

Jakarta's City Park – Lapangan Merdeka (*Independence Park*) in a Different Perspective

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The Independence Park, as the greatest open space in the Jakarta city (and probably the country's largest open space) are Located right in the middle of the city, three sides of the park are 1000 meters long and the fourth side of 800 meters long. This park is indeed an enormous green open space that one could possibly enjoy nowhere else in the city.

But the first necessity in understanding how cities and their parks influence each other is to throw out confusion between real uses and mythical uses of a park.

It's a disgrace if the authority of Jakarta would only call this park as "Monas – the lungs of the Jakarta city" . It takes about three acres of woods to absorb as much carbon-dioxide as four people exude in breathing, cooking and heating. The oceans of air circulating about us, not parks, keep cities from suffocating.

For a comparison, Los Angeles – which need lung help more than any other American city- happen to have more open space than any other large city. The pollution is owing partly to local eccentricities of circulation in the ocean of air and the city's disperse and amplitude of open space itself. The air and open land paradox is this: in modern cities generous scatters of open space promote air pollution instead of combating it. (read more about it in *Jane Jacobs: The Death and Life of Great American Cities*).

So even if the authority subtracts streets and adding their square meters to parks or project malls is irrelevant to the quantities of fresh air that a city would receives.



The National Monument in the center of The Independence Park open to public since 1975 under the commission from the Indonesian first president , Soekarno. (photo: Fransiska Prihadi)

While we get rid of the idea that parks would be the answer of Jakarta's air pollution problem, then we must see park in different perspective.

Parks intensely used in generalized public-yard fashion tend to have 4 elements in their design which *Jane Jacobs* called them Intricacy, Centering, Sun and Enclosure.

Intricacy is related to the variety of reasons for people to visit a park. Sometimes to do sport, sometimes do nothing just to escape the daily routine of the city, sometimes to get closer to a bit of nature (after seeing the backside of automobiles everyday in traffic jams), sometimes to keep children occupied, sometimes simply to see what offers, and almost always to be entertained by the sight of other people. Successful parks always look much more complicated in use than when they are empty. That's why park designers try hard to create centers and climaxes to a park.

However, The Independence Park is really succeeded in this Centering point of view. The most important element of Indonesia's identity –the

National Monument- are located in the center of the park, measuring 132 meters high as the highest structure in the city. The National Monument become a place which people commonly understood to be the center, a pausing point, a climax.

Sun is also a part of a park's setting for people. Jakarta, generally hot, actually could use shaded parks as a positive public space for the people. The buildings enclosed The Independence Park are in a good setting back position because most of them are two or three stories building, with only some 8 or 10 stories high. They didn't kill the sunny side of the park nor cut the sun angle with their shadow.

Although the presence buildings around the Independence Park don't cut sun from a park, they enclose it and so their diversity function really important to generate activities in daily use of the park. Unfortunately, the surrounding buildings around the park are dominated by publicly inaccessible or semi accessible but with unpopular functions. Military Headquarter offices, Embassies, Presidential Palace are among these type of buildings that are inaccessible. Meanwhile a truly publicly accessible buildings with public functions are Town Hall, National Museum and National Gallery. These users of building can't be expected much to use and swirls around the Independence Park at weekdays. It's a feeling of disconnection between the park and its surrounding functions.

Park, whether it's located in a small neighborhood or in the center of a city, are sometimes abandoned for people only see it as a green scenery to please their eyes. Some of the small size park can do perfect to simply please the eye. But the enormous size of Independence Park should meant deeper than that. Directly connected with *Thamrin -Sudirman* Avenue, this park is indeed inseparable identity of the Jakarta city. It acts also as a public place where it's free admission and multi-class of people could enjoy it on their own way.

What could be interesting in parks? Crowds of playing children, people walking, dancers, singers, photographers, people do their morning/ afternoon jogging, tourists, those mixed in as users of the park are very exciting.

The city officials regularly invent improvement schemes by which the park are sown to grass and flowers, then these days it's completed by surrounding it with fence. But apparently those improvement didn't attract more people to really use the park. The main problem of The Independence Park is the problem of nurturing more diversified people capable of using and support it. The idea of fencing the Independence Park are purely ridiculous because it marks property and lost the sense of public park, not



A ridiculous idea of fencing the Independence Park limits accessible point to use the city's largest public park. (photo: Fransiska Prihadi)

mentioning some part of the parks become inaccessible.

Parks with empty and quiet benches (no matter how lovely are the park's landscape) is usually left deserted. The power of park comes along when there are people swirls in the park, using it.

When a park become unpopular it would be troubling not only because of the waste and missed opportunities they imply, but also because of their frequent negative effects. They have the same problems as streets without eyes, crime grows and it become a danger places that would be avoided. The only way to avoid these things to happen is to encourage public presence of more people of wider range of class.



The Fenced Independence Park. (photo: Fransiska Prihadi)



A Portrait of the Independence Park, left lonely?. (photo: Fransiska Prihadi)

Seeing the present condition of the Independence Park arouse a concern that someday it could turned to be a failed public space and left lonely and deserted kept only as a relic collective image of Jakarta.
