

# Mural art as a media on making urban kampung's public space

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**Abstract.** The lack of public space is one of the main problems in the big cities in Indonesia. Urban kampungas part of the city is also no exception. Rapid growth on population sparks uncontrollable physical development that erode open space inside urbankampung . Sometimes, what is left is just neglected space which don't 'live' and far from the definition of public space. Mural art has been existed since the beginning of human civilization. Now, it has evolved into one of the popular urban art. The previous research has proven that the process of urban art making through participatory approach could trigger community interaction in a space. Interaction itself is a main factor that may trigger the establishmentof a public space. With the same method, this research attempts to build mural in a neglected space inside urbankampung named Palsigunung. After all of the process done, the space still haven't changed from the previous condition,which is still a neglected space. Together with facilitator,kampung's residentsneedto be involved identifying the problem and also the solution to the lack of public space in their kampung. Particularly for urban kampungPalsigunung, the needed solution might not be mural.

**Keywords:** urban kampung, public space, participatory, mural art

## 1. Introduction

In 2011, a new history has been created in Indonesia where more than half of the people live in urban areas. The yearly growth of occupant in urban areas of Indonesia has been drastically decreased from its climax of 5.71% in 1982 to 2.59% in 2015. However, the number is still twice the national population growth of 1.2% in 2015 [1]. This rapid growth started in 1960 which is marked with the change of focus in national economy development that was initially based on agriculture and changed to industry [2]. It triggers major urbanization from regions to big cities in Indonesia. Later on, informal settlement arise taking both the newcomers and the city'snative inhabitants which could not be accommodated in the formal housing system at the time. Urbankampung is a generic word which can be used to represent the informal housing inside the city. To this day, the word kampung is not enough to be pictured with only physical description such as: high-density, informal, or low-cost housing, but it also describe the whole community who lives in it [2]. As community, kampung residents has a very close social relationship. "Neighbours are more valuable, special and important than relatives who live in other places", This traditional phrase is well known among Indonesians. It describes the concept of relationships among people in kampung [3].

Human beings are social creatures and the balance between the public and the private life appears to contribute to a healthy psychological and physical life. Public life as opposed to a private



life provides opportunities for engagement and social contact [4]. Currently, public space as space for public life has become a rare place in urban kampung. While the space of urban kampung have not changed, its population keeps increasing, thus the area for its public space is getting shrunk. What is left sometimes is just a narrow alley or just a 'left-over' space. This public space could decrease more, or even gone as a result of horizontal development of housing within kampung. When that happens, people will be forced to utilize other open space which previously neglected for their new public space. The problem is that the concept of public space can be interpreted differently by communities according to each culture [5]. To change public space is not an easy matter because the neglected space that is forced to be made as public space may be not relatable to the culture of the community itself.

Mural art is a painting which is done in a wall surface or ceiling. In the history of modern civilization in America, this kind of art form was once obstructed because the development of 'modern art'. The art in that era is not 'owned' by the public and doesn't have any social role. The art that was approved was exclusively owned by artist. This changed in 1960 when the exclusivity of art was turned to the public, marked by the booming of urban art such as statue, mural, or other art form in almost every big city in America [6]. Now the use of mural has been spreading in the world as a 'filler' for public space in which not only limited as esthetic element but also as media for spreading information, marketing, and political movement. Chicago, USA is an example of the city using mural to show their expression of political views; meanwhile, Penang, Malaysia government sets up regulation to protect their heritage area as canvasses for the city creativity. Along with the advance of technology, mural making can also be developed not only by using paint but also by using printed wallpaper. Today, the presence of mural could also have side-effect. In physical context, several studies have proven that placement of mural art in the wall will decrease vandalism such as graffiti attack [4][6] [7]. In non-physical context, its presence could be used as space revitalization tool – mural that is presented in a neglected space could re-activate the places and its community [4]. If the mural is created based on local issue or theme, it will be worked as communal self-expression that could shape the sense of pride and sense of ownership for the community in which its present [4]. Although several literatures have agreed on the positive effect of mural, the presence of mural could not be appeared instantly without any process.



**Figure 1** Dr. Siddha Webber and team create a political themed mural in Bronzeville, Chicago. Pictured by Max Herman



**Figure 2** Mural as tourist attraction at George Town, Penang, MY. Pictured by K.E. Ooi

A place like public space is not a space that could be shaped by one-sided intervention, the planning should involve active participation from the community or in other word, public space is not something that could be created from the 'outside' [8]. According to classical design process, community/user only worked as a passive study object. This process could not guarantee the implementation of successful public space, but active participation which previously mentioned is co-design approach, which is a collaborative planning process between user and planner by viewing both in the same level of mastery. For this reason, the user has to be involved from the beginning of

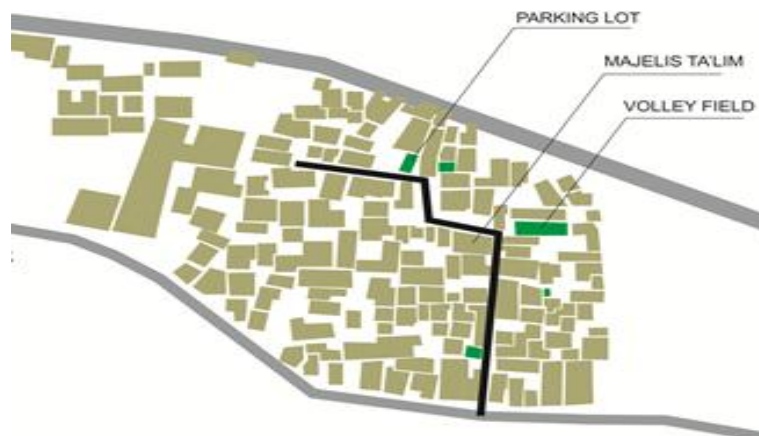
planning process [9]. Participatory approach through co-design process is almost fully guaranteed that the final product will be suitable with the values embraced by the user and also the history and time the product is used [10]. Mural as a final product is expected to fit the values comprised by community in which its present. However, several literatures mentioned that the emphasis of participatory practice is in the process. Collaboration experience in the practice encourages people who never interacted before to start communicating. After the practice, the interaction among community member is proven to be increased [4][10]. Therefore, mural construction through co-design participatory approach with community is expected to achieve two things; forming the sense of pride and sense of ownership of community to the mural and to enrich the interaction between people. This aspect is expected to be a catalyst of people interaction occurred the public space where the mural is present.

## **2. Research Methods**

The general purpose of this research is try to understand the effect of mural which created through participatory approach in a neglected space inside urbankampung. Literature mentioned that the inclusion of public art such as mural must involve community as much as possible. Thus, the ideal research method for this case is action research method. By using this method, the research process is functioning democratically by the involvement of participant (kampung's residents) in most of the stages. Action research is a research method in which the researcher describes, interprets and explains particular social situation at the same time by doing changes or intervention with the purpose of fixing [11]. The researcher in this study has a role of facilitator while the community is the participant. The knowledge of facilitator in this process is constrained as much as possible, resulting that the participant will do the most important role in the mural making. Facilitator is also a 'adviser' in the co-design process which only give knowledge of a good technical workmanship for mural making. Observation-evaluation practice in action research is not only held in the end of practice (post-mural built) but linear since the beginning (mural planning).

## **3. Research Context: Urban Palsigunung**

Palsigunung Kampung is one of the examples of an urban kampung, which is located at Depok City, in the province of West Java, Indonesia. This urban kampung has a population of 929 inhabitants with a percentage of 71% adult population (> 20 years) and 29% children-adolescent. Thekampung's location is very strategic, because it is located at the northern border of the city and adjacent to the East Jakarta municipality. This kampung is located between two main roads, which are Jalan Raya Bogor (Raya Bogor Street) on the eastern side and Jalan M. Jasin (M. Jasin Street) on the northern side. Both main roads are very crowded with vehicles and serve as a connection between cities or as one of the arterial roads of Depok City. On Jalan Raya Bogor, particularly on the area which intersects with the kampung, Traditional Tugu Market, supermarket or other economy facilities are located. Space for the public life of the kampung members has been through a dynamic process since 2007 until 2017. According to Mr. Budi, one of the kampung's public figure, formerly the kampung had a volleyball field, which they usually use. Because the field was surrounded by chairs and also had a small stall located nearby, it not only functions as a sport facility, but it became a place where kampung residents socialize in their everyday lifes. At certain moments, this field is often used as a place to celebrate certain occasions such as Indonesia's Independence Day event, Election Day, or even weddings. The users are all of the kampung members from elderly to children, and from men to women. These descriptions attest that the volley field is the only public space for the kampung at that time. Unfortunately in 2011, this public space was no longer usable because the legal owner decided to sell it to newcomer, which then build residential building upon it.



**Figure 3** Figure and ground plan of Kampung Palsigunung

Meanwhile for the education facility, in a radius less than 500 meters there are various kinds of school from various levels (kindergarten to high-school). Around this kampung there are also several health facilities such as TuguIbu Hospital and Puskesmas (Government's community clinic). Therefore, the information above proves that PalsigunungKampung, like other urban kampungs, is surrounded by various public facilities. However, a different condition occurs inside the kampung. In this kampung, there is only one road with 100 meters in length that can be passed by single four-wheel vehicles. Other than that, the kampung circulation is mostly dominated by 'narrow' alleys with a width of 1 to 2 meters, which can only be accessed by pedestrians or two-wheel vehicles. Based on the satellite imaging analysis, in a period of 2015-2016 there are at least 25 new residential buildings that built on the area that used to be open spaces. This condition surely affects the public life of the kampung itself.



**Figure 4** Cramped situation in 24 sqm public space in front of Mr.Budi and Mr.Agus house



**Figure 5** Parking space that temporarily converted into Independence Day celebrating area.

At this time, the public life for the kampung members is no longer concentrated in one area, but it is spread to several areas, where one of it is at the MajelisTa'lim Building. With a dominant user of adult and elderly, this building serves its formal function as a place for religious activities like reading Al-Quran and praying together. Despite its formal function, this building is also use for social activities between kampung members or as a meeting space for important discussion. At first, this building was being donated by one of the kampung's resident for the communitiy. Nevertheless, after the donors was deceased, one of his heirs sued his ownership status of the building to the court. Like the previous volleyball field, the existence of this building is in danger of being lost.



After 2011, kampung members celebrate big public events like the Independence Day celebration at an open space with a size of 150 sqm. This open space can be declared as the largest empty open space that the kampungs have at this time. When that day takes place, community can build a performing stage and arrange other competitions. However, this open space is still far from the definition of a kampung's public space, because the use of it by the community is still categorized as temporarily. Other than the celebration days, this open space only serves as a parking area for kampung members who doesn't have cars. In everyday life this space is filled with four-wheels vehicles, which leave no rooms for interaction between residents.

As for now, the active open space, which becomes the place for kampung communities to gather is a place that wasn't expected before. This open space is actually a joint terrace from two houses that is own by Mr. Budi and Mr. Agus. With an area of about 24 sqm (4 m x 6 m), this open space can be defined as the last public space that the kampung has because it is actively used by all community elements. Children use it in the mornings to the late afternoons as their play space, meanwhile from late afternoons to the evening this area is 'owned' by the adults. Adults that usually use this space are mostly men, using it as a place to relax. Besides relaxing and having conversations, common activities that these men do in this 'narrow' space is: watching soccer games on television, playing chess, and playing cards. Based on interviews with the kampung members, this space just became active in 2015 after some institutions from outside the kampung donated a non-permanent installation in this space. The installation that is made of wood material was initially meant to be use for a mini library. Instead, its existence became a catalisator for kampung's residents to start gathering and interacting with each other. The issue of this space is that the human capacity is very limited. During one of a visit by researchers, it is observed that this space can be filled by 20 human at once. The overall explanation about this kampung indicates that eventhough the public life of the kampung is still going along, the space for it has decreased from time to time. This urban kampung could be a stereotype condition that occurs to all urbankampung in Indonesia.

#### 4. Process and Result

##### 4.1. The Neglected Space of Kampung Palsigunung.

The chosen neglected space for the mural making, is located at an open space that can be accessed from an alley of 2 meters in width. Like all neglected space, this empty space with an area of 40 sqm is always far from human activities. Other than because it is the largest unused space in this village, this space was chosen because of its strategic location (almost at the center of the kampung). At first, this was a place for collecting unused construction materials, such as rock, sand, even concrete. The owner then supports to allocate his space as public facility rather than not be managed. Moreover, he initiated to clean the area and made the concrete cover for the flooring. The neglected space given became one of the resident participation to the community.



**Figure 6** The chosen neglected space before the drawing started. The left pictures the first condition, the right shows the condition after concrete covering.

##### 4.2. Socialization and Discussion

This phase invited all the community member to gather and discuss for the plan proposed. Located at the MajilisTa'lim building, around 50 villagers consisting of women and children came to join the

socialization and discussion phase. This phase is done to give awareness to the community about the aim of the activity, and also listening to their expectations about both the mural and the space.



**Figure 7** Situation inside Majelis Ta'lim building during socialization and discussion phase



**Figure 8** Children as participants drawing concept for mural during co-design phase

#### 4.3. Mural Co-design

At this phase, village members acting as participant will be accompanied by facilitators in designing the mural that will be created. Most participants are the children although the invitations were addressed to all kampung's residents. The facilitators triggered the children to draw anything related to the theme used, green kampung. Green kampung theme came from the dweller willing to make their kampung more livable and comfortable. The drawings made then was used as the mural design's basic idea.

#### 4.4. Implementation

Village members, represented by children and teenagers created the mural while accompanied by facilitators. Unfortunately, the adults which were expected to join the process didn't come along the implementation; whereas, their technical skills would support more. Besides drawing mural, used rubber tire were also re-furbished as chairs and placed at this space as a media for sitting and also playing for children. These additional elements are results of the discussion from the previous phase.

#### 4.5. Result

Based on the observation done by researchers, this open space is only used by children several days after the mural had been created. Afterwards, this space went back to being a neglected space.



**Figure 9.** Children working on rubber tire that will works as chair



**Figure 10.** Children and facilitator working on mural on the wall



**Figure 11.** Facilitators and children taking photo after mural completion



**Figure 12.** Situation in the neglected space after the mural has been constructed.

## 5. Discussion

The construction of mural and its participatory process have failed to be a catalyst for creating a public life in a neglected space inside the urban kampung. This failure is questioned for the researcher because the literatures and previous studies mentioned otherwise. However, it must be acknowledged that the practice process has several important notes to be discussed. The great purpose of this practice is to create a public space. The problem is 'public' in the word public space is incoherent, not a singular group but an entity that could be split to several groups based on the aspect of socio-economy, age, and gender. Each group will relate itself to the public space in different approach [12]. In participatory process which was held in Kampung Palsigunung, the group that followed the entire process is only the children. Other groups only present in the beginning process (socialization and discussion). This shows that the presence of 'public' in this process is still incomplete, therefore the public life in neglected place could not be created.

The general stages of participatory process held in the practice is divided to five major phases; socialization, discussion, co-design, implementation, and evaluation. When each phase is completed, the next phase will begin by ignoring the problems found in the previous phase. Sanders said that participatory is not simply a method or set of methodologies, it is a mindset and an attitude about people [13]. The major evaluation note taken from the first phase (socialization) shows that even though all of the community were invited, only the group of mothers who dominate the guests. A good participatory process is involving the proper analysis to solve a conflict, consensus building, and also decision making in the community. In other word, this practice focuses on the dynamic process that happens within, not on the result [14]. Hence the implementation of participatory practice in this was not supposed to be working linearly but circularly so the spreading of information and consensus could reach all of the elements inside the community.

Another issue in this research lies in the 'mural as solution' itself. Before the practice begins, mural has become a 'goal' that is wanted to be achieved. The researcher hoped that the 'process' for finishing the mural could be the catalyst of public life. This research placed the researcher or facilitator as the party who did the problem identification and making the solution to solve the problem, which is mural. The presence of participant or community was only involved after the first stage, which is the constructing mural with participatory approach. According to Masters, action research method with social-economy problems could only be solved by placing the power on the group, not to the individual either the facilitator/researcher or participant [11]. In other word, the identification of problem and solution should be decided together amongst the researcher and community, not only one-sided like what happened in this study. Therefore, the solution needed by the people of urban kampung Palsigunung for creating new public space might not be mural.

Moreover, there is a possibility that the mural is still seen as a way of vandalism. The residents in Kampung Palsigunung are familiar with the unwanted graffiti which easily found in some spots. Those graffiti express the identity of individual or group of people, and sometimes the drawings are



not showing the proper morals. Although the purpose of the mural is more to reactivate the neglected space, the residents still accept it in the opposite opinion. The participation which only comes from the segmented group -the children and teenagers- still cannot change the adult perspective about the mural.

## 6. Conclusion

Carmona said that there will never be a one-size-fits-all universal model of public space, and critiques and celebrations of public spaces alike will always require questioning and interpreting in the light of local circumstances [12]. The statement is relevant to this research because the process and final product that has been succeed in other place could not create any effect in Kampung Palsigunung. This conclusion is not suggested that the participatory approach of making mural will not able to develop public life in urbankampung. Nevertheless, urbankampung's community together with the facilitator, need to identify the problem and seek the solution themselves for the issue of their decreasing public space. With the heterogenous nature of communities around Jakarta and its surrounding areas, the possibility of both problem and solution can be different on each urban kampung.

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