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# The changing aspects of function and meaning of space in Alun-Alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta

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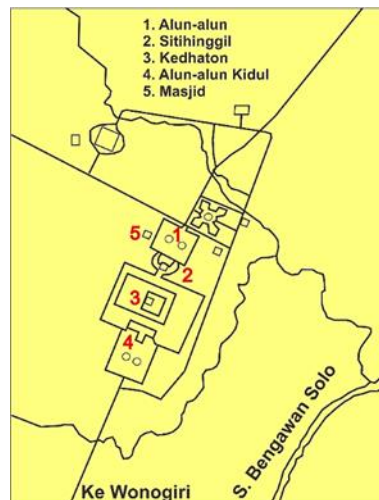
**Abstract.** As one of the traditional squares on the island of Java, Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta faces the challenge of changing its function. The physical condition of the South Square of the Keraton Surakarta is covered by a wall called beteng. In the Javanese spiritual concept, Alun-alun Kidul is connected in an imaginary line to the south coast. In terms of structure, the Alun-alun Kidul has a characteristic Javanese town square in general which is influenced by the cosmological concept of Hindu society. In the past, the function of the Alun-alun Kidul was closed and had a high degree of privatization and became a place for rituals of silence and contemplation of the king. On the other hand, the current physical condition and function of Alun-Alun Kidul have changed. This change is an effort to support the needs of the city today and in the future. The method used in this research is a phenomenological descriptive approach, refers to a grounded theory that does not use the term population but emphasizes a social situation consisting of four elements, namely place, activity, person (actor), and time. The results showed a pattern of spatial use for sacred and profane activities in spatial and temporal characteristics. Physical structure patterns in permanent form do not occur much, but semi-permanent and non-permanent physical patterns show changes in the meaning and behavior of space. These patterns show non-physical influences, namely the influence of cultural aspects, social aspects, economic aspects, and political aspects, as well as the behavior and mindset of the community, especially Surakarta City.

## 1. Introduction

The development of the times and modernity have generated many changes in all aspects of urban life in Indonesia, including its traditional cities. The concept of Keraton Surakarta greatly influences the spatial pattern of the city of Surakarta, which symbolizes Javanese cultural, traditional, and spiritual elements in the sacred-profane relationship in terms of macrocosm and the microcosm. According to the *Negarakretagama* book, the orientation of the Majapahit palace along with its square in the west is a symbol of the king's power and is different from the state of power centers in Java in the aftermath, where the north-south axis becomes a strong abscissa axis [1].

Likewise, the same condition occurred to Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta as one of the city's cultural heritage. The land and buildings of the Keraton Kasunanan Surakarta and all its accessories such as the Grand Mosque and Alun-alun Kidul are owned by Kasunanan Surakarta and need to be preserved as a city heritage. In fact, there are influences that result in various changes and shifts in functions, activities, and architecture [2]. City Center and Keraton Surakarta can be seen in Figure 1.



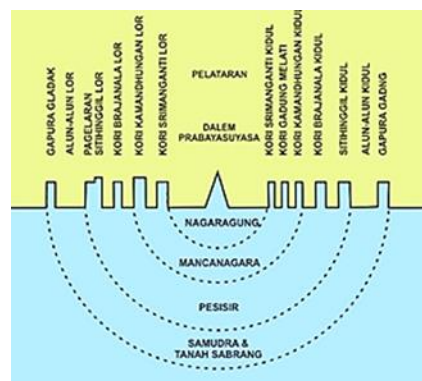


**Figure 1.** City Center and Keraton Surakarta (Source: Alun-alun Surakarta [3], compiled from Googlemaps).

Looking back at the past history of *alun-alun*, there has always been a connection between the traditional and cosmological problems of space. The conditions and spatial arrangement in *alun-alun* are also inseparable from the foundation of cultural philosophy and cosmological concepts. On the contrary, at present, *alun-alun* is better understood as an open space related to spatial functions in urban spaces. Its application can be in the social, cultural and economic fields.

These changes in patterns are related to the meaning and function of alun-alun spaces, and present challenges to spatial patterns. For this reason, it is essential to fathom the changes in the function of *alun-alun* space itself. This understanding is expected to be in line with the city government which performing some efforts to change the physical, territorial, or cultural arrangements of the square. Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta, as one of the traditional squares on the island of Java, faces challenges from this change in function.

The physical condition of Keraton Surakarta is covered by a wall called beteng. In the Javanese spiritual concept, this condition is connected in an imaginary line to the south coast. In the structural pattern, the square space owns the characteristics of a traditional Javanese town square in general which is influenced by the cosmological concept of Hindu society. In the past, the function of the Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta was very closed and had a high degree of privatization and was a place for rituals of silence and contemplation of the king. Now, the physical condition and its functions have changed. Keraton and cosmos pieces of the cosmic composition of the Keraton Surakarta can be seen in Figure 2.



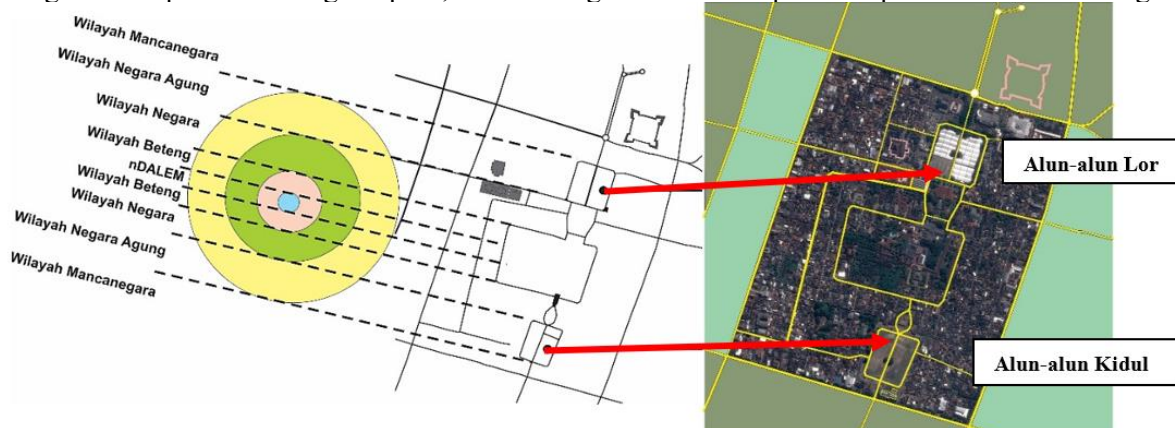
**Figure 2.** Keraton and cosmos pieces of the cosmic composition of the Keraton Surakarta (Source: Bahrend [4]; Santoso [5]).

Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta is a public space in the city center as well as a center for community activities, including economic, social and cultural activities. Economic activities have become very dominant in the region. During the kingdom era, the alun-alun area was a sacred area associated with the ritual and cultural activities of Keraton Surakarta. In connection with the current condition, there are concerns that a shift in spatial functions will hold an impact on the spatial, social, economic, and physical aspects of Keraton Surakarta. Based on the descriptions above, it can be concluded that ritual activities in Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta as a cultural heritage of the past and as part of the sacred activities of the palace are still being carried out. The composition in which the structures of colonial and traditional sets of elements stand adjacent can be found in the case of Yogyakarta and Surakarta. Comparing the scale of its range, *Caturtunggal* set of elements (Keraton, Alun-alun and Great Mosque) is more dominantly visible than colonial set of elements that are set right on its northern side. Alun-alun, part of Keraton complex. The existence of Keraton is characterized by the presence of Alun-alun in front of it and vice versa. Alun-alun shape is a large rectangle square [6].

## 2. Materials and methods

The spatial pattern in Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta area such as a field (*alun-alun*), an area of twin banyan trees in the middle of *alun-alun*, a perimeter fence, and a funeral carriage area still exist today and become a place to relax and gather with family or friends. The sidewalks in *alun-alun* area have been neglected and damaged. The main route as access in and out of *alun-alun* area becomes uncontrollable, congested and jammed. As a result, Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta lost the meaning of its sacred space and turned into a profane space. Sacred is something that is supernatural, extraordinary, very significant, and not easily forgotten. Meanwhile, profane is something general, related to things that are performed every day regularly and randomly, and actually not really significant [7].

The phenomenon that emerges is that there is a change in the function of space in Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta (as a square), from a place of sacred activity in the early days of the kingdom, to a place of community activity which owns profane meaning. In space theory, this implies that there is a change in the spatial meaning of space, the meaning of sacred and profane spaces related to zoning.



**Figure 3.** Alun-alun Surakarta (town square) and cosmology (Source: Author's processed results).

The method in this paper utilized a phenomenological descriptive approach. This method refers to a grounded theory that does not apply the term population but emphasizes a social situation consisting of four elements, namely place, activity, person (actor), and time.

The scope and boundaries of the research area are in Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta area (Figure 3). The determination of the scope and boundaries of the research is based on the cosmological philosophy of Java kings which is based on the cosmology adhered to the palace, with three elements of cosmology, namely: the universe - human - God, the form which is the basis and inherent in the existence of the palace [1].



### 3. Results

The results signified that there was a pattern of spatial use for sacred and profane activities and time. There are not many physical patterns that can be distinguished from permanent forms, but the physical structure patterns, both semi-permanent and non-permanent, indicate changes in the meaning and behavior of space. These patterns indicate a non-physical influence, namely the influence of cultural, social, economic, and political aspects, as well as the behavior and mindset of the people in Surakarta. The effect of time that occurs between day and night turns out to be able to change spatial space as a sacred and profane meaning (Figures 4, 5, 6 and 7).



**Figure 4.** The visual condition of the Alun-alun Kidul Surakarta at night.



**Figure 5.** Space Zoning for activities at night in Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta City (Source: Author's process).

Field observations at Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta also exemplify that the temporal report is not in a physical setting, but is related to cultural areas and areas related to the surrounding population (general public and street vendors). This is also related to the palace square area as a public space

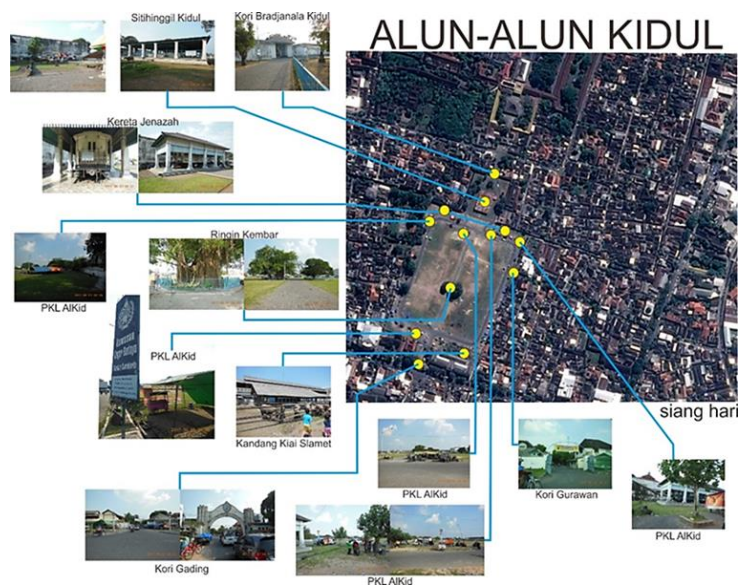
belonging to Keraton Surakarta which can also be utilized harmoniously by the common people with the king's permission.

Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta:

- The phenomenon of spatial interaction in Alun-alun Kidul area (street vendors and culinary stalls)
- The phenomenon of activities around the building where the hearse and twin banyan trees lie (street vendors, culinary street vendors, children's games)
- The phenomenon of interaction around the front of sithinggil, alun-alun Kidul (parking for love rickshaws, wagons, parking for cars and motorbikes)
- The phenomenon of spatial interaction around Kiai Slamet's cage (street vendors, children's games, parking area)
- The phenomenon of spatial interaction in Alun-alun Kidul (religious activities, Eid prayer)



**Figure 6.** Alun-alun Kidul Surakarta.



**Figure 7.** Space Zoning for activities at day in the Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta City (Source: Author's process).

#### 4. Discussion

Apart from being a culinary tourism spot, Alun-alun Keraton Kidul Surakarta is also a night tour. The purpose of establishing this tourist spot at night is not only to create employment opportunities for the surrounding community but also to renew the usefulness of the previous Alun-alun Keraton Surakarta. In the 1990s, Alun-alun Kidul was identical with the place of immorality, whereas now the Alun-alun Kidul Surakarta has become an open space for the people of Surakarta. The large amount of food sold and the many rides to play make this place a gathering choice for residents. One of the rides of choice at Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta is a tourist pedicab which is often referred to as a love pedicab. A love pedicab is a pedicab decorated with lights around it. The love pedicab is operated by a pedicab driver who is managed by the pedicab owner. There are several pedicab drivers who are owned by one pedicab owner (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Night tour in alun-alun Kidul (street foods, children's games, etc.).

In the past, Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta served as a bridge for good relations between the palace and the community. But now this area is a favorite tourist spot for residents of Surakarta and its surroundings. There are many cheap food vendors to the south of the Keraton Kasunan Surakarta. The young people who come usually hang out together and also have a culinary tour along the square. The sellers around the square start selling their goods at 16.00 and before 22.00 close their stalls because Kori Brojonolo Kidul is closed (Figure 9). Apart from young people, parents, families and young children also enjoy the night tours at Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta.



**Figure 9.** Kori Brojonolo Kidul when the conditions are closed and open.

#### 5. Conclusion

The term transformation phenomenon towards sacred-profane space in the concept of public space has actually occurred since the kingdom era. However, the changes in sacred-profane aspects that occurred in Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta at that time were not as lively and busy as they are now. Changes in the aspect of *alun-alun* space which used to be a private space, is now a public space. This makes Alun-alun Kidul Keraton Surakarta a public space with various 'uniqueness'.

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