

The analysis of informal activities in street space of Semarang's Chinatown, Indonesia

Yohanes Basuki Dwisusanto*^{ID}, Christin Purnamasai Nusaputra

Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan
Jl. Ciumbuleuit, no. 94, Bandung, Indonesia



ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i> Received June 20, 2021 Received in revised form June 30, 2021 Accepted March 08, 2022 Available online August 01, 2022</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Activity Outdoor living room Pecinan Semarang Sense of place Street space</p> <p>*Corresponding author: Yohanes Basuki Dwisusanto Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan, Indonesia Email: jbase@unpar.ac.id ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2686-5048</p>	<p><i>The informal aspect of daily activities plays a role in shaping the quality of urban architectural design. This is due to the fact that public open space has become a place for all community-based informal activities, thereby, making the public-private sphere a collective spectrum and using the outdoor as a common space for all. These activities, however, have the ability to create a sense of belonging to the urban community towards a place even though they are temporary. An example of this is the Semarang Chinatown area which is a street space being used as a living outdoor space (sense of place). Therefore, this study was conducted to understand the character of the outdoor living room in the street space through the sense of place dimension. This involved using qualitative methods through field observation data to identify the place identity, place attachment, and place dependence. The findings showed that the informal activities reviewed through the sense of place dimension shape the character of the outdoor living room in the street space and this is expected to increase the quality of the street as a public open space in the Semarang Chinatown area.</i></p>

Introduction

Informal activities are defined as the daily community-based activities which have spontaneously become the driving system for dynamic urban architecture. They are closely related to spatial socio-cultural issues when urban spaces are used as a place for activities overflowing from buildings and which are most visible in public open spaces. This spatial openness, therefore, leads to the combination of the public-private sphere (Nusaputra and Dwisusanto 2022). Moreover, the existence of informal activities in different economic-social-cultural domains has also raised the spirit of owning and maintaining a place through the concept of a sense of belonging (Lake et al. 2020). The daily activities repeated all the time have

become the lifeblood of public open spaces (Francis et al. 2012) with subsequent impact on the quality development of urban architecture by contributing to the living spaces which improve the overall urban architecture (Micek and Staszewska 2019).

Communities have adopted several methods to deal with massive and rapid changes being recorded in urban environments. An example of social adaptation is outdoor living in public open spaces which involves sharing the outdoor space. The understanding of private and public spaces has also shifted, thereby, leading to fluidity between two territories (Kamalipour 2020).

The Semarang Chinatown settlement is a suitable case study related to the informal activities being conducted as an outdoor living practice by a community in outdoor spaces. The

adaptation is observable in the daily social, cultural, and economic activities in the street spaces which form the only public open spaces in this area. This is associated with their use as traditional markets, night markets, informal culinary tours, and for annual cultural celebrations (Meneses-Reyes and Caballero-Juárez 2014). The existence of informal activities further improves the quality of habitation and visits to the area.

The informal spaces in the Semarang Chinatown area show the signs of the emergence of a sense of place. The pressures developed from this in the form of speed and change, however, threaten the loss of the region's ability to sustain its open space character. It is also possible to interrupt the street space development due to the dominance of these economic interests. This means the concept of architectural resilience which favors the character of the area is needed to resolve the challenges associated with the changes in the street space. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the sense of place dimension which has the ability to bring out the character of an outdoor living room. It is also useful to serve as an evaluation for the government to recognize the existence of informality (formalizing informality) to ensure communities are more confident and independent in developing the space quality as part of the overall urban space.

Outdoor living room

Pedestrian movement and on-street activity have the potential to increase livability in outdoor as public open spaces. This outdoor atmosphere also has the ability to increase creative sightseeing activities such as shopping in traditional markets, street food, and cultural performances. These arise spontaneously in the community due to the limited public space and relations between shophouses which allow public activities to spill over into street space and create a different atmosphere from the building. Moreover, the meeting of multicultural activities creates a corridor called an outdoor living room (Samadi, Omar, and Yunus 2012) as a potential place to have a certain colorful atmosphere rated by the presence of a place quality or sense of place. The existence of the quality of life (livability) is observable through the keyword of activities diversity as well as several timescales and types of users (Fauzi and Barus 2019).

The temporary spatial use of these spaces for a wide variety of daily activities leads to the

temporary urbanism concept (Madanipour 2017). This is often generated from direct community participation or the creative performance of formal entities such as non-profit organizations, developers, and governments in creating and activating the built environment. These approaches collectively lead to changes over time such that a short-term action creates long-term change (Lydon, Garcia, and Duany 2015).

Sense of place dimension

The place structure based on environmental psychology literature is described through three dimensions of identity, attachment, and dependence (Ujang and Dola 2007; Jorgensen and Stedman 2001).

The place identity dimension is defined as an individual's identity, the relation of ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, abilities, and the tendencies to behave, consciously or unconsciously, towards environmental conditions.

The place attachment dimension is described as affective and emotional bonds, knowledge and beliefs as well as behavior and actions by groups and individuals which serve as a reference to a place. This dimension explicitly involves people's emotional content.

The place dependence dimension is defined as the functional relationship to a place which is considered by users to have the ability to provide a situation that meets their needs and supports community behavior when compared to other places.

Semarang Chinatown in an urban context

The success of Semarang Chinatown in contributing to the city's economy is inseparable from the region's influence as part of a strategic economic area.

Historically, the complementary relationship between the Chinese community, the colonial government, and the indigenous people is reflected in the development of the urban spatial structure of Semarang City which has been in existence since the implementation of the *Wijkenstelsel* policy designed by the Dutch government to divide settlements according to ethnicity. Semarang has two main domains which include the economic and the political since the period. The economic domain has a double core including the spatial structure of the old Dutch city and Chinatown area connected by two primary transportation networks which are the

port canal and the railway station. The political domain also has a double core which includes the Dutch government and a traditional center with military infrastructure in the form of a fort (Widodo, Winarwan, and Hartanto 1989). The regulation expanded the Semarang Chinatown area to the north (Gang Lombok) in order to accommodate the urbanization of the Chinese community that was not allowed to live in rural areas.

Semarang, as a port city, became the heart of trade between inland farmers and foreign traders, especially in South China (Pratiwo 2010). The Pedamaran market in the North of Chinatown was observed to be the starting point of economic growth around the area and the Tiban market which spreads along the road was initiated by Chinese traders that bought inland produce to be sold. Over time, the indigenous traders from Kauman also traded in this market and this led to the spread of the markets to Beteng street, north of Pekojan street, Gang Baru, and Ambengan street. They are centered at intersections and occupy the space in front of the shops and this made the Chinatown area to be surrounded by trading activities.

The economic development of post-colonial Semarang Chinatown expanded rapidly after the abolition of *Wijkenstelsel*. The Chinese community started opening shops along Ambengan street (now MT. Haryono Street) and Bojong street (now Pemuda street) to expand the trading areas to the west and east of Chinatown.

The prospect of increasing market development in the region led the municipality to concentrate trading activities in a new market called Johar. The trading areas are, therefore, integrated into a regional trade center for Semarang and the surrounding cities as indicated in figure 1.

This rapid economic pressure causes environmental damage, congestion, and high crime rates. The city government has, therefore, been trying since 2015 to revive the socio-cultural values of the area to balance the impact. The first step to improve urban space quality eroded over time is the revitalization of the Kota Lama area, Semarang square, and the Johar Market area. The objective is to show the potential of Semarang Chinatown as a forum for the economic activities of the living community.

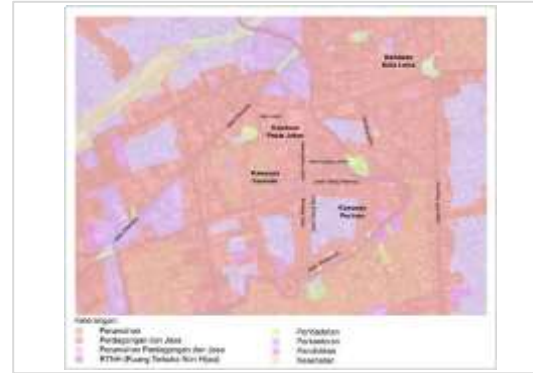


Figure 1. The development of land use around Chinatown is oriented to the trade function
Source: Retrieved from distaru.semarangkota.go.id (Dinas Penataan Ruang Kota Semarang 2020)

Method

The study was conducted using a qualitative-deductive method based on literature review and case study observations. The field data were collected using the community activities in the street space located in the Semarang Chinatown area. Moreover, the activity-place relationship was appropriately assessed with an empirical study of the sense of place dimension to shape the character of an outdoor living room in the street space which serves as the public open space in the Semarang Chinatown settlement area. This study selected three places as case studies based on their ability to attract visitors and these include the Gang Baru, Gang Warung, and Wotgandul streets as indicated in figure 2.



Figure 2. The location of street open spaces in the Semarang Chinatown area used as case studies
Source: Retrieved from Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team (Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team 2019)

Result and discussion

Street corridor as outdoor living room:

Economic movement of activity in street space

The street space in the Semarang Chinatown area is full of dominant economic-based activities due to the fact that trading is the livelihood of the early Chinese community (Handinoto 1999). The shophouse building is the predominant type of house which covers the residential space with the ground floor usually used for trading while the street space is the main circulation access. The activities overflowing from the shops and stalls as well as the street vendors lined up make the street space an outdoor living room. The interactions between the buildings are created by the street space which serves as the corridor or the living room for residents and visitors to meet through trading activities. The space actors claim, own, and privatize street space by conducting their daily activities spontaneously on the street which are considered public spaces (Madanipour 2010).

Figure 3 shows the trading activities on Gang Baru street. The area serves as a residential road circulation but is also used as a daily traditional market in Semarang's Chinatown which operates from 06.00-12.00 WIB. The merchandise is popular, especially the imported quality from China. Moreover, the buying and selling activities usually occur on the ground floor of shophouses, terraces, and the rows of street vendors that have privatized the street space. The source of attraction for the visitors is the driving force of dense pedestrian activity along the street as indicated by the customers passing around the traders in the middle of the street, the stalls on the side, and the shops along the street.



Figure 3. Traditional market economic activity in the Gang Baru street space

Figure 4 shows the economic activity in the Gang Warung street space which is from the morning-afternoon (08.00-16.00) with the focus on wholesale trading activities in shophouse buildings. Meanwhile, the space is used for night market on weekend evenings (18.00-23.00) through the concept of a street-food market. The buying and selling activities are indicated in the temporary tents set up in a row in front of the closed shops along the street space. Tables and chairs are placed in opposite rows for the visitors to eat their food. Semawis Night Market (Semarang Wisata) is, therefore, a tourist attraction site for city residents to spend time on culinary tourism activities.



Figure 4. Semawis night market economic activity in Gang Warung street

Source: (Waroeng Semawis Semarang 2019)

Figure 5 shows more informal economic activity on Wotgandul street. This is observed from the fact that Chinese restaurants and street vendors sell different culinary activities along this street from 16.00-23.00 after normal shop activities have been held from morning till noon (08.00-16.00). This is known as Cap Kaw King culinary and a simple restaurant is shown in the interior of the shophouse or on the street space. Moreover, sellers also cook and prepare their food in wheelbarrows placed on the roadside while tables and chairs are provided on the sidewalk shaded by tarpaulin tents. The visitors can buy food from any stall to be taken to another stall and this culinary activity provides more attraction on the informal economy than the previous two streets.



Figure 5. The culinary economic activity of Cap Kaw King in Wotgandul street

The variety of economic activities causing pedestrian movement in the three street spaces is summarized in [table 1](#). It is also important to note that the pictures showing the street space activity were taken at different location points of the Chinatown map in [figure 6](#).

Table 1. Various economic activities in the Semarang Chinatown area

Street space	Type of activity economy	Activity time	Information
Gang Baru street	Traditional market	06.00 – 12.00	Figure 3
Gang Warung street	Trade (shop) Semawis night market	08.00 – 16.00 18.00 – 23.00 (weekend)	Figure 4
Wotgandul street	Trade (shop) Cap Kaw King's informal restaurant	08.00 – 16.00 16.00 – 23.00	Figure 5



Figure 6. The shoot location point in the Semarang Chinatown area

The unavailability of planned parking space for the three street spaces makes it possible to reach the Semarang Chinatown residential area only on foot. The movement of pedestrians and the spilling of activities in the street space create quality and lively public open space. The temporary construction for different activities at a certain time makes the street space an urban tactical approach. This idea leads to the discussion on local resilience and also assists in the joint urgent exploration of the potential of the area according to urban development nuances. The approach predicts long-term transformation and the possibility of adapting to unascertainable changing conditions ([Lydon, Garcia, and Duany 2015](#)). Meanwhile, the attraction observed indicates the local resilience of the community in interpreting street space as a place.

Sense of place on the street space as a corridor

The economic activity which is the driving system for street space activities is used as the starting point in reviewing the sense of place dimensions in the Semarang Chinatown area.

The place identity dimension is physically shown through a marker element in the personal preference for the settlement based on Chinese architecture. This is evident in the orientation of the shophouse residences towards the street spaces. Moreover, the Chinese architecture is emphasized through the gable roof of the building

with a curved wuwungan called the Ngang Shan model (Kohl 1984; Han and Beisi 2015).

The place attachment dimension is proven by the potential of the Semarang Chinatown area to attract visitors. This is evident in the hustle and bustle associated with shopping activities filling the street space in the corridors of Gang Baru street as well as the culinary tourism activities causing pedestrian movement crowds in the Gang Warung and Wotgandul street spaces. The emotional bond between visitors and immigrants is reflected in these activities. Moreover, the term 'subscribe' is the right word to describe the attachment of the community repeatedly visiting and conducting activities in these spaces.

The place dependence dimension is described through the potential of the area as part of the embryonic economic center of Semarang City (Liem 1931; Purwanto 2005). The Chinese community has lived in the Chinatown area for a long time since 1740 (Pratiwo 2010) and this made the area to be included in the strategic economic spatial planning area of Semarang City (BAPPEDA Kota Semarang 2011). The dominance of shophouses in this area indicates the closeness of the residents to trading activities and this is a strong reason for the Semarang Chinatown community to depend on the street as an economic space to earn a living. It is important to reiterate that the shophouses are oriented towards street spaces (Choironi 2004; Rosiana 2002) with the ground floor open to the public while the activities from the shop overflow to the street space. Meanwhile, the merchandise is placed on the terraces and also takes up the street space which is a public open space.

The pandemic condition is currently a major problem in economic spaces as the center of the regional crowd. This is observed from the closure of the Semawis Night Market, restrictions on operating hours, and the implementation of health protocols in all places. However, the community's economic dependence on the Semarang Chinatown area has not disappeared. Most MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) are starting to open up virtual economic opportunities on social media while some shops and street vendors remain open with strict implementation of health protocols. This means the dependence is predominantly due to the place identity and attachment which have long served as an identifying dimension and emotional binding of the community to the city.

Conclusion

The three dimensions of sense of place were used to describe the character of the outdoor living room for corridors as public open spaces in the Semarang Chinatown area.

The first dimension, place identity, shows the physical presence of Chinese architecture with a distinctive roof and the function of a residential-shophouse which limits the street open space as the physical character identifier of the street corridor. Second, place attachment is shown through the emotional bond of visitors to the attractiveness of the area. The emotional character is formed through their 'subscription' concept which makes them happy to return these spaces. Third, place dependence is shown through the role of Chinatown as part of the city's strategic economic center. The closeness character between residential and commercial activities makes Chinatown and surrounding communities depend on open street space as the city's economic corridor.

The character of the Semarang Chinatown Street corridor formed based on the sense of place dimension creates a community-place interaction empowered by livability. The quality of livelihood (livable) is observed through the diversity of residential-trade activities spilling over into the street spaces, the meetings between actors in private-public activities, as well as the road-building activities in different timescales which have the ability to melt the street space atmosphere. The road corridor was found to be an outdoor living room that accommodates the interaction of visiting activities to the Semarang Chinatown area.

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Author(s) contribution

Yohanes Basuki Dwisusanto contribute to the research concepts preparation and literature reviews, data analysis, of article drafts preparation and validation.

Christin Purnamasari Nusaputra contributed to the research concepts preparation, methodologies, investigations, data analysis, visualization, articles drafting and revisions.