

Current Activities and Conditions of Merdeka Square in Medan

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Abstract

Merdeka Square in Medan is an open field which is a gathering point for Medan residents. As an open field for the citizens of the city of Medan, of course it has a function as a public space, several sectors in the field have been functioned for the benefit of the economic and political sectors. For this reason, research is needed to reveal the activities and the current merdeka field, considering that the merdeka field is a cultural heritage that has historical value as a symbol of colonial city civilization and the period of independence as a silent witness to the proclamation of Indonesian independence. This study uses qualitative research methods. This method will result in a writing of the activities and conditions of the current independent field so that the preservation of the concept of preservation is in accordance with the Cultural Conservation Law Number 10 of 2010.

Keywords: Merdeka Square, Cultural Heritage, Medan City

1. Introduction

“The key to preserving cultural heritage is the ability to maximize it as a source of funds” (Hilman Farid, Medan Merdeka, 2019). The statement by Hilman Farid (Director General of Culture of the Ministry of Education and Culture) above is actually very much in line with the preservation of cultural heritage in the city of Medan. The goal is the same, the preservation of cultural heritage as an additional source of funds in the regions. Ironically, the implementation is different when faced with the reality in the city or regional government environment. Preservation of cultural heritage is actually utilized by local-city governments, agencies, organizations, and certain institutions as a source of income for personal/group pockets or project activities. The pattern of project-based cultural heritage conservation activities is always the same. An example of a case is that there is an organization or institution x demanding and shouting in one of the online mass media demanding the rescue of the cultural heritage site x and then making various seminars, speeches and others about saving cultural heritage buildings to the city-regional government to save it. the cultural heritage. Three-quarters of the money the city-regional government welcomed the organization's chorus with an audience to the city-regional government service. Reach a mutual agreement between the city-regional government and these organizations by giving a writing project or a project that smells of saving cultural heritage. When the project is finished, the

mission and objectives of the organization/institution and the celebration of the city-regional government are completed. But what happened to the cultural heritage, was it saved? The answer is no. It is not the main goal to preserve the cultural heritage buildings, instead, the local government and institutions work together to make the object of the building a source of income from annual project activities. In the end, it is not the building that is preserved or saved, but rather that the preservation of the cultural heritage is utilized to its fullest as a source of income or as an annual project object. This is an example of a case pattern of why cultural heritage preservation failed in the city or regional government, especially in the city of Medan. This reason is the basis for describing the current reality of why the preservation of cultural heritage such as the Merdeka Square has not been saved as a cultural heritage that is used for the benefit of the community.

Merdeka Square has been registered as a national cultural heritage area. This is the first stage carried out by the regional government, but there are steps so that the independent field is preserved as a cultural heritage area that has historical and cultural values for the development of knowledge and history of the Indonesian nation. For this reason, the field of independence as a cultural heritage area must be seen from a historical and contemporary perspective. The historical fact is that the independent field (esplanade) during the colonial period was a symbol of the glory, civilization and progress of the colonial system, but the reality now is that the Medan city government only makes the independent field a field that functions as a place of official activity, a source of income and does not function as a symbol of civilization and progress of a country. Medan city.

2. Research Methods

This research uses qualitative research methods. The qualitative research used in this research is the research conducted by Bogdan and Taylor in Moleong (2000:3). Bogdan and Taylor stated that qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written and or oral words from people and the behavior observed by researchers. In line with this, Maleong (2007:6) says that qualitative research is research that aims to understand the phenomena of what is experienced by research subjects holistically, and can describe it in the form of words and language naturally by utilizing various scientific methods.

3. Results and Discussion

At the beginning of the 20th century, the esplanade became a symbol of civilization in the city of Medan, as seen from various sources and colonial photos. The colonial government was quite successful in managing the independent field (esplanade) as a public open space even though this management was a political interest of the colonial government when it colonized the city of Medan. In contrast to now the Merdeka Square as a green open space is increasingly narrow due to the presence of office buildings and commercial trading activities there. The independence field

is now still a public open space, but several sectors in the field have been functioned for the sake of the economic and political sector. It can be seen from Google Maps that if we see there are many buildings around the Merdeka Square, we can see the commercial and office sectors. For example, in the west there are various Merdeka Walk restaurants, in the north there is a mobile SIM service office, in the east there are Keeta Api Station Parking and Bookstores and many other buildings. The mapping shows that the Medan city government failed to fight for an independent field as a green open space for the beauty of the city.

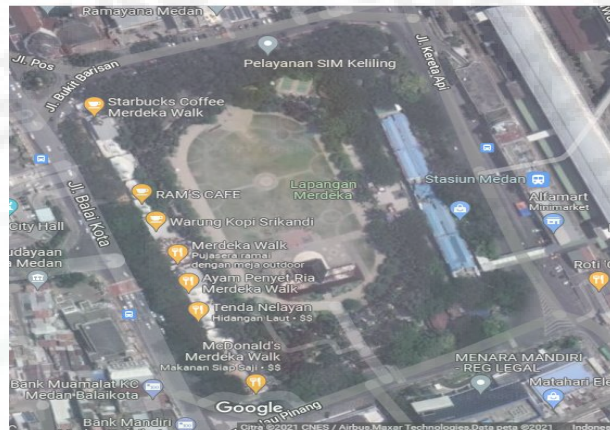


Fig: Merdeka Square Map from Google Maps,
Source: <https://www.google.com/maps>, accessed on 28 October 2021

It can be seen that if we enter through the gate of the Merdeka Square (esplanade) on Jalan Pulau Pinang, exactly behind Mc.Donalds, there is the Office of the City Cleanliness and Parks Office, Merdeka Square.



Fig.: Front View of the City Sanitation and Parks Office at Merdeka Square,
Source : Doc. Private, 26 June 2021

Not only the Medan City Cleanliness and Parks office, Merdeka Square, there is also the Medan Polrestabas Satlantas office and Mobile SIM Service which is in

front of Bukit Barisan Street, the position of the Polrestabes Satlantas office is in the north corner of Merdeka Square or in front of PT. Mighty Food Immortal. This post serves to maintain traffic order in the Merdeka Square. Beside this office, there is also a mobile SIM service office (next to the Merdeka Square Post).



Figure 33: Front View of Merdeka Square then Post Office,
Source: Google Maps, accessed on 27-10-2021

Commercial activities in the independent field are like mushrooms in the rainy season, which means something that suddenly becomes abundant, both legally and illegally. Commercial activities legally permitted by the Medan city government, namely Merdeka walk, there are many restaurants and cafes of expensive brand food and drinks standing in Merdeka square, ranging from Starbucks coffee, Fishermen, Coffee Crowd, The Aillo, Rams Cafe, Ayam Penyet Ria Jakarta and Mc. Donald. Merdeka Walks was built around 2005 with the permission of the Medan city government. Merdeka Walks is managed by HRD PT. Orange Indonesia, representing the foodcourt manager at Merdeka Square which has a 20-year contract from 2005 to 2025 (<https://medan.tribunmewas/2016/05/21/pengelola-merdeka-walk-ingatkan-contract-untuk-tahun-2021>) On the west side of Merdeka Square, on Jalan Bai, Medan City, there is already a Merdeka Walks restaurant and cafe building. The existence of Merdeka Walks, on the one hand, adds to the attraction of culinary tourism in the city of Medan, on the other hand it interferes with the existence of trambesi trees and the independent field area as a green open space in the city of Medan.



Fig: Front Door or Front View of Merdeka Walk, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: Merdeka Walks North Gate, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021

Another commercial activity is the train station parking area above which there is a used-book shop. The entire Eastern Region of Merdeka Square, precisely the area in front of the station road, has been filled with buildings for the train station motorized vehicle parking area and second-hand bookstores. Ironically, this area is behind the monument to the proclamation of independence of the Republic of Indonesia (RI), this monument should be a place of sacred symbols as evidence of the struggle for Indonesian independence in North Sumatra and Medan Around. If you look closely at the parking area, the condition is poorly maintained, dirty, muddy, and a lot of garbage is like a slum area and it can be seen that the construction is not finished yet. The development of this area is a collaboration between the Medan City Government (Pemko) and PT Kereta Api Indonesia (KAI) in 2018 with the aim of reducing traffic barriers that cause congestion. Indeed, its function is to control motorized vehicles which are still often parked haphazardly around Medan Railway Station, but this area also reduces the land for the independent field and adds to the slums of the independent field whose function is as a public and green open field.

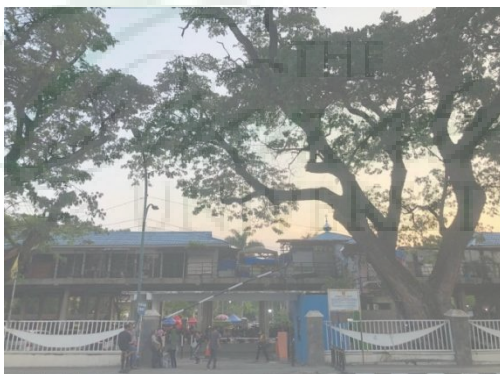


Fig: Station Parking Area and Used Bookstore Front View, Source : Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: Station Parking Area and Used Bookstore Rear View, Source : Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: Inside of Station Parking, Source : Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: The Parking Area and Used Bookstore Behind the Indonesian Proclamation Monument at Merdeka Square, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021

Commercial areas whose existence is illegal or non-official in the Merdeka Square are street vendors who can move from one place to another at any time in the Merdeka Square area. These street vendors are located in front of the north gate of the Merdeka Square, a playground at the Merdeka Square, and have even mushroomed on the right and left wings of the Proclamation of Indonesia Monument or to be precise behind the train station and used bookstores. These street vendors include chicken noodle-noodle traders, satay, grilled meatballs, burgers, and retail beverage traders. If you look at the description of street vendors, it can be seen below:

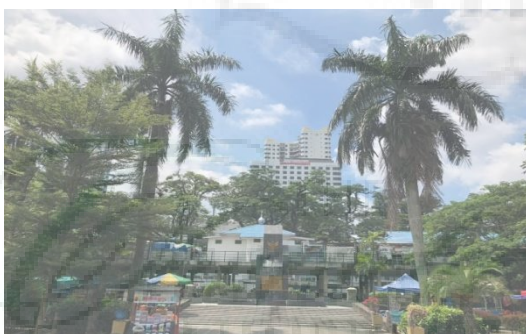


Fig: The Position of Street Vendors on the Right and Left Wings of the Proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia Monument at Merdeka, Square, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: The Situation of Street Vendors on the Left Wing of the Proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia is clearly visible, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: Street vendors in the area near the Merdeka Square Playground, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021

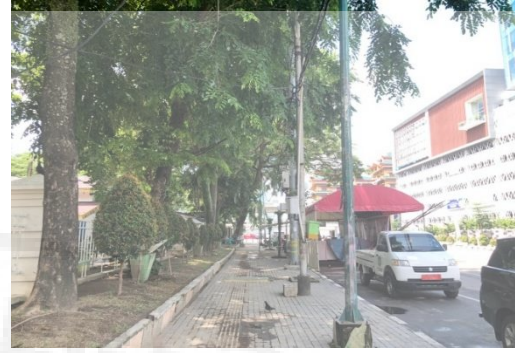


Fig: Street vendors in the area near the Merdeka Square Playground, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021

The existence of these street vendors is quite disturbing the sacredness of the Monument to the Proclamation of Independence of the Republic of Indonesia because its existence is very close to the area of the monument. The buying and selling activities there of course made the proclamation monument dirty due to buyer waste or dirt from the activities of retail heavy food-drink sellers. In fact, if we look at the meaning of the symbol of the proclamation of Indonesian independence, it is a symbol of Indonesia's freedom from the shackles of colonialism in North Sumatra. This is where the first proclamation apple was held in Fukuraido Square (independence field) on October 6, 1945 which was read by Governor Mr. T.M. Hassan and accompanied by Achmad Tahir, Soegoendo Kartoprojo. This monument was inaugurated on August 9, 1986 by Achmad Tahir, one of the figures who played a role in the proclamation of North Sumatra. The condition of the proclamation monument in the Merdeka Square is also not maintained and many of the marble walls are broken and damaged, especially the copper plaque that tells the events at this monument. In fact, the proclamation monument is a sacred place as a symbol of independence and a place to instill the values of nationalism for future generations, not a commercial place or street vendors hanging around the monument.



Fig: Condition of the Proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia Monument at Merdeka Square, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: Condition of the Proclamation of the Republic of Indonesia Monument at Merdeka Square, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: Rear View of the Proclamation Monument in Merdeka Square, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021

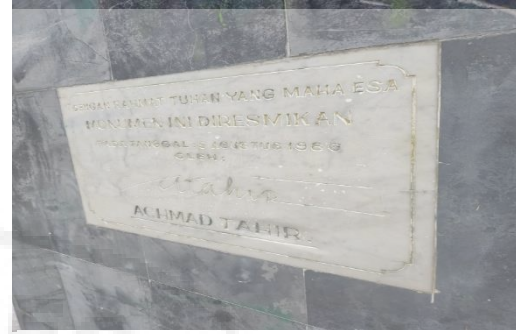


Fig: Rear View of the Proclamation Monument in Merdeka Square, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021

If we trace from the gate to the Merdeka field, the condition is still good, but there are a lot of traders and erratic parking lots that can disturb the atmosphere at the Merdeka Square gate and people walking.



Fig: South Sebalah Merdeka Square Gate in front of Jalan Pulau Pinang, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021

When we enter the southern gate of Merdeka Square, we will find various public facilities which of course have been developed by the Medan city government such as Playground facilities, Edu Taiment, Mushola, Toilets, Fish Ponds, Mini Laborotarium, Merdeka Square, Merdeka Square, Tennis Court. , Tribune or pondopo and ceremonial field full of green grass. However, if we monitor there are inadequate facilities such as toilets, children's play facilities and stands or independent field pondopos.



Fig: Condition of Children's Play at Merdeka Square, Source: Doc. Private, June 2021



Fig: Merdeka Square Toilet Condition, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: Damage to the Canopy and Floor of the Tribune/Pandopo Merdeka Square Staircase, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: Damage to the roof of the Tribune and Pandopo Merdeka Square, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021

This tribune or pondopo will be renovated at a budget of Rp. 22 billion and built on three floors. This pond serves as a ceremonial podium, community friends gather, press conferences and meeting rooms and galleries (<https://sumut.indozone.id/> accessed on 22 September 2021).



Fig : Tribune or Pondopo Merdeka Square now, Source : Doc. Private, 26 June 2021



Fig: Renovation Plan for the Tribune or Pondopo Merdeka Square Now, Source: Doc. Private, 26 June 2021

The Medan city government functions as the Merdeka Square as a venue for official events for the 17 August 1945 flag ceremony and other national ceremonies. As shown in the image below, every year the independence ceremony is held on August 17, 2021.



Fig: Raising the Red and White Flag on 17 August 2019, Source: <https://medan.tribunnews.com/2019/08/17/unnews.com/2019/08/17/>



Fig: Lowering the Red and White Flag on August 17, 2019, Source: <https://pemkomedan.go.id/article-19181-wali-kota-medan->

This Red and White Flag raising ceremony will be held on August 17, 2021, starting at 08.00 WIB until 09.00 WIB. This ceremony was not only attended by government officials from the cities of Medan and North Sumatra but also the people of North Sumatra, especially the city of Medan, to attend the flag ceremony of the 74th anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia's Independence. Since morning around 07.00 WIB, people have started arriving by following the Covid-19 health protocols. The community was present not only from the old group, young people, teenagers and children packed the Merdeka field area to attend the ritual ceremony and watch the red and white Sang Saka flag fluttering (<https://medan.tribunnews.com/2019/08/17/ribuan-citizen-enthusiast-see-ceremony-hut-to-74-republik-indonesia-in-field-merdeka>).

In addition to the official flag ceremony commemorating the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, there are also various other non-official activities such as entertainment and sports activities. The Car Free Day (CFD) activity at Merdeka Square was once carried out on 24-2-2019 to be exact on Sundays. This activity starts from 06.00 WIB until the afternoon, this activity is organized by the Medan City Government in the context of reducing air pollution due to motor vehicle fumes to the public. In addition to the CFD, there are also healthy heart exercises, Ahoi Dance socialization and photo/vlog video competitions in the Merdeka Square area and the area along the Kesawan heritage (<https://medanheadlines.com/2019/02/24/tari-ahoi-meriahkan-cfd-in-field-merdeka-field/>).



Fig: Car Free Day (CFD) activities at Merdeka Square, March 14, 2021, Source: <https://sentralberita.com/2021/03/>



Fig: Ahoi Dance Activities at Merdeka Square, 24 February 2019, Source: <https://medanheadlines.com/2019/02/24/>

From 2010 until now, the Medan city government has functioned the Merdeka field as a center for various entertainment and sports activities. With the sports facilities built by the government around the independent field such as tennis courts, fields that can be used as soccer fields and sports facilities. The facilities built are aimed at increasing public interest in sports, but the existing facilities are inadequate, many facilities are damaged and cannot be used. In line with this, Pane said that several sports rides at Merdeka Square were damaged, sometimes it was difficult to exercise because the rides were damaged (Pane, 26 June 2021). Even though the sports facilities are inadequate, the public's interest in doing sports in the Merdeka field continues, especially on Saturdays and Sundays. Many people continue to do gymnastics, jogging, cycling, playing skateboards, using the sports equipment provided, or even just sitting and chatting in parks (<https://medan.tribunnews.com/2020/03/04-news-photo-field-independent-now-center-of-entertainment-and-sports>).



Fig: Medan City Community Jogging Activities at Merdeka Square, Source: <https://medan.tribunnews.com/2020/03/04/berita-foto-field-merdeka-kini-centre-varia-activity-hiburan-dan-sport>



Fig: Inadequate Sports Facilities at Merdeka Square, Source: Doc. Private, 06-20-2021

Apart from being used as a sports facility, Merdeka Square is also often used for religious activities pioneered by the Medan city government, such as Eid al-Adha activities 1440 H - 201 AD, to be precise on August 11, 2019 at Merdeka Square, Medan. This activity also features parades or ornaments which are imitations of a small mosque built in a green grassy field (<https://asarpua.co./galeri-foto-aktif-hari-roya-iduladha-1440-h-2021-m-in-field-merdeka-field>). Eid al-Fitr celebrations are also held every year at Merdeka Square but in 2021 the Eid al-Fitr celebration will be canceled due to Covid-19. An overview of the Eid prayer 1 Syawal 1440 H at Merdeka Square, Medan, which was held on 05-06-2019 by the Government of North Sumatra.



Fig: Eid al-Adha activities at Merdeka Square, 11 August 2019, Source: <https://asarpua.com/galeri-foto-aktif-hari-roya-iduladha-1440-h-2021-m-di-field-merdeka-Medan/>



Fig: Eid Al-Fitr Activities at Merdeka Square, 05 June 2019, Source: <https://asarpua.com/gubsu-dan-wagubsu-sholat-idul-fitri-di-field-merdeka/>

The Merdeka Square, which was previously used as a public open space, is surrounded by various trambesi trees, but the number of these trees is decreasing day by day. In fact, when viewed from the colonial period, the function of the trambesi trees was actually for greening public spaces and absorbing rainwater during floods. The lack of adding trambesi green trees and only replacing various trees that are less functional compared to trambesi trees.



Fig: Trambesi Trees at Merdeka Square That Are Able to Survive, Source: Doc. Private June 26, 2021



Fig: Merdeka Square Conditions, Source: Doc. Private June 26, 2021



Fig: Condition of Merdeka Square Decorated with Medan Nameplates, Source: Doc. Private June 26, 2021

4. Conclusion

The independent field from the colonial era until now there has been a significant change in function, from what was previously a green public open space, now its function is increased to become a commercial and political space. The management system was better and more orderly by the colonial government than the current local government. Merdeka Square has become a symbol of civilization in the city of Medan, becoming an ordinary open field with no historical narrative in it. Both the government and the people have forgotten the identity of the independent field to become the identity of the city itself.

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