

## From Hill to Residential Space, Meteseh-Semarang 1987-2000: Transformation of Suburban Space

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menghasilkan narasi tentang proses transformasi ruang pinggiran kota yang terjadi di Meteseh-Semarang selama periode 1987 hingga 2000. Kawasan yang semula berupa perbukitan dan ladang pertanian mengalami perubahan menjadi area permukiman seiring meningkatnya urbanisasi dan ekspansi kota. Perubahan ini didorong oleh meningkatnya kebutuhan hunian, masuknya modal properti, serta kebijakan tata ruang yang membuka akses bagi pembangunan di wilayah pinggiran. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode sejarah yang terdiri dari heuristik, kritik sumber, interpretasi, dan historiografi dengan menggunakan sumber primer surat kabar Suara Merdeka, Abadi, dan Analisis untuk mengungkap dinamika sosial, ekonomi, dan politik yang memengaruhi alih fungsi lahan dari agraris ke permukiman, serta dampaknya terhadap masyarakat lokal. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa urbanisasi di Meteseh tidak hanya mengubah lanskap fisik, tetapi juga memicu dislokasi sosial, segregasi ruang, dan ketimpangan akses antara warga lama dan pendatang. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pembangunan kawasan pinggiran tidak bisa dilepaskan dari logika pasar dan dominasi aktor-aktor formal maupun informal dalam produksi ruang. Oleh karena itu, studi ini memberikan kontribusi penting dalam memahami sejarah sosial urbanisasi dan urgensi perencanaan kota yang lebih inklusif dan berkeadilan.

**Kata kunci:** hunian, meteseh, semarang, transformasi, ruang pinggiran.

### Abstract

*This study aims to produce a narrative about the process of suburban spatial transformation that occurred in Meteseh-Semarang from 1987 to 2000. The area that was originally hills and agricultural fields changed into a residential area along with increasing urbanization and urban expansion. The increasing need for housing drove this change, the influx of property capital, and spatial planning policies that opened up access to development in suburban areas. This study uses a historical method consisting of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography using primary sources from Suara Merdeka, Abadi, and Analisa newspapers to reveal the social, economic, and political dynamics that influence the conversion of land from agrarian to residential, and its impact on the local community. The study results show that urbanization in Meteseh changes the physical landscape and triggers social dislocation, spatial segregation, and inequality of access between old residents and newcomers. These findings confirm that the development of suburban areas cannot be separated from market logic and the dominance of formal and informal actors in the production of space. Therefore, this research contributes to understanding the social history of urbanization and the urgency of more inclusive and equitable urban planning.*

**Keywords:** housing, meteseh, semarang, transformation, fringe space.

### INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of the 20th century, Semarang experienced development and expansion of urban space. The expansion of urban space into the peripheral areas is

occurring at a rapid pace. Not only the expansion towards the east and west, but also the expansion towards the south and southeast. One of the areas undergoing transformation in the periphery is

Meteseh, which is morphologically dominated by hills and fields areas. From the eighth decade of the 20th century until two decades later, this area underwent a transformation that reflected ongoing social, political, and economic changes within it (Bintarto, 1984).

The transformation of hills into residential space accompanied by complete urban infrastructure affects the relationship patterns between suburban and urban communities. A change, where previously the land was an economic production space, primarily for agriculture or farming, then transformed into a property commodity for suburban residents (Bintarto, 1984). The changes occurring in the Meteseh area, located south of Semarang, serve as a concrete example of the transformation of suburban spaces in the 1980s.

In 1988, the population of the city of Semarang was recorded at 1,111,026 and was projected to increase to 1,507,730 by the end of 2000. During the period 1980-1990, the population growth rate reached 5.4% per year. A figure that far exceeds the national average of 2% per year (Bappeda Kota Semarang, 1989; BPS, 1990; Ridlo, 2011). This increase not only created density in the city centre but also exacerbated the housing crisis (Yunus, 2005). In such a situation, Meteseh began to be considered as an alternative for residential expansion. The city government responded to this population

surge by opening up infrastructure access and granting permits for residential area development in the suburban region. However, this reactive response frequently lacks long-term planning that considers social and ecological sustainability.

Development policies in suburban areas such as Tembalang and Banyumanik during the 1980s tended to be driven by considerations of investment value and ease of accessibility. People often neglect the agrarian function of the land and the local social structure (Hariyanto, 2005). This study indicates that the expansion of urban space is more controlled by market interests and the logic of economic growth (Rukmana, 2015; Smith, 2024). On a larger scale, as examined outside Indonesia by Wu et al. (2024) it shows that major cities in China face similar problems. Housing policies fail to guarantee access for vulnerable groups because they are bound by the logic of space commodification (Lefebvre, 1991).

The transformation of space in Meteseh is not only about fulfilling the need for housing but also reflects how urban space is reconstructed into speculative assets through compromises between the state and capital. This is closely related to various structural and local factors, such as increasing pressure for housing in Semarang, massive infrastructure development, the involvement of private developers, and

the city government's policies in responding to urbanization (Analisa, 1987).

However, this process does not proceed without obstacles. Behind the land use conversion from hilly and agricultural areas to residential spaces, conflicts over land ownership, marginalisation of local communities, shifts in spatial identity, and disparities in access to urban facilities emerge (Kurnianingsih & Rudiarto, 2014). As a result, the spaces created are often not inclusive and ignore the rights and sustainability of local communities who previously inhabited the area (Firman, 2004).

In this case, it is explained regarding some of the previous studies on the transformation of suburban spaces that have been conducted by several researchers. The study by Vasárus et al. (2024) in post-socialist Eastern European cities shows a similar pattern, where suburban growth is marked by weak spatial control and unequal development outcomes. This conclusion is in line with Banzhaf et al. (2013) observation of suburbanization in Santiago, which has caused socio-ecological vulnerability due to rapid and unplanned land use changes. Meanwhile, Pan et al. (2024) highlights the importance of understanding the roles of formal and informal actors in spatial policy formulation, as state intervention and market dominance do not always

operate independently but rather intertwine in rearranging living spaces.

Urban development is no longer concentrated in the core areas (Latifah & Pambudi, 2014), but has shifted to the suburban space. Centres of economic, trade, and residential activities are starting to be built in the suburban areas due to the limited space in the city centre. The community, which previously depended on the agricultural sector, is slowly shifting to the service and trade sectors in response to environmental changes (Wijayati, 2019). On the other hand, this development has also led to shifts in social structure, increased individualism, and disparities in the relationship between long-time residents and new middle-class inhabitants. Then, Yusuf (2019) study historically reviews the development of Perumnas Banyumanik in South Semarang as part of the national housing strategy during the New Order era. In the context of regional planning, this Perumnas development reflects the state's approach to developing suburban areas as new residential zones to address the surge in urbanization.

The position of Meteseh as a suburban area that has undergone rapid transformation post-New Order is not merely a response to the increasing housing demand but also reflects the complexity of urbanization management in Indonesia. The study of Meteseh can serve as an important mirror to understand how

the interaction between state policies, capital, and socio-economic dynamics collectively shapes the suburban spaces in Indonesia. On the other hand, this emphasises the need to make sustainability efforts the main focus in future urban development (Bintarto, 1984; Hariyanto, 2005; Wu et al., 2024).

## **METHODS**

The search for historical sources is conducted in order to reconstruct the incomplete reality of the past. Therefore, this article uses historical research methods consisting of heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography (Gottschalk, 1975; Kuntowijoyo, 2013). The first stage begins with the collection of sources (heuristics), both primary and secondary sources. The presence of public documents such as newspapers plays an important role in reconstructing historical facts (Wijayati, 2009), so the researchers conducted a search for sources at the Dinas Kearsipan Perpustakaan Provinsi Jawa Tengah, Depo Arsip *Suara Merdeka*, Monumen Pers Nasional, and the SIDAK website. The primary newspaper sources obtained for the study include *Suara Merdeka*, *Abadi*, and *Analisis*, based on the relevant years of research. Meanwhile, secondary sources such as books, theses, and scientific articles were accessed through libraries and various online platforms.

The second stage is verification, or source criticism, which includes internal criticism and external criticism. We conduct internal criticism by evaluating the content's credibility and the source's credibility. In addition, attention is also paid to the data's accuracy, the narrative's consistency, and the extent to which the news reflects the real situation at that time. Meanwhile, external criticism aims to test the authenticity of the document by examining physical aspects, such as the year of publication, the identity of the publisher, the condition of the print, and its completeness.

The next step involves interpreting the facts gathered from the earlier stages. The data that is still fragmented is arranged into a cohesive whole to explain the historical facts. The final stage, known as historiography, is writing down the discovered facts and presenting them in a chronological and systematic historical writing.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Urbanization of Semarang and Settlement Expansion (1987-1990)**

During the period 1980-1990, the city of Semarang experienced a population growth of 5.4% per year. This surge has put pressure on the city's spatial structure and encouraged the expansion of settlements into the suburban area, including Meteseh, an agrarian area with hilly and field morphology (Bappeda Kota

Semarang, 1989; BPS, 1990). Urban expansion began with this spatial transformation, yet thorough and equitable planning has not fully accompanied it.

This urbanization pressure was actually anticipated as early as 1984, when the Mayor of Semarang, H. Imam Soeparto SH, warned about the possibility of illegal settlements on state land if the urbanization flow was not handled seriously (Suara Merdeka, 1984, 1987a). The government acknowledges that without adequate spatial planning policies, the arrival of new residents has the potential to create slum areas that are difficult to control both spatially and socially. The economic disparity between rural and urban areas, the limited job opportunities in rural areas, and the image of urban life promising prosperity are the main driving factors for migration to the city (Suara Merdeka, 1987b, 1987c, 1987d). However, the rural community does not yet fully understand the harshness of urban life, so migration continues to occur as a form of hope for a better life.

The push for urbanization in Semarang is fundamentally inseparable from the New Order's development direction, which emphasized economic growth in urban areas, even though the consequence was the widening gap of inequality between regions (Suara Merdeka, 1987a). Mass migration to the

city has caused the city center to become increasingly crowded, making expansion to suburban areas like Meteseh inevitable. The development of these areas occurs unevenly and creates spatial disparities between the native residents and newcomers. This disparity creates increasingly palpable spatial polarization, especially in access to facilities and social structures that have formed in the new environment (Setyono et al., 2016).

The initial signals regarding the need for the expansion of residential space have emerged since the early 1970s. Various local media have published the official discourse regarding the need for new residential areas. The city government has even designed a planned residential development outside the city center as a response to the population growth that cannot be accommodated in the city center (Abadi, 1973; Suara Merdeka, 1973). However, this effort was not fully accompanied by mature spatial planning.

On the other hand, criticism of the weak spatial planning is growing stronger, especially regarding the dominance of market logic in the development of suburban areas. Development is often carried out without transparency, and even the locations of residential projects are frequently kept secret for the benefit of investors (Suara Merdeka, 1974). In this case, Lefebvre (1991) theoretical approach to the production of space

becomes relevant, that space is always produced through the relationship between power and capital (Lefebvre, 1991). The development of residential areas like Meteseh reflects the economic-political dominance over spaces that were previously local and agrarian. David Harvey refers to this strategy as a spatial correction, which is a way for capitalism to absorb excess capital accumulation through the creation of new spaces for investment (Harvey, 2008).

In 1987, Meteseh began to be considered an area for residential development. Its strategic location in the southern part of the city and relatively low land prices make it an ideal target for developers and newcomers (Gunawan, 2018). This change is part of a suburbanization pattern driven by urban expansion and development disparities between the center and the suburban (Rudiarto et al., 2013).

In Meteseh, informal actors such as land brokers and local village officials have begun to take on strategic roles in mediating land transactions. They not only act as intermediaries between landowners and buyers but also direct land-use conversion patterns through social networks that have been established long before (Leaf, 1994; Suara Merdeka, 1989).

These informal practices often operate outside the legal-formal framework, yet they are effective in accelerating land release, especially when

land prices soar and farmers deal with economic pressure. In some cases, subtle yet coercive forms of social persuasion emerge, such as the creation of a collective opinion that selling land is a rational choice and reflects progress, while retaining it is considered an action that hinders the development process (Roy, 2005).

The power of informal actors does not stem from legal authority, but rather from their ability to understand the local context and build consensus within the community. They operate in the gray area between legal and illegal, but that is the key to directing the rapid and complex process of space transformation (Kusno, 2013; Simone, 2004).

The local government has also begun to pay more serious attention to the suburban areas. In Semarang, large allocations of funds have begun to be disbursed for housing development. At the beginning of the 1990s, an investment of Rp100 billion from Jakarta conglomerates was recorded as being prepared for building residential areas in Meteseh (Suara Merdeka, 1990b). The process of spatial expansion is not entirely driven by the state. Otherwise, informal actors play a significant role in driving land-use changes, especially when land prices soar and local farmers lose their strong bargaining position (Dewi & Rudiarto, 2013). Such phenomena are also observed in many other suburban areas in Central

Java, where land conversion becomes a consequence of urban development pressures and the weakening bargaining position of agrarian communities (Prawatya, 2013).

In the 1990s, the government's attention to the development of suburban areas began to become more concrete. Local media coverage at the time mentioned plans for the construction of important infrastructure such as the Jangli-Tanjung Emas toll road and container port as part of a strategy to distribute the city's burden and open new growth areas outside the city center. This development marked the early phase when Meteseh was no longer viewed merely as an agricultural village but began to be placed within the framework of broader urban planning (Suara Merdeka, 1990a).

This phenomenon aligns with a broader trend in Indonesia's major cities during the New Order era, where the state played a dominant role in designing and directing urban space expansion. Regional planning is often conducted in a centralistic manner, placing the suburbs as buffer zones and simultaneously part of urban economic and mobility strategies (Silver, 2007).

In many cases, the transformation brings significant social implications, as spaces that were previously local and agrarian are reoriented to become part of the modern urban system connected

administratively and infrastructurally (Leaf, 1993). Although the government has set the direction for macro development, in practice, the process of spatial transformation also involves other dynamics at the local level, especially related to land use changes and the roles of stakeholders operating outside the control of the state.

### **Land Use Change: From Hills and Fields to Housing Clusters (1990-2000)**

Entering the 1990s, Meteseh, formerly known as an agricultural area in the southern hills of Semarang City, began to experience a fundamental shift in its spatial structure. The area, which was initially dominated by hills and fields, slowly changed with the emergence of rows of brick and tile buildings. This change did not occur suddenly but was the result of socio-economic pressures, government policy interventions that made the outskirts of Semarang an area for urban expansion (Suara Merdeka, 1992a). Other studies also note this change as a process of massive land use transformation in the area (Hariyanto, 2005).

The city government officially included Meteseh in the urban expansion plan for residential areas despite facing various technical obstacles. The construction of basic infrastructure, such as the Meteseh-Tembalang connecting road, was carried out to open access and

facilitate mobility towards the new residential area (Suara Merdeka, 1993). This shows the state's role as the main driver of the change in the function of the Meteseh space from an agrarian village to an urban area integrated into the city's expansion.

The availability of funds is essential to finance the provision of ready-to-build plots, house construction, permit processing, and other activities (Panudju, 2009). Therefore, the transformation of Meteseh into a residential area is greatly influenced by investments from developers, both local and national, who see the potential of this area as a new housing market. Several major investors from Jakarta have started to invest their capital. Names such as Dwikatmono, Ir. Ciputra, and Ir. Henkrisman were recorded as important figures who supported the funding of this project. The amount of investment poured into this project reached at least 100 billion rupiah, a figure that was considered substantial for a residential project outside the city center at that time (Suara Merdeka, 1990b).

The transformation of Meteseh into a residential space began in 1987 (Gunawan, 2018). In this year, the first modern housing development began with the emergence of the Bukit Kencana Jaya project initiated by PT. Bukit Semarang Jaya Metro. This project was included in the Master Plan of DPD REI Central Java

and became a pioneering project that marked the transformation of Meteseh from an agrarian area to a modern residential area (Suara Merdeka, 1992b).

The initial step taken by the developer was to obtain the principal construction permit issued in 1987. After the permit was obtained, the project's primary focus shifted to the land acquisition process from the community. This process did not occur easily, considering the vast area planned to be acquired. Of the total 350 hectares targeted, around 230 hectares have been successfully acquired, while the remaining 120 hectares are planned to follow soon. All land acquisition implementation is carried out by official procedures set by the government (Gunawan, 2018). After the land acquisition is completed, the construction process enters the technical phase, which includes planning, land measurement, certificate creation, and the submission of building permits (IMB) (Analisa, 1997; Suara Merdeka, 1992b).

The housing built initially was a simple type, such as type 36/90, which was intended for young families from the lower middle class. This shows that this housing project, from the beginning, was directed not only at the elite but also to meet the housing needs of middle-income urban communities (Gunawan, 2018).

In terms of price, the Meteseh area offers a much more affordable alternative than the city center. In 1988, land prices

in Meteseh were still around Rp5,000,00 to Rp20,000,00 per m<sup>2</sup>. For comparison, the price of land in the center of Semarang City at that time had reached around Rp100,000.00 per m<sup>2</sup>. The price of a type 36/90 house in Bukit Kencana Jaya is offered at around Rp9,625.00 per unit. The prices of larger-type houses, specifically type 36/120, in suburban areas like Ngaliyan and Mijen range from Rp255,000.00 to Rp288,000.00 per unit (Gunawan, 2018). This price difference indicates that housing in this area is relatively cheaper and more affordable for the lower middle class. This is a special attraction for city residents who want to own a house but cannot afford to buy property in the city center.

The involvement of large capital and support from the city government made the Bukit Kencana Jaya project a strategic project that was not only economic but also political. Commission D of the Semarang City DPRD also intervened by conducting a direct review of the project location (*Suara Merdeka*, 1990, Januari 26). Their presence indicates that this development receives political support, as well as oversight to ensure its implementation aligns with spatial planning and does not cause social conflicts.

These changes changed the physical landscape and affected the community's collective memory, which witnessed the loss of agricultural land that

was once their source of livelihood. Previous studies have shown that the 1990s were a critical period when agricultural land in the Gunungpati area, including Meteseh, decreased significantly due to conversion into settlements (Hariyanto, 2005). Weak regulations and the dominance of informal actors such as developers and land brokers in land transactions exacerbate this condition. This phenomenon accelerates the loss of agrarian space without a clear spatial plan.

The transformation of space in the suburban of Semarang in 1990 not only changed the physical landscape but also affected social relations and the structure of the local community. The shift from an agrarian lifestyle to exclusive settlements has impacted the fading of collective bonds and the emergence of spatial segregation (Douglass & Friedmann, 1998; Firman, 2004). The role of women has also shifted, from active participation in community activities to being more isolated in domestic spaces due to the social homogeneity of new residential areas (Rigg, 2014). Furthermore, the logic of private ownership has replaced the previously social communal spaces, resulting in the physical and symbolic marginalization of local communities (Harvey, 2008; Lefebvre, 1991).

### **Dislocation of Local Communities, equality of Access, and Social Segregation**

Urban development creates new physical spaces and changes the social, economic, and cultural structures of the communities that previously inhabited the space. This process often causes what is called dislocation of local communities, namely the condition of detachment of individuals or communities from their roots of residence, livelihoods, social networks, and spatial identity. In the framework Lefebvre (1991), theory of space production, dislocation is a symptom of the dominance of conceived space (space designed by the state or capital) over lived space (space experienced and experienced by society). Harvey (2008) also emphasizes that the production of space in capitalism tends to marginalize lower classes through spatial restructuring driven by the accumulation of value and market logic.

The discourse on the development of residential areas in Semarang began in the early 1970s. On January 4, 1973, the daily newspaper *Suara Merdeka* reported that the city government was building a new residential area as a solution to urban density (Suara Merdeka, 1973). Two days later, a journalist from the daily newspaper *Abadi* emphasized the urgency of the city's expansion project to overcome population density (Abadi, 1973).

Entering the early 1990s, the Meteseh residential area development project began to be carried out intensively. On July 28, 1990, it was explicitly stated that the Meteseh residential area was designed to suppress urbanization, indicating that this area was functionally intended as a buffer to accommodate the overflow of population from the city center and suppress the rate of urbanization (Suara Merdeka, 1990a). The use of suburban space to regulate this population is in accordance with Harvey (2008) idea of urbanization as a spatial strategy of capitalism, space engineered for economic and administrative purposes, not for the welfare of the local community.

However, behind the progress of this project, various tensions have emerged. On September 5, 1992, *Suara Merdeka* reported that the construction had never been delayed, even though many issues on the ground remained unresolved (Suara Merdeka, 1992b). In addition, the lack of transparency of information, the involvement of land brokers, and implicit pressure on local residents to sell their land caused ongoing social tensions. The local government appeared to be trying to maintain the continuity of this project by carrying out strict supervision of similar projects in Mijen and Gunungpati (Suara Merdeka, 1996). This strict supervision was an effort to control space and residents, as well as

a mechanism to secure investment and project continuity. In Lefebvre (1991) terminology, the result was a form of domination over lived space, a space that was previously produced by the social practices of local residents, now forced to submit to an external agenda.

The climax of the Meteseh residential area development process occurred in October 1997, when the project officially began after the environmental impact analysis document was declared complete and administrative requirements were deemed fulfilled (Suara Merdeka, 1997). However, the fulfillment of this legal aspect became a turning point for the local community, symbolizing the end of their role as legal owners and primary actors in local spatial planning.

The dislocation of the local Meteseh community is not only a physical displacement but also a social and cultural disconnection. Along with the development of residential clusters such as Bukit Kencana Jaya, there has been a change in relations between residents. New settlements with high fences and independent security systems are beginning to squeeze out old villages. Local communities have difficulty maintaining the values of social solidarity in an increasingly individualistic and socially segregated environment (Suara Merdeka, 1988). Spaces that were once collective have become transactional

arenas. This conclusion is in accordance with Harvey (2008) criticism that capitalist space production makes cities a commodity, not a home for communities.

However, local residents are not entirely passive in facing this process. Some residents have shown resistance in the form of rejection, limited land sales, and negotiations with developers. However, the power of capital and state legitimacy makes the resistance sporadic and weak.

Along with the development of new settlements, inequality in access to city facilities has also emerged. Basic infrastructure such as roads, clean water, and health services are more easily accessible to newcomers living in formal housing clusters, while local residents living in old villages are often left behind in terms of public services. This condition aligns with Douglass (1998), who stated that urban expansion in Southeast Asia tends to create polarized cities, where urban space reflects sharp socio-economic fragmentation.

Formal housing developed by developers has superior facilities and access, while older areas are often left behind in terms of public services. This inequality creates spatial separation between native residents and newcomers, not only in physical aspects but also in daily social relations. Local residents are often not involved in the spatial decision-making process and, as a result, have no influence

on the direction of development in their own areas (Firman, 2004).

Social segregation is further strengthened by the presence of fences and exclusive security systems in formal housing, which limit interaction between groups. In the long term, this separation creates social alienation, especially for old residents who begin to feel strange in a space that was once open and communal. As noted by Winarso (2011), urban space in the context of development like this is no longer a shared space but a space fragmented by economic logic and social class differences.

Furthermore, this inequality of access is also a consequence of the strong influence of market actors in determining the orientation of urban development. The increasing selling value of land and property makes areas like Meteseh an object of profitable speculation for developers, but at the same time removes local communities from production spaces and access to welfare. In the context of peri-urbanization, McGee (2009) states that suburban areas often experience tension between the interests of capital and the socio-ecological needs of local residents.

### **Identity of the Peripheral Urban Space**

The development of a city does not happen suddenly but is rather the result of a long process that takes place over time.

Each phase of city growth holds traces of decisions by various parties involved in it, both directly and indirectly. These decisions do not stand alone but are always influenced by various social, political, economic, and cultural factors that surround them. Thus, the city is present as a pile of interrelated layers of history, where every form and structure that is seen today is the result of the accumulation of past dynamics (Alvares, 1992).

The transformation of space in the Meteseh area is not just a physical change from fields to settlements but also reshapes the social and spatial identity of the local community. Initially, Meteseh was known as an agricultural area with a hilly landscape, a living space formed through collective relations between humans, nature, and tradition. The identity of the local community is built in a social space that relies on farming practices, water distribution, and interactions between residents based on cooperation and kinship (Geertz, 1963). In this context, the suburban space holds a distinctive social character, namely strong family relationships and land ownership that is passed down from generation to generation.

But by the late 1980s, urbanization from Semarang was changing Meteseh's face. The local government directed the area as a buffer zone with the function of new residential housing. Projects such as

the construction of the Meteseh Tembalang thoroughfare, as well as housing complexes developed by private companies like PT Bukit Semarang Jayametro, have become symbols of this transformation (Suara Merdeka, 1990b, 1993).

Behind the technocratic development discourse, this change contains complex social dynamics. Since 1989, Meteseh residents have faced restrictions on selling their land, with the exception of certain developers. Administration at the local sub-district level posed significant challenges for the residents. This means that the sub-district was unwilling to make a sale and purchase agreement for the land in question because they had been warned by land brokers not to make land sale and purchase agreements for residents to other people (Suara Merdeka, 1989). This has caused anxiety because the rights to space that were previously autonomous and communal have begun to be restricted by administrative mechanisms. Land speculation practices, large-scale land development, and the emergence of exclusive residential clusters mark the shift in control over space from local residents to the hands of the state and private capital.

This situation reflects the dominance of conceived space, which is space designed from above, according to technocratic and capitalistic logic

(Lefebvre, 1991). In the context of Meteseh, new forms of space such as wide paved main roads, fences, and residential zoning appear as part of the imposed representational space, neglecting the lived space that residents have long experienced in their daily lives. Harvey (2008) emphasizes that urban space in capitalism is often shaped not for communal living but as a project of capital accumulation.

These changes are also reflected in the image of space as formulated by Kevin Lynch. According to him, the identity of a city is formed through five elements, namely path, edge, district, node, and landmark. In Meteseh, these elements have undergone a sharp shift. The narrow roads have become one-way access, natural boundaries such as rice fields have been replaced by wall fences, and social nodes like village halls or mosques have been displaced by new commercial centers that are foreign to the old residents. The image of the old space becomes blurred, while the new image has not yet been fully embraced (Lynch, 1960).

In this case, Zahnd's perspective is relevant to consider. Zahnd emphasizes that the direct physical and social experiences of the community. When familiar elements are removed and unilaterally replaced by technocratic design, spatial alienation becomes inevitable. The community feels

disconnected from their history and spatial identity, even though administratively they live in the same location (Zahnd, 1999).

### **Meteseh: A Reflection of Suburban Patterns**

As an area that was initially dominated by agricultural land and local community-based settlements, Meteseh gradually experienced changes in spatial function due to population pressure, infrastructure development, and the influx of capital from outside. These changes make Meteseh a real example of a suburbanization pattern that occurs not only as a physical expansion of the city but also as a process of social and spatial restructuring.

The urbanization occurring in Meteseh is not an isolated case. Other areas on the outskirts of Semarang City, such as Mijen District, experienced a similar urbanization cycle. Starting from settlement expansion and conversion of agricultural land into housing to shifting economic and social structures of local communities (Nuzullia & Setyono, 2017). This process takes place in several stages, starting with increasing demand for housing in the city center, followed by a shift in development activities to the outskirts with the attraction of cheaper land prices and the availability of large land areas.

The growth of residential areas on the outskirts of Semarang City, such as in Banyumanik District, has experienced significant development recently. A study by Prakasa (2020) shows that between 2009 and 2019, there was an increase of 919 hectares in residential land use in the area. This development is not always accompanied by adequate spatial planning, resulting in problems such as irregular settlement patterns, limited infrastructure, and social fragmentation between immigrants and native residents. A similar conditions are also seen in Meteseh, which is starting to be filled with exclusive housing clusters, while the old environment is lagging behind in terms of services and accessibility.

The impact of residential development in Meteseh is not only felt in physical form but also in the social life of the residents. The emergence of new housing developments has changed the patterns of community interaction, weakened the communal bonds that were previously formed in agrarian relations, and created new social stratification between the old residents and the new housing residents. Native residents experience alienation in the space they have previously inhabited for generations, while newcomers bring a more individual and exclusive lifestyle (Mutmainah, 2024). This change reinforces the idea that the transformation of suburban spaces is not

only about physical development but also a profound social restructuring.

In a broader context, what happened in Meteseh reflects the pattern of peri-urbanization that is widely discussed in spatial planning and urban geography studies. The peripheral areas that were originally agrarian and communal have gradually changed into transitional spaces between villages and cities. This zone experiences pressure from two directions, the need for urban growth and the sustainability of traditional social systems (Allen, 2003; Muryanti, 2022). In such situations, local communities often do not have bargaining power in determining the direction of development in their own areas.

Like other suburban areas, it ultimately becomes a space shaped not by the needs of the local community but by market interests and macro development policies (Todaro, 2000). Control over space has shifted from the hands of the citizens to the state and developers, creating new spaces that are not always in harmony with local historical and social values.

## CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the transformation of Meteseh from 1987 to 2000 was not just a process of urban expansion but rather a concrete depiction of how the power of capital, spatial policies, and local dynamics

simultaneously shaped the suburban space. The production of space in this area involves formal actors such as the government and developers, as well as informal actors like land brokers and local elites, who together reconstruct the periphery into a high-value economic area. However, this process takes place without inclusive planning and tends to overlook the socio-ecological dimensions of the local community. As a result, there was dislocation of the dislocation of indigenous residents, spatial fragmentation, unequal access, and profound changes in spatial identity. This study emphasizes that urban space is not just a physical container but a product of social, political, and economic relations that are full of conflicting interests. By considering this, it is clear that the development of suburban areas like that taking place in the Meteseh area requires a more inclusive, historical, equitable, and sustainable approach.

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