

The 14th  
International Symposium  
of the Malay Archipelago

ORGANIZED BY :



Perak Branch



HOSTED BY :



UNM



e-ISSN : 3030-5543

*'Anging Mammiri Nusantara'  
Sulawesi Selatan*

# PROCEEDINGS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM NUSANTARA SIMPORA XIV

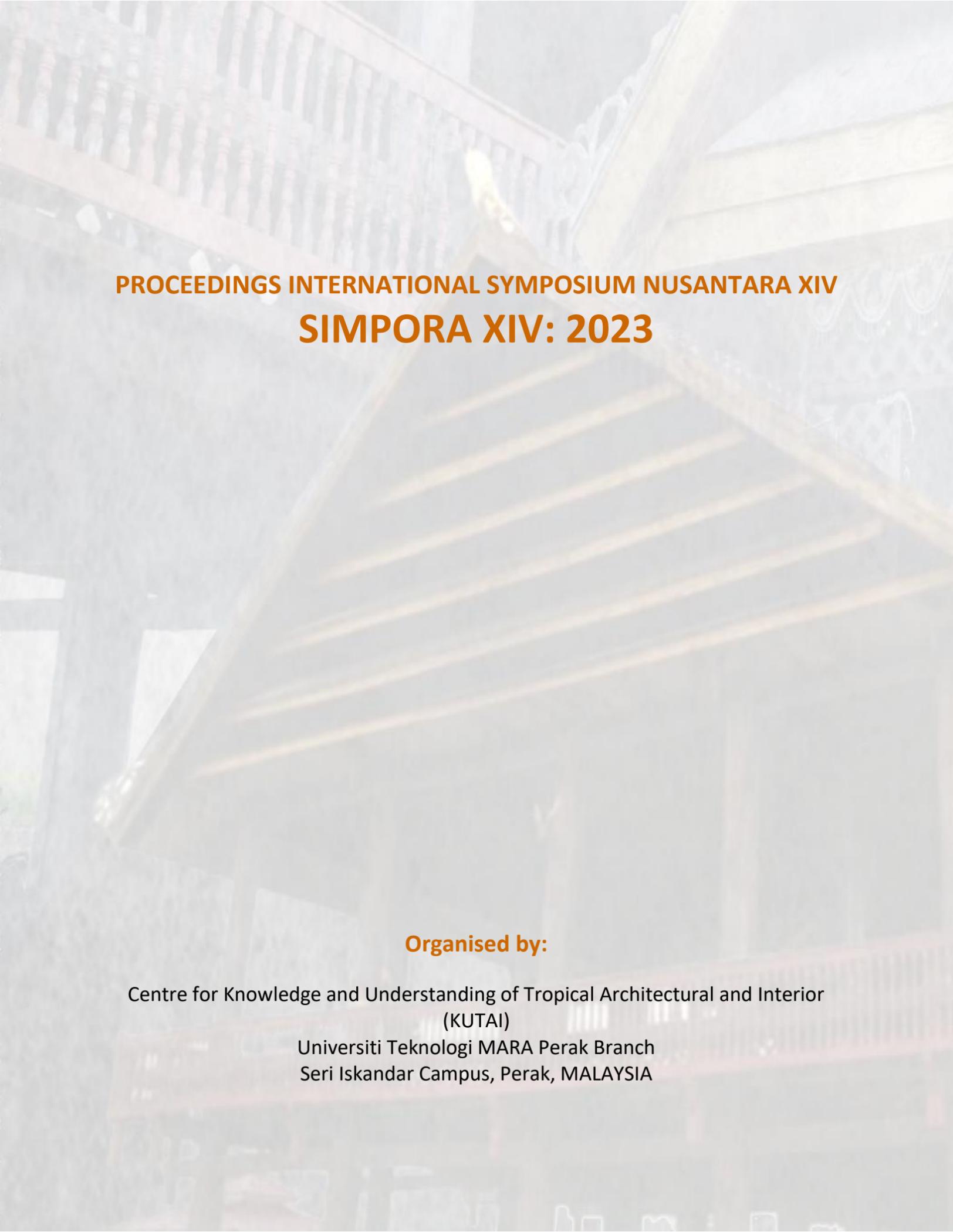
'SIMPOSIUM NUSANTARA KE-14' | OCTOBER 2023

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**PROCEEDINGS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM NUSANTARA XIV  
SIMPORA XIV: 2023**

**Organised by:**

Centre for Knowledge and Understanding of Tropical Architectural and Interior  
(KUTAI)

Universiti Teknologi MARA Perak Branch  
Seri Iskandar Campus, Perak, MALAYSIA

**Diterbitkan oleh:**

Unit Penerbitan UiTM Perak

**Alamat:**

Unit Penerbitan UiTM Perak,  
Pejabat Jaringan Industri, Masyarakat dan Alumni (PJIMA)  
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch,  
32610 Seri Iskandar Perak, Malaysia.

05-3742716

uitmperakpress@gmail.com

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Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing in Publication Data

No e- ISSN: 3030-5543

Cover Design: Ismail Hafiz Salleh

Typesetting : Nur Huzeima Mohd Hussain

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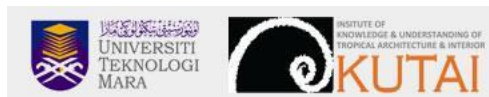
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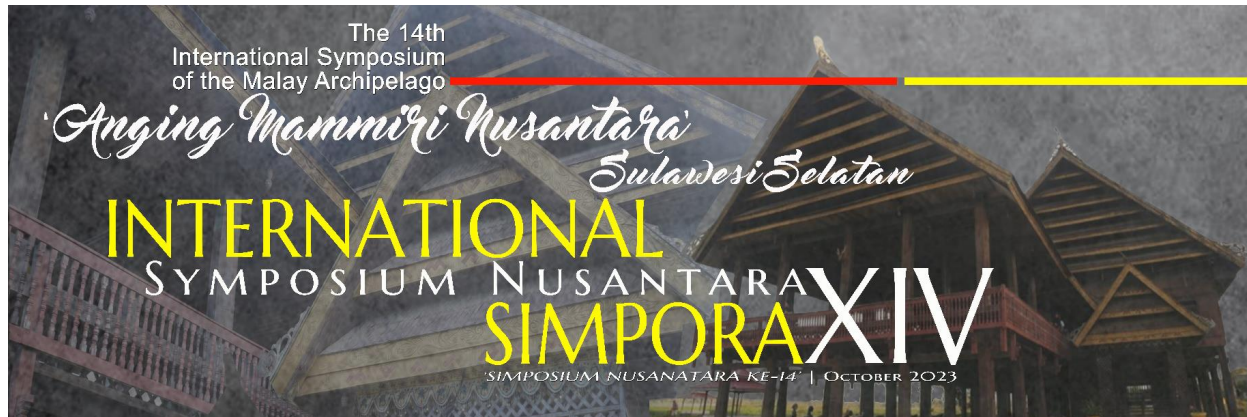
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## GEORGE TOWN'S HERITAGE BATTLEFRONT: RESOLVING PUBLIC SPACE CONFLICTS

Muhamad Ferdhaus Sazali<sup>1</sup>, Asyirah Abdul Rahim<sup>2</sup> & Zikri Muhamad<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Programme of Town and Regional Planning, Department of Built Environment Studies and Technology, College of Built Environment, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch, Seri Iskandar Campus*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Geography, School of Humanities, Universiti Sains Malaysia*

<sup>3</sup>*Faculty of Business, Economic and Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu*

Corresponding Author: [ferdhaus@uitm.edu.my](mailto:ferdhaus@uitm.edu.my)

**Abstract:** The UNESCO World Heritage Site in Malaysia is situated in George Town, Penang. The enclosed area of this protected site has a wide range of historical treasures that act as a deterrence against unauthorized modifications. Traders participate in regular activity within defined settings. Meanwhile, the peripatetic sellers transition from one area to another. However, it is crucial to recognize the existence of vendors and hawkers who participate in illegal activities and use public spaces for their business ventures. The study area has identified a prominent element that contributes to conflicts in public places, namely the substantial demand for street food outlets. The precise geographical coordinates of the combat area have been properly recognized and recorded to facilitate a thorough analysis. The objective of this research is to determine the geographic prevalence and severity of confrontations that occur in public settings. The conservation of the ecosystem is greatly dependent on the accessibility and use of public space.

**Keywords:** Public Space, Conflict, UNESCO World Heritage Site

## INTRODUCTION

The rich and complex story of our common human and environmental past is at the very core of each site designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Allegories like this stand as reminders of the priceless treasures on Earth and the great achievements of bygone civilizations. But beyond these magnificent facades, there is frequently a quiet but raging fight—a conflict that might destroy these sacred places. This is the domain of the UNESCO World Heritage Site's public space dispute, an intricate and critical matter that necessitates our intervention and settlement. The

The journey will find out what is holding the priceless artifacts back, figure out why they are at odds with each other, and figure out how to make the past and the present, the public and the heritage, live in peace with each other. This study highlights the core of the shared past, where the past reverberates with the hopes of the future, and the fight for preservation intersects with the needs of public access. This UNESCO World Heritage site and its cultural legacy serve as both a treasure and a battlefield.

Any city worth its salt will have public space as an essential feature. Section 8 of Act 171 of the Malaysia Local Government Act 1976 states that the property is subject to thorough control by local authorities since it is categorized as public. A particular public space inside George Town, Penang, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is the subject of this investigation. On July 7, 2008, the property was formally recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage property. Gazetteering helps the region's identity, which in turn increases its historical and economic relevance. In recent times, the domain of public space has been greatly affected by the unchecked advancement of modern development, which has damaged the cultural heritage that has been handed down through previous generations. The UNESCO World Heritage Site has been invaded by lawbreakers who are not permitted to be there, taking public space. People in this situation are destroying public spaces by using them for private gain rather than for the intended purpose of providing places for people to relax, socialize, and enjoy themselves. The area is now an illegal private business zone because of the changes that have taken place there. The public area has been misused and abused due to the governmental authority responsible for regulating it, the Penang Municipal City Council, violating norms and regulations. Consequently, many problems and worries arose as a result of this illegal activity. The study's overarching goal is to identify hotspots for and severity levels of public space disputes. In order to ensure the continued viability of this UNESCO World Heritage Site for present and future generations, it is essential to conduct this study and use sustainable preservation measures.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Public spaces within UNESCO World Heritage Sites serve as unique arenas where the past, culture, and the present intersect. These sites, recognized for their exceptional cultural and historical significance, attract millions of visitors annually. However, the conservation and

management of these spaces often entail complex challenges, particularly in the context of burgeoning tourism and increasing urbanization. This literature review seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted issues surrounding public space conflicts at UNESCO World Heritage Sites. It delves into the diverse perspectives, dynamics, and implications associated with these conflicts, ultimately aiming to contribute to the discourse on sustainable heritage preservation.

The topic of public space in urban areas has garnered considerable attention among scholars, who define it as inclusive areas that are accessible to the public, including but not limited to thoroughfares, recreational areas, open fields, plazas, and pedestrian walkways. According to the findings of PLANMalaysia (JPBD, 2004), public space refers to the spatial domain inside urban regions that is an integral component of human existence within the urban environment. An area of land, regardless of whether it is under siege or not, that has been designated or reserved to be organized, either in its whole or in part, This includes public parks, sports fields, recreational grounds, and pedestrian paths. According to UN-Habitat (2016), the Global Public Space Program suggests that a significant portion, namely 50%, of urban land should be designated for public space. This allocation may be further divided into 30% for roads and pathways and an additional 20% for open space, green areas, and public services. The significance of public space in urban areas cannot be overstated. It serves as a fundamental topographic element, contributing to the overall character of a city. Additionally, public spaces enhance the aesthetic appeal of the urban environment by providing visually engaging and beautiful settings (Cattel et al., 2008; Jacobs, 1985; Payne, 2009). The presence of public spaces inside urban areas has been shown to have a multitude of positive effects on several aspects of society, including the economy, environment, security, health, integration, and connection.

The status of public space has a direct and somewhat proportional impact on the quality of life of urban residents. This pertains to Thompson's (2002) assertion that an optimal public space is characterized by its ability to establish a direct connection between the space itself and the individuals who live or operate inside it. Hence, the present research adopts the theory of place in public space as a foundational framework and primary reference point for investigating the prioritization of public space design and provision, with a focus on aligning with the authentic essence and purpose of such spaces. The theory of place has been a subject of ongoing discourse and analysis over an extended period. The use of the Theory of Place is extensively employed in the conceptualization and development of public places. Previous research has shown that there exists a positive correlation between the behaviors exhibited in public spaces and the design of those spaces, resulting in the creation of effective and livable public environments (Francis, 2003; Lang, 1994).

In order to move forward, it is imperative to adopt a holistic and adaptive approach to managing these conflicts, ensuring that these extraordinary sites continue to inspire and educate future generations while remaining resilient in the face of contemporary challenges. Public space conflicts in UNESCO World Heritage sites are not mere challenges but opportunities for innovative and sustainable solutions that can benefit both the sites and the communities that call them home.

## STUDY AREA

The public space under investigation in this research encompasses a portion of the region situated inside the esteemed UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town, Penang. The term "public space" in this research includes the pavements of shophouses, pedestrian streets, and back roads. Public places are intended to be accessible to all individuals without any kind of ownership or control. Within the framework of the Town and Country Planning Act 1976 (Act 172) and the Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171), it is explicitly stipulated that government-owned property or areas are prohibited from engaging in any activity without obtaining legal authorization from the relevant local authority. Both of these legislative measures prioritize the safeguarding of government-owned territories or lands from invasion. If this conduct is contravened and disregarded, it is evident that physical abuse has transpired in the vicinity. The subject of the investigation under consideration is a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site, officially recognized and deemed a very significant national historical asset. Hence, it is essential for any action taking place or intended to take place within this vicinity to get the consent of the relevant stakeholders and adhere to all regulations governing this locale. The subject matter pertains to the National Heritage Act (Act 645) enacted in 2005. The designated research area has several sites of historical significance, necessitating a conscientious approach to social sensitivity within the vicinity. Consequently, strict adherence to legal regulations is important for all undertakings transpiring within the region. The aforementioned law was officially promulgated and published in the gazette, with the intention that it would be implemented by the relevant authorities and adhered to by the general populace. Hence, it is essential to implement adequate oversight and monitoring measures for any activities that may impact the significance of heritage, particularly its Outstanding Universal Values, which may include the utilization of structures or spaces inside the designated historic area.

## METHODOLOGY

This research encompasses a subset of the overall population of vendors and hawkers who engage in the unauthorized use of public space inside the UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town. The individuals chosen for this study are comprised of shopkeepers and hawkers who operate inside the UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town, located in Penang. The research region, including the UNESCO World Heritage Site George Town in Penang, lacked any previously documented estimates of vendors and hawkers who have exploited public space, necessitating the need for manual calculations to be conducted on-site. Upon completion of the data collection process, it was determined that the cumulative count of individuals engaged in trade and vending activities that resulted in public space conflicts amounted to 4969. This figure included 4597 merchants and 372 hawkers. During the process of data collection and analysis, the researchers used the Global Positioning System (GPS) application to capture the precise geographical coordinates of the specific region where the confrontation in the public space was instigated by merchants and hawkers. The use of the Global Positioning System (GPS) application is important in this research endeavor to ascertain the precise geographical

coordinates of the public space dispute occurring inside the confines of this UNESCO World Heritage Site. By using this program, it becomes possible to accurately identify and document the geographical coordinates of the conflict site. The geographical coordinates of this battle are determined via the use of GPS-enabled gadgets. The coordination of this particular site occurs concurrently with the assessment of the number of dealers and hawkers who have violated the regulations pertaining to public space use. The procedure of coordination entails a significant duration in order to identify the more accurate positions of dealers and hawkers at various times and locations. The data was acquired by collecting the coordinates of the public space dispute area and mapping them using the ArcGIS 10.1 tool.

## **FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

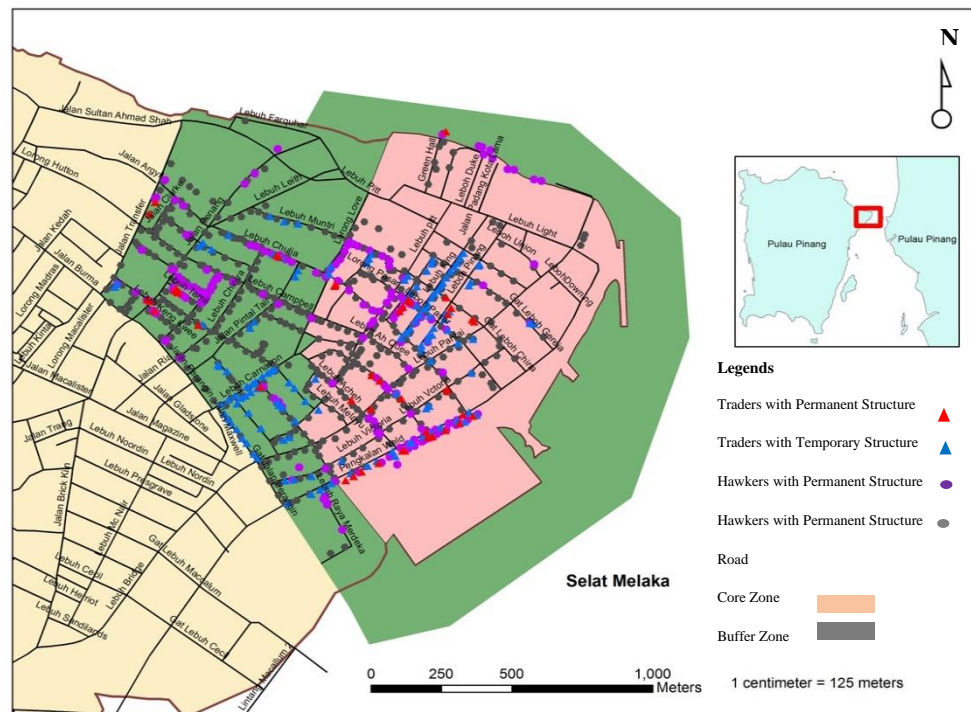
The research area's data-gathering approach facilitated the identification and presentation of public space conflicts at the UNESCO World Heritage Site. These conflicts were shown through the use of conflict location maps and diagrams.

### **LOCATIONS OF PUBLIC SPACE CONFLICT**

The geographical positioning of these merchants and street vendors only pertains to those who have caused disruptions in public areas situated inside the confines of the UNESCO World Heritage Site. Please see Map 1. The individuals engaged in commercial activities throughout both weekdays and weekends included not just merchants but also hawkers. The conflict pertaining to public space arises when it is unlawfully converted into private space, resulting in adverse consequences. These consequences manifest in the form of temporary or permanent barriers erected within the public space, which not only impede its intended purpose but also contravene legal regulations. The ongoing dispute in this public place has posed challenges for other individuals seeking to use the area. This research primarily targets merchants and hawkers who engage in the unauthorized use of public space, resulting in conflicts within the public sphere.

Public spaces play a crucial role in urban environments, facilitating the engagement of individuals within a community, promoting cultural interchange, and providing opportunities for leisure pursuits. Nevertheless, in highly crowded regions such as George Town and Penang, the distribution and use of public places sometimes give rise to disputes among inhabitants, visitors, and municipal officials. This research investigates the intricacies of public space conflict in George Town, providing insights into the primary areas where these disputes often arise and the underlying causes that contribute to their occurrence. These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of public space conflicts in George Town, Penang. Such conflicts result from the interplay of economic interests, heritage preservation, community needs, and environmental considerations. Effectively addressing these conflicts requires comprehensive urban planning, community engagement, and policies that prioritize heritage preservation

while accommodating evolving urban demands. It also necessitates a commitment to open dialogue among stakeholders to find equitable solutions that respect the diverse interests within George Town.

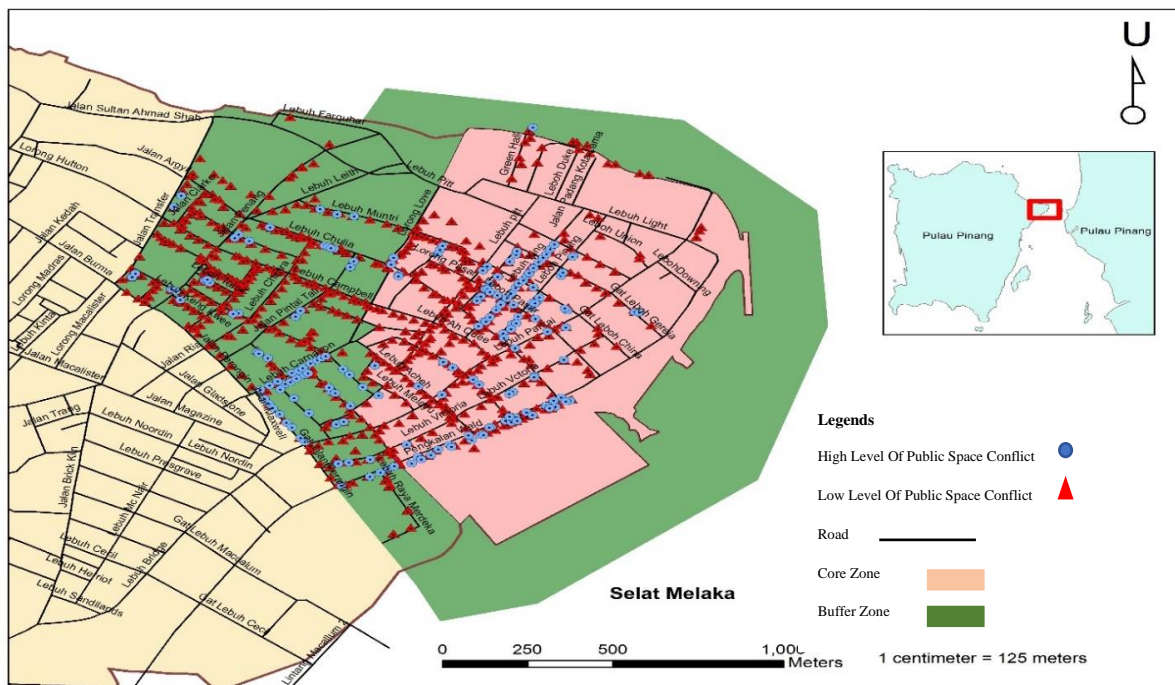


**Figure 1** Location of Public Space Conflict in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, George Town, Penang  
(Source: Field Study, 2016)

## LEVEL OF PUBLIC SPACE CONFLICT

George Town, Penang, is a vibrant and culturally rich urban center known for its historic significance, diverse population, and thriving tourism industry. Public spaces play a pivotal role in the city's fabric, serving as meeting points, recreational areas, and cultural hubs. However, with the growing population and increasing tourism, the level of public space conflict has become a matter of concern. This study aims to assess the current level of public space conflict in George Town and identify key contributing factors. The research region has been analyzed to determine the extent of public space conflict, resulting in the identification of two distinct categories: low public space conflict and high public space conflict. (see Map 2 for reference.) This degree of conflict arises because of several variables, with particular emphasis on the circumstances surrounding the public sphere. This research examines the absence of public space conflicts in a specific location, highlighting the seamless execution of everyday activities, particularly the unrestricted mobility of people and vehicles. It is important to ensure the regular maintenance of this area to safeguard the public space from any disruptions that may potentially lead to conflicts, thereby promoting the collective welfare of individuals.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that regions experiencing a scarcity of public space encounter a notable prevalence of conflicts, mostly arising from the utilization of sidewalks next to businesses, alleyways, and roadways. These conflicts predominantly stem from the activities of street vendors and merchants, which tend to concentrate in limited sections of public spaces. The presence of these dealers and hawkers sometimes leads to the establishment of transient obstacles inside public areas, therefore impeding the ease of passage for other individuals using the space. The temporary barriers constructed by these vendors and hawkers could be opened when not in use. The building of this barrier is mostly undertaken during peak hours when the region experiences a multitude of activities, despite its temporary nature and ability to be opened at any given moment. The presence of these temporary barriers serves as a precursor for the establishment of permanent obstacles within the vicinity. Moreover, the prevalence of public space conflict suggests that the public space has been subject to persistent building activities, therefore exerting control over the region. In the public space, both permanent and temporary constructions or barriers have been erected, encompassing various parts of the area. This situation poses challenges for individuals visiting the public area and other members of the general public in terms of usability. The occurrence of heightened public space conflict in this region may be attributed to its proximity to popular tourist destinations. Efforts must be undertaken to proactively address and eliminate the persistent conflict in public spaces, ensuring the equitable and enduring enjoyment of sustainable public spaces by all individuals. Preservation of history within this research area is important to ensure its appreciation by both present and future generations.



**Figure 2** Level of Public Space Conflict in the UNESCO World Heritage Site, George Town, Penang  
(Source: Field Study, 2016)

## DISCUSSION

Traders who possess a legitimate business license granted by the relevant authorities are bound by the provisions of the Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171), the By-Laws (Trades, Business, and Industry) of the Penang Municipal Council 1991, and other pertinent legislation, acts, or regulations that have been enacted and remain applicable throughout the duration of their business operations. Traders are obligated to engage in commercial activities only inside a defined location, limited to their own business premises, and during certain hours as stipulated and documented in their company licenses. As stipulated in the George Town Special Area Plan (RKK) of Penang (2016), the utilization of sidewalks and street areas for showcasing items while ensuring sufficient accessibility for pedestrians is allowed within the framework of 'road sharing'. Nevertheless, a small number of authorized dealers have engaged in activities that have resulted in conflicts, to the extent of disregarding all rules and regulations established for the benefit of the general public. A subset of merchants engages in the unauthorized utilization of the front, left, right, or rear areas of their establishments to grow their commercial operations, disregarding the requisite authorization from local governing bodies. The vendors have misconstrued the notion of 'road sharing' to such an extent that they have effectively monopolized a significant portion of the public space. These merchants have erected many barriers to exhibiting their merchandise in the vicinity of their commercial establishments. Traders employed both permanent and temporary barriers in accordance with specific temporal and situational factors, thereby engendering conflicts within public spaces that evidently contravened the Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171) and the By-Laws (Trades, Business, and Industry) of the Council Penang Municipality 1991. The Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171) explicitly stipulates, in accordance with Section 102, that local authorities possess the authority to periodically establish, modify, and nullify business licenses that give rise to issues and disruptions, in accordance with the Law By-Laws, intending to safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of the populace.

Conversely, it is essential that individuals engaged in hawking activities possess a legitimate hawker permit issued by the relevant local governing body. According to the Hawkers (Amendment) By-Laws 1991, it is explicitly stipulated that individuals are prohibited from engaging in hawking activities unless they possess a valid license granted by the relevant local governing body. As to the Hawkers (Amendment) By-Laws 1991, the designated location for conducting hawking operations, as determined by the municipality, excludes areas such as staircases, pavements, paved fields, and public places. This refers to regions that do not disrupt public thoroughfares, property owners, or privately held businesses. The idea of 'road sharing' has been implemented in George Town, Penang, which is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The George Town, Penang Special Area Plan (RKK) 2016 introduced the notion of 'road sharing', which involves the utilization of sidewalks and street space for the purpose of displaying items while ensuring sufficient pedestrian access. Regrettably, hawkers have rejected this idea, resulting in conflicts over the usage of public space. The presence of these street vendors gives rise to a conflict in public spaces, characterized by the presence of both permanent and temporary impediments that vary depending on certain times and conditions. The dispute that arises in public spaces is in contravention of the Hawkers (Amendment) By-

Laws 1991, the Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171), and many other legislations. The Hawkers (Amendment) By-Laws of 1991 impose restrictions on hawkers, prohibiting them from engaging in activities that might impede or disrupt the unobstructed flow of vehicular traffic and pedestrian movement within a designated area.

## CONCLUSIONS

In summary, it can be inferred that the phenomenon of public space encroachment, whereby public areas are unlawfully transformed into private domains, is a significant concern and challenge affecting UNESCO World Heritage Sites, as well as other urban public spaces globally. The prompt calls for the expeditious resolution of the difficulties and problems pertaining to conflicts in public spaces. It is important to use suitable and accurate methods and solutions in order to safeguard the welfare and longevity of these communal areas. Therefore, this research represents a significant advancement towards identifying a resolution for effectively managing disputes that arise inside public areas. Efficient engagement of policy makers at the central government level and local authorities at the local level is imperative in effectively addressing public space conflicts within urban areas, particularly in UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Furthermore, collaboration with UNESCO on an international scale is crucial to effectively resolve these conflicts.

Furthermore, it is essential for the urban population, particularly merchants, hawkers, and city inhabitants, to exhibit heightened awareness of their roles and responsibilities within the urban environment, in order to safeguard the welfare and long-term viability of the city. The integration of sustainability principles, particularly concerning the preservation and longevity of public spaces, should be included in urban planning and development processes. The application of this notion should be enhanced within the individual and collective consciousness of the urban population, therefore fostering a deeper appreciation for the existing places. This phenomenon has the potential to engender feelings of affection and foster a robust sense of communal space inside urban areas. Hence, the preservation of public space's sustainability serves as the primary foundation that should be used as a point of reference and guidance in mitigating the occurrence of conflicts within public spaces. This research aims to serve as a valuable reference and guidance for addressing the problem of public space conflict in the UNESCO World Heritage Site of George Town, Penang, as well as in other metropolitan locations globally.

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## MAIN AUTHOR'S PROFILE



Mithen Lullulangi is a Professor of Planning Education in the Building Engineering Education Study Program (1988 - 2014), Population and Environmental Education Master's Study Program (2015 - present) at Universitas Negeri Makassar. Undergraduate Faculty. Completed a Bachelor's degree (S1) in the Architectural Engineering Education Study Program at IKIP Ujung Pandang, in 1986. In 2002 he completed a Masters (S2) Program in the Architecture Study Program, at Hasanuddin University Postgraduate Program. In 2014, he completed the Doctoral Program at the Population and Environmental Education Study Program, at Makassar State University.



Kartina Alauddin is an Associate Professor in the Quantity Surveying Program at Universiti Teknologi MARA, Perak Branch, Malaysia. She earned her PhD in Built Environment from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Melbourne, Australia. Her research focuses on intellectual capital for the adaptive reuse of historical buildings, and she has made significant contributions to the field through her publications in peer-reviewed journals, conference papers, and book chapters. Additionally, she is a researcher for the Knowledge and Understanding of Tropical Architectural and Interior (KUTAI) research interest group. With over 25 years of teaching experience at both undergraduate and graduate levels, Dr. Kartina has instructed a variety of courses in quantity surveying and project management. Her dedication to research excellence, teaching, and student mentorship underscores her invaluable role in the academic community.



Finished her undergraduate of architecture from Hasanuddin University, graduated in architecture from the Institute of Technology Bandung, and focused research design on old cities as tourism. And her Doctoral Student from Technische Universität Wien, Austria. focuses research on Architecture culture and Heritage. She worked at Universitas Negeri Makassar.



Izziah received a Bachelor's degree from Surabaya Institute Technology (ITS), Surabaya, Indonesia in 1987. She finished her master's degree at Drexel University, Philadelphia in 1994 and her doctoral degree in Architecture and Urban Design at the University of Adelaide Adelaide, Australia in 2010. Izziah's PhD thesis at the University of Adelaide, which focused on Aceh's architectural identity, proved a major advantage in her role in the rebuilding program.



Othman Bin Mohd Nor is a senior lecturer in the Interior Architecture Department at the UiTM Perak Branch. He graduated with a Ph.D. in Architecture in 2018 from the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), after obtaining his MSc in Design in 2013 from the Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB). He received a bachelor's degree in Interior Architecture from the Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) in 2000 and a Diploma in Interior Design (ITM) in 2006. His field(s) of interest focus on Interior Design, Interior Architecture, Identity Architecture, Traditional, heritage, and conservation.



Rahmansah, born in Puttada, Majene, West Sulawesi in 1982. Completed his undergraduate education in the Department of Civil Engineering Education and Planning, Faculty of Engineering, Makassar State University in 2007, completed his Masters in Architectural Engineering, Postgraduate Program, Hasanuddin University Makassar in 2011, completed his undergraduate education in the Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Pepabri University Makassar in 2013, and completed his Insiyur professional education at the Insiyur Professional Study Program, Faculty of Engineering, Hasanuddin University Makassar in 2021. The author is a permanent lecturer at the Faculty of Engineering, Makassar State University in 2012 until now. The courses taught are Archi. Design Studio, Building Structure & Construction, and Architectural Drawing.



Muhamad Ferdhaus is a senior lecturer in the Urban and Regional Planning Department at the UiTM Perak Branch. He graduated with a Ph.D. in Urban Geography in 2018 from the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), after obtaining his MSc in Sustainable City and Community in 2013 from the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). He received a bachelor's degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) in 2011. His field(s) of interest focus on sustainable cities and communities, Islamic planning and development, urban geography and metropolitan areas, tourism planning and development, and heritage and conservation.



Moh Sutrisno received a doctorate in 2020 in architectural engineering and planning from Gadjah Mada University. Previously he also earned a master's degree at the same campus in 2014 with cum laude predicate. He has taught architectural theory and criticism at UIN Alauddin Makassar since 2019 and has been the main subject in his functional position since being an expert assistant. The courses included the scientific fields of history and architectural theory. His research includes the theory of iconic architecture since 2012. He studied iconic buildings in various parts of the world, heritage architecture as an icon of its time in the old city space of Palopo (2015-2020), and Icons of Islamic architecture in South Sulawesi (2020-2022). Currently, he is interested in Heritage building preservation methods using HBIM (2022-2023)



Graduated and holds a Doctor of Architecture in Architecture from the Department of Architecture ITB in 2011. She is an Associate Professor in the School of Architecture, Planning, and Policy Development (SAPPD) ITB. She teaches disaster-resilient architecture, sustainable architecture, and building materials. She is also a member of the Building Technology Research Group which is one of the research groups under the Faculty of SAPPD. Her research includes fire risk in buildings and dense urban areas (1996-2022), fire-resistant plaster bamboo wall construction (2015-2023), waste-based building materials (2020-2024), and local wisdom of traditional communities in disaster management (2017). She is currently interested in developing research on traditional building designs in Indonesia that anticipate fire hazards.



The author is a permanent lecturer in the Department of Civil Engineering and Planning Education at the Building Engineering Education Study Program (2015-2021), Architecture Study Program (2021-present) Faculty of Engineering, Makassar State University. Completed her Bachelor's Degree (S1) in the Architectural Engineering Study Program, Hasanuddin University in 1999. In 2012 she completed the Master's Program (S2) in the Planning Study Program and Regional Development of Hasanuddin University Postgraduate Program. Currently continuing her doctoral studies in the Doctoral Program at the Architectural Science Study Program, Department of Architectural Engineering, Hasanuddin University with the research topic Adaptive Thermal Comfort of Coastal Stilt Houses in Humid Tropical Climates. Writing a book with ISBN: Space Conditioning Viewed from Building Physics Aspects (First edition, November 2021). Interested in writing and conducting research in the field of architecture: building science, traditional architecture and environmental architecture.



Armiwaty is a Lecturer in Architecture Program Study at Universitas Negeri Makassar. A motivated professional with a blend of academic excellence, creative flair, and a track record of achievement. Dedicated and versatile professional with a passion for writing and research. Graduated with a bachelor's degree in architecture in 2000. A master's degree in regional planning and development in 2012 and currently continuing my studies in the doctoral program in architecture at Hasanuddin University with a research topic on thermal comfort in floating houses on Lake Tempe. I was awarded the Best Paper Award Presented in The Technical and Vocational Education and Training International Conference (TVETIC) Faculty of Education Universiti Teknologi Malaysia in 2016. The last article published in the Central European Management Journal Vol. 31 Iss. 2 (2023) is The Symbolic Meaning of The Essential Engraving and Its Placement in Mamasa Traditional Architecture.



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