

# The Presence of Social Space

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## Abstract

Kampung Keling, once a residential area in Medan, has advanced significantly into an elite commercial area over the last century. Initially, this region was a residential district of Tamil community, but since the 1960s was turned into the commercial area which then was dominated by the Chinese community. Accordingly, the use-value of daily life in Kampung Keling of Tamil community has changed into the exchange-value of the abstract space of the Chinese community that oriented to material advantage. The result of the research shows that the cultural heterogeneity of Tamil and Chinese communities in Kampung Keling have the potential to build a harmonious social relationship. The social relationship which occurs between the two communities then creates a new social space. The Tamils run their non-permanent firework stalls along the pedestrian pathways in front of Chinese's shop houses.

**Keywords:** *Kampung Keling, Social-space, Urban Planning*

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## Introduction

Kampung Keling (Figure 1), an old residential area in Medan City, has undergone significant changes during the development. Started as a settlement area of the initial community of Tamil ethnic, Kampung Keling currently is filled with shop houses belonged to the Chinese community. In the 2000s, Kampung Keling was enlivened by the mega project buildings such as malls and hotels.

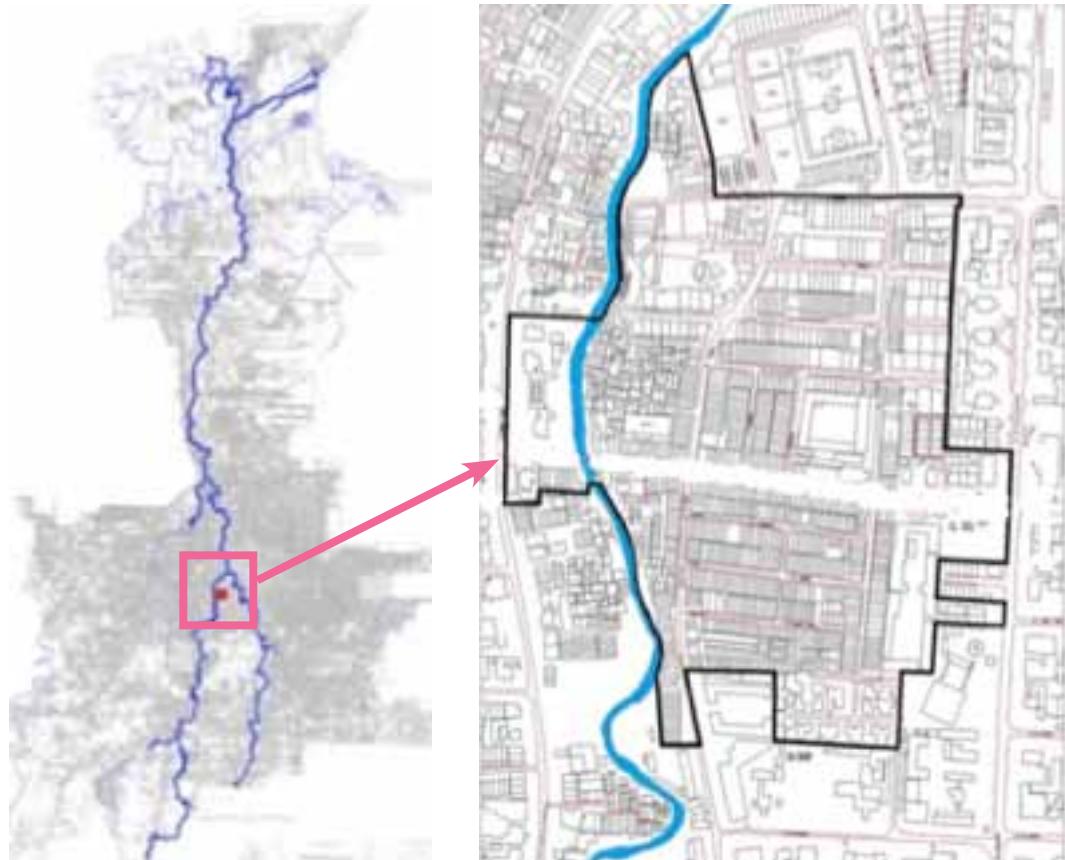


Figure 1. Map of Kampung Keling.

Adjusting to the changes, the remaining Tamil community who lived in the periphery area of Kampung Keling bring their daily life into the public space. In the areas around the Chinese's shop houses they open small scale non-permanent sales stalls.

The harmonious social relation between the Chinese community which dominates the centre of the area and the Tamil community on the periphery creates a new space called social-space. This space which is generated by a social relationship of the two communities describes the struggle of Tamil community in maintaining their livelihood toward the social changes that occurred in Kampung Keling and to protect the business activity of Chinese. For both communities, the social space is also a way to achieve economic interests.

This paper intends to discover and elaborate on the presence of social space occurred in Kampung Keling, which connects the periphery and centre spaces, the

use value brought by Tamil community in spaces of daily life and the exchange value brought by the Chinese community in the abstract space.

### Social Space

Henri Lefebvre (2004) stated that the city spaces can be analyzed by understanding their social relationships. The emergence of space cannot be separated from social life. Space is not only an output produced but also the means of production. The concept of Production of Space stated by Lefebvre is a dialectic of space that includes three spaces (triad space), namely: the space of daily life with the use value (perceived space), abstract space with exchange-value (conceived space) and space-social (lived -space) that occurs as a result of the social relationships.

### Methods

A qualitative method was used in the study of the presence of social space in Kampung Keling. The only technique used is the direct site observation by a researcher in the whole area and the interpretation of the interviews with the informants. The primary data from direct observation of the spaces that are predicted as a new space along the pedestrian pathways in Kampung Keling are recorded and mapped.

### Discussion

#### a. The History of Tamil Community and Kampung Keling

Initially, Tamil community is an immigrant group who was brought to Indonesia as workers. Bringing about the cooperation of tobacco fields in Tanah Deli between the Malays and the Dutch colonial government required a lot of manpower. So that in 1873 for the first time this tobacco fields received 25 Indian Tamil labours from the island of Penang and Singapore.

To improve the performance of workers, the Dutch colonial government ran a social concept that consigned the area of Kampung Keling as a settlement for the Tamil community. The determination of this location was the part of the design concept of Medan city called 'quarter system' developed by the Netherlands in 1917 to divide the settlement zones based on ethnicity (Buiskol, 2004).

This concept enabled the freedom to build houses of worship respectively. So that in 1884, Hinduism Tamil community built the Shri Mariamman Temple, which nowadays becoming the oldest Hindu temple in Medan city, followed by the Shri Subramaniam Temple in 1892 and Sri Kali Amman Temple in 1905.

At the beginning of placement, the residential area in Kampung Keling was a village with houses that were separated from each other with a large yard. There were shady trees everywhere, and the paths were made of soil. Tamil community was gardening and feeding cows, children were playing in the yard, mothers and fathers interacted in an open space. Every day they bathed and washed in the river. In every custom events and cultural and religious celebrations, they worked together in kindness. Tamil community ran their daily life in the space they produced themselves.

After Indonesia's Independence, in 1945, many of the capital cities were developed included Medan city. At that time, the walkways were reconstructed to be the bituminous road and their names were changed as well to the name of Indonesian characters or heroes, such as Calcutta Straat became Zainul Arifin Street, Colombo Straat became Cik di Tiro Street, Madras Straat became Jenggala Street, Nagaphatnam Straat became Kediri Street, Ceylon Straat became Muara Takus Street and Bombay Straat became Teuku Umar Street.

### b. Kampung Keling Nowadays

Physically, the strategic location of Kampung Keling led this area to thrive from time to time. Since the 1960s, most of Tamil community sold their lands and buildings to the Chinese community, and they moved out to outside area.

The remaining Tamil community lived in the dense and irregular periphery area in four villages along the Barbara River in the west side area, namely: Dayak Village, Mayor Village, Kubur Village, and Madras Hulu Village (Figure 2). These villages are located behind the houses and shop houses adjacent to the river. Most of the houses are small and with insufficient drainage. The circulation system is only a narrow passage, which is only accessible by motorbike. Their houses are not directly visible from the road but hid behind the shop houses belonged to Chinese ethnic.

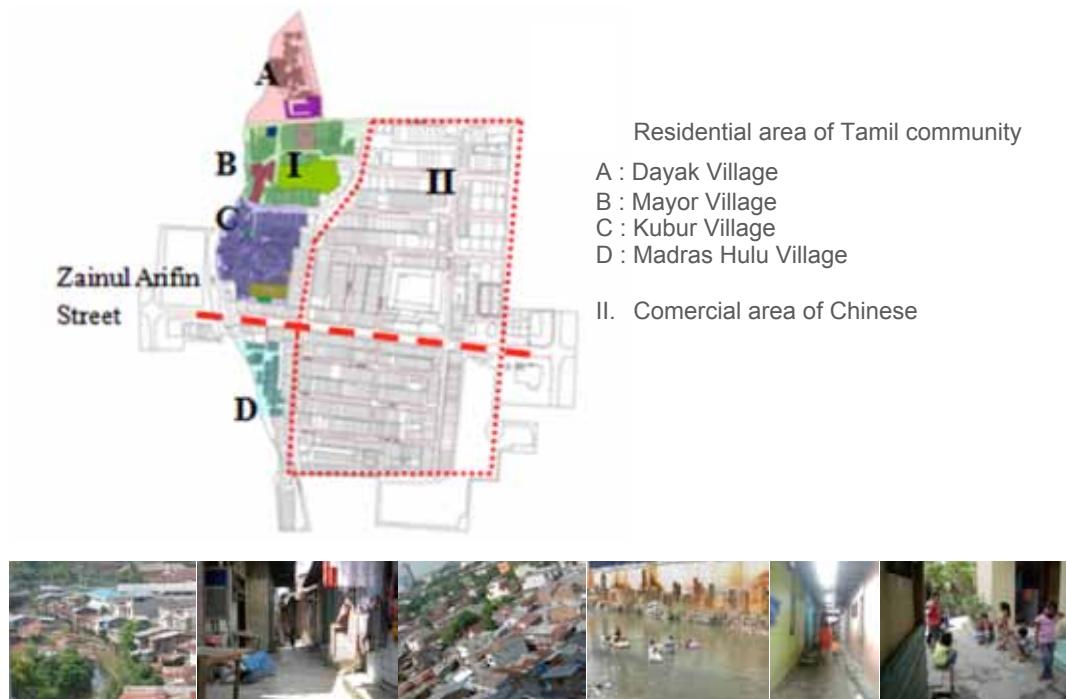


Figure 2. Residential area of the suburban Tamil Community.

In a social point of view, the Tamil community has a low education so that the chance of getting a job becomes very limited. Most of them work in service jobs with inadequate salary. They work in Chinese families as housekeepers, night watchmen, and parking attendants.

On the other hand, since 1970s, Kampung Keling was developed into the most elite commercial district in Medan city. Even in the era of 2000s, Kampung Keling enlivened mega projects such as malls and hotels. Until now, 85% of Kampung Keling areas are occupied by the Chinese community

The buildings in the area are dominated by commercial buildings that are used as such. They have a modern appearance, colorful and large glass windows to attract people. All of these modern buildings are located along Zainul Arifin Street, the longest and primary roads in the region which divides Kampung Keling from the East edge to the West edge of the region. It becomes the busiest and most crowded streets in Medan which represents the development of Kampung Keling area (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Zainul Arifin Street. Upper photostrip - shophouses. Bottom photostrip – mega projects.

The bustling abstract spaces with business activity belong to Chinese community dominates the central area of Kampung Keling. Chinese community continuously advances their business, so that their life is much better than the Tamil community.

The dense and unplanned residential area inhabited by the Tamil community and the commercial space as well as the mega projects owned by Chinese communities together are present in Kampung Keling.

### c. Socialization between Tamil – Chinese Communities

Although the Tamil community lives in a small and marginalized space, they do not feel neglected. They mingle harmoniously with Chinese community since many years ago and continue until now.

There is no jealousy between the two communities. A tight social relationship between the two communities exists not only because they know each other, but also because they maintain a feeling of mutual respect. This is in spite of having residents of different religions those in Kampung Keling still feel like one family.

The individual and introverted character of the Chinese community is not an issue with the social relationships with the Tamil community in Kampung Keling. If a Chinese resident gets in trouble, they do not hesitate to request help from the Tamils. They also even use Shri Mariamman temple as a place for their prayers.

Despite differences in economic levels, the Tamil community are appreciated by the Chinese community in Kampung Keling. In turn, the Chinese residents with a higher economic level feels greatly helped and safe with Tamil community and works closely with them either as drivers, guards, or housekeepers.

On the other hand, for the Tamil community, being accepted by the Chinese community assists them in carrying out their daily life. With the lower education level, the Tamil community has the opportunity to earn revenue from the Chinese community.

#### **d. The Presence of Social Space in Kampung Keling**

Modernity brought by the newcomer Chinese immigrants and the locality by Tamil community as the initial people, present different values and spaces in Kampung Keling. The Chinese community brings the exchange value in abstract space (conceived space), while Tamil community brings the use value in their daily life space (perceived space). However, the social relation between the two communities unifies both the different values and spaces into one new space called social space. In this social space, the existence of the Tamil community as part of Medan city can be seen clearly.

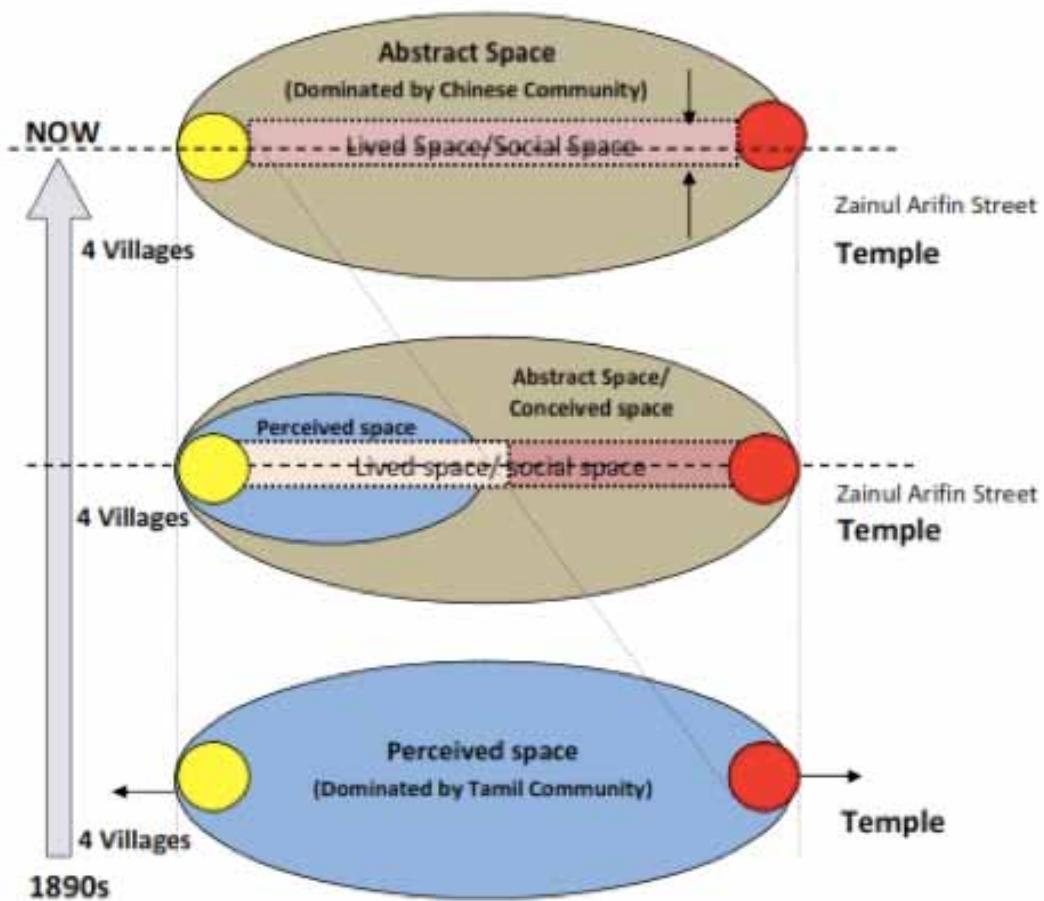
The economic interest of both communities becomes the main aspect of using the public space as the new social space. Economic considerations of the pedestrian pathways in front of Chinese's shop houses brings to Zainul Arifin Street a new social space for the two communities. In this case, social space becomes a way to achieve their respective goals.

For the Chinese community, their commercial business in Kampung Keling becomes more secure from the threat of racism and crime by allowing Tamil community to build fireworks stalls in front of their shops. Fireworks stalls become an attraction for buyers. At the same time people come for fireworks, they are also indirectly attracted to and visit the shops belonging to the Chinese community. This social space also is reviving business activities belonging to the Chinese community that were weakened by the construction of the mega project in Kampung Keling. In this case, both the Tamil and Chinese communities benefitted.

As for the Tamils, their selling activities in front of shop houses at Zainul Arifin Street had been going on for three generations. It is a routine activity that occurred three times a year, respectively during a month before the celebration of

Eid Fitri, Chinese New Year and Christmas / New Year. They open their stalls along the pedestrian pathways in Kampung Keling from 11 am until midnight. For them, the profit from this activity can cover their needs for a whole year.

The firework stalls along the pedestrian pathways show the social space where the various spaces (*daily life space/ perceived space and abstract space/ conceived space*), values (*use value and exchange value*), styles and way of life (*locality and globalism*) and communities blend together (Figure 4).



In adjusting to globalization, the Tamil community is trying to adapt to the urban changes. Selling fireworks in the pedestrian pathways along Zainul Arifin Street has become the routine activity of Tamil community for a long time. The non-permanent firework stalls in the pedestrian pathways has become the space of their daily life by transference from the public space. And at the same time, the fireworks stalls are arranged with care to not excessively disturb pedestrians.

To sell fireworks, they use the non-permanent stalls made of wood and plywood which looks like ladders with plastic roofs (Figure 5). At night, the stalls get the lights from the shop houses owned by Chinese community. On rainy days, fire-

works stalls are not closed but only covered with plastic. After a month-long sell, Tamil community brings the stalls return to their homes.

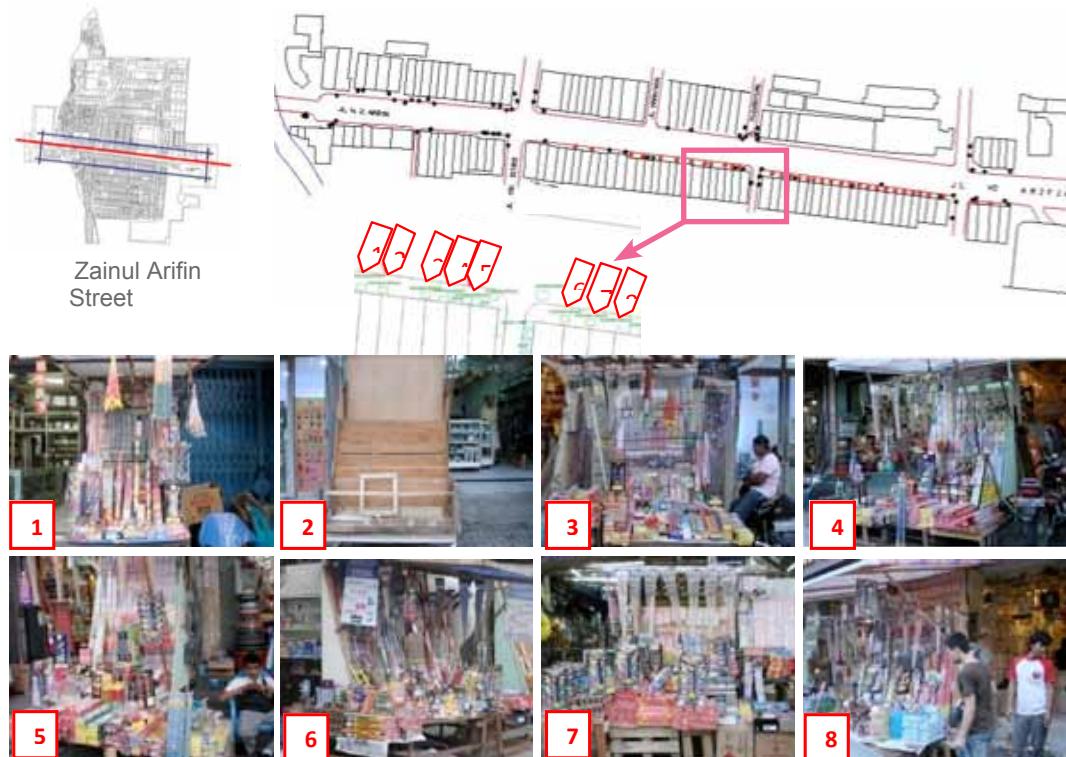


Figure 5. Location of Fireworks Stalls on Zainul Arifin Street.

Social space is the strength of the area and becomes the powerful magnet that attracts people of the city to come to Kampung Keling. The attraction comes from a purely social relationship between the Tamil community and Chinese community in the area without any intervention of the government or other communities. Until nowadays, Kampung Keling becomes a famous fireworks seller in Medan city and the centre of the fireworks festival even on New Year's Eve.

#### Conclusion

The outcome of this study indicates that the presence of social spaces in Kampung Keling as part of a modern city, can be realized through the harmonious co-existence between the Tamil and Chinese residents living together in the area.

This study also shows that the identity of a city is not built only in the form of physical structures, but also in the manner of the activities within the local communities. The activity of selling fireworks by the Tamils maintains and even strengthens the identity of Kampung Keling as a landmark of Medan city and the Tamil community itself. Without the presence of these unique social spaces, the identity of this area might be lost.

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