

Examining the neoliberalization of space in Indonesia through the lens of Ahmadin's "sociology of space"

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Abstract

Ahmadin's book "Sociology of Space: Concepts, Theories, and Case Studies" responds to academic concerns about the frequent understanding of space as merely a passive physical entity. This book envisions space as a dynamic social product, imbued with power relations, and a battleground for meaning. Through a comprehensive study approach, Ahmadin takes readers on an exploration of how spaces—from cities and villages to malls and sidewalks to parks—are produced, consumed, and reproduced through social relations. The book is structured in a well-organized manner, beginning with a conceptual mapping and the roots of sociological thought in space, exploring key theories from leading thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, and Michel Foucault, and concluding with a depiction of reality in various case studies of several cities in Indonesia.

Abstrak

Buku "Sosiologi Ruang: Konsep, Teori, dan Studi Kasus" karya Ahmadin hadir sebagai jawaban atas kegelisahan akademis tentang masih seringnya ruang dipahami sekadar sebagai entitas fisik yang pasif. Buku ini membayangkan ruang sebagai produk sosial yang dinamis, berdimensi relasi kuasa, dan menjadi arena pertarungan makna. Melalui pendekatan studi yang komprehensif, Ahmadin membawa pembaca menyelami bagaimana ruang mulai dari kota, desa, mall, trotoar, taman, hingga ruang virtual diproduksi, dikonsumsi, dan direproduksi dalam bentuk relasi sosial. Buku ini tersistematika dalam struktur yang apik, dimulai dari pemetaan konseptual dan akar pemikiran sosiologi ruang, menjelajahi teori-teori kunci dari para pemikir utama seperti Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, hingga Michel Foucault, dan diakhiri dengan penggambaran realitas dalam berbagai studi kasus pada beberapa kota di Indonesia.

Keywords

neoliberalization; lens; Ahmadin; sociology of space; Indonesia

1. Introduction

In the synopsis of this book it is explained that the Sociology of Space is an extension of the study of sociology that uses geographical theories, especially human geography (Peters, 2016), economic geography (Coe et al., 2019), and feminist geography (Sharp, 2009). The study targets various social practices, the dynamics of social institutional power, and spatial dialectics as a form of human interaction with space (the environment). For quite a long time, the sociology of space has played an important role and contributed positively in giving a new nuance to the study of social sciences and even space is considered an important part of the process of forming sociological theories. This book discusses the definition and scope of spatial sociology, the pioneers of spatial sociology (M. Ahmadin, 2025), and spatial theories in sociology. The following sections discuss the construction of spatial consciousness, spatial practices, spatial production, the dialectics of space and social reproduction, the irony and problematics of space, urban spatial conflicts, spatial representation, narratives of public space, urban space and public transportation, and public space as a tourist attraction (A. Ahmadin, 2025).

2. Book Strengths

Ahmadin's book, "Sociology of Space," has several strengths, including: (1) it uses structured language that is easily understood by a wide range of readers. A noteworthy strength of this book is its ability to simplify complex theoretical discussions into relatively easy-to-understand language. The concept of Lefebvre's "Space of Production" (Lefebvre, 2012) or Manuel Castells's "Space of Flows" (Castells, 2013) is explained very well. To further deepen understanding of these theories, the book's discussion is complemented by a variety of illustrative examples that facilitate easy comprehension for readers, especially students of Sociology or other social sciences. (2) the theoretical approach used is comprehensive, not focused solely on one school of thought. Ahmadin presents a very broad theoretical map, thus providing a rich and in-depth perspective. This allows readers to compare various viewpoints in analyzing spatial phenomena and problems (A. Ahmadin et al., 2025). (3) the book's discussion is highly contextual, including a variety of urban case studies in Indonesia. This also serves as evidence that Western-born theories, when used as analytical frameworks, are not merely abstract, but are applied to understanding urban phenomena in Indonesia. Studies of spatial conflict, segregation, the transformation of public space, spatial awareness, and other phenomena make this book highly relevant to the realities of Indonesian urban life; (4) it is relevant to contemporary issues, namely virtual space (cyberspace) and how social media creates new interaction spaces that are also rife with hierarchy and power.

3. Book Weaknesses

The theoretical discussion in some sections of this book is very dense, although the language is clear, but it can be difficult to digest, especially for readers completely new to the study of spatial sociology. In other words, some theories are not explained in detail, especially regarding their underlying assumptions, leaving readers new to sociology overwhelmed and difficult to fully understand. Another weakness of this book is that some of the cases presented seem to serve only as brief introductions or as examples to reinforce theoretical arguments, resulting in a lack of in-depth analysis. In short, in some sections of this book, the case studies are more than just illustrations of the application of the theory, rather than the results of in-depth research.

4. Analysis and Critique

This book is highly successful in fulfilling its mission as a valuable introductory text for the study of the Sociology of Space. Its primary strength lies in its excellent integration of theory and practice within the context of Indonesian cities. Similarly, the choice to discuss several issues concerning the commercialization of public spaces, which have transformed into commercial plazas, and the spatial conflicts between communities and the government over urban space, is a smart one, as it touches on current issues.

As a lecturer specializing in economics, I am intrigued and believe that the study should devote more space to critical perspectives on political-economic dimensions. This would include examining the relationship of power in the production of urban space in Indonesia, particularly within the analysis of neoliberalism. While acknowledged as having been touched upon in this section of the book, it appears to have not been explored in depth, leaving room for other researchers or authors to focus on this specific aspect.

5. Conclusion and Rekomendations

"Sociology of Space: Concepts, Theories, and Case Studies" is a book that makes an important contribution to the body of social sciences in Indonesia. In terms of topic/theme of study, this book successfully fills the gap in literature discussing space from a sociological perspective (A. Ahmadin, 2024). This book is very suitable as reading for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students majoring in Sociology, Geography, Anthropology, Urban and Regional Planning, Architecture, and Political Science. It is also suitable as reading for NGO activists working on issues of spatial conflict, the struggle for urban space, and citizens' rights to the city. Especially for policy planners (policymakers) and urban development practitioners, this book is also important as material for understanding the various social dimensions of space. In short, this book is not only required reading, but also serves as an analytical framework for examining various complex spatial issues in Indonesia. In addition, several other works by Ahmadin can also be read to complement the material in this book, such as: Urban Sociology (Mansyur et al., 2022), Sociology of Urban Public Space (A. Ahmadin, Kurniawan, et al., 2023), Sociology of Virtual Space (A. Ahmadin, Nugroho, et al., 2023), Sociologizing Urban Space (A. Ahmadin, 2024), as well as many of his articles on urban space.

6. Book Identity

- Title: Sosiologi Ruang: Konsep, Teori, dan Studi Kasus
- Author: Ahmadin
- Publisher: Widina Media Utama
- City: Bandung, Indonesia
- Size: 15,5 x 23 cm
- Thickness: 238 pages
- Published: 2025
- Language: Indonesian
- ISBN: 978-634-246-025-2

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