

# Memorable square : identities, meaning and the production of public space

A case study of Yogyakarta, Indonesia



REAL CORP 2012 - Dyah Widiyastuti – TU Dortmund

# introduction

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- A place as a space that entails cultural quality and local attachment
- Place-making is a process in which the people attach meaning to the city space
- The meaning of space is not static, it evolves over time
- An urban public space is where both place and urban life are produced

# What is a public space ?

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- Public space relates to all those components of the built and natural environment, where the public has free access within their framework of their function (Carmona *et al.* 2003) either for collective or personal activities (Carr *et al.* 1992).
- A public space may be interpreted as a space concerning people as a whole, which is accessible and open to all, provided by public authorities for the use of people in general.
- Public space is also being understood as the opposite of private space where the differences lay on the degree of its *publicness* (or its *privateness*).

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Referring to Benn and Gaus, the degree of *publicness* could be described from the criteria of :

- **ACCESS** -- is not only access to physically enter into the space, but also to social activities, information and resources in public space.
- **INTEREST** -- relates to common wellbeing or benefit received by people instead of by individual.
- **ACTOR** -- relates management, which means individuals or agencies as representative of people who manage and make sure public space is used for common purposes

The degree of *publicness*, regarding to these three criteria, therefore depends on the degree of its activities, uses, development process and management, which are used and served public interest.

# Important notes on public space & meaning

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- Term of public space is physical and social. Public space as a material space then could be recognized from its spatial form and order, while social dimension of public space deals with people, their behavior and activities, supporting the public life of society. It means that understanding public space has to consider both physical and social aspects simultaneously and focus on the dynamic interrelationships between them.
- Public space has meaning as the result of interrelationship of spatial and human activity. People shape and interact with public space through meaning the public space have for them
- Public space is emerging. It produces and reproduces through cultural and historical changes. It is a part of urban structure, where space and societies are in the dynamic of historical change.

# The research

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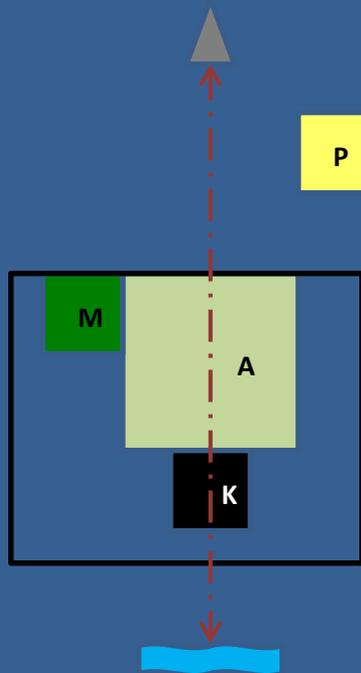
- The focus of the research will take place on a traditional public spaces within the historic part of the city, called *Alun-alun*.
- It is located in front of the palace of Yogyakarta, the center of the city
- *Alun-alun* takes form as a square open space that covers area of 310x280m<sup>2</sup>
- These spaces have been existed since 1755 and now have been struggling in finding their form and function within recent urban development.
- These traditional open space will be selected to explain the transformation of public spaces due to their rich character through long history.

## purpose of the presentation

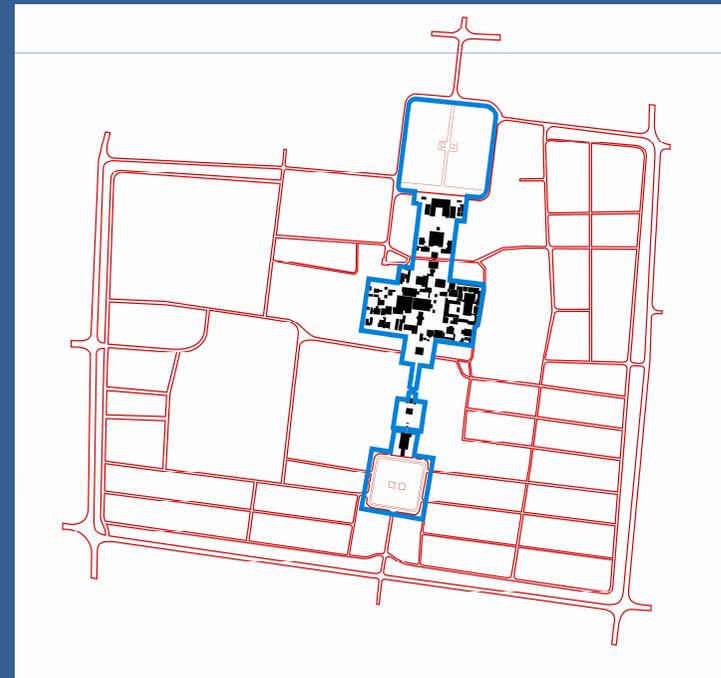
1. The value and meaning of public space over its history
2. Significant features of public space which make it as a memorable space

# The early form of the city

- City and palace was the representation of parallelism between macrocosm-microcosm
- a palace became the exemplary center and a king was the representation of God (divine kingship)
- hierarchy-centered of spatial arrangement – power is strongly hierarchical, flowing from center to periphery



K – *Kraton*, the royal center  
A – *Alun-alun*, the public center  
M – Mosque, the religious center  
P – Market, the economic center



# I. the history of the square (1755 – 1900s)

1. The representation of *alun-alun* strongly showed the king power over his subjects
  - It was a representation of macrocosm-microcosm, hence this space was considered sacred.
  - *Alun-alun* was the only part of palace that was publicly accessible only during special occasions.
  - there was a restriction of access and uses.

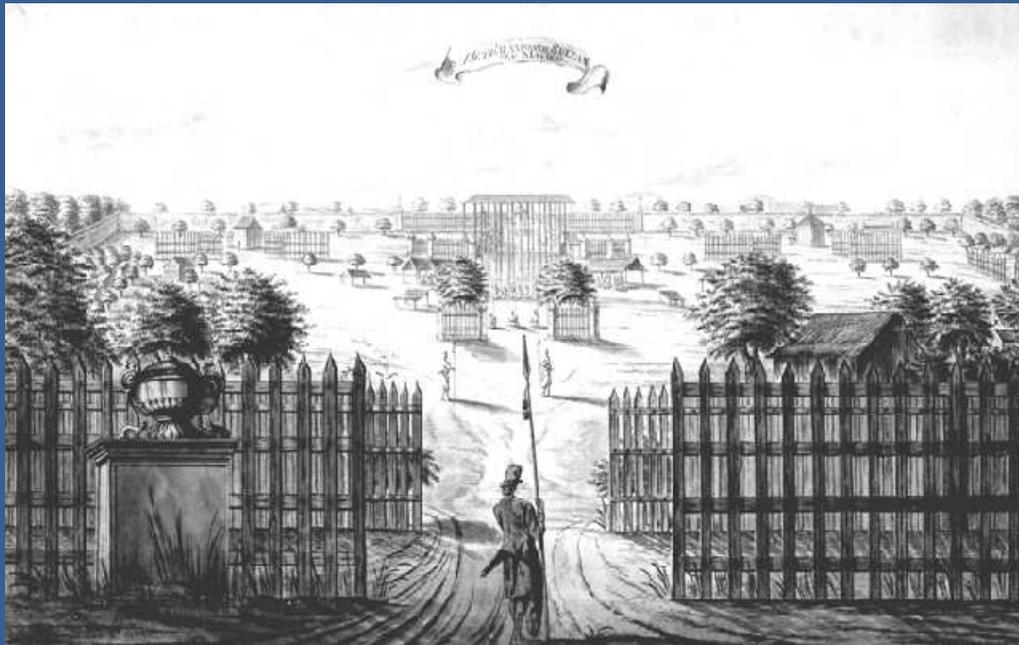
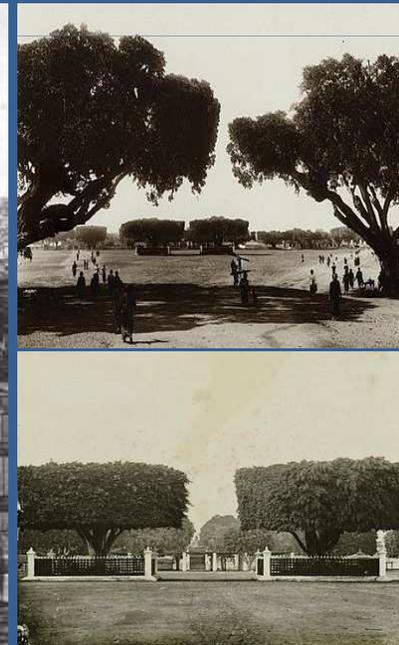


Figure 6-5. View of the Yogyakarta *kraton* from the northern square (*alun-alun*) sketched by A. de Nelly, one of Johannes Rach's pupils, in circa 1771.

Source: Courtesy of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam as cited in Peter Carey 2008

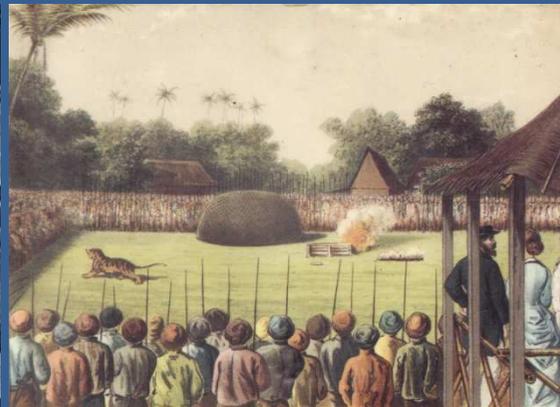
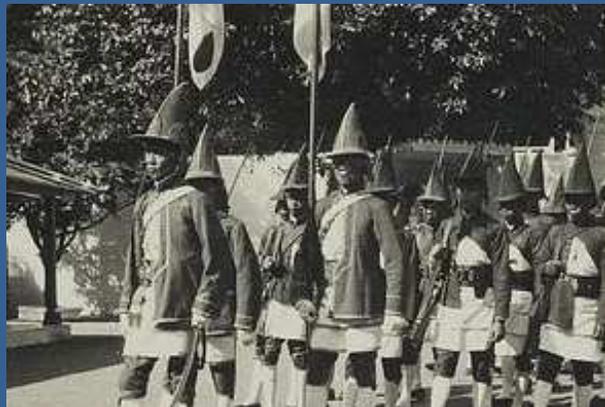


Source: Courtesy of KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies

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2. *Alun-alun* was central to both physical and cultural lives of its people. It had a more civic in nature although this was mostly symbolic

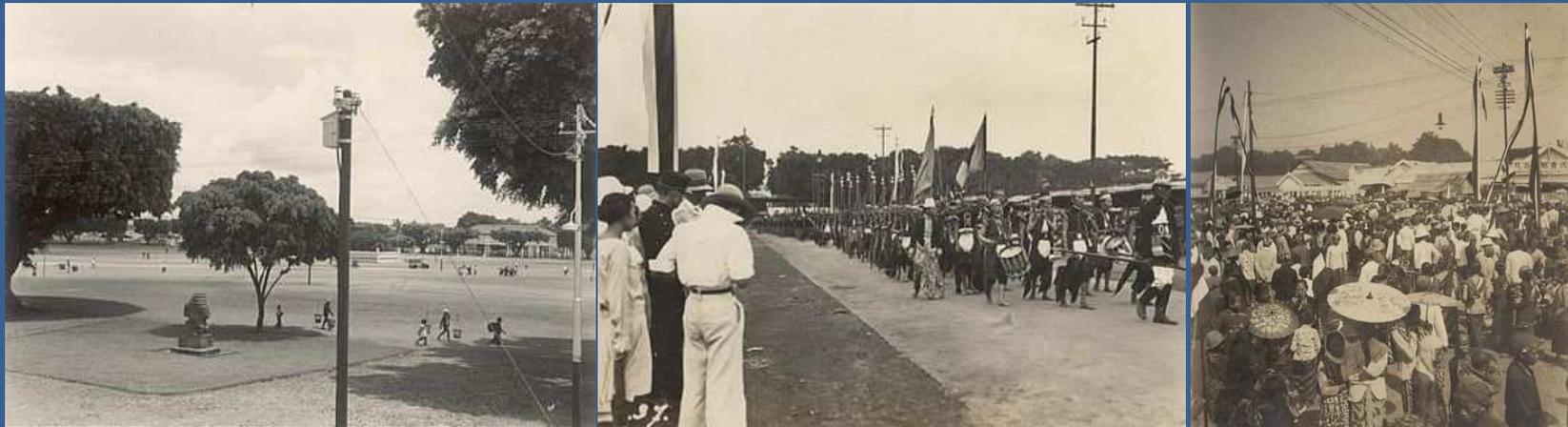
- Arena for delivering opinion and demand to the king
- Arena for public activities sponsored by the realm
- Arena for religious ceremonies



## II. *Alun-alun* in the early Indonesia independence period (1940s)

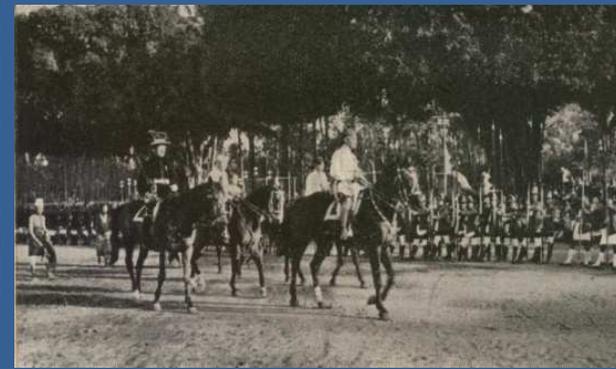
The representation of *alun-alun* showed the integration of traditional monarch to national Republic of Indonesian system

- The realm becomes the center of religious and culture, but not political
- Simplification of rites and rituals
- Open access and less restriction of uses



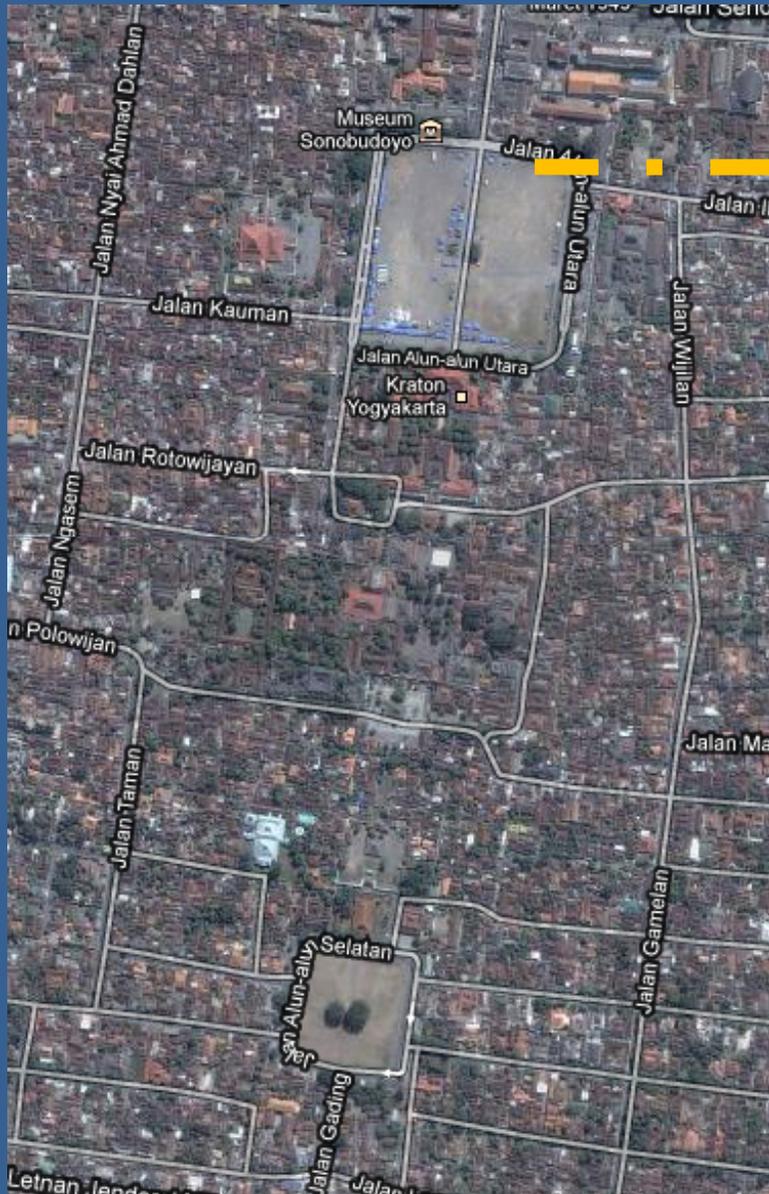
It became governmental and cultural symbols

- Arena for political rallies
- Arena for national movement against Dutch power
- Arena for cultural religious ceremonies



Source: Collection of IPPHOS, Indonesian National Archives.

### III. Alun-alun today



#### City

Area : 32.5 km<sup>2</sup>  
Population density : 13.253,4/km<sup>2</sup>  
Growth rate : 1,9%

#### Inside the city wall

Area : 1.40km<sup>2</sup>  
Population density : 16,086 persons/km<sup>2</sup>  
around 74.6% was used for settlement



- The city is growing, mostly to the north direction
- Areas along the city axis turn into commercial and business districts
- Modernization – mall and virtual space
- Mixed population – city of education and tourist destination

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It supports the role of the palace as a center of culture and tourist attraction

- Arena for culture religious ceremonies



Continues to be central of both physical and cultural lives of its people

- Arena for social, cultural, political activities
- Public activities



Distinction of events and processes between:

- 'Making life' – everyday life practices
- 'Making history' – special events as the rupture of everyday life



**1** Transportation channel - passing through



**2** Walking and jogging



**3** Massive exercise



**4** Playing football game



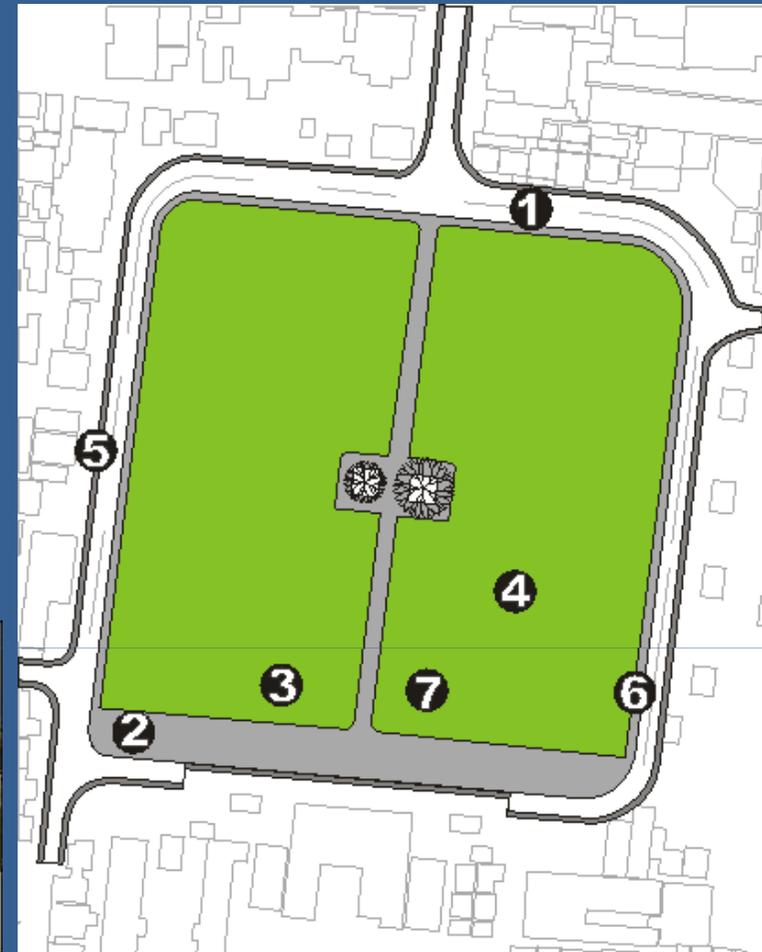
**5** Food stalls



**6** Exercise using outdoor exercise equipment



**7** Parking space



# Problems associated with the present roles

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- Decreasing of physical and social qualities
- Mushrooming street vendors and informal sectors
- It is becoming part of transportation arteries



- Dual authorities between traditional authority and city government – inefficiency
- Different perspectives between ‘conservation’ and ‘development’
- Romanticizing the past and sacredness of the place
- Lack of detailed plan

# Physical transformation, permanence of the events

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- The character and intensity of socio-politic and economic activities transcend the physical transformations specific to each era
- The residential population has maintained similar socio-religious belief over the span of centuries, in spite of facing the modernity
- the king as the holder of traditional authorities remain the strong actor that control decision making with regard to *alun-alun*
- *Alun-alun* maintains its role as an urban node, connecting the past to the presence

# Significant features of *alun-alun*

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- **Cultural values**  
It is an arena for traditional and contemporary cultural ceremonies which link this space to its past
- **Political values**  
It is a significant arena for delivering opinions and demands to the authorities
- **Social values**  
It provides a space to escape from the highly dense environment for social interactions
- **Economic values**  
It supports the informal sectors' livelihood, when government is unable to do so

# Conclusion

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- Only civil society has the capacity to define a space as a place. On the other hand, the market and the state could either facilitate or restrict the place-making process
- The meaning of historic urban space is an accumulation of past events with contribution from the presents
- Functional elements combine with symbolic ones to form structure and meaning of a public space

**Thank you for your attention**