

The Juridical Construction of The Obligation of Land Deed Officials to Conduct Field Inspections: Theoretical Foundations, Normative Gaps, and Professional Responsibility in Indonesian Land Law

Yanah Susanti*, Zudan Arief Fakrulloh

Universitas Borobudur, Indonesia

Email: jannasantoso@yahoo.com*, cclsis@yahoo.com

Keywords

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ABSTRACT

The existence of land as a fundamental object of law demands absolute data accuracy in every transfer of rights. This study examines the juridical problems surrounding the obligation of field inspection, or site inspection, by Land Deed Officials (Pejabat Pembuat Akta Tanah/PPAT), which to date remains without explicit regulation under Indonesia's positive law. The central issue lies in the tension between formal juridical data and physical field conditions, a discrepancy that frequently gives rise to destructive land disputes. Employing normative legal research through statutory, conceptual, and case analysis approaches, this study identifies a normative gap in Government Regulation No. 37 of 1998 and Government Regulation No. 24 of 2016. The analysis demonstrates that the field inspection obligation constitutes a legal construction derived from the prudential principle and a systematic interpretation of the PPAT's oath of office, which requires the exercise of due diligence (*seksama*). Failure to conduct physical verification risks degrading the authenticity of the deed from a public instrument (*openbaar document*) to a privately executed deed. This study concludes that the transformation of a vague norm into an explicit legal obligation through regulatory reconstruction is urgently required in order to guarantee legal certainty (*Rechtssicherheit*), substantive justice (*Gerechtigkeits*), and utility (*Zweckmäßigkeit*). The principal recommendation is the formalization of standard operating procedures for field inspections, integrated with the electronic land registration system.

INTRODUCTION

PPAT is a public official authorized to execute authentic deeds in respect of certain legal acts concerning land rights or Rights of Ownership over Condominium Units (Gunawan & Putri, 2021). The role of PPAT is central to the national land law framework, as they assist the Head of the Land Office in conducting land registration activities by providing legally valid documentation (Hartono & Susilo, 2023). As an auxiliary executor of land registration, PPAT is obligated to act professionally, independently, and impartially. This tripartite duty professionalism, independence, and impartiality—constitutes the bedrock of the PPAT's public mandate (Adjie, 2011).

Table 1. Dimensions of the PPAT Office: Characteristics and Juridical Basis in Indonesian Land Law.

Dimension of PPAT Office	Characteristics and Juridical Basis
Legal Status	Public Official exercising a portion of state functions.
Primary Authority	To execute authentic deeds as the basis for registering changes in land registration data.
Nature of the Deed	Carries the force of perfect evidentiary power.
Working Principles	Trustworthy, honest, meticulous, independent, and impartial.
Regulatory Basis	Government Regulation No. 37 of 1998 jo. Government Regulation No. 24 of 2016 on PPAT Official Regulations.

Source: Compiled from various primary legal sources and literature, 2024

The authority of PPAT as regulated under Article 2 paragraph (1) of Government Regulation No. 37 of 1998 emphasizes that the deed executed by PPAT constitutes evidence that a particular legal act has been performed (Susanti, 2024). Since such deed serves as the 'gateway' to any modification of data in the land register, the validity of the data contained therein is of paramount importance (Setiawan & Kurniawati, 2022). Should PPAT act merely as an administrative recorder without performing adequate verification, the risk of legal defects arising in the deed would increase, ultimately causing harm to the transacting parties as well as to third parties (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024). Accordingly, an understanding of PPAT's responsibilities must be broadened beyond mere formal compliance to encompass substantive accountability for material truth (Sjaifurrachman, 2011).

From a normative standpoint, the obligation of PPAT to conduct field inspections in the preparation of a Sale and Purchase Deed is not expressly regulated in any single comprehensive provision (Lestari & Wahyudi, 2022). Government Regulation No. 24 of 1997 on Land Registration and its implementing regulations place greater emphasis on the verification of juridical data, such as certificate verification at the Land Office to confirm that the land is not subject to dispute, seizure, or blocking orders (Setiawan & Kurniawati, 2022). PPAT officials frequently rely solely upon documents submitted by the parties and the results of formal certificate verification (Nuraini & Hidayat, 2023).

The absence of regulations that explicitly mandate physical inspection creates what Hans Kelsen's legal theory describes as a gap in the hierarchical legal system, with the potential to undermine the principle of legal certainty (Hadi & Michael, 2022). On one hand, PPAT is required to provide legal protection; yet on the other, no standard protocol obliges them to physically inspect the land object (Rahayu & Hadi, 2022). This ambiguity gives rise to varied practices in the field: some PPAT officials conduct physical inspections as part of their internal standard operating procedures to minimize risk, while others consider this outside their authority and leave all physical risk entirely to the buyer (Nurhayati & Purnama, 2023).

The following table summarizes the analytical framework concerning the normative, practical, and theoretical dimensions of the field inspection obligation of PPAT (Pratiwi & Wibowo, 2023).

**Table 2. Analytical Framework of the Field Inspection Obligation of PPAT:
Normative, Practical, and Theoretical Dimensions**

Dimension	Indicator	Normative Framework	Empirical Practice	Theoretical Perspective	Legal Implication
Regulatory Basis	Legal provisions on field inspection	Not explicitly regulated in Land Laws/Government Regulations	Informally encouraged in professional practice	Theory of Legal Certainty	Ambiguity in legal obligation
Nature of Obligation	Binding force	Non-mandatory within formal structure	Tends to be treated as quasi-mandatory	Sociological Jurisprudence	Shift from soft law to hard obligation
Professional Standards	Due diligence requirements	Limited to document and juridical verification	Expanded to include physical verification	Prudential Principle	Strengthens professional accountability
Purpose of Inspection	Alignment of law and fact	Emphasis on juridical data validity	Ensuring consistency of physical and juridical data	Theory of Legal Protection	Prevention of future disputes
Institutional Practice	Administrative policy	No uniform national standard	Varies by region and institution	Institutional Legal Theory	Inconsistency in legal implementation
Efficiency Aspect	Time and cost	Supports fast and low-cost transactions	Potentially increases cost and time	Law & Economics	Trade-off between certainty and efficiency
Risk Management	Dispute prevention	Relies on formal legality	Combines substantive verification	Risk Prevention Theory	Minimizes land disputes
Legal Consequences	Sanction mechanism	No explicit sanction for physical inspection failure	Emergence of informal professional expectations	Theory of Legal Responsibility	Unclear obligation boundaries

Source: Author's compilation based on analysis of regulations, practice, and legal theory, 2024

This situation reflects a tension between a static formal legal framework and a dynamically evolving professional practice (Radbruch, 1950). From Gustav Radbruch's perspective, this circumstance illustrates the need for a balance among legal certainty (*Rechtssicherheit*), justice (*Gerechtigkeit*), and utility (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) (Radbruch, 1950). While mandatory field inspection may enhance legal protection, it also risks disrupting the efficiency of legal services if not regulated through a proportionate mechanism (Marzuki, 2016).

Notwithstanding the absence of an explicit rule, PPAT's obligation to conduct field inspections may be construed through a systematic interpretation of the prudential principle (Sitorus & Limbong, 2020). This principle requires every public official, including PPAT, to act with a high degree of vigilance and care in order to prevent harm to the public (Rahayu &

Hadi, 2022). In their official oath, PPAT pledges to discharge their duties in a trustworthy, honest, meticulous, independent, and impartial manner (Ibrahim & Hasibuan, 2022). The word 'meticulous' (seksama) in that oath implicitly demands of PPAT a thorough verification not only of the legal subject but also of the legal object (Nuraini & Hidayat, 2023).

Table 3. Elements of the Prudential Principle and Their Relevance to PPAT's Physical Inspection Duties

Element of the Prudential Principle	Manifestation in PPAT's Duties	Relevance to Physical Inspection
Carefulness	Conducting detailed verification of identity documents and certificates.	Ascertaining whether the object genuinely exists and its area corresponds to the documents.
Vigilance	Detecting indications of document or identity fraud.	Identifying actual physical occupation by unauthorized third parties.
Independence	Not being influenced by pressure from either party or financial institutions.	Ensuring factual accuracy without merely accepting the seller's representations.
Substantive Verification	Going beyond formal correctness to achieve material truth.	Field inspection is the primary tool for material verification of the object.

Source: Author's compilation based on the prudential principle in Indonesian land law, 2024

The prudential principle is also closely connected to the theory of legal protection for bona fide third parties (Lestari & Wahyudi, 2022). Should PPAT disregard conspicuous on-site facts—such as the land being fenced by another party or the presence of permanent structures belonging to others—PPAT may be deemed to have been negligent in the discharge of the prudential principle (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024). In the context of transfers of unregistered land, the application of the prudential principle is even more critical, as physical and juridical data in such cases derive solely from village officials' statements and continuous physical possession (Rahayu & Hadi, 2022). Without a field inspection, PPAT cannot reasonably be satisfied that the seller genuinely possesses the land in question (Rahayu & Hadi, 2022).

Indonesia's land registration system aims to provide legal certainty through the issuance of certificates. A certificate of land rights consists of a copy of the land register (juridical data) and a measurement letter (physical data) bound together in a single document (Santoso, 2019). Any deficiency in either of these aspects will result in the land right lacking full legal certainty (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024). Juridical data encompasses information regarding the legal status of the land, the identity of the right-holder, and the existence or otherwise of legal encumbrances (Setiawan & Kurniawati, 2022). Physical data, on the other hand, encompasses the boundaries, area, and location of the land parcel (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024).

A fundamental problem arises from the fact that Indonesia operates under a negative publication system with positive tendencies (Santoso, 2019). Within this system, the state does not guarantee the absolute accuracy of the physical and juridical data presented (Sumardjono, 2009). The holder of a certificate may at any time face a claim from another party who can demonstrate that the data in the certificate does not correspond to the actual field conditions (Santoso, 2019). This is where the urgency of PPAT's role lies: as the official processing the

transfer of rights, PPAT must ensure that what is written in the 'measurement letter' remains consistent with the 'field reality' at the time of the transaction (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024).

Field inspection by PPAT serves to:

1. **Verify Physical Boundaries:** to confirm that boundary markers remain in place in accordance with the measurement letter (Pratiwi & Wibowo, 2023).
2. **Identify Occupants:** to ascertain whether any third party is unlawfully occupying the land, which could obstruct the registration of title transfer (Handayani & Wulandari, 2023).
3. **Assess Land Use Compliance:** to ensure that the current use of the land does not conflict with the recorded designation or zoning regulations, relevant to tax obligations and building permits (Kurniadi & Putra, 2022).
4. **Prevent Duplicate Certificates:** through coordination with the surrounding community and physical observation, PPAT may detect indications of competing claims over the same parcel of land (Pratiwi & Wibowo, 2023).

Discrepancies between physical and juridical data frequently constitute the root cause of protracted disputes (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024). In Supreme Court Decision Number 2829 K/Pdt/2024, it was revealed that a PPAT who executed a deed over an object with unclear boundaries and area could trigger conflicts prejudicial to heirs and bona fide purchasers (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024). Accordingly, data synchronization through physical inspection is not merely an option, but a functional necessity for safeguarding the integrity of the land administration system (Pratiwi & Wibowo, 2023).

Several studies have examined the legal responsibilities and professional obligations of Land Deed Officials (PPAT) in the Indonesian land law system. Susanti (2024) analyzed the legal construction of PPAT's obligations in Indonesian land deed practice and identified that field inspection remains an implicit rather than explicit duty. Lestari & Wahyudi (2022) examined the application of the prudential principle and legal certainty in the issuance of land right certificates, concluding that physical verification significantly reduces the risk of future disputes. Firmansyah & Hakim (2024) investigated the legal responsibility of PPAT for defective land deeds and found that courts tend to characterize verification responsibility as an inherent obligation of PPAT, as demonstrated in Supreme Court Decision No. 2829 K/Pdt/2024.

Rahayu & Hadi (2022) focused on the prudential principle of PPAT in the transfer of uncertificated land, emphasizing that field inspection is critical when dealing with unregistered land where physical and juridical data derive solely from village officials' statements. Pratiwi & Wibowo (2023) conducted a juridical analysis of the role of notaries and PPAT in preventing overlapping land rights, concluding that field inspection can effectively serve as a preventive mechanism for detecting competing claims that go undetected by purely administrative-electronic certificate verification systems. Setiawan & Kurniawati (2022) examined the role of PPAT as users of electronic certificate verification services, noting that while electronic systems facilitate formal verification, they cannot replace the need for physical on-site inspection.

Nugroho & Sari (2023) analyzed PPAT responsibility in sale and purchase deeds using forged documents, finding that field inspection would help detect document fraud by verifying the actual existence of the land object and its physical condition. Handayani & Wulandari

(2023) studied PPAT responsibility toward registration of transfer of land rights that become dispute objects, concluding that data synchronization through physical inspection is not merely an option but a functional necessity for safeguarding the integrity of the land administration system. Wiraatmadja & Fathoni (2023) conducted a legal analysis of criminal liability of PPAT for land document engineering, highlighting that acts of administrative manipulation or the execution of a deed containing false statements regarding the condition of the land object constitute serious violations that may result in imprisonment.

Despite the significant body of research on PPAT responsibilities, several gaps remain. First, previous studies have focused primarily on the legal consequences of defective deeds after disputes arise, rather than on preventive mechanisms such as field inspection. Second, existing research has not systematically analyzed the normative gap in Government Regulation No. 37 of 1998 and Government Regulation No. 24 of 2016 concerning the absence of explicit field inspection obligations. Third, no comprehensive study has constructed a juridical framework that transforms the implicit prudential principle into an explicit legal obligation using Hans Kelsen's theory of normative hierarchy, Roscoe Pound's law as social engineering, and Gustav Radbruch's tripartite balance of legal certainty, justice, and utility.

The novelty of this research lies in several key aspects. First, this study provides a systematic normative analysis of the gap in positive law regarding PPAT's field inspection obligation using Kelsen's legal theory. Second, this research constructs a juridical foundation for field inspection derived from the prudential principle and systematic interpretation of the PPAT's oath of office. Third, this study analyzes relevant court decisions (including Supreme Court Decision No. 2829 K/Pdt/2024 and West Jakarta District Court Decision No. 248/Pid.B/2022) to illustrate the legal consequences of failing to conduct physical verification. Fourth, this research formulates concrete recommendations for regulatory reconstruction, including the formalization of standard operating procedures for field inspections integrated with the electronic land registration system.

This study aims to analyze the juridical problems surrounding the obligation of field inspection by PPAT, identify the normative gap in Government Regulation No. 37 of 1998 and Government Regulation No. 24 of 2016, and construct a legal framework that transforms the vague norm into an explicit legal obligation. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of land law theory, particularly regarding the balance between legal certainty, justice, and utility in the context of PPAT professional responsibility. Practically, this study provides recommendations for regulatory reconstruction to the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency, serves as a guideline for PPAT officials in discharging their professional duties with due diligence, and offers legal protection for transacting parties and bona fide third parties in land transactions.

METHOD

This research uses normative legal research methods to analyze the field inspection obligations of Land Deed Officials (PPAT) in preparing Sale and Purchase Deeds. The approaches used include:

1. Statute Approach

An analysis of relevant regulations, including Government Regulation No. 37 of 1998 and Government Regulation No. 24 of 2016, was conducted to identify any normative gaps related to PPAT obligations to conduct physical inspections of land.

2. Conceptual Approach

This study examines legal principles, such as the prudent principle (principle of due diligence) and the PPAT oath of office, which require vigilance, independence, and thoroughness in carrying out their duties.

This analysis aims to interpret the obligations of Land Deed Officials (PPAT) from a conceptual and theoretical legal perspective, including the theories of legal certainty (Rechtssicherheit), substantive justice (Gerechtigkeit), and the purpose or efficiency of law (Zweckmäßigkeit).

3. Case Study Approach / Court Decision Analysis

Relevant court cases are examined to illustrate the legal consequences of PPATs failing to conduct physical verification, including administrative, civil, and criminal liability.

This case study is used to construct the professional and practical implications of PPATs' obligations to maintain the conformity of physical and legal data.

Data Sources

1. Secondary data: laws and regulations, regulations of the Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency, legal journals, academic documents, and court decisions related to PPATs.
2. Primary data: not used in this study due to its normative and document-based nature.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted descriptively and qualitatively, emphasizing the identification of normative gaps, interpretation of legal principles, and practical and professional implications for PPATs.

The results of the analysis are used to formulate strategic recommendations regarding the standardization of field inspection procedures and their integration with the electronic land registration system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Case Studies and Analysis of Relevant Court Decisions

Several court decisions provide concrete illustrations of the legal consequences for PPAT officials who disregard the clarity of land objects. Analysis of these decisions indicates that courts tend to characterize verification responsibility as an inherent obligation of PPAT (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024).

1. Supreme Court Decision No. 2829 K/Pdt/2024

In this case, a PPAT (Co-Defendant IV) executed a deed of land rights transfer in respect of an object that was unclear both as to its area and its boundaries (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024). The land in question also turned out to constitute part of an inheritance that had not yet been duly divided (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024). The Supreme Court

affirmed that had PPAT discharged its obligations in accordance with Article 39 of Government Regulation No. 24 of 1997 by refusing to execute a deed in respect of unclear or disputed land, the dispute would not have escalated to the level of court litigation (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024). This decision reinforces the view that PPAT has an obligation to ensure the 'physical identity clarity' of the object prior to processing the deed (Firmansyah & Hakim, 2024).

2. West Jakarta District Court Decision No. 248/Pid.B/2022

This case involved a PPAT entangled in criminal proceedings on account of the manipulation of land ownership documents (Wiraatmadja & Fathoni, 2023). In its considerations, the court highlighted the standard of due diligence that PPAT should have applied in the process of transferring rights (Wiraatmadja & Fathoni, 2023). The decision emphasized that all information in a PPAT deed must correspond to the actual facts on the ground (Wiraatmadja & Fathoni, 2023). Acts of administrative manipulation or the execution of a deed containing false statements regarding the condition of the land object constitute a serious violation that may result in imprisonment (Ibrahim & Hasibuan, 2022).

3. Cases of Duplicate Certificates and Legal Defects

Many land disputes originate from the issuance of two certificates over the same object (Pratiwi & Wibowo, 2023). In such situations, the PPAT who processed the transaction for the second certificate is frequently named as a defendant on the basis of alleged negligence in examining the physical history of the land (Handayani & Wulandari, 2023). Research indicates that field inspection can effectively serve as a preventive mechanism for detecting competing claims that go undetected by purely administrative-electronic certificate verification systems (Pratiwi & Wibowo, 2023).

Regulatory Reconstruction: Toward the Standardization of Field Inspection

On the basis of the analysis of the normative gap and the existing legal risks, regulatory reconstruction is required to make field inspection an explicit obligation of PPAT (Susanti, 2024). Such reconstruction aims to create uniformity in practice, enhance legal certainty, and provide stronger protection for all parties (Ali & Heryani, 2012).

1. Formulation of Explicit Rules

A clause must be added to the Government Regulation on PPAT Official Regulations that expressly mandates field inspection as a precondition to the execution of a Sale and Purchase Deed (Susanti, 2024). Such a rule must define the scope of the inspection, the procedure for its conduct, and the manner of documenting the results (Nurhayati & Purnama, 2023). With a written rule in place, the limits of PPAT's responsibility become clearer, so that PPAT officials no longer operate in a 'grey area' of interpretation (Marzuki, 2016).

2. Development of Technical Guidelines (Standard Operating Procedures)

The Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency is required to issue technical guidelines that standardize field inspection practices (Susanti, 2024). Such guidelines may encompass the obligation to verify boundaries with neighboring landowners, to check physical possession, and to prepare a 'Field

Inspection Report' signed by the parties and local witnesses (Mulyadi & Rahayu, 2023). Documentation in the form of timestamped and GPS-coordinated photographs of the site may be required as mandatory attachments to the original deed (*minuta akta*) (Susanti, 2024).

3. Integration with the Land Registration System

The results of PPAT's field inspection must be integrated into the BPN electronic land registration system (Hartono & Susilo, 2023). In this manner, physical data collected by PPAT can enrich the national land database and assist BPN in the ongoing maintenance of physical data (Setiawan & Kurniawati, 2022). Synergy between PPAT and BPN in physical verification will create an early warning system for potential disputes or land overlaps (Nopriandi & Putra, 2024).

4. A Proportional, Risk-Based Approach

Given the extensive operational territory of PPAT, the physical inspection obligation may be applied proportionally based on the level of risk in the transaction (Marzuki, 2016). High-risk transactions—such as land that has not yet been certificated, land in conflict areas, or land of very high value—must undergo thorough physical inspection (Rahayu & Hadi, 2022). For transactions in formal residential areas where data has been adequately validated, the inspection procedure may be simplified through the use of digital verification technology (Wahyu & Pratama, 2023).

Theoretical Implications: Law as a Tool of Social Engineering

The legal construction of PPAT's field inspection obligation is consonant with Roscoe Pound's theory of Law as a Tool of Social Engineering (Pound, 1954). Within this perspective, law is employed to direct the behavior of the public and of professionals toward a more orderly and secure order (Pound, 1954). By mandating physical inspection, the state endeavors, through law, to minimize land disputes that have long constituted a social and economic burden for the Indonesian nation (Sumardjono, 2009).

In theoretical terms, the transition from 'formal legality' to 'substantive validation' reflects a paradigm shift from legalistic justice to material justice (Ali & Heryani, 2012). PPAT is no longer to be regarded as a 'deed-making machine,' but as a 'preventive adjudicator' tasked with ensuring that justice has been upheld before a legal act is formalized into an authentic deed (Sjaifurrachman, 2011). This also supports the achievement of the UUPA's objective of realizing legal certainty and legal protection for the people with respect to their land (Harsono, 2008).

Furthermore, the strengthening of PPAT professional standards through the field inspection obligation will enhance the dignity and credibility of the PPAT office in the eyes of the public (Adjie, 2011). Public trust in authentic deeds can only be sustained if such deeds are genuinely capable of guaranteeing transactional security (Prabowo & Santoso, 2023). Accordingly, this legal reconstruction is not merely a technical-administrative matter, but a fundamental effort to fortify the foundations of national land law (Sumardjono, 2009).

CONCLUSION

The obligation of Land Deed Officials (PPAT) to conduct field inspections in the preparation of Sale and Purchase Deeds constitutes an urgent requirement that must promptly be formalized within

Indonesia's legal system. Although at present such obligation remains implicit and rests upon the prudential principle, the dynamics of land disputes and demands for legal certainty necessitate the establishment of more concrete and binding standards. Through the integration of traditional prudential principles and the utilization of digital technology, PPAT may discharge its function as the foremost guardian of land law certainty. Field inspection must no longer be viewed as an administrative burden, but as a professional investment in preventing future legal risks. With this step, it is to be hoped that land disputes may be significantly reduced, protection for *bona fide* purchasers enhanced, and public trust in the national land administration system firmly maintained. Ultimately, this legal reconstruction will bring Indonesia one step closer to realizing legal order and the welfare of the people through equitable and legally certain land management.

Based on these conclusions, this study proposes the following suggestions. For policymakers (Ministry of ATR/BPN), it is recommended to revise Government Regulations No. 37 of 1998 and No. 24 of 2016 by adding an explicit clause that requires field inspections as a prerequisite for making a Deed of Sale and Purchase, as well as compiling Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) integrated with the electronic land registration system. For PPAT, it is recommended to voluntarily conduct field inspections even though they are not explicitly required, as a form of applying the principle of prudence and preventive efforts against future disputes. For the next researcher, it is recommended to conduct empirical research on the effectiveness of field inspections in preventing land disputes as well as comparative studies with PPAT practices in other countries.

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