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## The Change of Public Perception towards Alun-Alun Bandung as a City Center

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### Abstract

A struggle for Bandung’s identity has been reflected on the dilemmatic situation in its city center- Alun-Alun Bandung. Alun-Alun has been known widely as a traditional form of indigenous city center in Indonesian city. Presently, Alun-Alun is no longer perceived as the representation of Bandung city center. As a result, public space in Bandung has become an empty landmark. Many questions have been arising regarding history is still a significance basis to build a city center image. This paper tries to visualize an ephemeral aspect of the city, seen differently through the time. A durational installation artwork is created by the author to convey an artistic critic that describes a destruction process of water to a soil, as a symbol of time that decays the meaning of Alun-Alun Bandung.

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*Keywords:* Alun-Alun Bandung; city center; virtual city; colonial town

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### 1. Introduction

This paper tries to elaborate the transformation of Alun-Alun and its meaning conversion through time, supported by various theories that relate to the issues of contextual design. Alun-Alun Bandung, a genius loci of Bandung, has been slowly losing its significance and value following the globalization process. An unplanned development - as mere pragmatic response without historical sense - has transformed Alun-Alun into an entity of superimposed

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expressions without unity. This transformation gives impact on the sense of identity of places. Public in Bandung has no longer perceived Alun-Alun as a landmark of city center.

## 2. Transformation of Alun-Alun Bandung

### 2.1. History of Bandung: the hybrid city

The city of Bandung was established in 1811 when Daendels was the Dutch Governor in West Java. Daendels instructed the mayor at that time – Wiranatakusumah II - to move the capital city of West Java to the Grote Postweg - the main artery road that linked West Java and East Java. Wiranatakusumah tried to find the proper location through technical and mystical consideration. He had to move the city center three times before he found the right location in the west side of Cikapundung river, next to Grote Postweg. Alun-Alun was a concept of indigenous city center borrowed from the Javanese symbolic meaning of power balance. Daendels had modified the traditional Alun-Alun for the city center of Bandung by combining the Javanese culture with colonial style.

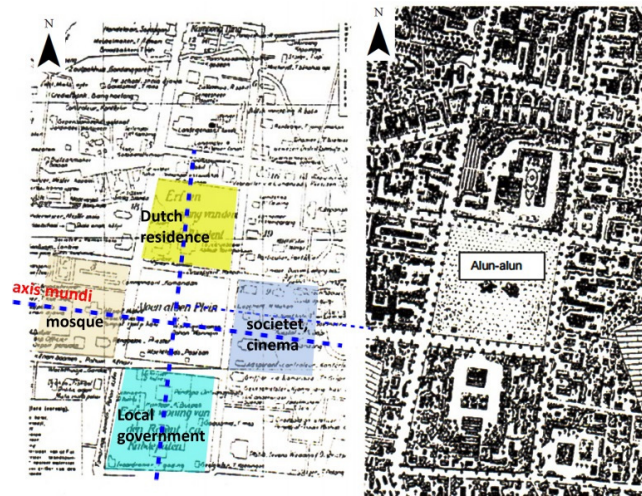


Fig. 1. The Grote Postweg has crossed the unity of Alun-Alun. Source: Kunto, 1986.

The traditional Alun-Alun comprises an open plaza which is typically surrounded by four buildings: Kraton/ Palace at the North, mosque at the West, prison at the South, and traditional market at the East. The placement of this building on north-south and east-west axis was based on the fundamental dual principle in Javanese philosophy. Alun-Alun functions as a city center that is vibrant and symbolizes the sense of community. The city axis goes through south to north because the north side is the most sacred place: the Kraton/ Palace.

Transformation of traditional building typology in the surrounding of Alun-Alun Bandung had brought some influences. First, the typology at the north side is changed to loji building (business center), post office, and gigantic Dutch bank. The Kraton/ palace is not to be located here and moved to the south area. The new building was a symbol of Dutch authority on economic and business. Secondly, there was no market at the east side besides the cinema or Dutch's club house. Thirdly, the significant change was in the orientation of Alun-Alun. The Kraton/ Palace of Wiranatakusumah II was located at the south side replacing the prison, while the Dutch governor residence was built are the north side. This signified the domination of Dutch authority to the local government.

The construction of new buildings deliberately in the city center is a showcase of power exercise of the Dutch to disguise the authority of the Palace in an implicit way. The new architectural style in the surrounding Alun-Alun was the effort of the Dutch to degrade systematically the independency of local culture. As a result, Alun-Alun became a place of dualism: an assimilation of west and east culture. Hereafter, new settlements and other economic

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