

## **Conceptualizing the New *Alun-Alun*: Public Protests, Place-Making, and Their Implications on the Design of Urban Space**

**Dr. Rita PADAWANGI**

Research Fellow - National University of Singapore - SINGAPORE

*ritapd@nus.edu.sg*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper discusses the idea of the “new alun-alun” as a result of collaborative place-making in defining and re-defining sites of public protests. The analysis covers the concepts of the public sphere, social construction of space, and place-making, in relation with the concept of a traditional alun-alun. By nature, protests are materializations of resistance movements that aim to bring political change. With the decision-making power of urban design and planning in the hands of the ruling authorities that they oppose, activists often have to re-interpret designed landscapes to suit their protest goals. Place is a central element of public protests; therefore, place is also an important element in social movements. The analysis uses the case study of place-making at the north gate of Medan Merdeka Park in Jakarta by weekly Kamisan protesters. Based on data from in-depth interviews and ethnographic research, the analysis shows the intricate relationship between space design, activities, and place. It demonstrates that place-making as a continuous process of interpretation and re-interpretation of space. The consistent re-interpretation of the space, which is designed as an entrance to the park, makes it a meaningful place of healing and empowerment. This phenomenon also shows that the availability of physical public spaces in the city to deliver concerns to the ruling powers indicate the state-society relationship. Collaboration among different groups and creative strategies in re-appropriating space are key components of the place-making process and the conceptualization of the new alun-alun as a manifestation of the public sphere in the built environment. Understanding these components leads to the conclusion of this paper that features collaborative policy solutions to rejuvenate the public sphere in urban design.*

**Keywords:** *alun-alun, place-making, public protest, public space, demonstration, creativity, collaboration, urban design, ethnography*