

SOCIAL DYNAMICS BETWEEN PT GARAM WAREHOUSE AND THE SITISEWU COMMUNITY IN SOSROMENDURAN, YOGYAKARTA, INDONESIA

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Abstract:

Industrial heritage sites in Indonesia often reflect the continuity of colonial infrastructures within contemporary urban landscapes. The PT Garam warehouse in Sosromenduran, Yogyakarta, represents one such example as a colonial industrial structure that remains active in the present as a form of living heritage. Despite its historical significance, the building has not been officially designated as a cultural heritage site, making it vulnerable to functional transformation and potential demolition. This study aims to examine the social dynamics between the warehouse and the surrounding community and to explore the heritage narratives constructed by various stakeholders. This research employs a qualitative approach through field observation, interviews, and archival study method that were framed within industrial archaeology and cultural landscape theories. The findings indicate a shift in the social role of the warehouse from an open and socially integrated space into a more restricted and institutionally controlled environment, contributing to increasing social distance between the community and the site amid urban development and gentrification. Despite its significant historical, social, and cultural value, the absence of formal recognition and limited community involvement pose challenges to its preservation. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of inclusive heritage management to ensure the sustainability of industrial heritage within an evolving urban context.

Keywords: Industrial heritage; Industrial archaeology; cultural landscape

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1. Introduction

Industrialization during the colonial period in Indonesia has left behind various archaeological remains that continue to exist within contemporary urban landscapes. Among these remains, industrial infrastructures such as salt production centers and

storage facilities (known as *Zoutpakhuis*) played a crucial role in supporting colonial economic systems in relation with monopoly system and strategic distribution of commodities like salt. Rapid development of salt industrialization in Indonesia was closely related with European demand that drove the expansion of production and distribution networks across different regions in the country.

Studies on industrial archaeology emphasize that colonial industrial structures are not merely physical remnants of the past but also represent ongoing social and economic processes that extend into the present (Palmer and Neaverson, 1998). In the Indonesian context, Inagurasi (2024) highlights the potential of industrial archaeology research in examining the remains of industrial activities and their historical development in Indonesia. Many colonial industrial buildings have also continued to function after independence despite changes in their political and social contexts (Handinoto, 2010). This continuity of function has led to the recognition of such structures as forms of living heritage in which historical functions coexist with contemporary contexts. Furthermore, heritage studies highlight that the significance of a site is not determined solely by its physical attributes. Jones (2017) emphasizes the importance of social values in understanding heritage, particularly through the relationships between historic places, communities, identity, memory, and a sense of belonging. This perspective suggests that the significance of industrial heritage can also be understood through the narratives and experiences constructed by communities and other stakeholders. In urban contexts, changes in land use, tourism development, and gentrification can further reshape the relationship between communities and heritage sites, potentially resulting in social distancing and a reduced sense of ownership (Smith, 1996; Low & Smith, 2006).

One example of this phenomenon is the PT Garam warehouse, located in Sosromenduran, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This salt storage facility was established in the early twentieth century as part of the colonial economic infrastructure supporting the salt distribution network in Java and continues to serve a storage and distribution function today. Despite its historical continuity and significance, the building has not been officially designated as a cultural heritage site. This condition makes the building vulnerable to functional transformation and potential demolition. At the same time, the surrounding area has undergone significant urban changes, including the development of tourism infrastructure and the displacement of local communities, which have gradually isolated the warehouse from its surrounding social context and contributed to the fading of its cultural and historical significance in contemporary community life.

Previous studies have largely focused on the historical and architectural aspects of colonial industrial buildings, while less attention has been given to the dynamic relationship between industrial heritage sites and their contemporary communities, particularly through the perspectives of social narratives and interactions among different stakeholders. Therefore, this study offers a different perspective by integrating industrial archaeology with heritage narrative and cultural landscape approaches to examine how the meaning, value, and social relationships associated with the PT Garam warehouse continue to interact with its surrounding communities and urban context.

Based on this gap, the research problem addressed in this study concerns how the social dynamics between the PT Garam warehouse and the surrounding community are formed and constructed through different stakeholders' narratives regarding the building. This issue becomes increasingly significant considering that the PT Garam warehouse has not yet been officially designated as a cultural heritage building, despite fulfilling several important criteria, including its age and historical significance. This condition creates a substantial risk of functional transformation or even eviction while overlooking the fact that the building continues to operate to the present day.

In response to these concerns, this study is guided by several research questions: (1) How are the social dynamics between the surrounding community and the activities within the PT Garam warehouse formed? (2) How do various stakeholders construct narratives regarding the relationship between the warehouse and the surrounding community? and (3) How is the status of the PT Garam warehouse positioned from the government's perspective? Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the social dynamics and heritage narratives of the PT Garam warehouse in Sosromenduran, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in order to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of industrial heritage within an evolving urban context.

2. Method

This study using qualitative research approach to examine the social dynamics and heritage narratives surrounding PT Garam warehouse in Sosromenduran, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The research process consists of two main stages, data collection on the field and data analysis to address the research problem and questions outlined in the introduction.

Data collection techniques of direct observation were conducted at PT Garam warehouse site located on Jalan Gowongan Kidul, No. 51, Sosromenduran, Gedong Tengen, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The observations were carried out periodically on both weekdays and weekends to capture the varieties in environmental conditions and community activities around the site. These observations were undertaken by assessing the physical condition of the building, its surrounding environment, and potential informants for subsequent interviews. In addition to interpreting communities and stakeholders narration, observation in relation to collecting visual documentation of the area around the site and also conducting field-base interviews with the locals to determine the general information of community activities around the warehouse.

Following field data collection, a literature review was also conducted to contextualize the findings from the field. This process includes the examine of colonial-era archives such as newspapers, historical to modern maps, and also company reports to trace the development of the PT Garam warehouse and its surrounding landscape. In addition, relevant academic sources, including journal articles and book were analyzed to support the interpretation of data and strengthen the theoretical framework of the study.

The data that has been gathered will be analyzed by qualitative approaches as mentioned above. This method focuses on generating descriptive and interpretative insights on PT Garam warehouse site and the community activities nearby the site to

match various data gathered from interview process. All collected data were examined systematically to identify patterns, relationships, and narratives emerging from different stakeholders. The analysis emphasizes an objective interpretation of the data, avoiding bias toward any particular group. In conclusion, this study seeks to understand the interaction between the warehouse and the surrounding community, including the indication of social changes such as population displacement and gentrification process in the area.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the research and discusses the social dynamics and narrative constructions surrounding the PT Garam Salt Warehouse in Sosromenduran, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The analysis is structured into three main parts; The historical development of the warehouse, the social narratives constructed by local communities, and the perspectives of institutional stakeholders including the government and PT Garam themselves. By integrating these three aspects, this section aims to illustrate how the meaning and significance of the warehouse are continuously negotiated through interactions between space, history, and social actors within an evolving urban context.

3.1. History of PT Garam Warehouse

In the early establishment of *Gudang Garam* of PT. Garam in Yogyakarta dates back to the period of the Dutch East Indies administration in 1920. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the development and implementation of salt monopoly policy in the Residency of Djokjakarta at the time required the provision of a large-scale storage facilities and distribution infrastructure for salt. However, in the early planning stages it was found that throughout the residency there was only a single salt storage warehouse, which was considered insufficient to support the monopoly policy implemented by the Dutch East Indies government in the Residency of Djokjakarta.

In response to this implementation, the Dutch East Indies government prioritized the rapid construction of new salt storage warehouses in order to ensure salt distribution could be carried out on a massive and organized scale. Nevertheless, the implementation of these construction projects encountered administrative difficulties. Historical records regarding the building during its construction are being used for opium sales indicate that similar projects had previously experienced obstacles related to irregular contractor payments and weak supervision of officials. These conditions formed the part of the background that led to the construction of salt storage warehouse in Yogyakarta, including the building that would later become the premises of PT. Garam in later years.

The salt warehouse operates as one of the main distribution centers for salt commodities in Yogyakarta. All of the administrative, supervisory, and directive functions are carried out by officials of *zoutreige* (Salt Service in English) that has a direct connection to the Dutch East Indies government themselves. The building functioned not only as a storage facility for the salt commodity, but also as a place for safekeeping cash and managing daily sales operations.

Various historical records indicate that the use of the warehouse has evolved over time (Indra, 2025). One notable case involved the embezzlement that was carried out by the salt officer named *Mas Kadji*, who for nearly six months conducted illegal sales of salt from the warehouse and significantly depleted the company's revenues. This case was eventually uncovered by the head of the salt warehouse in *Djokjakarta*, demonstrating that the warehouse formed as part of the official bureaucratic chain of colonial salt distribution in the regency and eventually to the island of Java.

According to Indra (2025), the building was reported to have been burglarized on the night between Sunday and Monday in 1933. The perpetrator reportedly gained entry by breaking the door, after which the large safe was forced to open and approximately of f4,000 in small denominations were stolen. This incident indicates that the cash kept in the warehouse from the derived of daily sales played an important role in financial aspect with the broader framework to the colonial economic and administrative system.

Later on, during the transitional period between the Japanese occupation and the early years of the Indonesian Revolution War, the salt warehouse building was reportedly used as a detention facility for Europeans. One historical record (Indra, 2025) mentions that a European detainee named Mr. Doppert was held in this warehouse for more than a year starting from October 1945. This record indicates a functional transformation of the building during a time when the colonial structure in Yogyakarta was undergone unstable political phase. The use of the warehouse as a detention facility suggests that the building was considered sufficiently, secured, enclosed, and generally suitable as a strategic place for centralized supervision and confinement of certain individuals.

Following Indonesian independence and the nationalization of colonial assets, the salt warehouse building was fully repurposed as a salt storage facility managed by the *Jawatan Regie Garam* between 1945 to 1949 based on State Gazette No. 254 and No. 457 of 1937. In 1952, the state enterprise underwent institutional restructuring and was renamed to *Perusahaan Garam dan Soda Negara* (National Enterprise of Salt and Soda Industry) under the Law No. 14 of 1952. Subsequently in 1961, *Perusahaan Garam dan Soda Negara* was also reorganized again into two separate companies with each industry enterprise. Two of them are *Perusahaan Soda Negara* (National Soda Company) and *Perusahaan Negara Garam* (National Salt Company). In 1981, *Perum Garam* (Public Company Garam) was established in later years of 1981 based on Government Regulation No. 46. This enterprise was also transformed into *PT Garam* that was known well today. *PT Garam* now operates under the Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises and is part of the National Food Holding Company ID Food, established under the Government Regulations No. 118 of 2021.

The center of salt production is located in Madura, while the warehouse primarily functions as a temporary storage facility before the salt is distributed more broadly. This function has continued to the present day, making the building part of the national salt storage network, particularly for Yogyakarta and the Southern Part of Central Java. Today the warehouse building is located in the Sosromenduran area. However,

according to information presented by Indra (2025), there is no comprehensive inventory listing for potential cultural heritage objects (*Objek Diduga Cagar Budaya* in Indonesia) has yet been conducted in the area. As a result, the historical documentation of the building remains incomplete, although there have been preliminary plans to record it as a potential cultural heritage object prior to its possible designation as an official cultural heritage site.

3.2. Social Narration and Construction From Communities Perspective

Local communities of Sitisewu in general has long been aware of the existence of the salt warehouse which most of them recognized that the building was already built during Dutch colonial period. According to local residents from the interview, the physical structure of the building has remained largely unchanged over time. However, they have limited knowledge regarding the state acquisition and formal management of the warehouse. Most residents are only aware that the facility is currently operated by PT Garam with the main salt supplies sourced to Madura as its primary commodity. They also noted that although the warehouse remains operational, the frequency of distribution activities appears relatively low. Over time, the warehouse area has also been used for additional purposes such as a bus parking area and a storage space for construction materials under PT Garam's daily management board.

In the past, the warehouse area was relatively open and frequently utilized by the local community as a base for *becak motor* (Pedicab) and motorcycle taxi drivers. At the same time the open space of the warehouse was also used as a playground area for the children due to the tightness of space around the local residential area. However, this situation changed after PT Garam enclosed the front area with fencing. Since then, interaction between the community and the warehouse has significantly decreased. This shift has been further reinforced by the gradual relocation of many long-term residents, which has contributed to the weakening of social ties between the site and its community. Although some pedicab drivers can still be seen waiting in front of the warehouse, their numbers have significantly declined. The persistence of this activity is largely attributed to the warehouse's strategic location, situated near hotels and residential areas with users consisting of both local residents and hotel visitors.

Transformation of the surrounding area is related to patterns of urban development in Gowongan. Much of the land use around PT Garam remained vacant until the 1960s, the area around the warehouse began to develop into a residential zone as a result of urbanization localized in the area. Many of the residential through *ngindung* system settled by the land that was owned by private landlords. Later in 1990s, settlements that located by the west area of the warehouse were cleared due to eviction by the landowners. According to one informant, families who had long lived under the *ngindung* system were forced to relocate when the land was reclaimed. Until later time between the year 2006 and 2013, the cleared land was subsequently developed into hotels and recreational facilities, including rural futsal courts (See Table 1).

Table 1. Transformation of Gudang Garam Salt Storage (Yellow rectangle) and its surroundings landscape form that consist of main road, nearby residential districts, Luxury Malioboro Yogyakarta Hotel (Blue rectangle), and Riss Hotel Malioboro (Red rectangle) from 2006 to 2025.

Years	Satellite Image
2006	
2010	
2012	
2015	
2025	

Sources: Google Earth with modifications by Nanayu (2025).

Due to the evictions, most of local residents are relocated to nearby areas, often to the renting houses located approximately 500 meters to the east. There are also some people that moved to different parts of the city. A similar relocation pattern occurred

on land located to the east of the current hotel sites, which had previously been vacant but later became occupied under the *ngindung* system. In 2010, the landowner reclaimed this area as well, resulting in the displacement of approximately two neighborhood units (Called *Rukun Tetangga* in Indonesia). Construction of the Riss Hotel began in 2012 and was completed in 2013 (Further overall landscape changes, see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Officer Residential House of *Gudang Garam* Salt Storage.

Source: Azhar (2025).

Additionally, residential structures are now found directly adjacent to the southern wall of the warehouse. These structures initially began as small kiosks built by the local community in the 1970s to accommodate incoming migrants as part of the urbanization process. Over time, these kiosks were gradually transformed into permanent residences, a development that local authorities were unable to prevent (See Figure 1).

Despite the historical proximity between the warehouse and surrounding settlements, many residents perceive that the presence of PT Garam has provided limited tangible benefits to the local community (See Figure 2). The role of the warehouse is often described as inconsistent, largely depending on changes in management. Some managers were perceived as more socially engaged as frequently engaged in the contribution to the community through promotional activities and occasional distribution of free salt and other groceries while some other managers were described maintain a minimal interaction. A major concern expressed by residents relates to employment opportunities as they feel excluded from job access within the state-owned enterprise with most of the employees perceived to be non-local. This

situation has further contributed to the social distance between the institution and the surrounding community.



Figure 2. Front (Above) and side view (Below) of *Gudang Garam* Salt Storage shows limited tangible benefits to local communities.

Source: Permana (2025).

Overall, according to the local resident has indicates that the area around Gowongan Kidul, particularly Sitisewu in Sosromenduran was initially characterized by extensive vacant land. Significant changes began in the 1960s with the arrival of migrants and followed by the development of informal settlements under the *ngindung* system. In the 1970s, local residents initiated the construction of kiosk along the warehouse boundary area which later evolved into residential spaces. However, from the 1990s onward, processes of land clearance and redevelopment for hotel construction primarily that significantly reshaped the spatial and social landscape of the area.

Later spatial transformations in the research area are further illustrated through a series of satellite images from 2006 to 2025. These images demonstrate the gradual

conversion of vacant land and residential areas into hotel complexes, accompanied by the physical deterioration of the PT Garam warehouse boundary in the recent times. Along with the construction of hotels, particularly the Riss Hotel resulted in the displacement of the entire neighborhood units while in other cases, such as the D'Paragon Hotel, land exchanges (*Ruislag*) were carried out between residents and developers. Collectively, these developments reflect a broader process of urban change and gentrification that has significantly altered both the physical environment and the social context around the PT Garam warehouse.

3.3. Social Narration and Construction From Various Stakeholder

According to the Cultural Heritage and Heritage Assets Registry of the Special Region of Yogyakarta, the PT Garam Warehouse has not yet been officially registered as either a Cultural Heritage property (*Cagar Budaya*) or a heritage asset. Furthermore, neither the local community nor the village administration has submitted a formal report or proposal for the assessment and designation of the building as a Cultural Heritage property.

Based on records held by the Regional Cultural Preservation Office Region X (In Indonesia designated as *Balai Pelestarian Kebudayaan Wilayah X*), the building is estimated to have been constructed in the early twentieth century, around 1920. Since its establishment, it has functioned as Dutch colonial salt warehouse (*Zoutpakhuis*) used for the distribution of salt throughout the Yogyakarta region (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Old Map of the area around PT. Garam in 1920 with the designated building numbered 51.

Source: KITLV.

As shown in historical maps, the salt warehouse (*Zoutpakhuis*) was located to the north of Tugu Railway Station, specifically on plot number 51 (Figure 3, Blue circle). The warehouse complex was directly integrated with the railway station through a rail connection extending into the new warehouse area. This railway line served as the

transportation route for salt blocks or briquettes shipped from Madura, which were subsequently distributed throughout Yogyakarta. Regarding the development of the site, several historical newspapers and archival records provide descriptions of the warehouse and its activities.

One such record appeared in the newspaper *Soerabaijasch Handelsblad* on 5 July 1929, which reported a stock discrepancy at the Yogyakarta *zoutpakhuis* resulting from embezzlement committed by a warehouse supervisor (*mantri*) working at the facility. As a consequence, the company suffered losses amounting to f1,200, and the supervisor was detained pending legal proceedings.

Subsequently, in 1933, an article published in *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* reported a burglary at the Government Salt Warehouse in Gowongan, Yogyakarta, on the night between Sunday and Monday. The perpetrator reportedly gained access by damaging a door and succeeded in breaking open a safe. Approximately f4,000 in cash was stolen, representing revenue from daily salt sales that was supposed to be deposited into the state treasury every ten days. The theft was reported to the police, and the resulting damage was promptly repaired by the *Burgerlijke Openbare Werken* (Department of Civil Public Works).

During the increasingly turbulent political situation of the early Indonesian independence period in 1945, the building was temporarily used as a political detention facility. In *Memories of the East*, a collection of oral histories compiled by Fridus Steijlen concerning the experiences of people in the former Dutch East Indies, it is recorded that in October 1945 a Dutch citizen named Mr. Doppert was detained by Indonesian revolutionary forces in an old salt warehouse (*zoutpakhuis*) in Yogyakarta. According to his testimony, he remained under house arrest for more than one year and was only reunited with his family in 1947.

No further records have been found regarding this transitional period. However, the building was eventually returned to its original function as a salt warehouse. Following the transfer of authority to the Indonesian government, both the building and its management became state-owned and have remained under Indonesian control ever since. For subsequent periods, no written documents, news reports, or archival records held by government institutions have been identified that specifically describe the further development of the site.

Regarding land-use conversion, no formal proposals or government initiatives currently exist concerning the repurposing of the PT Garam Warehouse. Nevertheless, the surrounding area is considered highly vulnerable to land-use transformation, particularly through the conversion of residential properties into hotels and the development of land owned by PT Kereta Api Indonesia (PT KAI) located south of the site. Government representatives emphasized that any future proposal involving the warehouse should first be supported by a comprehensive assessment to determine its historical significance and potential benefits to the wider community. If a building is found to possess substantial cultural value, it should ideally be preserved or adaptively reused.

Furthermore, any utilization of a heritage building must be undertaken appropriately and in accordance with existing regulations. Adaptive reuse may be permitted provided that it does not alter more than 80 percent of the original structure and that a clear justification for the intervention can be demonstrated, as stipulated in the Indonesian Cultural Heritage Law.

4. Conclusion

The PT Garam warehouse in Sosromenduran, Yogyakarta, represents a form of living industrial heritage that has maintained its primary function as a salt storage and distribution facility since the colonial period. Historical records indicate that the building played an important role within the Dutch colonial salt distribution network and continued to function under successive Indonesian state institutions after independence. Beyond its economic function, the warehouse possesses historical and cultural significance reflected in its long-term continuity, its integration with the colonial railway system, and its role during several important historical periods. These characteristics demonstrate that the warehouse constitutes a valuable industrial heritage asset within the urban landscape of Yogyakarta.

The study also reveals that the relationship between the warehouse and the surrounding community has undergone significant transformation. While the site was once closely integrated with local social activities, increasing urban development, population displacement, and the expansion of tourism-related infrastructure have gradually weakened community engagement with the warehouse. At the same time, the building remains unregistered as a Cultural Heritage property, creating uncertainty regarding its future preservation. Therefore, a comprehensive heritage assessment is necessary to evaluate its cultural significance and potential contribution to the wider community. Such efforts may provide a foundation for more inclusive heritage management that balances preservation objectives with the ongoing development of the surrounding urban environment.

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