



## Aesthetic Values of Ruins: A Case Study of The Malabar Radio Station Area

Rahmadean Alifani Purwatiana<sup>1\*</sup>, Sri Handayani<sup>2</sup>

Master of Architecture Study Program, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

\*Correspondence: E-mail: [rahmalifani@gmail.com](mailto:rahmalifani@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

Relics of the past that have historical value must be preserved, but due to war and natural factors, these relics only leave ruins, so the conservation measures are different from buildings. The aesthetic value is one of the reasons for maintaining the ruins as they are, where this value is related to the physical and non-physical aspects of the ruins. One of the locations of the historical ruins is the ruins in the Malabar Radio Transmitting Station Area located on Mount Puntang, Banjaran District, Bandung Regency, West Java, which used to be a Radio Station complex that bridged long-distance communications between Indonesia and the Netherlands, has important historical value and impact the time. A change in function to become a tourist spot at this location can intervene in the ruins by adding or developing tourist facilities that can reduce or damage their historical and aesthetic values. This study intends to examine the aesthetic value of the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station to find a value that can be maintained as it is. This research uses qualitative research methods by searching historical data through primary and secondary sources. The results of the study found that the aesthetic value of the ruins consisted of 1) physical aesthetic values related to the shape of the ruins that can be observed and felt with the five senses, identified forms and materials (traces of weathering, the remaining walls, and floors) that blend into the mountainous landscape to give it an interesting and distinctive landscape character and visual appeal; and 2) non-physical aesthetic value related to the function of marking the passage of time, evidence of representation of the involvement of indigenous workers, defense of independence in the Banjaran region, and becoming a tourist attraction. Both of these aesthetic values are things that must be protected and maintained for the preservation of the ruins.

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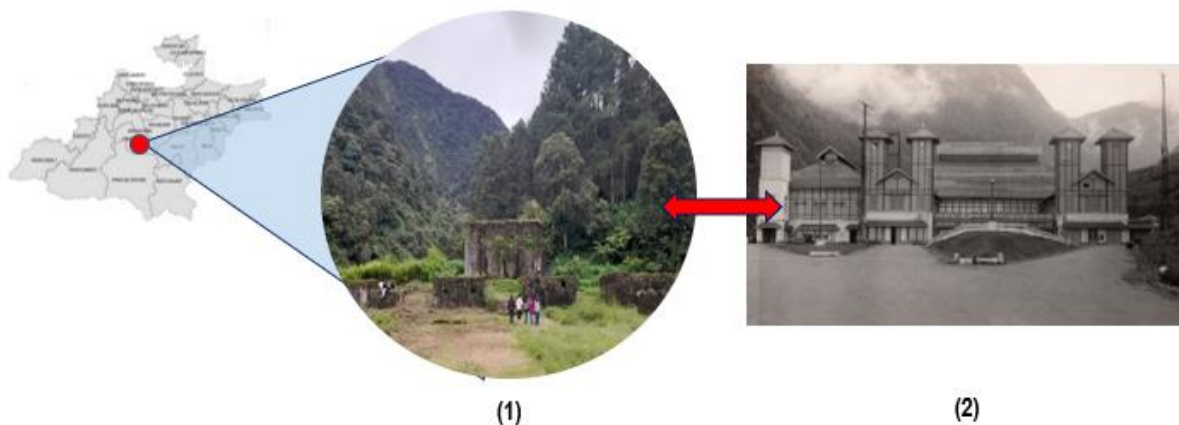
historic buildings,

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A building relic of the past that was abandoned and neglected, over time will be damaged until only part of the building is left, or it is called ruins. By definition, ruins refer to structures that have been abandoned, suffered some degree of damage or neglect, and are no longer used for their intended purpose. (Whitehouse, 2018). Abandonment can occur either because of conflict or war, where due to security or political reasons it has to be abandoned or destroyed. These remains of neglect or destruction become physical evidence of past events, which can have historical value and become historical ruins, can have an impact, and be respected as a valuable heritage (Camocini & Nosova, 2017). The value here means that ruins are physical evidence of history or human activity in the past that have original materials, shapes, or materials that have survived to this day. Data and information recorded in the ruins are very important if the object is related to important historical events, or even has important cultural significance (aesthetic, historical, scientific, social, or spiritual value) of a nation. Under international cultural heritage preservation regulations, places that have cultural significance must be preserved for present and future generations (Australia ICOMOS, 1999). As for Indonesia, a location that stores information on human activities in the past can be designated as a cultural heritage site (Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 11 Concerning Cultural Heritage, 2010) and must be protected.

In Indonesia, there are many historical buildings that as a result of the war had to be abandoned, neglected and even destroyed until only ruins remained. One of the locations of the historic ruins is the ruins in the Malabar Radio Transmitter Station Area which is located on Mount Puntang, Banjaran District, Bandung Regency, West Java. This place used to be a radio station complex that bridged long-distance communications between Indonesia (formerly the Dutch East Indies) and the Dutch (Netherland) built from 1917-1927 (Katam, 2013). This area complex consists of the installation of telegraph transmitters and radiotelephones complete with signal receiver installations, employee housing, recreation and entertainment facilities, as well as other buildings needed (Katam, 2013; Udo, 2018a).



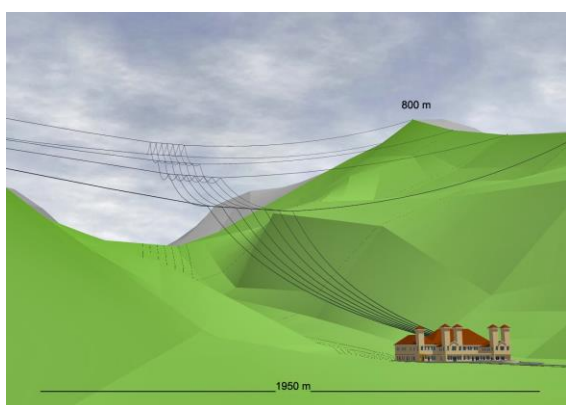
**Figure 1.** Malabar Radio Station Locations. Picture 1 is the condition in 2023, while picture 2 is the front view of the radio station building around 1928.

The facilities and infrastructure in the Malabar Radio area complex during its operational period had an important role as a communication link between the two continents. In terms of technological achievements, the telegraph and radiotelephone transmitter installation on Mount Puntang was the largest in the world at that time and was often said to be the World's Most Powerful Arc Transmitter Ever, as well as being an extraordinary antenna system considering the morphology of the location, length, equipment limitations, and installation. at that time (Katam, 2013). This is because of the idea of Dr. Ir. CJ de Groot is in charge of the project by making a mountain antenna. This mountain antenna was made by hanging a cable nearly 2 km long between the canyons of Puntang and Haruman mountains so that it became the tallest and largest antenna in the world at that time (not found in America or Europe), heights were reached that surpassed even the Eiffel Tower, the tallest radio mast in the world (Dijkstra, nd; Katam, 2013; Udo, 2018b).



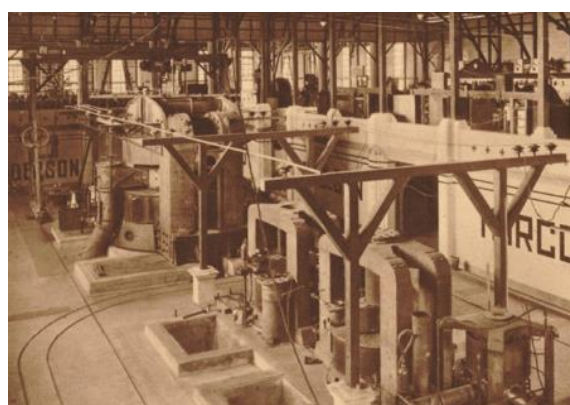
**Figure 2.** A view of the Malabar Radio Transmitting Station Area from the air. The top part is the main building of the radio transmitter station, and the 3 buildings lined up below are the employee's official residence

Source: Source: University of Leiden KITLV Digital Collection 1403284Link:<http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:856581>



**Figure 3.** Illustration of a mountain antenna installation hooked up to a canyon at the Malabar Radio Station

Source:(Udo, 2018b)



**Figure 4.** The arc emitting machine in the hall of the Malabar Radio Station

Source: University of Leiden KITLV Digital Collection 94407Link: <http://hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:929621>

The existence of technology at the Malabar Radio Station became the starting point for the advancement of the world of broadcasting telecommunications, as well as the most powerful symbol of Dutch East Indies radio (Udo, 2018c). The first telephone test or cross-talk as far as 12,000 km between the Dutch East Indies and the Netherlands was successfully carried out from the Malabar Radio Station on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1927 then inaugurated as Radio Malabar with the call sign Hallo Bandoeng (Dijkstra, nd; Katam, 2013). Dutch East Indies and Dutch radiotelephone traffic opened on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1929, and no less than 3,413 conversations took place, marking a very important event (Dijkstra, nd; Udo, 2018a). Conversations that occur are often very emotional accompanied by sobs, considering that so far both parties can only communicate via letters without hearing the person's voice (Katam, 2013). The events of this touching long-distance conversation are described in Willy Derby's song "Hallo Bandoeng" which has become songs part of the culture of the Dutch people (Leenders, 2013) because the impact of Radio Malabar was so phenomenal.

Even though it has technology and infrastructure that is important and has a big impact, the Radio Malabar Station cannot be separated from the conflict in the war for the defense of independence. As the destruction of buildings has always been an integral part of winning and losing wars (Charlesworth, 2006), the destruction of the building and equipment of the Malabar Radio Station was also carried out to avoid being re-occupied by the Dutch and their allies (Katam, 2013). This began in 1945, during the last months of the Japanese occupation and the 'Separation Period', Indonesian fighters took over government offices and important or strategic facilities, including the Malabar Radio Station which was taken over by PTT Youth Troops. (Katam, 2013; Udo, 2018c). The process of paralyzing the Malabar Radio Station began by moving some important equipment to the Dayeuhkolot and Rancaek radio stations and destroying the building and equipment of the Malabar Radio Station using dynamite. (Katam, 2013). At the time of its discovery on

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21<sup>st</sup> September 1947, the Malabar Radio Station was described as having burned to the ground, only a few of the stone walls below were still standing, while parts of the superstructure were completely missing including the tower which was destroyed. (Dijkstra, n.d.). The destruction of the Malabar Radio complex began with the looting of copper metals from transmitter installation equipment to be sold to artisans which lasted from 1946 to the 1950s (Katam, 2013). The former Malabar radio complex was used as a base for the movement of the DI-TII gang when it spread in the Pangalengan area and the Malabar Complex, so that the entire former Malabar Radio complex was eventually destroyed (Katam, 2013). The limited information at that time made the existence of the Malabar Radio Station forgotten, and in 1974-1975 this area was planted with pine trees by Perum Perhutani (Katam, 2013).

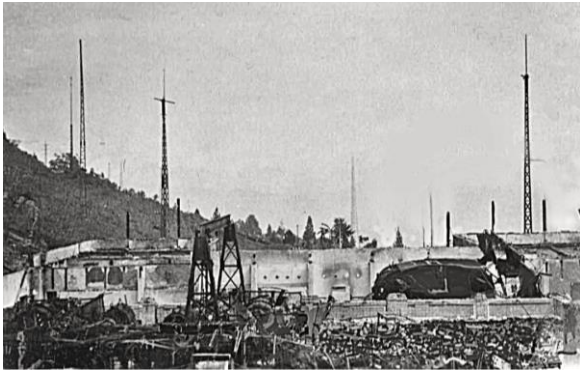


Figure 5. Destroyed Malabar Radio Station building. To the right of the dark remains (above) is the 'De Grote Boog' transmitting machine designed and built by Dr. CJ de Groot  
Source: Gn Veld-Cie. Slid AJ van der Knaap\*



Figure 6. The ruins of a part of the Malabar Radio Transmitting Station, formerly thought to have been a storage/utility building

Source: Personal Documentation, 2023

The destruction of the Malabar Radio Station area occurred twice, namely the destruction deliberately by dynamite, and the destruction that occurred in a long process due to nature and the mountainous environment through weathering, erosion, and so on; so that what remains is the former building or ruins only. The debris and ruins of the Malabar Radio complex were rediscovered on June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1987, then managed to become a recreation area and campground starting in 1988 by Perum Perhutani (Katam, 2013) and is still operating to this day. The remains of the Malabar Radio Station complex that can be found today include the ruins of the transmitter station building, ruins of official houses, cooling pools or better known as love pools, and several other infrastructures. The ruins of the Malabar Radio Station complex are organic in appearance as a result of the two deconstruction events, most of what remains are the walls and substructures of the buildings, all of which still have the original materials surviving.



Figure 7. The former cooling pool area is now better known as the love pool. It is currently a sitting and gathering place for visitors

Source: Personal Documentation, 2023



Figure 8. Malabar Radio Station ruins area, where the remaining parts can be climbed by visitors to explore or take pictures

Source: Personal Documentation, 2023

Currently, the Radio Malabar area is a recreational area and a campground known as the Puntang Adventure Park with tourism activities offered such as hiking, camping, viewing the ruins of Radio Malabar,

and so on. The existence of these ruins is a tourist attraction, especially natural and historical tourism, because ruins can be enjoyed and given aesthetic value because they are the remaining part of the original object, and have their unity even though they are not works of art (Ginsberg, 2004). Nature becomes the "artist" who produces the shape of the ruins, the natural environment is also important for the character of the ruins site, and the existence of certain species of flora and fauna (Ashurst, 2007) thus providing a distinctive visual appeal and landscape that differs between locations. Ruins also have a physical form that can be seen, touched, heard, or felt, therefore ruins can be categorized as an aesthetic object, just as an aesthetic object is an object of sensory experience and enjoyment such as: heard, seen, or (in the limiting case) imagined in a sensory form (Sunarto, 2020). The existence of ruins, especially those that have historical value, must be protected. The protection of ruins is interesting because, unlike the protection of active historical buildings which must be kept livable and safe, the ruins are preserved as they are as part of their story (Ashurst, 2007). However, along with the increasing interest in tourism activities, there have been changes that have occurred in the Malabar Radio Station area which is included in the management of the Puntang Adventure Park section. This change occurred due to the adjustment of facilities from those originally not specifically intended for tourist attractions to the current tourist attractions. This can go against the value of preserving the ruins to "keep them as they are" because it does not rule out the possibility of interventions being made to the remaining ruins, which could damage their historical and aesthetic qualities. The aesthetic value of the ruins must be maintained because it relates to the physical existence of the ruins "as they are", historical evidence of long events and processes from the past. This study is intended to analyze the aesthetic value of the Malabar Radio Station complex and explore its potential as an aesthetic object that supports and strengthens this location as a protected historical site for preservation, utilization, potential development and education for future generations.

## 2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method, where this method can be used to find new perspectives on things that are already widely known (Moleong, 2006). The main components of qualitative research include an emphasis on the natural setting (the object of investigation is not moved from its place of origin) and a focus on interpretation and meaning (Groat & Wang, 2013). One of the characteristics of qualitative research is descriptive which uses words, pictures, and not numbers and the methods usually used are interviews, observations, and utilization of documents (Moleong, 2006).

This research takes a case study on the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station area and analyses its aesthetic value. To explore the historical data of Malabar Radio Station, various literature sources were used including primary and secondary sources of information (Akihary et al., 2016; Brundage, 2018). The primary source used is the personal notes of Klaas Dijkstra, a direct eye witness who was involved in the construction of a radio installation in Malabar with Dr. CJ de Groot and at the Bandung Radio Laboratory, it consists of 2 parts, the first entitled *Radio Malabar: Herinneringen aan een boeiende tijd 1914 – 1945, deel 1: de langgolfperiode* (Radio Malabar: Memories of an interesting time 1914 – 1945, part 1: long-wave period); and the second part is entitled *Radio Malabar: Herinneringen aan een boeiende tijd 1914 – 1945, Deel 2: de kortegolf periode* (Radio Malabar: Memories of an interesting time 1914 – 1945, part 2: shortwave period). The secondary sources are the Tjitaroemlein Book written by Sudarsono Katam and the website managed by Jan-Willem Udo which contains quite complete historical data of Radio Malabar on the page <https://radiokootwijk.nu/geschiedenis-malabar/>. The aesthetic theories of the ruins are obtained from the results of a literature review of various sources. Apart from reviewing the literature, observations were also made through photographs of the condition of the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station for analysis.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 3.1. Physical Aesthetics Value of the Ruins

The term aesthetic is derived linguistically from a Greek term that means: sensitive or alive. (Sunarto, 2020). Aesthetics is the science that seeks to understand beauty, or the knowledge of beauty (August, 2017). Aesthetics is broader in scope than the philosophy of art, not only related to the nature and value of art but

also to responses to natural objects that find expression in beautiful and ugly language. (Sunarto, 2020). John Hospers in (Ali, 2011) defines aesthetics as contemplation about aesthetic objects or works of art, as well as analyzing the concepts used in that contemplation. Aesthetic objects are objects of sensory experience and are enjoyed as heard, seen, or (in the limiting case) imagined in a sensory form (Sunarto, 2020). Although ruins are not works of art, they emerge through the interaction of sources that transform an originally functional or artistic structure into an aesthetically non-functional existence. (Ginsberg, 2004); but has a physical form of length, width, height, and texture that can be felt by the five senses: seen, touched, heard, and smelled, so that ruins can be categorized as aesthetic objects. An object can be said to be a ruin if it fulfills several conditions, one of which is that it is old because time provides a framework for nature to form a building that has lost its function and becomes ruins through a very slow process (Ryynänen & Somhegyi, 2018). The aesthetic nature of the ruins emerges suddenly because they were not intended as an aesthetic design (Ginsberg, 2004). The aesthetic value of the ruins relies heavily on the casual and random work of nature's "artists"; this is why they are often left in neglect (Ryynänen & Somhegyi, 2018).

The ruins of the Malabar Radio Station area are considered aesthetic objects because they still retain shapes that we can observe and feel with our five senses. The process of destroying buildings that originally functioned and had an important position in history at that time, into ruins today has gone through a very long process due to intentional destruction by dynamite and looting, as well as unintentional natural causes through weathering, wind, rain, and so on. Physically, we can still trace and explore the remaining forms as part of a cross-country experience and see historical relics. Traces of weathering can be seen, we can still identify the remains of the walls and floors even though they are no longer intact. Visitors can explore the area of the ruins with geographical and visual features that only exist in this area of the Malabar Radio Station.



Figure 9. Malabar Radio Station Ruins

Source:

<https://www.goodnewsfromindonesia.id/uploads/post/large-gunung-puntang-ee268672343d04397ce34fc04aa1c317.jpg>



Figure 10. Ruin wall

Source: Personal Documentation, 2023

Nature as an "artist" produces ruins that differ from one location to another due to the different natural characteristics. The natural environment is also very important to the character of the ruins site, the presence of certain species of flora and fauna is an indicator of the site undisturbed for decades or centuries and can provide valuable historical information about past changes (Ashurst, 2007). That is what makes the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station area different from other ruins and has its special features. The location of these ruins is in a mountainous nature which is synonymous with cold and damp air, often fog that produces ice dew so that the walls of the ruins are overgrown with moss and ferns. In addition, many typical mountain plants such as large pine trees grow around the ruins. This is the attractiveness of the landscape which has a visual character and a unique and attractive environmental atmosphere from the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station area, where the objects of the ruins and the nature of the mountains blend harmoniously after going through a long process of formation.





Figure 11. Aerial photo of a combination of the ruins and the surrounding mountain vegetation

Source: <https://cdn.antaranews.com/cache/730x487/2019/10/30/Reruntuhan-Stasiun-Radio-Malabar-301019-rai-6.jpg>



Figure 12. Plants growing naturally on the walls of the ruins without intervention, create a visual character of their own

Source: Personal Documentation, 2023

### 3.2. Non-Physical Aesthetics Value of the Ruins

Aesthetic objects are contemplated and studied, not only as objects of sensory pleasure but also as repositories of meaning and value (Sunarto, 2020). As aesthetic objects, ruins are a means of contemplating time (Hill, 2019) where we can "aesthetically" encounter not only the forces of nature but also the passage of time; reflect on our historical and existential position in the world (Rynnänen & Somhegyi, 2018); impermanence, and memory, the accomplishments of mankind and their arrogance (Whitehouse, 2018). Apart from its physical form, ruins confirm that there is still something, not just what has passed but what remains because it is the remains that lead us to the original (Rynnänen & Somhegyi, 2018); encourages us to imagine not only what was lost, but also what will be (Hill, 2019). Ruins also signify durability and point to the future, as they outlast their communities and the people who originally built and used them (Whitehouse, 2018). Ruins cannot be separated from the perspective of history, space, and time, where observers can imagine how the building originally looked and used through the remaining parts, as well as how much time has passed for it to take its present form.

What remains in the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station area is representative evidence of human achievement of his time, namely the construction of a large facility to serve as a means of connecting locations 12,000 km apart. The creation of these facilities was not only thanks to the colonial government but also thanks to the natives who became workers in the construction of facilities and the installation of mountain antennas. As it is acknowledged that the Sundanese workers involved in installing the antenna are reliable climbers who carry heavy materials up the mountain through the forest and do not give up quickly (Dijkstra & Arthur O. Bauer, 2006). These native workers work in difficult terrain and have a high risk of accidents, where there have been several accidents such as a worker falling into a ravine and when installing a mountain antenna cable which killed three workers, followed by the death of several other workers who were injured (Dijkstra & Arthur O. Bauer, 2006). Symbolically, the ruins in the Malabar Radio Station area that remain represent the native workers involved in its construction, whose names are not recorded in history but have contributed as much as European workers, because these Sundanese worked hard and at the same time challenged the death in the construction of the largest telecommunications facility of its time.



Figure 13. Workers when exchanging broken glass bodies  
Source: Klaas Dijkstra\*



Figure 14. Worker Laying cable carrier  
Source: Klaas Dijkstra\*

The ruins of the Malabar Radio Station area that remains show evidence of human achievement destroyed due to unavoidable factors due to war and nature, but it does show something that still survives with the original materials remaining. The ruins with this original material certainly have a long durability, from the time it was originally erected around the 1920s until today in 2022, which means it has been more than 100 years. This part lasts longer than the age of the humans who created it. This raises an open question: how long will these ruins last without intervention such as natural disasters or damage from vandalism? But if we think about the importance of this historical evidence for education, of course, we want these ruins to last much longer, to be enjoyed and passed on to future generations as we can enjoy it today.

The aesthetics of ruins non-physically has potential, but not in the sense of being something practical and useful but aesthetic; as well as abilities in the aesthetic manifestation of the passage of time (Ryynänen & Somhegyi, 2018). The long time spent in the process of damage to the ruins adds to its aesthetic value, it is this aspect that cannot be efficiently "recreated" artificially (Ryynänen & Somhegyi, 2018). In addition, the ruins have a very evocative and emotional power; forcing us to reminisce and imagine (Pallasmaa, 2009).

As a stimulant for imagination, the incomplete and damaged shape of ruins can allow us to focus on the creativity of users and architects (Hill, 2019). Ruins are free to create themselves in aesthetic appreciation, material free from form, form free from function, and function free from purpose (Ginsberg, 2004), thus allowing for exploration in its utilization. As an aesthetic object, ruins can be enjoyed and explored because they are areas of occurrence, unlike rows of antiquities in a museum (Ginsberg, 2004). Observers can touch and feel the atmosphere of the ruins by exploring them, but what needs to be considered is the fragility of the rubble material, given the age of the material so that exploration of ruins, especially those with cultural significance, must pay attention to the rules of cultural heritage conservation. Frequently visited ruin sites can cause unacceptable damage and/or damage to vulnerable surfaces, environments, and habitats; while the material is a unique and irreplaceable resource (Ashurst, 2007). Therefore it is necessary to develop a management strategy to make the best use of the potential of the ruins and plan to minimize the risk of damage (Ashurst, 2007) through interventions that allow the use of ruins following the social expectations and aspirations of users (Molski, 2021).

The potential of the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station area is not for something practical, but aesthetic. At present the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station do not carry out a specific function but their existence is visually an attraction to visit. Considering that the ruins are scattered at various points and the area is wide, the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station area have the potential to become a historical educational tourist attraction. The location of the ruins is currently under the management of the West Java-Banten Ecotourism KBM and is part of the Puntang Adventure Park which offers natural tourism with hiking, camping, and other natural sports activities. In addition to nature tourism, through visual observation, the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station are an attraction for visits for historical educational tours.





Figure 15. Tourists in front of the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CiPHfj2vtki/>



Figure 16. Examples of visitor activities that risk damaging the original materials of the ruins

Source: <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/--ARv7UzJ0vc/VLoD90x4o4I/AAAAAAAAAQ/vsXMq3rRRx4/s1600/P1160872.JPG>

Currently, there are also minor design interventions in several ruins where visitors can enter the ruins, but from several locations, there are activities that risk damaging the original ruins. There needs to be regulation and control of the design interventions carried out so that visitors can explore the ruins but the original materials are preserved and the risk of damage is minimal.

#### 4. Conclusions

The aesthetic value of the ruins in the Malabar Radio Transmitter Station area consists of 2, namely physical and non-physical aesthetic values. The aesthetic value is physically related to the shape of the ruins that can be observed and felt with the five senses through searching and exploring the area of the ruins. The physical aesthetic value is also related to the identified shapes and materials (weathering traces, remnants of walls and floors) that blend with the mountainous landscape so that they have an attractive and distinctive landscape character and visual appeal, which are only found in the Malabar Radio Station area. This physical aesthetic value can be an attraction for visitors for nature tourism and historical tourism, as well as being a unique location, considering that there is only one object with such significance that only exists here.

While the aesthetic value of the ruins is non-physically related to things that cannot be seen by the five senses, namely their function, and meaning. Its function is to contemplate and mark the passage of time, the ruins still standing after more than 100 years since their founding. As for the meaning, the part that remains in the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station area is also evidence of the great technological achievements of its time, which were not only realized thanks to the colonial government but also the natives who spearheaded the construction of regional facilities and the installation of high-risk mountain antennas. The loss of the ruins also means the loss of representation of the indigenous workers involved in it. These ruins are also evidence of the defence of independence, especially in the Banjaran area, which has been traversed by different timelines: its beginnings and operations, the devastation caused by war, and today, which has become a tourist spot. Non-physically, the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station also have the potential to visually become an attraction to visit for historical and natural tourism. Given the fragility of materials and their aesthetic and historical values, this tourism activity also needs to be studied further to preserve the values and natural environment in the Malabar Radio Station area. The aesthetic value of the ruins must be protected and maintained to maintain this preservation. the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station also have the potential to visually become an attraction to visit for historical and natural tourism. Given the fragility of materials and their aesthetic and historical values, this tourism activity also needs to be studied further to preserve the values and natural environment in the Malabar Radio Station area. The aesthetic value of the ruins must be protected and maintained to maintain this preservation. the ruins of the Malabar Radio Station also have the potential to visually become an attraction to visit for historical and natural tourism. Given the fragility of materials and their aesthetic and historical values, this tourism activity also needs to be studied further to preserve the values and natural environment in the Malabar Radio Station area. The aesthetic value of the ruins must be protected and maintained to maintain this preservation.

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