## The Study of Teenagers' Perceptions about Function and Activity in Public Open Space Case Study : Lapangan Merdeka, Medan

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## Abstract

Teenagers' needs of public open space become important to accomodate teenagers' activity to prevent them from juvenile behaviour. Therefore, it is necessary to study teenagers' perceptions about function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan as one of the public open space located in the city center. The purpose of study is to determine function and role of Lapangan Merdeka, Medan and teenagers' perceptions about function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan. The study used Likert Scale to measure perception and data were collected through observation, questionnaires distribution to 250 respondents, photos and interviews. Results were analyzed with descriptive qualitative techniques. The study shows that Lapangan Merdeka, Medan has an important role to accommodate teenagers' optional and social activity. In addition, teenagers' perceptions about the characteristic of function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan are good meanwhile teenagers' perceptions about facility in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan are quite good.

Keywords: perception, teenagers, function, activity, public open space

## Pendahuluan

In 2007, Medan city has public green open spaces with the percentage of 0.37% which is 98.79 Ha from the total area of Medan city in the amount of 26,520 Ha (Dinas Pertamanan Kota Medan, 2007). This condition has certainly violated the Indonesia Republic Law No. 26 of 2007 which concerns about the spatial planning that requires the provision of green spaces of at least 30% of the area of the city. Public open space is important for teenagers as a means of recreation and learning (Culture, 2007). In addition, teenagers are the most dominant users of the public open space (Tallen and Coffindafer, 1999). Teenagers like to visit public open space located in the city center (Duzenli et al., 2010) and for that reason, the study has selected Lapangan Merdeka, Medan to be observed.

Formerly, Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was a swamp area and then in 1885, the Dutch change it into a public open space called Espalanade. At that time, Esplanade was only used by the Europeans and the Malay royalty while the common people uses it only when there was a night market (Loderischs, 1997). During the Japanese rule in 1943, Esplanade was renamed Fukuraidu. Later, on August 17th 1945, Indonesia has been independent and Fukuraidu was renamed Lapangan Merdeka, Medan. On October 6th 1945, the Indonesian Republic flag rising ceremony was held for the first time in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan (Loderichs, 1997).

In the mid of 2000, the government of Medan City moved the bookstores in Titi Gantung to the east side of Lapangan Merdeka, Medan and the bookstores were called as "Pasar Buku". Then, in Mei 19th 2005, Merdeka Walk was built in the west side as the culinary place. Not long after, the government of Medan City added sport facilities in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan (Rahmawati, 2010). In July 25th 2013, the bookstores located in the east side were closed (Dinas Pertamanan Kota Medan). Now, Lapangan Merdeka, Medan is an public open space with the area of 15,867 m<sup>2</sup> (Dinas Pertamanan Kota Medan) which is opened for the public as a place to hold various informal and formal activities.

The problems in this study are " How is the function and role of Lapangan Merdeka, Medan for teenagers ?" and "How are teenagers' perceptions about function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan ?".

The purpose of this study are to find the function and role of Lapangan Merdeka, Medan for teenagers and to find teenagers' perceptions about function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan.

This study is expected to be useful in developing the study discipline in designing a good public open space for teenagers and also to give recommendations for improving the quality of a public open space that can accomodate teenagers' needs to do activities optimally.

## Literature

In the period of being a teenager, the social life changes from family into groups of friends (Monks et al., 1996). Teenagers' developments are divided into 2, which is (Makmun, 2003):

- 1. Early teenagers who aged between 11 15 years old. In this period, teenagers have lots of friends and unstable emotions.
- 2. Late teenagers who aged between 16 20 years old. In this period, teenagers enter the adult stage and their emotions are stable.

Public open space is a place for various events such as cultural activity, public service, trade meeting, etc. (Krier, 1979). There are 3 types of activities in public open space, such as (Gehl, in Zhang and Lawson, 2009):

- 1. Important activity such as the routine activity that should be done regardless of environmental conditions.
- 2. Optional activity such as the activity that appears if there is a desire to do it and it depends on the environmental conditions.
- 3. Social activity such as the social interaction.

A successful public open space must have the characteristics of function and activity such as comfortable, safe, clean, green, attractive, historic, fun, celebratory, vital, active, lively, special, friendly, walkable, and accessible (Project For Public Spaces, 2000).

There are several amenities that are usually found in a public open spaces, such as (Project For Public Spaces, 2000):

- 1. Seatings is placed close to the trash bin and should not be placed facing each other except if the seating is placed for the use of playing game. Besides, seating must be made from durable material such as concrete, wood, iron, steel etc.
- 2. Lighting is placed in enclosed areas especially areas that are proned to criminal acts.
- 3. Signage is placed in open and easily seen area. It must also provide enough information as well as directions.
- 4. Trash bin should be easily moved, easy to reach, and it must be splited between organic and anorganic waste.
- 5. Pedestrian way where the placement of plants along the pedestrian way will provide shade and greenness.
- 6. Vegetation such as plants.

7. Other amenities such as public toilet, playground, parking lot, etc.

In the terms of the usage, there are several factors to evaluate function and activity in a public open space, such as (Project For Public Spaces, 2000) :

- 1. Time of visit where a public open space that is always visited during its operation time can be one of the indicator of a successful open public space.
- 2. Long of visit where the longer someone visits a public open space means that the person feel more comfortable to do activity in that open public space.
- 3. Amount of visit where the more routine one's visit in a public open space indicates that the open public space is more successful.
- 4. Visitor where a public open space that is visited by 2 person together or groups is more successful than a public open space that is visited alone.
- 5. Type of activity where the diversity of activity in a public open space can be one of the indicator of a successful open public space.

## **Research Methodology**

The location of this study was at Lapangan Merdeka, Medan that included the area of Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk (Picture 1).



## Picture 1: The Location Map of Lapangan Merdeka, Medan

#### Source: Own Documentation

Results of this study were analyzed with descriptive qualitative techniques. Population in this study was teenager aged 12 - 19 years old who visit Lapangan Merdeka, Medan. The minimal sample was 120 people and the maximal sample was 250 people. Likert scale was used to measure teenagers's perceptions. The variables, indicators and methods used in this study were shown in Table 1 below.

Variable	Indicator	Methods
The character of function	• Comfortable	Questionnaires
and activity	• Safe	• Interviews
	• Clean	Observations
	• Green	• Photos
	Attractive	
	• Historic	
	• Fun	
	Celebratory	
	• Vital	
	• Active	
	• Lively	
	• Special	
	• Friendly	
	• Walkable	
	• Accessible	
Amenity	• Seating	Questionnaires
	• Lighting	• Interviews
	• Signage	Observations
	• Trash bin	• Photos
	Pedestrian way	
	Vegetation	
	Public toilet	
	Playground	
	Parking lot	
Function and activity	Time of visit	Questionnaires
	Long of visit	• Interviews
	Amount of visit	
	Visitor	
	• Type of activity	Questionnaires
		• Interviews
		Observations
		• Photos

#### Table 1: Variables, Indicators & Methods

Sumber : Project For Public Space (2000)

The data in this study included :

- 1. Primary data which was collected for 1 week through observations, questionnaires, photos, and interviews. This primary data was collected with the division of time such as :
  - a. Morning hours from 5:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
  - b. Afternoon hours from 12:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.
  - c. Evening hours from 4:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
  - d. Night hours from 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.
- 2. Secondary data which was collected from Dinas Pertamanan Kota Medan, books, journals, electronic media, etc.

## **Results**

The number of questionnaires distributed were 250 units and only 242 units of questionnaires can be used as the sample in this study. From those 242 respondents, it was known that all of the respondents have ever visited Lapangan Merdeka but there were only 198 respondents who have ever visited Merdeka Walk. Moreover, teenagers' visits to Lapangan Merdeka were dominated by the visits of the late teenagers who aged 16 - 19 years old (79%) compared to those of the early teenagers who aged 12 - 15 years old (21%). Besides, there were more teenage girls (60%) who visited Lapangan Merdeka compared to teenage boys (40%). Teenagers' visits to Merdeka Walk were also dominated by by the visits of the late teenagers who aged 16 - 19 years old (81%) compared to those of the early teenagers who aged 12 - 15 years old (19%). Besides, there were also more teenage girls (54%) who visited Merdeka Walk compared to teenage boys (46%).

There were several activities done by teenagers in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan such as:

- 1. Type of activity done by teenagers in Lapangan Merdeka, such as :
  - a. Optional activity such as sat, watched events, used sport equipments, did aerobic, jogged, played volley ball, played football, played badminton, practiced dancing, practiced karate, played in the playground, strolled, biked, practiced flag - waving (paskibraka), played skateboard, celebrated the formal events, and took photos. The most dominant optional activity were jogging (33.47%) and using sport equipments (28.51%).
  - b. Social activity such as chatted, met friends, and did group study. The most dominant social activity was chatting (19.42%).
- 2. Type of activity done by teenagers in Merdeka Walk, such as :
  - a. Optional activity such as did culinary tour, watched events, and played in amazon. The most dominant optional activity was culinary tour (77.27%).
  - b. Social activities such as met friends (4.55%).

Most teenagers visited Lapangan Merdeka, Medan with 1-3 friends and 4-8 friends where teenagers' visits to Lapangan Merdeka were mostly done with 1-3 friends (41.7%) and 4-8 friends (23.1%) while teenagers' visits to Merdeka Walk were mostly done with 1-3 friends (46.46%) and 4-8 friends (39.90%). This was because in the period of being a teenager, the social life changes from family into groups of friends (Monks et al., 1996).

Then, generally, teenagers visited Lapangan Merdeka, Medan for 0-5 hours/week where as much as 91.32% teenagers spent 0-5 hours/week in Lapangan Merdeka and all teenagers spent 0-5 hours/week in Merdeka Walk.

Teenagers visited Lapangan Merdeka with the types of visits such as:

- 1. Type of teenagers' visits in Lapangan Merdeka, such as :
  - a. Routine visits such as 1 times per week (33.88%), 2-3 times per week (13.22%), > 3 times per week (2.07%), 1 times in a month (1.24%), 2-3 times in a month (5.79%), and 1 times in a year (0.41%).
  - b. Non-routine visits such as 1-5 times (15.7%), 6-10 times (4.13%), and > 11 times (23.55%).
- 2. Type of teenagers' visits in Merdeka Walk, such as :
  - a. Routine visits such as 2-3 times in a month (1.52%).
  - b. Non-routine visits in which were > 11 times (65.66%), 6-10 times (21.72%), and 1-5 times (11.1%).

These have shown that if Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk are compared, the function and activity in Merdeka Walk was less successful than those of Lapangan Merdeka because according to Project For Public Space (2000) that the more routine one's visit in a public open space indicates that the open public space is more successful.



### Picture 2: Teenagers' Activity in the Morning in Lapangan Merdeka

#### Source: Own Documentation

#### Picture 3: Teenagers' Activity in the Afternoon in Lapangan Merdeka



#### Source: Own Documentation

Teenagers' activity in Lapangan Merdeka has the highest intensity in the morning (Picture 2) with the percentage of 31.8% and it would reach its peak in the evening (Picture 4) with the percentage of 40.5%. Teenagers' activity was seldom seen in the afternoon (Picture 3) with the percentage of 18.6% and would be fewer in the night (Picture 5) with the percentage of 9.09%.



#### Picture 4. Teenagers' Activity in the Evening in Lapangan Merdeka

#### Source: Own Documentation





#### Source: Own Documentation

Teenagers' activity in Merdeka Walk has a quite high intensity in the evening (Picture 7) with the percentage of 33.84% and it would reach its peak in the night (Picture 7) with the percentage of 49.5%.

Teenagers' activity was seldom seen in the afternoon (Picture 6) with the percentage of 16.16% and it will be more seldom seen in the morning (Picture 6) with the percentage of only 0.5%.

From the overall analysis of function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk, it can be concluded that Lapangan Merdeka, Medan is a public open space which is categorized as central square and is used by the teenagers to do various optional and social activity.

## Picture 6: Teenagers' Activity in the Morning and in the Afternoon in Merdeka Walk



#### Source: Own Documentation

## Picture 7: Teenagers' Activity in the Evening and in the Night in Merdeka Walk



Source: Own Documentation

Teenagers' perceptions about characteristics of function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were good with the total score of 3.43. Teenagers agree that Lapangan Merdeka, Medan has the characteristics of function and activity such as safe, attractive, fun, active, vital, lively, special, accessible while teenagers quite agree that Lapangan Merdeka, Medan has the characteristics of function and activity such as celebratory, clean, green, historic, walkable, comfortable, and friendly.

Safety in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as good with the total score of 3.56. It was seen from the existence of the parks department's office in Lapangan Merdeka and there were also 2 security posts in the north and south side in Merdeka Walk. But, in Lapangan Merdeka, there were still some hobos in the podium, some sport equipments that were broken, and some lighting amenities in the playground area that were inadequate.

Cleanliness in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as quite good with the total score of 3.26. It was seen from the existence of some janitors in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk. But, in Lapangan Merdeka, there were still some trashes and the capacity of the trash bins were still minimal where the trash bins were mostly put only in the playground area and the south park.

Greenness in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as quite good with the total score of 3.22. It was seen from the availability of plants in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk. But, there were still some area with arid grasses in Lapangan Merdeka.

Attractiveness in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as good with the total score of 3.44. It was seen from various events that were frequently held, the existence of many people, the availability of playground area, and also the availability of eating and drinking area such as the existence of several street sellers in Lapangan Merdeka. Moreover, Merdeka Walk has also frequently held various events, provided playing arena such as the amazon, and provide culinary area for people.

Historical value in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as quite good with the total score of 3.17. It was seen from the existence of the Old Post Office, the Dharma Deli Hotel, and the Bank Indonesia. But in the west side, there was Merdeka Walk with its modern facade.

Walkability in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as quite good with the total score of 3. It was seen from the existence of row of tress along the pedestrian ways in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk. Moreover, the pedestrian ways in Merdeka Walk were still in good condition and comfortable to be passed. But, there were no cycling paths in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk and there were still some pedestrian ways that were damaged in Lapangan Merdeka.

Comfort in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as quite good with the total score of 3.09. It was seen from the conditon of Merdeka Walk that was clean, safe, and it also provided adequate seatings. But, in Lapangan Merdeka, the discomforts were still seen from the inadequate seatings, the existence of trashes, the existence of hobos in podium, and some of the sport equipments that were damaged.

The activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as fun with the total score of 3.8. It was seen from the various formal and informal events that were held and the various optional and sosial activities done by teenagers in Lapangan Merdeka. But, teenagers' activity in Merdeka Walk were less variable than those in Lapangan Merdeka where teenagers' activity in Merdeka Walk were only limited to activity such as had culinary tour, watched events, played in amazon and met friends.

Activeness in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived good with the total score of 3.79. It was seen from Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk that were used by teenagers to do various optional and social activity.

The activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as quite celebrative with the total score of 3.37. It was seen from the various optional and social activity that was done by teenagers in Lapangan Merdeka. But, teenagers' activity in Merdeka Walk were less variable than those in Lapangan Merdeka where teenagers' activity in Merdeka Walk was only limited to activities such as had culinary tour, watched events, played in amazon and met friends.

The existence of Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as vital with the total score of 3.47. It was seen from the various formal and informal events that were held and the various optional and sosial activities that were done by teenagers in Lapangan Merdeka. Moreover, Merdeka Walk has also held various events frequently and provided various food and drink stands for people.

Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as lively with the total score of 3.47. It was seen from the majority of teenagers that came to Lapangan Merdeka, Medan with 1-3 friends and 4-8 friends. But, on usual days, Merdeka Walk seemed to be very desolate and it will be more crowded on holiday, sunday, and when there was any events organized at there.

Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as special with the total score of 3.66. It was seen from the various activity that were done by teenagers and various formal and informal events that were held.

Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as friendly with the total score of 3.15. It was seen from Lapangan Merdeka that was used by teenagers as the place to meet friends and to do various optional and social activity. Moreover, Merdeka Walk was also used by teenagers as the place to did activites such as had culinary tour, gathered, chatted, and watched events.

Accessibility in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as good with the total score of 3.97. It was seen from the location of Lapangan Merdeka, Medan which is located in the city centre. Moreover, Lapangan Merdeka also had 3 exit and entrance doors in the north, south and west side while Merdeka Walk had 4 exit and entrance doors.

Teenagers' perceptions about the amenities in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were quite good with the total score of 3.17. Teenagers gave the perception of quite good for the amenities such as playground amenities, sport amenities, toilets, parking lots, trash bins, vegetations, pedestrian ways, seatings, and the completeness of the amenities. Besides, teenagers gave the perception of good for the amenities such as signages and lighting amenities.

Sport amenities in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were perceived as quite good with the total score of 2.95. There were 22 units of sport equipments in Lapangan Merdeka that were located in the west side. But, there were lots of sport equipments that have damaged and needed to be repaired for the comfort and safety of the users.

Playground amenities in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were perceived as quite good with the total score of 3.12. Playground in Lapangan Merdeka provided amenities such as see saws, swings, merry go rounds, monkey bars, and sliders. But, there were several playing equipments that had broken and needed to be repaired for the comfort and safety of the users.

Vegetations in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were perceived as quite good with the total score of 3.27. It was seen from Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk that provided lots of plants. But, there were still some area with arid grasses in Lapangan Merdeka.

Seatings in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as quite good with the total score of 3.19. Seatings in Lapangan Merdeka were the type of non movable seatings which were made of concrete and ceramics materials while seatings in Merdeka Walk were the type of movevble seatings which were made of aluminium and plastic materials. On the other hand, the capacity of seatings in Lapangan Merdeka were inadequate and they were placed unevenly where there were no seatings in the east and the west side. In order to solve this condition, then the seatings in the east and the west side should be added. But, the capacity of the seatings in Merdeka Walk were adequate, where it has had 700 seatings.

Lighting amenities in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were perceived as good with the total score of 3.46. It was seen from the various lighting amenities that has been provided in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk. Types of lighting amenities in Merdeka Walk were the type of hanging lamps with various shapes and cable lamps. Moreover, the type of lighting amenities in Lapangan Merdeka were the type of pole lamps, cable lamps, spotlights, and lamps with attractive shapes. But, the lighting amenities in Lapangan Merdeka were still inadequate especially for the playground area and the south park area which made lighting amenities in those areas should be added.

Signages in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were perceived as good with the total score of 3.44. The signages have been put in the right order where they have been put in the easily seen and open areas. Besides, the type of signages in Lapangan Merdeka were the green community map, location nameplates, and prohibition boards while the type of signages in Merdeka Walk were the location nameplates that were put in each food and drink stands, prohibition boards, and direction boards.

Toilets in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were perceived as quite good with the totl score of 3.24. The toilet in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk were clean enough. But, the capacity of toilets in Lapangan Merdeka were still inadequate where there were only 2 toilets at there.

Pedestrian ways in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were quite good with the total score of 3.15. It was seen from the row of trees along the pedestrian ways in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk. Moreover, the pedestran ways in Merdeka Walk were still in good condition and comfortable to be passed. But there were no cycling paths in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk and there were still several pedestrian ways in Lapangan Merdeka that were damaged.

Parking lots in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were perceived as quite good with the total score of 3.23. It was seen from the parking lots for cars and motorcycles that have been provided in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk. But, there were no parking lot for bicycle in Lapangan Merdeka and Merdeka Walk.

Trash bins in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were perceived as quite good with the total score of 2.67. It was seen from the trash bins in Lapangan Merdeka that have been separated between organic and anorganic trashes. Moreover, trash bins in Merdeka Walk have been put in certain distance in almost every side of the tress that rowed along the west side. But, the capacity of trash bins in Lapangan Merdeka were still inadequate and trash bins in Merdeka Walk haven't been seperated between the organic and anorganic trashes.

The completeness of amenities in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan was perceived as quite good with the total score of 3.12. It was seen from the amenities in Merdeka Walk that were still in good condition and adequate. But, there were still several amenities in Lapangan Merdeka that were in a bad condition and have inadequate capacity such as there were lots of damaged sport equipments, the capacity of seatings that were inadequate, the lighting amenities that were inadequate especially in the playground area and in the south park, there were several pedestrian ways that were damaged and have an uneven surface, the minimal capacity of trash bins, the parking lot for bicycle that has not been provided, inadequate toilets and there were several damaged playing equipments.

#### **Conclusions**

Lapangan Merdeka, Medan is a public open space which is categorized as central square and is used by the teenagers to do various optional and social activity.

Teenagers' perceptions about the characteristics of function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were good because of its quality which is safe, attractive, fun, active, vital, lively, special, accessible, quite celebratory, quite green, quite clean, quite historic, quite comfortable, quite walkable, and quite friendly. Besides, teenagers' perceptions about the amenities in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan were quite good because teenagers feel quite satisfied with the amenities such as playground amenities, sport amenities, toilets, parking lots, trash bins, vegetations, pedestrian ways, seatings, the completeness of the amenities and teenagers also feel satisfied with the amenities such as signages and lighting.

#### **Recommendations**

In terms of policy, there are several ways to increase function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan, such as:

- 1. Mantain cleanliness by providing more trash bins, providing more janitors, and make the prohibition board that forbid people not to throw trashes randomly.
- 2. Mantain safety by curbing the hobos that were seen in Lapangan Merdeka.

In terms of management, there are several ways to increase function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan, such as:

- 1. There must be a routine management and maintainance of the amenities especially for the amenities in Lapangan Merdeka by performing routine check at least once in a month.
- 2. There must be various events held and arranged routinely at least once in a week such as the music concert, cultural festivals, bazaar, and any competition that is openes for the public.

In terms of amenities, there are several ways to increase function and activity in Lapangan Merdeka, Medan, such as :

- 1. The damaged amenities especially the amenities in Lapangan Merdeka must be repaired immediately such as the the broken sport equipments, the damaged pedestrian ways, and several playing equipment that have been damaged. Several playing equipment which are made of the stainless steel material with sharp edges must be replaced with the wood or plastic material which avoid the sharp edges. Moreover, the pedestrian ways that have been damaged must be repaired and use the rough material such as concretem stone and brick. In order to avoid monotony, pedestrian ways can be made with various shapes, textures and colours.
- 2. Some amenities must be added such as the seatings, sports equipments, toilets, lighting amenities, trash bins, wi-fi, and the provision of the skateboard arena. It is better if the seatings are made of wood materials. But, if it is not possible, the concrete and ceramics material can also be used. Moreover, the capacity of trash bins must be added and must be separated between the organic and anorganic trash bins.

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