

The History of Sriwedari Park as a Public Sphere: Jürgen Habermas's Public Sphere Approach

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ABSTRACT

Sriwedari is a cultural heritage which is full of historical value as the King's garden in the Pakubuwana X era. Since its inception, Sriwedari Park has been designed as a place of reflection and an amusement park for the royal family, until it was finally opened to the public. The purpose of this study is to see the history of Sriwedari Park in Surakarta as a public sphere for the wider community by looking into several aspects of the public sphere by using the approach of Jürgen Habermas. The results of this study explained that Sriwedari Park has a long history and is included in one of the historical-cultural heritages for the people of Surakarta City. The hectic atmosphere of Sriwedari Park is also more or less described in Kartodikromo's writings as a crowded place that is communal and becomes a public sphere. Sriwedari Park also has a spatial aspect in facilitating the wider community to build public interactions, mainly in self-expression and political deliberation.

Keywords: Sriwedari Park, Surakarta, Jürgen Habermas, Public Sphere, Politics

1. INTRODUCTION

Surakarta has an interesting attraction with its beauty and exotic cultural heritage. It has a long history, and many cultural heritages still stand firmly in almost every corner of the city. There are old buildings with exotic shapes such as the Dutch building complex in the Gladak area, historic buildings as the center of Javanese civilization, and the Surakarta Palace and Mangkunegaran Palace which have sublime architectural arts, with all of them are still preserved in Surakarta [1]. There are several amusement parks such as Balekambang Park and Sriwedari Park. The two parks located in Surakarta are relics of royal gardens, or Kebon Raja, owned by the King [2]. One of the parks that has undergone significant changes is Sriwedari Park, which is now forgotten and unkempt.

Sriwedari Park was once a large park as a place for Surakartaans to gather and relax. The park was established by Pakubuwana X on an area of 17,000 m² or about 1.7 hectares [3]. It was built on the command of Pakubuwono X and has functioned since 1901 until now. Its initial establishment purpose was as a place of recreation with elements of arts and culture as well as a resting place for the royal family. Thus, many people came and visited the park to enjoy the charming garden and watch art events. The wayang orang (drama version of Javanese puppet show) was one of the popular shows and the main attraction for Sriwedari Park. There were also several other supporting facilities in introducing wayang culture, including the puppet museum and the Javanese wayang library [4].

After the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, the Solo government provided a public

space for the people of Solo as part of a recreation area and green space to relax. In 2011, Sriwedari Park, which had a long history and was originally an arena for playing, recreation, and relaxing, experienced a land dispute [5]. Sriwedari Park was built by Pakubuwono X on the land of KRMT Wirjodiningrat, his brother-in-law. The land was purchased from Johannes Buselar who was a Dutchman in 1877 with the status of RVE or absolute ownership of land. After the issuance of the Basic Agrarian Law in September 1960, the land ownership status was re-registered by the family of KRMT Wirjodiningrat in 1965, but this effort only resulted in the status of building rights. Since then, the dispute between the Solo City Government and the family of KRMH Wirjodiningrat over the land ownership rights of Taman Sriwedari has existed.

Sriwedari's strategic location has actually experienced a shift in meaning, unlike in the past, which was full of artistic and cultural values. It had currently turned into a commercial space [6]. As a result of the conflict between the Solo City Government and the heirs of the land, the Sriwedari Wayang Orang Building (GWO), was poorly maintained. In addition, people have started not to be enthusiastic about watching wayang orang shows. The building tenants also prefer renting another building for holding events because of this case. Therefore, this article seeks to see the condition of Sriwedari Park in the past by prioritizing aspects of the public space through the Public Sphere approach by Habermas. Thus, this study can bring up aspects and characteristics of public space based on the historical review of Sriwedari Park.

2. RESULT & DISCUSSION

2.1. Habermas' Public Sphere Concept

Jürgen Habermas was born in a social research environment that emphasized public freedom and social critique of the "public" paradigm in medieval France. His theory points to the history of the struggle of the bourgeoisie in France against the policy of "faux public spheres" inhabited by the aristocrats and citizens of the Kingdom. Everything in the mass media about the king and the state became absolute, completely controlled by the palace and the elite while still called the media "the public sphere". Habermas always brought his theoretical approach to the historical realm which is a representation of the bourgeoisie [7]. The bourgeois public sphere allows the formation of a space on

public opinion against state power and the powerful interests that are shaping bourgeois society. Habermas added a historical foundation to institutional theory, arguing that the "refeudalization" of the public sphere began to occur in the late 19th century. The transformation involves vested interests that carry out direct political functions, as powerful corporations began to control and manipulate the media and the state [8]. The bourgeois public sphere, which began to emerge around 1700 in Habermas' interpretation, was to mediate between the private interests of individuals in family, economic, and social life as opposed to the demands and concerns of social and public life. It involved mediating contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the *citoyen*, to overcome personal interests and opinions in formulating common interests, and to reach societal consensus [9]. The public sphere consisted of political information and debate organs such as newspapers and journals, as well as political discussion institutions such as parliaments, political clubs, literary "salons", general assemblies, pubs and coffee shops, meeting halls, and other public spheres where socio-political discussions were held. For the first time in history, individuals and groups could shape public opinion, express their needs and interests directly while influencing political practice [10].

The public sphere mediates between the domains of the family and the workplace –where vested interests prevail- and the state which often uses arbitrary forms of power and domination. What Habermas calls the "bourgeois public sphere" consists of social spaces where individuals gather to discuss their common public affairs and to organize against arbitrary and oppressive forms of social and public power (absolutism) [11]. The state played a more fundamental role in the private sphere and in *habitual* lives, thereby eroding the distinction between the state and civil society, between the public and private spheres. When the public sphere is "declined", citizens became consumers, dedicating themselves more to passive consumption and personal attention than to issues of the common good and democratic participation [12].

In the early stages of bourgeois development, public opinion was shaped in open political debates about common interests that sought to form a consensus regarding the public interest while in the contemporary stage of capitalism, public opinion is shaped by the dominant elite, and thus represents a large part of their personal interests. The rational consensus among individuals and groups is no longer the common norm. On the other hand, struggles

between groups to advance their well-being and personal rights characterize the contemporary political scene [13]. Habermas described the transition from a liberal public sphere dating back to the Renaissance and from the American and French Revolutions to a media-dominated public sphere in the current era which he called "welfare-state capitalism and mass democracy". This historical transformation was based on Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of the culture industry, where giant corporations had taken over the public sphere and transformed it from the realm of rational debate into the realm of manipulative and passive consumption [14].

The public sphere in Jürgen Habermas' opinion leads to the realm of politics and democracy, so it is quite difficult to understand further. In simple terms, the public sphere that Habermas idealized in his perspective leads to individual freedom to embrace their rights as citizens, freedom of opinion, freedom of politics, and freedom to express themselves in order to achieve self-independence. In this case, its relation to the existing public sphere in Indonesia does not always lead to the principles of democratic politics, and in the context of debate and dialogue about politics, at least the people are able to get their rights and freedoms as citizens and achieve their political interests. One of them is through open space which includes many elements, activities, and interactions that are not limited so as to encourage positive struggles that can lead to democratic space. At first glance, Habermas' Public Sphere in various narratives makes it increasingly difficult for readers to understand the meaning of the public space itself. Indeed, the Public Sphere desired by Habermas does not escape the quality of communication between individuals that is formed from the public sphere and the number of elements that are mixed and heterogeneous in building various opinions and problems so that it becomes a separate reflective power for each individual both in matters of personal life, anecdotes, to even complex political issues.

Tischgesellschaften or community associations that are communal in nature fill the spaces to build interactions in channeling their political desires. Simply put in the context, Sriwedari Park, which had many objects inside, had an attraction that created public interest in gathering and enjoying each object in fulfilling their political desires or interests. In the narration written by Jürgen Habermas regarding the public sphere, people occupied spaces in society that uphold togetherness and individual freedom. In the 18th century, the coffee shop as the simplest example became a place of discussion and deliberation by the

bourgeoisie [15]. This was done because other rooms were claimed to be the privacy of the king or the rest were only intended by people who were close to the palace, so there were special restrictions. Therefore, the coffee shop was not only a place for discussion and deliberation but also as a "place of opposition" from royal rooms which were full of palace boundaries and rules [16].

2.2. The History of Sriwedari Park as a Public Sphere

Sriwedari Park is a park complex located in Laweyan Subdistrict of Surakarta. Sriwedari Park was built on July 17th, 1901, during the reign of Pakubuwana X (1893-1939) which originally functioned as a relaxation park and a gathering place for the royal family. Pakubuwana X used his power to build the Residency of Surakarta, especially the City of Solo, to become the administrative center of a populous kingdom, whereas previously in Solo there was still a lot of vacant lands. Just as Majapahit was great because of its *patih* (prime minister), the Surakarta Sunanate was also victorious for the services of its *patih*, Raden Adipati Sosrodiningrat IV. He was an expert in urban planning so that many of the Surakarta heritage buildings that still exist to this day were the results of his hands, such as Sriwedari Park. At first, Sosrodiningrat chose a plot of land in the Kadipala area for the construction area to be purchased from a Dutchman, Johannes Busselaar, whose residence is now the Radyapustaka Museum.



Figure 1 Sriwedari Park in the beginning of its establishment in 1901. (Source: *Collectie Tropen Museum*)

In the beginning of its development, Sriwedari Park was described in the *Babad Taman Sriwedari* (Chronicle of Sriwedari Park) as a plot of land full of branching roads that connected one site to another [17]. There was also *Segaran*, a pool which functioned as a place sanctified with *Malam Selikuran* (Event on the night of the 21st day of Ramadhan) ritual used for *tirakatan* [18]. The name

Segaran was taken from the Javanese term meaning ocean. It was an artificial "lake" with an "island" in the middle that was artificially created, containing the *Taman Kepujanggan* and *Guwa Swara* buildings which were built as a place to store traditional musical instruments. Besides, there is the *Kupel Segaran* which still exists to this day to keep the symbol of the sacredness of the Segaran garden and pond. Generally, poets also came to the pool area to get calm and inspiration through *samadhi* (meditation) and *prihatin* (fasting), and perform *olah rasa* (affective exercises) to fill their soul with spiritual mindfulness in *Segaran* and *Taman Kepujanggan*. In addition, there was also a vacant lot filled with flower gardens, which in 1932 was developed into Sriwedari Stadium designed by Mr. Zeylman. The stadium was inaugurated by Pakubuwana X in 1933 as a place to practice football and practice lines for the *abdi dalem* (courtiers) of the Palace [19].

The study of the public sphere in Sriwedari Park took place after the King opened the garden to the public in the 1910s, in which the King's private space was transformed into a public sphere according to Habermas's idea. The bustle and hubbub of Sriwedari Park were depicted in Marco Kartodikromo's work entitled *Student Hidjo* [20], which tells the story of an educated man's encounter with a noblewoman with the hubbub and crowds of Sriwedari Park at that time. The background of the story was Sriwedari Park in 1913, which at that time was the King's garden that had been opened to the Surakarta community in general, including Marco, who at that time enjoyed a busy night with Ajeng Biru at Sriwedari Park. Every 25th day of *Ramadhan*, Sriwedari had several agendas so that many people flocked and jostled for the entrance to Sriwedari. Sriwedari Park emitted a bright light at night because of the many floodlights used in the event.

Sriwedari Park had several important roles in achieving characteristics in the context of Habermas' Public Sphere. Mainly, Sriwedari Park was a space for people to gather and interact. Sriwedari Park occupied an area of 10 hectares in the southern part of Jalan Slamet Riyadi (*Groote Postweg*). In its east was the Museum road, and up to the west was an empty land which is now a Stadium [21]. By having a large area of land, large numbers of people could enter and gather in the park. In addition, another criterion as a Public Sphere is the nature of "hospitality". Hospitality in this context means that Sriwedari Park could be used by all elements of society that knew no boundaries. All heterogeneous communities with different backgrounds and

conditions could enter and enjoy all park facilities. There were no restrictions, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or social status in society. All could embrace the freedom to gather and interact in the park.

Sriwedari Park also had its own charm. It was not only a former royal garden but also had attractions such as the *wayang orang Sriwedari*, *Malam Selikuran*, and *Kethoprak* (Javanese drama) as collective memories that have existed since the past [22]. This certainly encouraged people to fill Public Spheres and occupy places based on their interests in achieving individual independence: some wanted to watch *wayang*, join *Malam Selikuran* activities, and watch *ketoprak* as a means of refreshing. There were many activities in the past, such as boat trips, relaxing around *Segaran* while enjoying musical performances (*gamelan* and *Sinden*), and celebrating the *Malam Selikuran* (Maleman Sriwedari). But nowadays (until the demolition) visitors came to just sit, fish, and enjoy culinary delights at a culinary restaurant in the middle of Segaran island, while the *Malam Selikuran* event has been moved to the Sunanate's Great Mosque, with musical performances and boat tours are no longer operating [23]. The many interesting things aforementioned made the community able to contribute in enlivening Sriwedari Park as a Public Sphere.

Art performances in the Sriwedari Park area were the most important part of Habermas' public sphere locus. The public sphere actually encourages communication for the community communally by conveying messages and information through the interactions that are formed inside [24]. The audiences of the show gathered and created a communal space to enjoy the show's presentation. The transfer of information from the content of the show proved that Sriwedari had become a Public Sphere that all elements could enjoy. As their function, the *Kethoprak*, *Wayang Orang*, and various other performances had succeeded in building communication and interaction, both among players and with the audience. Connectivity occurred between the players and the audience through the responses shown by the audience's facial expressions, ranging from funny scenes which made them laugh to the climactic scene which made the audience felt tense and anxious.

The performances often made the audience dissolved and carried away by the atmosphere. There were many messages and information conveyed to the audience. One of the ideas of Habermas' Public Sphere is to get the right and freedom of expression

[25]. In contrast to Habermas's depiction of the public sphere that takes coffee shops as a space for discussion and deliberation related to political issues, Sriwedari Park provided more space than coffee shops for deliberation, but also provided the role of cultural performances which often triggered developing political issues as references and ideas in opinion and deliberation. An example of this is the *ketoprak* performances, in which a narrative was made containing values, messages, and information for the audience to convey. Upholding freedom of expression, *ketoprak* performances usually prioritized moral messages, sometimes attaching satire in portraying narratives about political issues.

The art center provided entertainment and reflection in obtaining discourse and information. There was also a large garden where people could freely enjoy the beauty of Sriwedari Park. People could relax and had a vacation with their family. This free open space was the same as coffee shops that give the public the freedom to establish effective communication and interaction. People could express themselves and speak freely so that opinions and discussions were built in a community that gathered and struggled politically. Besides being able to occupy an open space in the form of a large expanse of gardens, there were also shops and restaurants around Sriwedari Park. In here, the public could discuss and talk freely. Through discourse and information obtained as well as freedom in the public sphere, the Sriwedari Park encouraged the critical spirit of the community in deliberation and discussion of various matters, without barriers and boundaries [26].

3. CONCLUSION

Sriwedari Park is a park complex located in Laweyan Subdistrict of Surakarta, which was built on July 17th, 1901, in the era of Pakubuwana X's reign. The study of Public Sphere in Sriwedari Park has taken place after the King opened the park to the public around the 1910s, in which the King's private space was transformed into a Public Sphere according to Habermas' ideas. Sriwedari Park had several important roles in achieving characteristics in the context of Habermas' Public Sphere. Mainly, Sriwedari Park was a space for people to gather and interact. Art performances in the Sriwedari Park area were the most important part of Habermas' public sphere locus. The audiences of the show gathered and created a communal space to enjoy the presentation of the show. The transfer of information from the content of the show proved that Sriwedari Park had become a Public Sphere that all elements could

enjoy, for example in *ketoprak* performances, a narrative was made that contains values, messages, and information for the audience to convey. Upholding freedom of expression, *ketoprak* performances usually emphasized moral messages, sometimes attaching satire in portraying narratives about political issues. There were shops and restaurants around Sriwedari Park where people could discuss and talk freely. Through the discourse and information obtained as well as freedom in the public sphere, it encouraged the critical spirit of the community in deliberation and discussion in various matters, without barriers and boundaries.

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