

CONFERENCE PAPER

NZAAR-UDCP-16-54 ICUDCP 2016

Repurposing Underutilised Space as Public Space in Bandung: Learning from London Borough Redesigning Study

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PUBLISHED IN

The First NZAAR International Event Series on Natural and Built Environment, Cities, Sustainability and Advanced Engineering
International Conference on Urban Design and Cities Planning (ICUDCP 2016)

Pages	156–167 of the volume
Held	26 June 2016, Shangri-La Hotel, Putrajaya, Malaysia
ISSN	2463-5979 (online) 2463-5960 (print)
Publisher	New Zealand Academy of Applied Research Ltd, Auckland

ABSTRACT

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HOW TO CITE

Tika Savitri Deddy Hasan ST and Denny Zulkaidi (2016). Repurposing Underutilised Space as Public Space in Bandung: Learning from London Borough Redesigning Study. In *The First NZAAR International Event Series on Natural and Built Environment, Cities, Sustainability and Advanced Engineering*, Putrajaya, Malaysia, 26 June 2016 (pp. 156–167). Auckland: New Zealand Academy of Applied Research. ISSN 2463-5979 (online), 2463-5960 (print).

REPURPOSING UNDERUTILISED SPACE AS PUBLIC SPACE IN BANDUNG: LEARNING FROM LONDON BOROUGH REDESIGNING STUDY

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Abstract

There is few study on repurposing underutilised space in industrial-type landscape. This paper discussing the possibility of repurposing underutilised space in Bandung using approach applied in Valley Retail Park in London Borough of Croydon. Valley Retail Park, situated off the A23 Purley Way, an out-of-centre, car-based, Retail Park and surrounded by industrial landscape. It has a great amount of space used for surface car park that this study recognised as underutilised space. While large surface car parks are common in out-of-town retails, it provides hidden opportunity to have its public realm improved. The study mostly used visual research methodology where the photographs taken are used as key visual elements. The method was seen as valuable in urban research because they can convey something of the feel of urban places, space and landscapes, specifically those qualities that are in some way visible. The study generated a master plan for Valley Retail Park as an attempt to bridge the gap between pushing down the idea of out-of-town retail development and enhancing the underutilised space to be used for community activities. Key findings include three periods of time needed to initiate Valley Park as sustainable retail park into a new local centre as envisioned in the council's Core Strategy. Learning from the study, a proposal for repurposing underutilised space in Babakan Siliwangi Bandung is discussed.

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1. Introduction

There is a great chance that a city has a parcel or two of underutilised space, no matter how fast or slow the development goes. Underutilised space, or commonly generalised as vacant land, can be acknowledged as all properties that can be put to a higher and better use, whether it is from financial, community, social and/or economic standpoint¹. Those underutilised spaces conform to the term of Lost Spaces – the undesirable urban areas that are in need of redesign². Lost spaces could be the surface car parks that sever the connection between the commercial centre and residential area which offer incredible opportunities for urban designer to rediscover many hidden potentialities.

Babakan Siliwangi is one of the open green spaces remaining in Bandung. Its location around colleges, universities, and other education institutions make Babakan Siliwangi can be utilised in research and education functions, resembling the function of the arboretum. Arboretum is an urban forest that provides a collection of plants or botanical garden containing living collections of woody plants intended at least partly for scientific study. In 2011, Babakan Siliwangi was finally set as World Urban Forest after series of controversial issues in its land use conversion to commercial area. However, its current condition does not optimally serve its purpose as public space.



Figure 1. Surface car park in Valley Retail Park. Source: Personal documentation (2013)

Meanwhile in London Borough of Croydon, the council considers the area around A23 Purley Way as a relatively forgotten landscape that is characterised by a disjointed public realm³. Purley Way is an out-of-centre, car-based, retail and industrial park on the A23 that is immediately adjacent to the Croydon Metropolitan Centre. Although recent developments on the Purley Way have been such a commercial success, they have not been completely welcomed. The transformation from industry to retailing and leisure came through entrepreneurial initiative rather than conscious planning³.

The concept of 'retail parks' on the Purley Way was not formally recognised by the Council until the adoption of the 1997 Unitary Development Plan, and, in the meantime, there had been a number of debates over the details of the proposed developments³. The dispersion of stores (particularly the development of Valley Park) has led to a growing problem of traffic congestion, especially at weekends, on A23 Purley Way, which is still an important main road.

This study conducted in 2013 aimed to improve public realm in Valley Retail Park by knitting together the existing retail, surface car parks, and public transport spaces. The existing large space of surface car parks has the potential to be transformed into an open space (rather than an underutilised space as it was in 2013) where families and friends are able to relax

and appreciate the landscape. The main intention was to initiate the early stage of shaping a new local centre to bridge the gap between Croydon Metropolitan Centre and the surrounding Valley Retail Park neighbourhood so that, in the end, there would be promotional strategies to benefit both areas.

Because of the time constraint during the period this study was conducted, the scope of work was emphasised in physical output and not deeply explored in social and economic term. Although some social and economic consideration was definitely being taken into account towards the design generation. Based on Croydon study findings, ideas to repurpose the underutilised space as public space in Babakan Siliwangi emerges.

2. Defining Underutilised Space and Various Practices in Making Public Space

Lost spaces, in general, are defined as the underused and undesirable urban areas that are in need of redesign and make the least positive contribution to the surrounding or users. Those places offer great opportunities to the urban designer for rediscovering many hidden potentialities. Some cases of lost space include surface car parks that sever connection between the commercial centre and residential area⁴. Existing surface car parks in Valley Retail Park, which are presently less meaningful space, have the potential to be transformed into a viable open space.

Barton, Grant, and Guise⁵ distinguish three grades of sustainable retail catchment areas: first of all, the primary area – within easy walking distance; the secondary area – offering both a modest walk/cycle (<2 km), and a frequent, accessible bus/tram service; and the third area – which has either a frequent bus service or a modest walk/cycle.

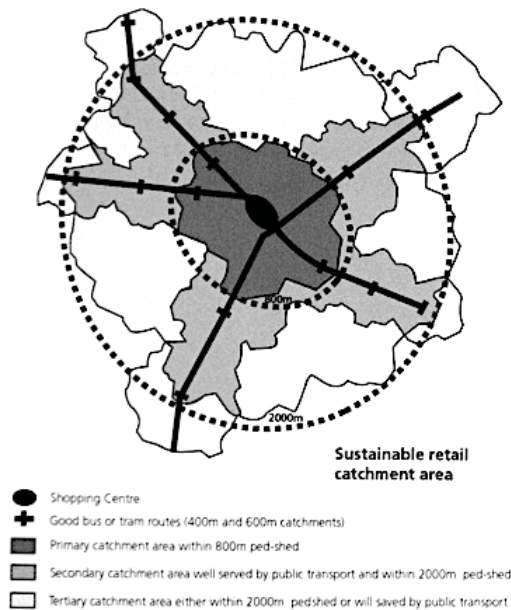


Figure 2. Sustainable Retail Catchment Area.
 Source: Barton, Grant, and Guise (2003)

The exact distance will vary depending on local circumstances. In practice, there is a fourth and wider catchment area that is based on car access and longer distance cycling. This is particularly relevant in terms of town hinterland. In some places the fourth catchment area may currently provide the majority of trade. But the object of good planning is to progressively extend the secondary area, or to create a situation where a new center is viable, so that fewer people have to depend on their private vehicles. Large stores, let alone the agglomeration of them, are commonly generators of local activity. When superstores are centrally located in neighborhood, they should encourage a substantial proportion of local access to public transport. Location and quality of access is important. Assuming Croydon

Metropolitan Centre is a central dot in the middle, Valley Park could act in between the third and fourth catchment areas that serve the surrounding neighborhood.

Many new kinds of retail space have emerged in recent decades. The traditional retail spaces, such as town centres and outlying shopping malls, are either increasing in size or disappearing, producing new urban types and whole environments totally dedicated to retail⁶. Kärholm pointed out that research has shown a tendency by which shopping seems to have less to do with just quality and price, and more with style and identity-making.

There are five factors as the cause for lost space: the highway, the modern movement in architecture, urban renewal and zoning, privatisation of public space, and changing patterns of land use in the inner city⁷. In order to address the lost space issue, the need to reclaim these spaces by transforming them into an opportunity for development is vital. Lost space, underused and deteriorating, provides exceptional opportunities to reshape an urban centre.

What makes a public space great is not solely rely on the physical attributes. Its function to serve people as gathering space must put ahead of its physical form. Designing a successful place involves bringing together the environmental, social and economic elements that are necessary for it to be truly sustainable. The definition of sustainable development extends the concept of equity to future generations; it introduces the idea of trans-generational equity. The sustainability of any place depends on a number of factors, which contribute to its liveability, quality and identity⁸.

The following are the things that must be considered in order to make a place to be sustainable:

- Active, inclusive and safe – fair, tolerant and cohesive with a strong local culture and other shared community activities;
- Well run – with effective and inclusive participation, representation and leadership of;
- Environmentally sensitive – providing places for people to live that are considerate of the environment;
- Well designed and built – featuring quality built and natural environment;
- Well connected – with good transport services and communication linking people to jobs, schools, health and other services;
- Thriving – with a flourishing and diverse local economy;
- Well served – with public, private, community and voluntary services that are appropriate to people's needs and accessible to all;
- Fair for everyone – including those in other communities, now and in the future.

Precedents in Redesigning Spaces

Spring Street, Los Angeles

One of the greatest challenges facing any dense city in the world is how to provide its citizens' needs for a proper amount of park and public open space. This challenge is complicated by demands and expectations that are always changing over time; these are caused by population growth, increased urbanisation and density, and shifting community demographic. To address the challenge of open space, Los Angeles' 50 Parks Initiatives was launched in August 2012 by then-Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and aims to transform underutilised properties in areas lacking recreational space into parks.

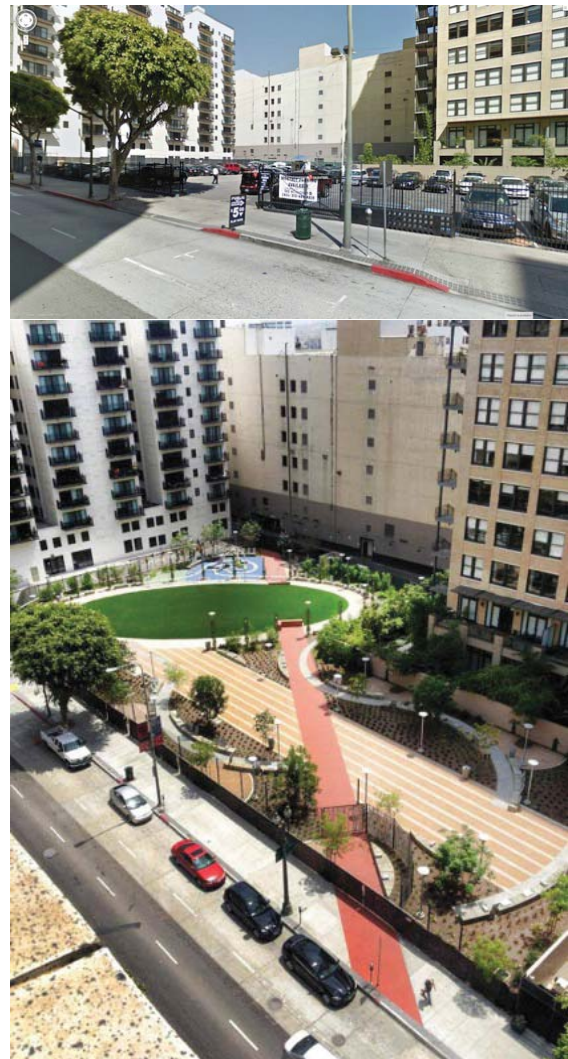


Figure 3. Before and after transformation.

Source: www.thebigcity.net

Lehrer Architects, partners on the project with the City of Los Angeles, envisioned the redevelopment as becoming part of the physiognomy of downtown Los Angeles and, particularly, the surrounding community. Furthermore, the project intends to become the community's outdoor living room, to balance the life at work and family⁹.

The High Line, New York City

The High Line is a public park built on a historic freight rail line elevated above the streets on Manhattan's West Side (www.thehighline.org). It is owned by the City of New York, and maintained and operated by Friends of the High Line (non-profit conservancy, private partner to the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation). Founded in 1999 by community residents, Friends of the High Line fought for the High Line's preservation and transformation at a time when the historic structure was under the threat of demolition.

The High Line was built in the 1930s as part of a massive public-private infrastructure project called the West Side Improvement¹⁰. The project lifted freight traffic 30 feet above street level, removing dangerous trains from the streets of Manhattan's largest industrial district. In the 1950s, the growth of interstate trucking led to a drop in rail traffic, nationally, and on the High Line; no trains have run on the High Line since 1980. Then, in early 2000, the Design Trust for Public Space provided a fellowship for architect Casey Jones to conduct research and outreach for "Reclaiming the High Line", which is a planning study jointly produced by the Design Trust and Friends of the High Line that lays out planning framework for the High Line's preservation and reuse.



Figure 4. The High Line: Before and After.
Source: www.thehighline.org (Iwan Baan)

3. Research Methods

Primary and secondary research were carried out in Croydon study to collect necessary data and information regarding the project. The primary source gathered from interview with Simon Bashford (Business Development and Liaison Officer, Croydon Council) and direct observation on site. Observation is a fundamental research skill that requires attention and the systematic recording of phenomena, including people, artefacts, environments, events, behaviours, and interactions¹¹. The type of observation used in this study was semi-structured (casual observation), where the researcher sets out guidance on what to observe, but primarily observes with an open mind; departures from the plan are allowed in response to unexpected events during observation. In the case of observing Valley Retail Park, it was about how people behave in using the space between car park and the retail boxes. This semi-structure type was also applied in the interview.

Both study in Croydon and Bandung were used visual research methodology where

the photographs taken were used as key visual elements. There are three methods applied: photo-documentation, photo-elicitation, and photo-essays. In photo-documentation, a researcher takes a carefully planned series of photographs to document and analyse a particular visual phenomenon¹². Originally, photo-elicitation asks research participants to take photographs, which are then discussed in an interview with the researcher. But given the time constraints for this study, the photographs were taken by the researcher instead and then used as the interview material. The last are photo-essays that include a series of photographs put together, usually with some text, to interpret a social situation or problem.

These visual methods have been selected for this study as photographs are seen as valuable in urban research because they can convey something of the feel of urban places, space and landscapes, specifically those qualities that are in some way visible. The layout, colour, texture, form, volume, size and pattern of the built environment can also capture people's behaviour.

Secondary research consists of information collected and synthesised from existing data rather than original material sourced through primary research with participants¹¹. The sources including books, research papers, journal articles, conference papers, records and statistics from government, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), or any number of other sources or archives. This is an excellent method of establishing the definitional boundaries of the design project because it identifies existing precedents and what may be opportunity gaps. In this study, the secondary research was gathered from literature reviews and case studies.

Former study in Babakan Siliwangi on 2010 carried out by interviewing experts

from architecture, landscape architecture, and biology. Site observations to Babakan Siliwangi and precedents in other universities have also been done.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Croydon has been designated in the London Plan (2012) as an Opportunity Area; therefore Croydon Council regards it as critical that the borough addresses the implications of this growth through the Core Strategy. Solid urban design policies are necessary for Croydon to encourage significant levels of growth in a sustainable way, and to ensure new development respects local character and the historic and natural landscape, including established suburban residential areas and open spaces.

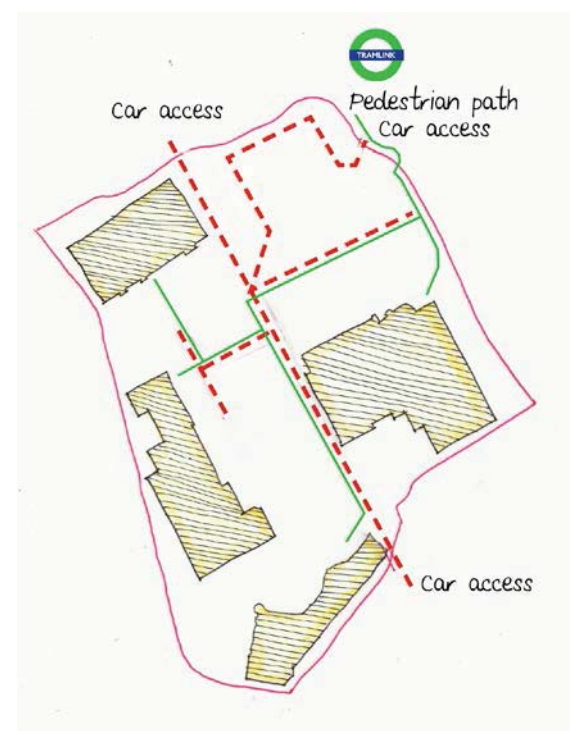


Figure 5. Accessibility car-users vs. non car-users.
Source: Personal documentation (2013)

Public transport available to support Valley Park is the tram link network with one adjacent bus stop. To prepare the site as a future local centre, Valley Park needs more public transport link for accessibility. Based on observation, visitors came with families and friends. This implies that Valley Park has something to offer to bring

people together (restaurants, cinema, and high street fashion retail), which is a good start to initiate a local centre. The missing link is providing space that still brings people together without the urge to spend money.

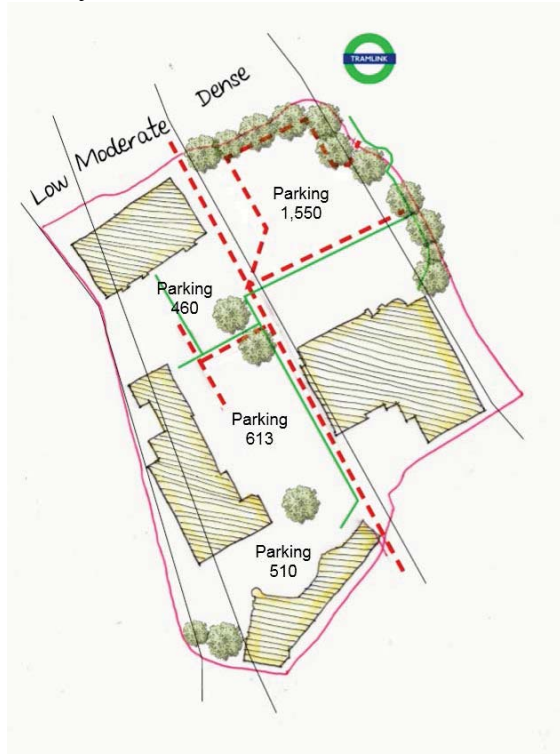


Figure 6. Landscape density. Source: Observation (2013)

The site is potential to become a local centre because it would serve as a catchment area for surrounding neighbourhood. Forming a local centre in Valley Park with appropriate public transport link can be expected to maintain low level of car movements, thus help to address traffic issue.

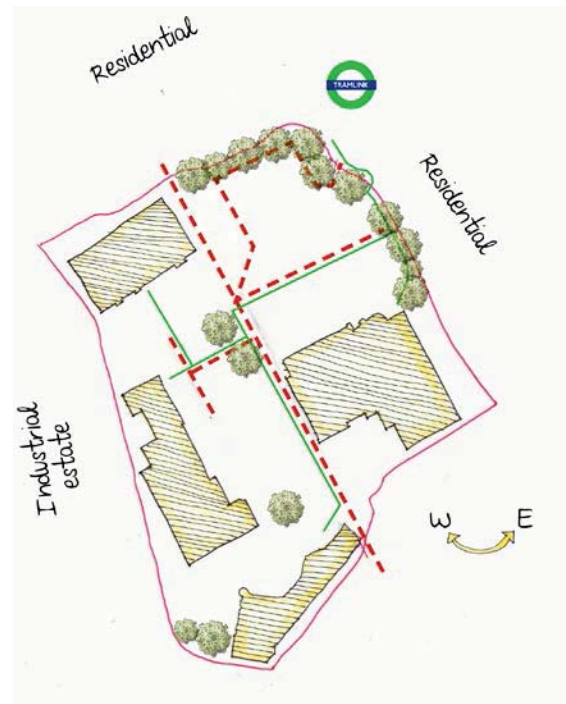


Figure 7. External land use. Source: Observation (2013)

Interview with the Business Development and Liaison Officer of Croydon Council has established the idea of mixed-use development. Valley Park has unique character where it is surrounded by residential and light industrial unit. There used to be a separation between residential and industrial area. However, it has been regarded that the advantage to have residential and industrial units grows hand in hand is that both will keep an eye on each other's property. The main reason for the Council to envisioned Valley Park as a potential future local centre is based on the need of surrounding residential areas. Forming a local centre in Valley Park could also help to reduce the need to travel by cars. The discussion with members of Broad Green Residents Association (BGRA) developed from how the site was under the impression of only designed for car users, how it was not human-friendly, and how it took ages to walk from one place to the other side. It can be concluded that the main issue from the residents' perspective was internal accessibility.

Based on previous observation, public consultation and interview with the Council below are the SWOT analysis from the site.

Strengths

- Almost no development constraints (no conservation area);
- Tram link access to the site;
- Whole package of retail and leisure activities for families and friends (cinema, high street fashion stores, restaurants, and warehouse retailer).

Weaknesses

- Not pedestrian friendly – the site is under the impression of designed for car-user only;
- Lack of signage within the site to the tram link when it is the only public transport within walking distance (no public bus pass through the site);
- Underused space, only for parking.

Opportunities

- Strengthen public transport link to Croydon Metropolitan Centre and London;
- Provide connecting bus from tram link station or provide bus stop within the site;
- Enhance physical features/public realm;
- Reanimate the surface car park – not reducing the amount of parking space- so that the place will be lively in every season;
- For long-term vision: shaping a local centre – with residential and offices provided in the site.

Threats

- Traffic congestion;
- As an out-of-town retail, often seen as a threat to local market/the high street.

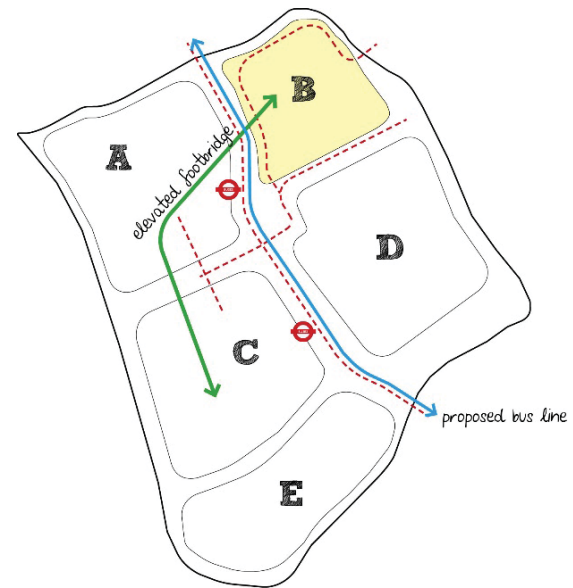


Figure 8. Design Concept. Source: Analysis (2013)

Table 1. Development Programs

A	Public realm enhancement
	Maintain surface parking
B	Proposed multi-storey parking that can be raised for future residential needs
C	Public realm enhancement
	Provide parking for blue badge holders Local market/incidental outdoor kitchen
D	Maintain surface parking
E	Maintain surface parking
	Pedestrian path improvement for better connection

Table 2. Development Vision

Planning Term		Vision
Short-term	5 Years	Sustainable retail park
Medium-term	10 Years	Local centre initiation
Long-term	15 – 20 Years	Mixed-use development: new local centre



Figure 9. Master Plan and street views from the site. Source: Own (2013)

The study in Croydon established the idea of mixed-use development in an underutilised space within Retail Park. The findings in conclusion are:

- 1) Surrounding land use will determine demand for a new local centre

- 2) To initiate a new land use, it will need development stages in certain amount of time
- 3) Appropriate facilities should be added or upgraded to support transition process to form a new land use or activities

Meanwhile in Babakan Siliwangi, the surrounding land uses are education institutions and densely populated settlements along the Cikapundung riverbank. Therefore it is only natural that the underused space should be made public space, as there is limited space for this needs.



Figure 10. Current conditions of Babakan Siliwangi Bandung. Source: Personal documentation (2016)

Although some feature has been added to the site since the last research in 2010, it is evident from current site observation that Babakan Siliwangi could perform better as

public space. As can be seen in Fig. 10, the general situation does not really encouraging and welcoming people to come by and linger around for some time.

There are several suggestions based on reflection from Croydon for Babakan Siliwangi to perform in its optimum performance as public space:



Figure 11. (Top) Teras Cikapundung and Babakan Siliwangi Orientation. (Bottom) Teras Cikapundung View From Above.

Source: Google Maps 2016

and <http://majalahkartini.co.id/sites/default/files/cikapundung5.jpg>

- 1) With the new space introduced as Cikapundung Riverspot/Teras Cikapundung just a few minutes' walk from Babakan Siliwangi, it is important to get these two spaces better connection.
- 2) Babakan Siliwangi utilisation can be directed towards creating a balance between the built environment and the natural environment and to improve the environmental compatibility based spatial aspects. At least there are three functions that can be made use of this area is a function of ecological, socio-cultural, and aesthetic. Further study needs to be conducted to test this idea

and evaluate Babakan Siliwangi's performance in current condition.

- 3) New feature should be introduced in Babakan Siliwangi as to encourage people to visit the urban forest without feeling unsafe.



Figure 12. One of The Main Entrance to Babakan Siliwangi Forest used as Landfill. Source: Personal documentation (2016)

- 4) The underutilised land outside the forest area should be regarded as an asset for land banking for future development. Existing utilisation appears to be landfill area which is not really suitable to be located in between emerging public spaces. This is important for area image/branding because the landfill area is one of the main entrance to Babakan Siliwangi. As for land banking, currently there is a research lead by Dr Haryo Winarso aimed to develop a model of policy to manage land banking in Indonesia which this paper is a part of.

In conclusion, to make best use of Babakan Siliwangi Urban Forest as public space is a great challenge as we need to maintain its very natural appearance while at the same time encourage people to spend time and gather around with families and friends. There will need stages of time and careful planning consideration for that.

Acknowledgement

Part of this paper is based on dissertation written for MA degree in Sustainable for Place Making and Urban Design at Kingston University London under supervision of Dr Silvia Gullino. This paper is also part of Higher Education Research of Excellence funded by Ministry of Research Technology and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia entitled Land Banking Model for Land and Infrastructure Development in Indonesia.

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