Sirah Kencong requires significant improvements. Although several signs are available,

preliminary observations indicate that the existing system fails to meet the standards necessary for providing adequate information to tourists. The current sign system is primarily traditional, utilizing small wooden elements and painted labels. This results in confusion and limits the potential for visitors to fully enjoy their experience.

Thus, a redesign of the sign system that is effective, innovative, consistent, and inclusive is essential to address these shortcomings. An improved sign system will facilitate navigation, enhance the visitor experience, and support the development of the tourism sector in Sirah Kencong.

1.1 Literature Review

Table 1. Comparison of Relevant Previous Design Journal References

Researchers	Study Title	Research Objectives	Research Methods	Findings
Ramzy Adzhar & Swasty (2019)	Design of a Sign System Integrated with a Website as an Information Medium	Understanding sign placement, target audience behavior, and integrating QR codes for detailed information and directional guidance.	Qualitative and quantitative	The current signage system is ineffective. Emphasis on improving public facilities, directional signs, and digital integration.
Sugiyanto (2022)	Design of a Sign System for SMK Krian 2 Sidoarjo	Examining sign system design to enhance the school's image and establish it as a center of excellence.	Qualitative	The signage design process involved 7 alternative layouts. Digitalized sketches followed methods from *The Wayfinding Handbook* by David Gibson. Signs prioritize durability, consistency, and readability.
Kautsar et al., (2023)	Design of an Eco-Friendly Educational Tourism Sign System for Bukit Bambu	Addressing signage issues at Bukit Bambu as a sustainable educational tourism destination.	Qualitative descriptive and design thinking	Prototypes include two design types with pictograms, ensuring readability and durability. SWOT analysis informed the new concept design, which received positive feedback.
Niagaranti & Surya Patria (2020)	Design of a Sign System for Sumber Gempong Rice Field Tourism, Mojokerto City	Understanding the creation and positioning of signs to facilitate navigation in tourist areas.	Design thinking and implementation	The design included 29 pictograms with functions for identification, information, and direction. Feedback indicated that the signs were easy to understand, readable, and visually appealing.
Awalin et al., (2023)	Design of a Sign System at the Watu Gong Cultural Heritage Site in Tlogomas	Designing a sign system to preserve cultural heritage and provide visual information.	Qualitative	The signage system includes four types (identification, information, direction, warning). Visual design

				aspects were rated positively, although some improvements are needed. Implementation was successful, with positive feedback supporting cultural preservation.
Sitohang, J., & Ichsanuddin, D. (2023)	Development of Sirah Kencong Agrotourism Post-Pandemic in Ngadirejo Village, Wlingi Sub-District, Blitar Regency	Integrating agriculture and tourism sectors to provide educational, recreational, and cultural experiences.	Qualitative	Sirah Kencong contributes to environmental conservation and sustainable farming practices. Tourism villages grew by 30–35% in 2022, with 1,831 new tourism villages established across Indonesia, raising awareness of natural preservation.

Summary

Studies on sign system design across various locations have demonstrated its significant impact on improving visitor experience, communication, and cultural preservation. Methodologies vary, including SWOT, USP, and qualitative approaches, but all emphasize accessibility, clarity, and user-centric design. Notably, effective sign systems contribute to branding, environmental conservation, and the promotion of educational tourism.

2. Research Methods

The design method for the sign system at Sirah Kencong Tourism Area employs the design thinking approach. According to Rahmawan et al. (2022), adapting from Aulia et al. (2021), design thinking methodology, as proposed by the Hasso-Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford (The Interaction Design Foundation, 2021), is a user-centered and iterative problem-solving method. Ilham, H., Wijayanto, B., and Rahayu, S. P. (2021) explain that this method consists of five stages: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test.

The first stage, Empathize, focuses on understanding and experiencing the emotions and perspectives of others. In the Define stage, as described by Bila & Indah (2023), insights obtained during the Empathize stage are analyzed and detailed to identify key points within the system. Subsequently, during the Ideate stage, as outlined by Bila & Indah, 2023), brainstorming and conceptualization of design solutions begin, generating ideas for system design as a foundation for the next stage. In the Prototype stage, the generated ideas are transformed into prototypes or tangible products that can be tested. Finally, the Test stage evaluates the performance and effectiveness of the prototype or product. This iterative and user-focused process ensures that the designed solution aligns with user needs and expectations.

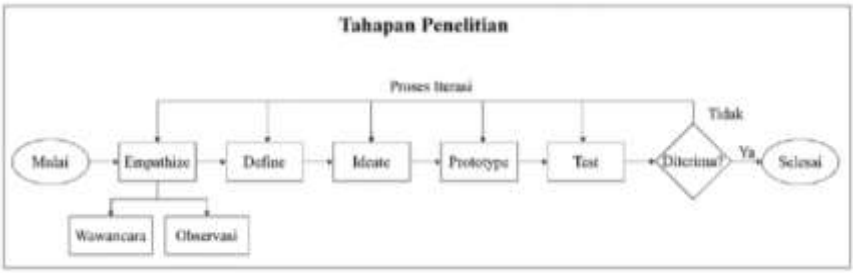

Fig 2. 1 Design thinking method. Source : Arifah, L. L., A., Putra, P., Oktadini, N. R., & Sevtiyuni, P. E. (2023)

The design study employed a combination of observation, interviews, and document studies for data collection. Observation provided direct insights into the conditions and specific needs of Sirah Kencong, while interviews with tourism managers offered valuable perspectives on expectations and user-oriented considerations. Document studies enriched the analysis with secondary data from reports, articles, and prior research, ensuring a well-rounded understanding. The 5W+1H method Sugiyanto (2022) structured the analysis by addressing What, Why, Where, When, Who, and How, enabling the development of a functional, innovative, and inclusive sign system aimed at improving the visitor experience and supporting regional tourism growth.

1. **What (Objective):**
   Design a Tourism Sign System for Sirah Kencong to assist tourists in locating specific destinations easily.
2. **Why (Purpose):**
   Highlight the importance of a sign system to help tourists navigate to specific locations and enhance the positive image of Sirah Kencong as a tourist destination.
3. **Where (Location):**
   Implement the sign system in key areas of **Sirah Kencong**
4. **When (Timing):**
   The sign system will function when visitors are in the Sirah Kencong area.
5. **Who (Audience):**
   The system is designed for specific audience segments, catering to their navigation and information needs.
6. **How (Design Approach):**
   Create the sign system following established principles of design, incorporating: Semiotics for meaningful symbols and Visual communication design for clear, attractive, and functional signage.

3. Result and Discussion

Sirah Kencong, a tea plantation located in Ngadirenggo Village, Wlingi District. Covering an area of approximately 219 hectares, it stands as the largest tea plantation in the region. This area offers a variety of attractions, including tea gardens, ancient temples, waterfalls, photo spots, and the "Puncak Pecel Blitar" food cour. However, the sign system in Sirah Kencong requires significant improvements. Although several signs are available, preliminary observations indicate that the existing system fails to meet the standards necessary for providing adequate information to tourists. The redesigned Sirah Kencong Tourism Sign System combines visual communication design principles, semiotics, and informative elements to deliver comprehensive tourism information. Featuring a bilingual format for local and international visitors, it integrates physical and digital formats to enhance accessibility. Physical signs provide essential general information, while digital elements offer specific, up-to-date details, ensuring relevance and functionality. This adaptive, engaging concept addresses diverse visitor needs effectively.

The sign system for Sirah Kencong Tourism Area was developed using the design thinking method, following the stages of empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. This process involved brainstorming, sign layout sketching, and visual execution.

A. Brainstorming

Brainstorming facilitated idea generation by gathering diverse inputs, promoting creativity, and fostering collaboration among the design team. This stage enabled the exploration of innovative concepts, ensuring a broad range of solutions for the sign system.

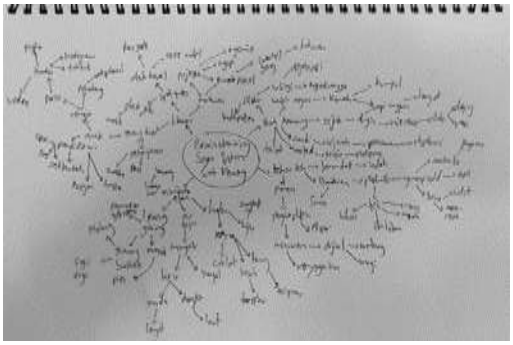

Fig 3.1 Brainstorming process. Source: personal document

B. Sign Layout Sketching

The sign layout sketch provided an initial visualization of sign placements, evaluating proportions and spacing. This step helped in refining the design for readability and effective communication, ensuring alignment with project goals.

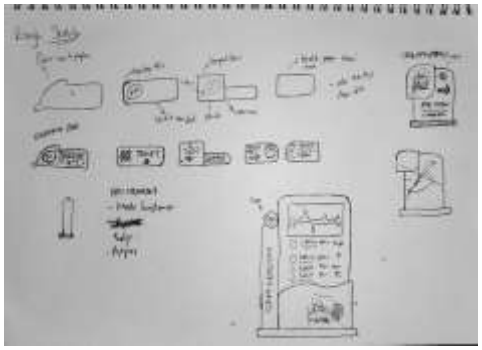

Fig 3.2 Rough sketch. Source: personal document

C. Visual Execution

During visual execution, the layout sketch was transformed into detailed designs using Adobe Illustrator. Typography, icons, and color schemes were incorporated to create an aesthetically appealing and functional sign system.

Fig 3.3 Pictogram. Source: personal document

Fig 3.4 Identification sign. Source: personal document

Fig 3.5 Information sign. Source: personal document

Fig 3.6 Directional sign. Source: personal document

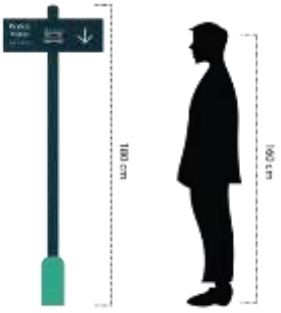

Fig 3.7 Directional sign. Source: personal document

Fig 3.8 Prohibition sign. Source: personal document

Fig 3.9 Warning sign. Source: personal document

The implementation of the sign system design for the Sirah Kencong tourist area focuses on two main media categories: primary and supporting media. The primary medium is the Graphic Standard Manual Sign System, which provides detailed guidelines on design standards, typography, color schemes, and other visual elements. This manual serves as a key reference for designers and tourism managers to ensure consistent and cohesive visual communication across the site.

Fig 3.10 Graphic Standard Manual. Source: Personal Document

In addition to the Graphic Standard Manual, supporting media are also developed as integral components of the sign system. These include informational brochures, foldable maps, digital maps, posters or banners, facades, animated motion graphics for attractions, flags or pennants, lanyard ID cards, and keychains. Together, these media enhance the effectiveness and reach of the sign system, improving the visitor experience and reinforcing the destination's identity.

Fig 3.11 Supporting media of Sirah Kencong's Sign System. Source: personal document

Trials

The media validation test for the Sign System at Sirah Kencong Tourism was conducted by Ibu Adita Ayu Kusumari, S.Sn., M.Sn., on July 13, 2024, through an online platform. The validation results indicated that the majority of aspects received high scores, with a rating of 5, suggesting that the Sign System was successful. However, the results also highlighted the need for further improvements, particularly in ensuring that the implementation of the design system is consistent throughout.

Fig 3.12 Validation Evidence. Source: Personal Doument

The validation test was conducted using a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, which involved 30 respondents from Malang, Probolinggo, and Blitar. In Malang, 24 respondents were divided as follows: Polinema 1 (3.3%), UMM 2 (6.7%), Universitas Brawijaya 2 (6.7%), Universitas Negeri Malang 4 (13.2%), general public 5 (16.5%), and STIKI Malang 10 (33%). From Probolinggo, there were 2 respondents from the general public (6.7%), and from Blitar, 4 respondents: Universitas Islam Balitar 1 (3.3%) and the general public 3 (9.9%).

The results of the questionnaire evaluation from the 31 respondents showed the following:

1. 83.9% rated it as excellent, while 16.1% rated it as good.
2. 71% rated it as excellent, while 29% rated it as good.
3. 58.1% rated it as excellent, while 41.9% rated it as good.
4. 83.9% rated it as excellent, 12.9% rated it as good, and 3.2% rated it as poor.

4. Conclusions

The design study of the sign system in the Sirah Kencong tourism area aims to facilitate visitors in obtaining information and navigating the area. The goal of this research is to create an effective, innovative, consistent, and inclusive sign system as an information medium for tourists, enhancing the quality of the tourism experience, and supporting the development of the tourism sector in Sirah Kencong.

The data collection methods used include direct field observation, interviews with tourism managers, and related document studies. Data analysis was conducted using the 5W+1H method (what, why, where, when, who, how) to determine the specific needs for the design. The design process followed a design thinking approach, consisting of five stages: empathize (understanding the needs of tourists), define (defining the problem in detail), ideate (developing design solution ideas), prototyping, and testing. The results of the study indicate that the designed sign system successfully addressed the shortcomings of the previous system, providing clear information, enhancing the image and appeal of the area, and advancing the development of the tourism sector in Sirah Kencong.

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