

ISSN Print: 2664-7699 ISSN Online: 2664-7702 Impact Factor: RJIF 8.53 IJHA 2025; 7(2): 386-391 www.humanitiesjournals.net Received: 06-08-2025 Accepted: 08-09-2025

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# Surabaya zoo in transition: Management practice from colonial to the independence ERA

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**DOI:** https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26647699.2025.v7.i2f.246

#### Abstract

The Surabaya Zoo has undergone a long, challenging journey that has shaped its future. This article examines the dynamics of Surabaya Zoo management during the colonial and post-colonial eras, focusing on the changes in management and their impacts on the zoo's condition, animal welfare, and tourism. This study answers three main questions: (1) What was the condition of Surabaya Zoo during those eras? (2) How did its management develop? (3) How did management changes impact animal collections, animal protection, and tourist attractions? Using historical methods that include heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography, as well as management change theory, this study found that the management of Surabaya Zoo was initially under the Surabaya Flora and Fauna Park Association before being taken over by the Surabaya City Government as a Regional Company. This change had a significant impact, particularly in improving animal welfare and restoring tourist attractions after a previous period marked by numerous animal deaths due to internal management issues, which drew national and international concerns.

Keywords: Surabaya Zoo, animal protection, tourism, management changes.

### Introduction

Zoos have undergone a long evolution throughout the history of human civilization. The first zoo is estimated to have been established in China, possibly as early as 1100 BC during the Zhou Dynasty (Shadily, 1990) <sup>[5]</sup>. The purpose of establishing this zoo was to collect the emperor's favorite animals and to provide entertainment for the people of that dynasty. Several centuries later, a zoo was built for the benefit of science and technology. This zoo, located in Paris, was built in 1793 and used for developing medical research, particularly for veterinarians. Several European countries followed the construction of the first zoo in Europe to establish their own zoos. In Indonesia, according to records from the Indonesian Zoo Association (PKBSI), the first zoo to be established was the Surabaya Zoo in 1916 (Syariffudin, 2006) <sup>[16]</sup>.

Zoos are believed by their supporters to function as a means of healthy natural recreation, educating and developing community culture to maintain the balance and sustainability of ecosystem life (Mangunjaya, 2017) [19]. Surabaya Zoo (KBS) is one of the places for preserving animals that are almost extinct ex-situ. In addition, Surabaya Zoo not only preserves animals but is also used as a place to keep plants. One of the goals of preserving these plants is to maintain the balance of the ecosystem and reduce the air pollution caused by motorized vehicles passing through Surabaya. Surabaya Zoo is also Southeast Asia's most extensive forest and animal recreation area (Syariffudin, 2006) [16]. In addition, Surabaya Zoo has been used as an alternative recreational venue for the community, especially Surabaya residents, whose presence has become an integral part of the city's identity.

Since Surabaya was established as a *Gemeente* in 1906, Surabaya has rapidly developed (Basundoro, 2009) <sup>[1]</sup>. The development of the city of Surabaya as a *Gemeente* was arranged in such a way as to create a modern city layout similar to cities in Europe. Modern city layout must be supported by the development of adequate city infrastructure, one of which is the existence of entertainment facilities. Surabaya, as a modern city, required open entertainment facilities to meet the needs of its residents, especially Europeans, and the Surabaya Zoo was one of these facilities.

Initially, Surabaya Zoo, inaugurated on August 31, 1916, was named *Soerabaiasche Planten en Dierentuin*, which can be interpreted as Surabaya Botanical Gardens and Zoo.

Discussions about Surabaya Zoo (Kebun Binatang Surabaya/KBS) have been presented in various works. A study by Syarifuddin (2006) [16] presents the history of KBS from 1916 to 2006, focusing on the key events that occurred during this period. A study by Deka (2007) [3] discusses KBS's history and management issues from 1916 to 1955. It focuses on management and describes the changes that occurred in KBS over almost four decades, from the colonial period to the beginning of independence, aimed at improving the zoo's quality. Ambarala (2012) [2] examines the causes of internal conflict within the management of KBS, which developed to involve the city government, and how this conflict was resolved. Although there are similarities among these studies in their focus on KBS, the temporal scopes and aspects discussed differ.

Based on the above explanation, this article aims to explain the management changes at the Surabaya Zoo and their impact on the animals housed there. The main problems of this article are as follows: (1) What was the condition of the Surabaya Zoo from 1955 to 2013? (2) How was the management of the Surabaya Zoo developed from 1955 to 2013? (3) Management changes for the performance of collections, animal protection, and tourism at Surabaya Zoo? This study aims: (1) To determine the condition of Surabaya Zoo until the early days of independence. (2) To explain the changes in the management of Surabaya Zoo from 1955 to 2013. (3) To explain the impact of changes in the management of Surabaya Zoo on collections, animal protection, and tourism. With this aim, the study conducted is different from several writings conducted by previous those that authors, for example, highlight management/administration of the richness of fauna and flora diversity in the context of the historical development of conservation carried out in natural habitats (Nawiyanto, 2018) [10].

# **Materials and Methods**

The research method used in this study is the historical method, as the research subject falls under the historical study category. The historical method is a critical process in examining and analyzing records and relics of the past to reconstruct stories from the human past (Gottschalk, 1983) [14]. The stages in this method include collecting sources (heuristics), source criticism (both external and internal), interpretation, and writing history (historiography) (Gottschalk, 1983; Sasmita et. al., 2012) [14, 15].

The first stage, heuristics, focuses on collecting relevant

historical sources. These sources are divided into two types: primary sources and secondary sources. In this study, primary sources include documents from the Surabaya Zoo and interviews with historical actors, while secondary sources are obtained from various libraries at universities and related institutions. The second stage is source criticism, which aims to verify the authenticity and credibility of the collected sources. External criticism is used to assess the authenticity of sources based on factors such as language style and writing model.

In contrast, internal criticism is used to determine the credibility of the information conveyed in the source. This process is vital to prove that the sources used are valid and reliable as historical evidence. The final stage is the interpretation and writing of history, also known as historiography. At this stage, the analyzed facts are arranged in a systematic, chronological, and coherent manner in historical writing. The discussions are theoretically inspired by management change as a process aiming at increasing efficiency and achieving organizational goals more effectively (Sarinah, 2017) [14]. This theory is relevant to elaborate on how Surabaya Zoo faces challenges and transforms towards better management.

## Origins of Surabaya Zoo and Early Development

The establishment of Surabaya Zoo originated from the initiative of a famous Dutch journalist in Surabaya, HFK Kommer, who had a hobby of collecting animals in his yard in Kaliondo (Widodo, 2002) [19]. Many people also knew HFK Kommer as an animal lover, especially animals from Indonesia. His close friends often visited his house to see his animal collections. The increasing daily cost of his animal collection led Kommer to believe that his journalist salary, which was not substantial, was insufficient to cover the expenses (Syariffudin, 2006) [16].

Kommer's friends and several prominent individuals, including government bureaucrats and businesspeople, all expressed their willingness to help ease Kommer's financial burden. The journalist finally happily accepted the offer of the funders' idea to preserve his animal collection, so based on the Decree of the Governor General of the Netherlands No. 40, he formed an organization on December 31, 1916, with the name *Vereeniging Soerabajasche Planten-en Direntuin* (Surabaya Botanical Gardens and Zoo Association) (Von Faber, 1934) [17]. According to the decree, the management of Surabaya Zoo consisted of: Chairman: Mr. J.P. Mooyman; Secretary: A. H. de Wildt; Treasurer: P. Egas. Members: 1. F.C. Frumau, 2. A. Lenshoek, 3. J. Th. Lohman, 4. H.C. Liem, 5. M.C. Valk, 6. Edw. H. Soesman (Syarifuddin, 2006) [16].



Fig 1: Kebun Binatang Surabaya 1933 (Sumber: https://www.goersapp.com)

The establishment of the Surabaya Botanical Gardens and Zoo held significant importance because, at that time, there were no public entertainment facilities, especially for children to learn about the various animals in the Dutch East Indies. The land area that became the location of the Surabaya Botanical Gardens and Zoos (Soerabaiasche Planten-en Dierentuin) was initially located in Kaliondo. Still, along with the increasing number of animal collections, on September 28, 1917, the Surabaya Botanical Gardens and Zoos were moved to the Groedo area with the assistance of a company called Bouwmaatschappij Koepang. The management rented land in the Groedo area, previously a former sugar factory building on Jalan Groedo, not far from Tamarindelan. The rented Groedo area was near the electric tram rail line (Wiretno, 2019)  $^{\left[20\right]}.$  The plan to move to a new land on Jalan Grudo faced problems transporting the animals, but by working with the local police, the animals could be moved to the new location

The placement and construction of the new land also required the management to follow the requirements set by the city government, such as ensuring good drainage and constructing solid enclosure fences. This resulted in the transfer of animals to the new land, which did not meet the city government's expectations. The management tried to cover the costs required, asking permission from the Director of Education and the Honorary Services to hold a prize draw at the Surabaya Zoo. Thus, with this event, the people of Surabaya had the opportunity to get to know the Surabaya Zoo. In April 1918, Surabaya Zoo was opened to the public with an entrance fee. At that time, the Surabaya Zoo was known as the Wonokromo Zoo because the zoo was located in the Wonokromo area.

The management of Surabaya Zoo attempted to enhance the existing facilities by constructing new infrastructure and facilities to attract visitors to the zoo. The development of the Surabaya Zoo's facilities and infrastructure has received special attention from the Surabaya City Government. In 1926, a bird's nest and a large aquarium building stretched

east and west in the southern part of *Soerabaische Panten en Dierentuin*. On March 16, 1937, the Lion Sea basin was also inaugurated by the Mayor of Surabaya. In 1941, the war affected the condition of the Surabaya Zoo. The administrators were in a dilemma with the situation that occurred. The plan to expand the Surabaya Zoo's land and build new cages was hindered and could not be implemented for a long time. This was due to the lack of materials prioritized for war purposes. The war also hampered the plan to add animals at that time.

The management of Surabaya Zoo had to overcome the difficult times. After the war, management continued to strive to maintain and develop Surabaya Zoo by adding new animals and exchanging them between zoos in Indonesia and abroad. Additionally, management repaired several cages that had begun to deteriorate and decorated them to attract visitors to Surabaya Zoo. From the establishment of Surabaya Zoo until 1955, the efforts to add animals carried out by Surabaya Zoo were under the authority of the Dutch, both in the form of granting permits and supervision (Deka, 2007) [3]. The position of head of the Indonesian Botanical Gardens Nature Protection and Hunting Agency, previously held by a Dutch person, was replaced by a native Indonesian. Since then, the managers of Surabaya Zoo have been able to conduct expeditions to various regions without any special conditions imposed by the Indonesian Botanical Gardens Nature Protection and Hunting Agency.

The first expedition after Surabaya Zoo's recognition as a Conservation Institution by BKSDA was carried out in 1955. The management of Surabaya Zoo, chaired by Mr. Dr. RM Soeripto, sent Hartoyo to conduct an expedition to Lampung and capture four siamang monkeys (Syariffudin, 2006) [16]. The siamang monkeys captured from their original habitats were brought to Surabaya Zoo to be cared for and bred, so they could be released into the wild. In 1968, management again sent Eddy Mamauya on a 30-day expedition to East Kalimantan. The expedition was carried out by exploring the forests along the Mahakam River to capture proboscis monkeys. Eddy and his friends returned to

Surabaya Zoo, bringing five proboscis monkeys (Syariffudin, 2006) [16].

Important notes were made on the development of Surabaya Zoo. Surabaya Zoo added animals through expedition activities carried out by the zoo to their original habitats (Syariffudin, 2006) [16]. Some steps taken are: 1) Conducting an animal capture expedition to Komodo Island to capture three pairs of Komodo dragons and bring them to Surabaya Zoo for Komodo animal breeding. 2) Surabaya Zoo not only takes animals to their natural habitat, but they also exchange animals through Surabaya Zoo partners, some of which are Babirusa and Anoa from Sulawesi, Proboscis Monkey and Pesut from Kalimantan, Bawean Deer from Bawean, several Elephants from Sumatra, a pair of Dugongs from East Nusa Tenggara, 3) Good relations between Surabaya Zoo and zoos abroad in the context of animal exchange.

In addition, management developed and built facilities in the form of Aquariums and Terrariums, and continued with the construction of Komodo cages, bird cages, and water pumps to draw water from the Brantas River to the Surabaya Zoo. Furthermore, parks were created in the Surabaya Zoo area to beautify the atmosphere. The management also collaborated with the Purwodadi Alas Protection Service to plant trees, making the area more shady. The orangutan, bear, and pig cages were to be repaired to be safer and more aesthetically pleasing. In 1959, the management constructed a kindergarten arena, built a monkey cage on the "monkey island," erected a museum building, paved sidewalks around the "monkey island," and created elephant cages and several bird cages. The following year, in 1960, construction of a camel house, a snake terrarium in front of the Aquarium, and the asphalting of roads inside the Surabaya Zoo began. This continued in 1961, with the building of cages for wild boars and shelters for proboscis monkeys.

The management of Surabaya Zoo has completed construction and improvements to its facilities (Syariffudin, 2006) [16]. The various construction projects are achievements recorded by the Surabaya Zoo management. Construction projects during this period include an Aviary, hippopotamus enclosure, herbivore enclosures such as deer, sambar, and donkeys, open enclosures for large primates, a watchtower, a parking lot, an island/boat pond, and renovation of the Main Gate, after the booming construction project to beautify the Surabaya Zoo. Furthermore, the management carried out another construction project, including the creation of a water circulation channel for the pool and channeled out of the Surabaya Zoo area regularly and smoothly, so as not to disturb the comfort of visitors who are in the Surabaya Zoo, because the channel was previously not well organized and disturbed visitors. The large-scale physical development carried out by the management was the installation of paving, which was previously only an asphalt road, renovation of the Guest House, construction of the Auditorium so that meetings held by the management could be carried out comfortably, construction of the Surabaya Zoo library, nursery office, elephant arena, camel arena, and others.

The development of Surabaya Zoo is increasingly significant. However, this development needs to be balanced with the ability to support the animals at Surabaya Zoo. In 1966, the Surabaya City Government, led by Dr. Poernomo Kasidi, who understood this matter, provided a subsidy fund from the City Youth/Surabaya APBD. R. Sutopo Danusubroto, as the Regional Secretary of Surabaya City,

on behalf of the Mayor of Surabaya, has exempted the public viewing tax for Surabaya Zoo. Since Surabaya Zoo was led by R. Soenaryo (Chairman of the Association) with Hilmi Oesman (Commissioner) from 1952 to 1972, Ki Soemali (Chairman of the Management) and Aryono (Director) experienced a significant increase in the number of visitors. In 1971, the number of visitors to Surabaya Zoo had increased by 1,011,327 people (Putra, 2021) [13]. They have contributed to improving the quality of the Surabaya Zoo, attracting the public's attention to visit.

# **Recent Changes in the Management**

Surabaya Zoo began to experience several problems in 2001. This can be seen from the resignation of Stany Soebakir, chairman of daily management. The resignation resulted in a vacancy in the position of chairman of the daily management and encouraged several members of the plenary management to include new personnel in the management. The problem began to escalate when H. Kamilo Kalim and Dr. I. Komang Wiara Sardjana had differing opinions from H. Moch. Said as Chairman of the Surabaya Zoo Management. In this situation, several members of management considered holding a General Members Meeting to elect new management. The meeting resulted in the adoption of new Articles of Association and a revised management structure. However, with these results, the problem still needed to be solved. Problems re-emerged in the management of the association. This problem arose due to another disagreement with H. Moch Said (Ambarala, 2012) [2]. Now, there was a conflict between plenary and daily management. There was a sharp difference of opinion, which became public, between H. Kamilo Kalim, the chairman of the plenary management, and Dr. I. Komang Wiarsa Sardjana, the chairman of the daily management,

In the association conditions that began to heat, suddenly H. Moch. Said handed over the land assets of the Surabaya Zoo to Sunarto Sumoprawiro, who then served as Surabaya's mayor. H. Moch. Said handed over the assets in the form of land certificates. All association members have yet to learn the origin and contents. H. Moch. Said thought that the conflict within the association's management caused H. Moch. Said to hand over the certificates and make the Surabaya City Government the third party in resolving this problem (Ambarala, 2012) [2]. The management of the association, which did not accept the act of releasing the land assets, decided to sue it in the High State Administrative Court (PT TUN). The association was declared the loser in the High State Administrative Court trial. However, the association did not give up so easily. The association immediately filed an appeal. The problems faced by the management became very sharp. News about the dispute over the land of the Surabaya Zoo began to emerge. Management also overlooked animal welfare due to the issue. This caused many animal deaths. Negative public assessments of the Surabaya Zoo also appeared in several newspapers.

Between 2003 and 2006, the presidium team restructured the management of the Surabaya Flora and Fauna Park Association to improve the Surabaya Zoo's poor image. With this new management, the journey to create programs to enhance the good image of the Surabaya Zoo could have run smoothly. Old internal problems also emerged gradually. Between 2006 and 2009, there were still

numerous changes in management due to recurring internal issues. Until 2009, internal problems at the Surabaya Zoo escalated again. The Director General of PHKA, the Ministry of Forestry, and the Surabaya City Government have tried to resolve the internal problems faced by the management of the Surabaya Zoo. They met on January 7, 2010, to discuss the issues at the Surabaya Zoo. The meeting was held in Tretes, Pasuruan. On February 18, 2010, another meeting was held in Jakarta (Lanu, 2015) [8].

In both meetings, peace was still impossible between the Plenary Chair and the Chair of the Surabaya Zoo's daily management. With no peace found between the parties, the government immediately decided to revoke the Surabaya Zoo management rights permit from the Surabaya Flora and Animal Park Association through the Ministry of Forestry. The Ministry of Forestry issued Decree Number SK.471/Menhut-IV 2010, dated August 20, 2010, which revoked the management permit held by the Surabaya Flora and Animal Park Association. The Ministry of Forestry also established a Team through Decree Number SK 472/Menhut-IV/2010, concerning the formation of a temporary team to manage the Surabaya Zoo.

In April 2011, the Directorate General of PHKA and the temporary management team met with the Mayor of Surabaya. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the continuation of the Surabaya Zoo. In the meeting, the Mayor of Surabaya expressed his desire to manage the Surabaya Zoo. The Mayor of Surabaya immediately sent a proposal for the management plan of the Surabaya Zoo. In March 2012, the Surabaya City Government was granted permission to manage the Surabaya Zoo, and this management was subsequently made definitive. In July 2012, the Surabaya City Government stipulated Surabaya City Regulation Number 19 2012 concerning the Surabaya Zoo Animal Park Regional Company.

In 2008, KBS visitors numbered approximately 1,322,614, representing a 19.95% increase from 2007. However, the number of KBS visitors has declined in the last three years (2010-2012). Where in 2010, the number of visitors dropped the highest among the five years, which was down 19.15% from the total number of visitors in 2009 of 1,586,483 to 1,282,694 visitors in 2010, where between 2009-2010 was the peak of the KBS conflict, until finally, KBS began to be managed by the Temporary Management Team which the Ministry of Forestry officially gave authority on August 20, 2010 (Pratono, et al, 2014) [11]. The number of visitors to Surabaya Zoo has been decreasing on average every year, except for a slight increase in 2011. This decrease was caused by problems such as the KBS ownership conflict, fewer animals due to deaths, and negative media coverage of Surabaya Zoo. One of the news items circulating was in the Tempo Newspaper on October 26, 2011, entitled "Surabaya Zoo's Collection is Decreasing." In the news, the death of a babirusa was attributed to the animal's inadequate care and the impact of internal conflict at the Surabaya Zoo. The babirusa, which was already sickly due to its age, died due to the negligence of the management.

This zoo disaster had attracted international attention. On March 24, 2012, Surabaya Zoo drew international attention when representatives from Tierpark Berlin, one of Germany's most prominent zoological institutions, and a CNN news crew visited the facility. Their visit was part of a broader investigation into the zoo's deteriorating conditions and mounting concerns over animal welfare. During their

assessment, both parties documented and publicly highlighted several alarming issues, most notably the severe overcrowding of animals within enclosures, the poor quality of care provided to the zoo's inhabitants, and the low quality of the animals' food (Pratono *et al*, 2014) [11].

CNN's coverage revealed distressing scenes, including tigers confined to cramped cages, pelicans packed into enclosures with barely enough room to spread their wings, and a baby elephant struggling to walk with chains around its feet. Tierpark Berlin's involvement underscored the gravity of the situation, as their expertise in animal management lent credibility to the criticisms being raised. The visit heightened global scrutiny and intensified calls for reform, particularly as the zoo was already under pressure due to years of mismanagement and public outcry. This moment marked a turning point in the international community's awareness of Surabaya Zoo's challenges and the urgent need for structural and ethical improvements in its operations (Pratono *et al*, 2014) [11].

The Surabaya City Government addressed this issue by issuing Surabaya City Regional Regulation Number 19 of 2012, which concerns the Surabaya Zoo Animal Park Regional Company. The response was taken because Surabaya Zoo is one of the icons of Surabaya City. Surabaya has many other tourist attractions, but Surabaya Zoo remains the icon of Surabaya City. Tourists who visit Surabaya Zoo come not only from Surabaya City but also from outside the city (Irsyad *et al.*, 2017) <sup>[6]</sup>. Visitors to Surabaya Zoo are primarily families with small children, as visiting the zoo not only allows them to travel but also educates their children and showcases the animal collections of Surabaya Zoo.

# **Closing Remarks**

Surabaya Zoo began with the vision of HFK Kommer, a journalist passionate about collecting animals. However, as time passed, Kommer struggled to maintain his collection, prompting a group of donors to step in and form the Surabaya Botanical Garden and Zoo Association in 1916. By 1955, Surabaya Zoo had become independent and began expeditions across Indonesia, expanding its animal collection and conservation efforts. The zoo's first successful breeding expedition, which involved capturing and caring for four Siamang monkeys, marked the beginning of its conservation legacy. Despite these early successes, internal conflicts plagued the zoo's management. In 2001, leadership struggles intensified when the chairmanship was vacated, leading to disagreements and calls for reform. Efforts to resolve these issues culminated in a General Members' Meeting, which reshaped the management and led to the appointment of new leadership. However, ongoing discord among the management teams persisted, requiring intervention from the Director General of PHKA and the Surabaya City Government. In 2012, after years of instability, the Surabaya City Government assumed complete control of the zoo's management. This transition was formalized through the issuance of Surabaya City Regulation Number 19, 2012, officially establishing the zoo as a regional company. The government's intervention and subsequent restructuring resolved long-standing leadership challenges, marking the beginning of a new era for Surabaya Zoo, one focused on revitalization and sustainable conservation.

To prevent recurring internal conflicts, it is essential for Surabaya Zoo to establish a transparent and cohesive management structure. Regular leadership training and precise succession planning should be implemented to ensure that future transitions of power are smooth and conflict-free. Building on its legacy as a conservation institution, Surabaya Zoo should prioritize expanding its animal breeding and reintroduction programs. Collaborating with local and international conservation organizations can help improve species preservation efforts, particularly for endangered animals. The zoo should actively engage the public through educational programs, events, and community involvement initiatives. The zoo can increase visitor interest and support by fostering a deeper connection between the public and wildlife conservation efforts, ensuring its long-term sustainability and relevance as a vital conservation hub.

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