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Jagat Nusantara as a Simulation of a Future City: Metaverse and the Imagination of the State

Geleceğin Şehrinin Bir Simülasyonu Olarak Jagat Nusantara: Metaverse
ve Devletin Tahayyülü

Abstract

Developments in digital technology and the metaverse have opened new spaces through which the state imagines, represents, and legitimizes its future projects. In Indonesia, Jagat Nusantara exists as a digital simulation of the Indonesian National Capital (IKN), functioning not only as a technological visualization but also as a space for historical and ideological imagination. Drawing on the visual and narrative content of the Jagat Nusantara platform, together with policy documents and academic literature on the metaverse and national representation, this article analyzes the Jagat Nusantara simulation by situating it within the long tradition of representations of state power. Using a critical qualitative interpretive approach grounded in Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation, the analysis demonstrates that Jagat Nusantara operates as a form of hyperreality that blends historical narratives, visions of the future, and symbols of nationhood to construct state legitimacy. The findings suggest that the metaverse is not merely a technological medium but also a new arena for constructing meaning within state-controlled imaginaries of urban space, raising critical questions about who has the authority to define the nation's future.

Keywords: Hyperreality, Metaverse, Simulation, State

Öz

Dijital teknoloji ve metaverse'deki gelişmeler, devletin geleceğe yönelik projelerini nasıl tahayyül ettiği, temsil ettiği ve meşrulaştırdığı konusunda yeni alanlar açmıştır. Endonezya'da Jagat Nusantara, Endonezya Ulusal Başkenti'nin (IKN) dijital

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bir simülasyonu olarak var olup yalnızca teknolojik bir görselleştirme değil, aynı zamanda tarihsel ve ideolojik tabayyülün üretildiği bir alan olarak da işlev görmektedir. Jagat Nusantara platformunun görsel ve anlatısal içerikleri ile politika belgeleri ve metaverse ile ulusal temsil üzerine akademik literatürden yararlanan bu makale, Jagat Nusantara simülasyonunu devlet gücünün temsillerinin uzun geleneği içinde konumlandırarak analiz etmektedir. Jean Baudrillard'ın simülasyon teorisine dayanan eleştirel niteliksel yorumlayıcı bir yaklaşımla gerçekleştirilen analiz, Jagat Nusantara'nın tarihsel anlatıları, gelecek vizyonlarını ve ulus sembollerini bir araya getirerek devlet meşruiyetini inşa eden bir hipergerçeklik biçimi olarak işlediğini göstermektedir. Bulgular, metaverse'ün yalnızca teknolojik bir ortam olmadığını; aynı zamanda devlet tarafından şekillendirilen kentsel mekân tabayyülleri içinde anlamın inşa edildiği yeni bir alan olduğunu ortaya koymakta ve ulusun geleceğini tanımlama yetkisinin kime ait olduğuna ilişkin eleştirel soruları gündeme getirmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hipergerçeklik, Metaverse, Simülasyon, Devlet

Introduction

Throughout the history of civilization, nations have consistently used specific media to project their power and visions of the future. Maps, monuments, archives, and symbolic cities have historically been instrumental in shaping collective imagination and political legitimacy (Anderson, 2006). Capital cities, in particular, often function as symbolic texts conveying the state's ideology and historical orientation. States are never neutral in representing space, time, and the future. Maps, archives, monuments, and symbolic cities have long been used as media to construct collective imaginations, affirm national identity, and legitimize political power (Anderson, 2006). In this context, capital cities function not only as administrative centers but also as symbolic texts conveying a nation's ideology, historical vision, and future orientation.

In the 21st century, digital technology and the metaverse have presented new immersive and interactive media, enabling states to simultaneously produce representations of space and the future (Castells, 2010). Jagat Nusantara, a virtual representation of the National Capital City (IKN), is a concrete example of this transformation. It not only represents the city's planning but also presents a narrative of progress, sustainability, and national identity, distributed through a digital experience.

In the Indonesian context, Jagat Nusantara serves as a virtual representation of the project to relocate the National Capital (IKN) to Nusantara. Jagat Nusantara refers to a metaverse-based virtual space developed to represent the National Capital (IKN) of Nusantara in the form of an immersive and interactive digital environment. As a city simulation, Jagat Nusantara presents visualizations of government spaces, infrastructure, natural landscapes, and national symbols designed to reflect the state's vision of Indonesia's future. It is not simply an architectural replica, but rather a narrative construction that combines technology, development ideology, and collective imagination.

The emergence of the metaverse concept as an immersive digital space that enables simultaneous social, economic, and cultural interactions marks a significant transformation in the relationship between power, space, and human experience (Castells, 2010; Kitchin, 2014). Representations of the

state are no longer limited to material forms but also exist as digital simulations that can be accessed, explored, and experienced directly by the public.

Through Jagat Nusantara, the state is constructing a metaverse as a simulation space that allows the public to "experience" the future capital city before it is fully materially realized. This digital experience places users in a participatory position, where space, time, and the future are represented as something that can be explored and experienced directly. Thus, the metaverse functions as a strategic medium for shaping public perceptions, expectations, and affections regarding the capital relocation project.

From a historical perspective, this practice can be understood as a new form of state representation. While in the past, monuments, maps, and city plans served to affirm visions of power and the direction of history, in the digital era, virtual simulations fulfil these functions. Jagat Nusantara, in this case, operates as a symbolic space where the future is produced and normalized through hyperreal images, thus blurring the boundaries between plans, representations, and reality.

Within Jean Baudrillard's framework, such simulations no longer simply represent reality but have the potential to replace it through the production of signs and images that are more convincing than material reality itself (Baudrillard, 1994a). Against this backdrop, this article poses a central question: how can Jagat Nusantara be understood as a simulation that imagines a future city? Positioning Jagat Nusantara as a digital cultural artifact, this article aims to analyze its role as a medium for state representation, a space for the production of future imaginations, and a new form of the relationship between power, technology, and history.

Research Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with an interpretative-critical analysis design to understand Jagat Nusantara as a context for national representation in the digital era. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to interpret the meanings, symbols, and narratives contained in digital cultural artifacts.

Methodologically, this research is based on critical social theory. Jagat Nusantara is positioned as a text and practice of representation that can be read as a contemporary historical document. Therefore, the analysis is not directed at the technical aspects of metaverse development, but rather at the ideological, symbolic, and discursive meanings produced through this simulated space.

The data sources in this study consist of two types. First, primary sources consist of visual and narrative content from Jagat Nusantara, including virtual architectural representations, digital spatial planning, national symbols, and development narratives presented on the metaverse platform. Second, secondary sources consist of policy documents related to the relocation of the national capital, official

government publications, and academic literature discussing the metaverse, national representation, capital city history, and simulation theory.

Theoretical Framework

History, Representation, and Power

History is not only concerned with past events, but also with how the past is interpreted and used to shape the future. Modern states actively construct historical narratives through symbols, language, and space, making history a political and ideological instrument (Anderson, 2006). In the historiographical tradition of power, capital cities and centers of government serve as visual and spatial media for establishing state legitimacy.

In the study of history and social thought, power is not solely understood as the coercive or administrative capacity of the state, but rather as the capacity to produce meaning, organize collective memory, and frame how societies understand their social reality. History, in this sense, exists not as an objective record of the past, but as a discursive field where various actors, particularly the state, attempt to assert certain narratives as the official version of reality (Foucault, 1980).

Representation is a key instrument in the relationship between history and power. Through maps, archives, monuments, urban planning, and visual symbols, the state constructs what can be called a regime of representation that regulates how space, time, and identity are perceived by citizens. Benedict Anderson asserts that modern political communities are imagined through symbolic media that enable individuals to feel bound by a national unity, even if they never know each other directly (Anderson, 2006). Within this framework, history serves as a source of legitimacy, while representation serves as a medium for the distribution of that meaning.

The national capital occupies a privileged position in the configuration of representations of power. Several studies have shown that the capital city functions not only as a center of government but also as a symbolic project that represents the ideological vision and historical orientation of a regime. Through monumental architecture, spatial planning, and symbolic naming, the state instills notions of progress, order, and continuity in national history. Thus, urban space can be read as a consciously and politically constructed historical text.

From a critical historiographic perspective, these practices of representation emphasize that history is always produced within relations of power. Michel Foucault emphasized that knowledge, including historical knowledge, is never value-free, as it is formed through mechanisms of selection, archiving, and repetition of certain discourses while excluding other narratives deemed irrelevant or subversive (Foucault, 1980). The state, as the dominant actor, has the epistemic authority to determine which narratives are considered legitimate, rational, and progressive.

When historical representation enters the digital realm, the relationship between history and power does not disappear but undergoes a transformation. Digital media and virtual spaces expand the reach of state representation while increasing the intensity of symbolic experience. Representations are no longer simply viewed or read, but experienced immersively. This marks a significant shift from history as a linear narrative to history as a curated and simulated experience, opening new space for critical analysis of how power operates through contemporary technology.

Digital representations, including simulations of cities and national spaces, represent a continuation of these historical practices in new technological forms. They function as imaginary archives that connect collective memory with projections of the future, as well as expressions of contemporary political thought.

Jean Baudrillard's Simulation Theory

Jean Baudrillard's simulation theory provides an important conceptual framework for understanding how contemporary reality is produced, mediated, and experienced through signs, images, and technology. In his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard argues that modern society has entered a phase where representation no longer refers to material reality but instead constructs its own reality through a series of simulacra—signs that exist autonomously without any original referent (Baudrillard, 1994a).

Baudrillard distinguishes several stages of representation, ranging from images that reflect basic reality, to images that obscure and distort reality, to pure simulations that no longer have any connection to reality. At this final stage, what is known as hyperreality emerges, a condition where the simulation appears more coherent, more convincing, and more "real" than the material reality it represents (Baudrillard, 1994a). In the hyperreal, the boundaries between the real and the imaginary become blurred.

In the context of politics and power, simulation functions as a mechanism for the production of legitimacy. The state not only manages territory and population but also manages the signs, images, and symbolic experiences of citizens. Representations of the future, including visions of development, technological progress, and sustainability, are produced through simulations designed to evoke collective beliefs, hopes, and affections. Thus, simulations have become an integral part of modern governance practices.

When applied to digital spaces and the metaverse, Baudrillard's theory becomes even more relevant. The metaverse can be understood as an advanced simulation space where social, spatial, and temporal experiences are constructed entirely through digital code and visuals. In this space, users do not simply observe representations but immerse themselves in them. Virtual reality no longer functions

as a mirror of the real world, but rather as a world with its own logic, consistency, and persuasive power.

Within this framework, Jagat Nusantara can be understood as a hyperreal form of state simulation. It not only represents the physical plan of the Indonesian capital but also produces a ready-made experience of the future in digital space. The future is presented as a reality that can be explored, experienced, and normalized before it materially materializes. Thus, Jagat Nusantara operates as a simulacrum: an image of a future capital that precedes and frames its own reality.

Through Baudrillard's simulation perspective, Jagat Nusantara cannot be read solely as a technological innovation or a policy communication tool, but rather as an artifact of political and historical thought. It demonstrates how the contemporary state uses digital simulation to manage collective imagination, construct future historical meaning, and produce legitimacy in an era of hyperreality.

Analysis and Discussion

Jagat Nusantara as a Projection of Future History

The Jagat Nusantara in the metaverse functions not merely as a digital representation of the National Capital (IKN), but as a projection of future history designed, simulated, and experienced before its material reality is fully realized. In this context, the metaverse becomes a space where the future no longer waits to happen, but is symbolically and narratively produced through visualization, interaction, and immersive experiences. History, therefore, is no longer understood merely as a record of the past, but rather as a prospective construction and a future-oriented history shaped by technological imagination and present-day ideological interests (Adam & Groves, 2007; Koselleck, 2004).

As a simulation, Jagat Nusantara presents the future of the Indonesian capital in a structured, idealized, and simplified form. The city is presented as a center of green, high-tech, inclusive, and sustainable civilization. This representation functions as a teleological narrative, one that directs public understanding toward a specific historical goal: Indonesia as a modern nation with a new, globally competitive center of power. Within this framework, the future is positioned as a predetermined goal, rather than as an open and contested field of possibilities (Ricoeur, 1984; White, 1973).

From the perspective of Jean Baudrillard's simulation theory, Jagat Nusantara can be understood as a form of hyperreality, where the simulated future becomes more real and convincing than the material reality still under construction (Baudrillard, 1994a). Through digital architecture, avatars, and immersive virtual environments, users experience the future as if it were already fully present. In this

state, the distinction between plan, representation, and realization becomes blurred. Simulation no longer represents reality but instead replaces reality as the primary reference point.

Furthermore, Jagat Nusantara functions as a tool of historical and political legitimacy. By presenting the future as an accessible and enjoyable experience, this metaverse builds a symbolic consensus that the development of the new capital city is a national historical inevitability. As Foucault (1980) argued, knowledge production is always linked to power relations; in this context, future visualizations function as a form of knowledge that normalizes a particular development direction while simultaneously excluding alternative narratives, social conflicts, and ecological tensions that may accompany them.

Jagat Nusantara can also be read as a pedagogical medium that shapes a collective imagination of the nation's future. Through simulation, the public is not only invited to see the future but also to believe in it. This aligns with Anderson's (2006) notion of imagined communities, where technology and media play a crucial role in shaping a sense of togetherness and historical continuity. In the metaverse, the national imagination is extended into the virtual realm, and the nation's future is produced as a shared, visual and emotional experience.

Thus, Jagat Nusantara demonstrates a fundamental shift in the way history is produced in the digital age. History is no longer written after the event has occurred, but rather simulated before it occurs. The metaverse functions as an archive of the future, a space where memories of things that have not yet happened are constructed in advance. This situation demands a critical reading, because behind the optimistic and immersive visualizations lies a process of selecting meaning, eliminating conflict, and reducing the socio-political complexity that accompanies the construction of the new capital as a national historical project (Adam & Groves, 2007; Baudrillard, 1994a).

Hyperreality and State Legitimacy

In the metaverse, the Indonesian archipelago is presented as a completed, orderly, and harmonious city. This creates a hyperreality that has the potential to strengthen political legitimacy by projecting success before material reality is fully realized. This phenomenon aligns with Baudrillard's argument that simulation can replace reality in the production of social and political meaning.

In the context of Jagat Nusantara, the concept of hyperreality is key to understanding how the state produces and negotiates legitimacy through the metaverse. Hyperreality, as proposed by Baudrillard (1994a), refers to a condition in which simulation no longer represents reality but instead replaces it as the primary reference point. In Jagat Nusantara, the digital representation of the National Capital City (IKN) not only presents a picture of the future but also constructs a symbolic reality that

is more stable, orderly, and convincing than the material reality of development, which is still full of uncertainty.

Through hyperreal simulation, the state presents the IKN as a symbolically completed project. Visualizations of futuristic architecture, green infrastructure, and idealized public spaces create the perception that successful development is something already achieved, not merely planned. In this context, the metaverse functions as a machine for the production of meaning, normalizing state projects and reducing the space for public criticism. In line with Debord's (1994) analysis, visual spectacles have become a primary means of modern power in shaping social consciousness, where images replace direct experience and critical reflection.

The hyperreality of the Jagat Nusantara also functions as a mechanism of symbolic legitimacy. State legitimacy is no longer solely constructed through legal institutions or democratic procedures, but through the affective and visual experiences citizens experience in virtual spaces. Weber (1978) emphasized that the legitimacy of power depends on public trust; in this context, this trust is produced through digital immersion, which makes the state's future feel imminent, real, and inevitable. The metaverse thus becomes a new instrument in transforming forms of modern legitimacy.

Furthermore, hyperreality allows the state to simplify the social and political complexities inherent in the IKN project. Agrarian conflicts, environmental issues, and social inequalities that arise in material reality tend not to be represented in simulation spaces. What is presented is a version of reality that has been selected and cleansed of contradictions. This process aligns with Foucault's (1991) concept of governmentality, where power operates through the regulation of representations, knowledge, and ways of thinking, rather than solely through coercion.

Jagat Nusantara can also be read as a form of digital power architecture, where virtual spaces are designed to direct the behaviour, perceptions, and political imaginations of their users. Just as physical city planning reflects power relations (Lefebvre, 1991), metaverse spaces create symbolic structures that affirm the state's position as the primary actor in development and progress. In these spaces, citizens act more as visitors or users, rather than as active political subjects negotiating.

Thus, the hyperreality within Jagat Nusantara not only creates an illusion of the future, but also reinforces state legitimacy through unquestionable symbolic experiences. When simulations become more convincing than reality, critiques of state projects risk being perceived as incongruent with the visually agreed-upon "future." This condition marks a crucial shift in contemporary power practices, where legitimacy is produced not only through policy and discourse, but also through technologically packaged hyperreal experiences (Baudrillard, 1994a).

While Jagat Nusantara presents a coherent, optimistic, and immersive narrative of the future, the hyperreality it constructs is not total and seamless. As Baudrillard (1994a) argues, hyperreality always contains a paradox: it appears stable and reassuring, yet is vulnerable to fracture when confronted with complex and conflicting material realities. In this context, Jagat Nusantara not only serves as a medium for state legitimacy but also opens up space for contradictions and the potential for symbolic resistance.

One of the main contradictions lies in the tension between virtual representations and real-life social experiences. Jagat Nusantara presents the new capital city as an inclusive, sustainable, and harmonious space, while real-world development processes involve issues of eviction, agrarian conflict, ecological impacts, and unequal access to resources (Harvey, 2008). This incongruity creates what Lefebvre (1991) calls a conflict between conceived space (the space designed and represented) and lived space (the space experienced in reality). The metaverse represents the ideal space of the state, but it fails to fully encompass the social realities experienced by affected groups.

Furthermore, the hyperreality of Jagat Nusantara is also limited by digital access and literacy. Not all citizens have the skills, infrastructure, or opportunity to participate in the metaverse space. This creates symbolic exclusion, where the nation's future is presented and negotiated in a space accessible only to certain groups. As Couldry and Mejias (2019) argue, digital technology often reproduces unequal power relations, rather than democratizing participation. Thus, the legitimacy established through Jagat Nusantara is partial and not fully inclusive.

On the other hand, virtual space also holds the potential for narrative resistance. Although designed as a medium for the state, the metaverse is not entirely immune to alternative interpretations. Users can read, interpret, or even question the presented narratives of the future. Scott (1990) refers to these practices as hidden transcripts, forms of critique that emerge outside the official arena of power. In the digital context, this resistance can emerge through public discourse, social media, or critical comparisons between virtual experiences and material reality.

Furthermore, Jagat Nusantara demonstrates the inherent limits of hyperreality: its reliance on collective belief. As Weber (1978) emphasized, legitimacy only lasts as long as it is believed. As people's actual experiences increasingly deviate from the idealized image presented in simulations, hyperreality risks losing its persuasive power. In this context, the metaverse no longer serves as a tool for strengthening legitimacy, but instead can symbolize the distance between the state and its citizens.

Thus, Jagat Nusantara cannot be understood solely as a hegemonic and closed representational project. It is also a field of contestation of meaning, where state narratives confront social realities, technological limitations, and the critical capacity of society. Hyperreality can indeed delay conflict and dampen criticism, but it does not completely eliminate it. It is precisely in this gap between simulation

and reality that the possibility of critical reflection on the direction of development and the proposed national future emerges.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates that Jagat Nusantara cannot be understood solely as a technological innovation or a visualization medium for the development of the National Capital City (IKN), but rather as a simulative space where the state produces future narratives, builds legitimacy, and manages collective imagination. Through the metaverse, the future no longer presents itself as an open possibility, but as a representation that has been constructed, experienced, and normalized from an early age.

As a projection of future history, Jagat Nusantara functions as a medium through which history is written prospectively. The future is simulated before it materially materializes, so that virtual experiences serve as the primary reference for understanding the direction of national development. Within this framework, history is no longer entirely retrospective, but becomes a forward-looking construction imbued with the symbolic interests of the state.

A hyperreality analysis demonstrates that Jagat Nusantara creates conditions in which simulations are more convincing than the material reality of the ongoing development of the IKN. Through immersive and spectacular visualizations, the metaverse functions as an instrument of symbolic legitimacy, affirming the state's project as a historical inevitability. Legitimacy is not solely constructed through formal policies or procedures, but through affective experiences that make the future feel present, stable, and inevitable.

However, this article also emphasizes that the hyperreality of Jagat Nusantara has limits and contradictions. The tension between virtual representation and real social experience, the limitations of digital access and literacy, and the existence of critical interpretations indicate that simulation does not completely close off spaces for resistance. It is precisely in this gap between simulation and material reality that the potential for critical reflection on dominant development narratives emerges.

Thus, Jagat Nusantara demonstrates a significant shift in the practices of power and the production of meaning in the digital age. The metaverse becomes not only a space of representation but also a symbolic political arena where the nation's future is negotiated. This study contributes to the study of simulation, hyperreality, and the state by demonstrating how immersive technologies are used to shape history that has not yet occurred, while also raising critical questions about who has the right to define the future and how state legitimacy is produced in virtual space.

Author Contributions

Addin Kurnia Putri (Corresponding Author) led the conceptualization, planning, and implementation of the study; conducted the literature review; analyzed and interpreted the findings; prepared the first draft of the manuscript; and managed all correspondence and publication-related procedures. Heru Nugroho and Dian Arymami contributed to the development of the research, participated in the preparation and review of the manuscript, provided academic feedback, and approved the final version for publication. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript and accept shared responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the work.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial, institutional, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, analysis, interpretation, or publication of this study.

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