Places Where the Elderly Meet Friends at Banyumanik Public Housing, Semarang, Indonesia

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Places Where the Elderly Meet Friends at Banyumanik Public Housing, Semarang, Indonesia

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There is a phenomenon of aging in place at Banyumanik Public Housing in Semarang-Indonesia. The aim of this study is to find places where the elderly can meet friends from other generations in their neighborhood when they do their activities. By using qualitative approach, the results of this study explain that the elderly do their activities in two character places that is a real place and abstract place. Those places have various meanings, such as share and entertain and those make the elderly feel happy and satisfied.

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Key words: Housing; aging in place; elderly's places; meaning

1. Introduction

The Indonesian National Development Agency has estimated that in 2025 more than fifth of Indonesia's population is elderly (Mustika, 2007). It makes Indonesia has a highest rate of elderly population compared to the other ASEAN countries. In that time, based on the Indonesian Statistic data, there will be 68 percent of urbanization. According to Hermana (http://www.depsos.go.id), in 2020, the trend of the elderly population in the urban area will be increased. There is important to be noted that most of the Indonesian people have an orientation to remain at home in their old age. (Darmojo, 1999, Abikusno, 2007, Wijayanti, 2010). So the aging in place has been occurred in Indonesia.

The problems discussed above have been affecting to the housing provision. The housing development has to accommodate the needs of the people who prefer to remain in their house until their late life. This study was conducted to get a result which is expected to give a benefit for housing

¹ Corresponding author. Tel.: +62-24-7470690; fax: +62-24-76480836. E-mail address: wijayanti_jaft@yahoo.co.id. development in urban areas to face the aging in place. By considering the housing needs for lower and middle income people, this study was focused on the Public Housing in Semarang city.

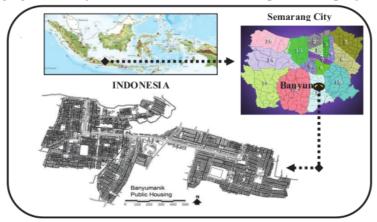


Fig. 1. The location of Banyumanik Public Housing. Source: Processed by the author

Banyumanik Public Housing is one of the pioneers of public housings in Indonesia built in 1979 in Semarang city. It is located in Banyumanik district which belongs to one of the main development areas in southern part of Semarang city. With its hilly feature and 96.5 ha of area width, Banyumanik Public Housing belongs to two sub district administration areas that is Padangsari sub district and Srondol Wetan sub district. It has been 33 years inhabited by the residents who are now most of them are the elderly. From the beginning it was intended to be built for the government official and the army who has not a house yet. There are 5,100 units of houses in Banyumanik Public Housing and consist of three types of floor area that is 21 m2, 33m2, and 36 m2. There are social and public facilities such as education facilities, religious facilities, open spaces, public halls, and economic facilities. These facilities are spread out in the neighborhood and some of them were built as the initiative of the inhabitant based on their need.

The elderly who live in Banyumanik Public Housing prefer to live in their house than living in nursing homes. In their aging in place, the elderly do activities in their social life. Based on the previous research, they have four organized activities, that is: social meeting activity, religious activity, sport activity, and health check activity (Wjayanti, et al, 2010). While they conduct these activities they can meet their friends from the same generation. But in other chances in their unorganized activities or in special events held by the community, they can meet friends from other generations in some places. These conditions show how active the elderly in their living and there are places needed by the elderly to support their social life. This study tries to explore the places where the elderly meet friends and find the meaning of those places from the the eldery's point of view.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Social interaction need of the Elderly

Aging in place is one's choice when stepping on his old age, and it is considered would give an effect to the seniors' health (Costa-Font, et al, 2009). The understanding of aging in place is growing older

without having to move (Senior Resource, 1983). In their neighborhood the elderly hope to be able to meet other people. With the increasing of age, the elderly face a decline of social aspects in which one of them is the limitations to make a communication with young people. Based on the concept of gerotranscendence the elderly tend to choose friends from the same age. (Hyse, 2009). But, WHO has been promoting a health life in people's aging process with its the active aging concept. It means that by this program the elderly is hoped to be active in social life inclusively with the healthier physical and psychological condition. The elderly should be able to do their activities in their home and their neighborhood independently including in the public space. In the case of a neighborhood, Sugiyama et.al (2007) said that it can support the health of the elderly in two ways, that is when it gives the elderly an opportunity to be active in it and if there are places where the elderly can meet people and enjoy the nature. According to Gale (2011) how older people feel about their neighborhood may be important for positive mental health in later life. A public space, Teo (1977) explained that it can be an important space for the elderly and its existence should be maintained. A public space is also expected to have a fresh air, an easy access and convenient for walking (Takano et al, 2002). To make the built environment is accessible for the elderly, there is universal design concept (Goldsmith, 2000). The applications of this concept include the concept of street for life (Burton E, 2006) and visit-ability (Smith, 2008). In principle, these approaches provide a safe and an easy access in a home and neighborhood scale. Hence the elderly can be more independent and be able to make a social contact with others and they do not trapped in their houses. These approach is important in terms of the attention to the elderly's' health in a holistic manner, especially for the frail elderly (Hyegyung et al, 2012).

2.2. Places

Berleant (2003) explains place is a setting of the events of human living. By understanding the sense of place conveyed by Tuan (2001), a space when it was known well by the elderly and used for specific purposes, then that space has become a place for the elderly and it has a meaning for them. Related to places for social need which have meanings for the elderly and there is an attachment or a sense of belonging to the places, then these places will be able to help the elderly to maintain their identity and well-being (Wiles et al, 2008). Sense of place is formed and supported by the physical character of the place itself. The physical identity and physical coherence built the sense of place (Berleant, 2003). Places with their physical identity means that geographically the places bordered by special features of the nature such as mountains, waters etc., or as a physical form the places become a centre like historical building, mosque, church, mountain. Meanwhile places with their physical coherence include districts with their architectural character, spaces with their definite border such as a house, urban square etc.

3. Methodology

This study was done in the Banyumanik Public Housing, Smarang city, Indonesia. The aim of this study is to find places where the elderly meet their friends from various generations, and to find the meaning of places from the elderly's point of view. Based on this aim this study uses qualitative approach which the refferences used as a background knowledge. Primary data of places where the elderly conducted activities and their opinion were collected through field survey and interviews. The interviews were done directly with the elderly as the respondents who were still conducting the activities in the places during the field survey. There were 15 respondents of the elderly involved in that interview. They were 60's till 80's years old. The data were analyzed qualitatively through exploring the places where the elderly have a chance to meet their friends from various generations and deciding the type of

those places by identifying their physical character. The interview was focused on the meaning of the places from the elderly's point of view.

4. Findings

Banyumanik Public Housing is one of the pioneers of large scale public housing in Indonesia. It was built in 1979. Most of the residents are now become elderly of 60 years old or more. They are retiree of the Army and the Government Officer, and now they are. In their 33 years living in their neighborhood they did their daily activities not only in their house but also in their neighborhood. Basically there are two types of activities conducted by the elderly, that is organized activities such as social meeting, health check activity, etc., and unorganized and special activities, such as chatting, shopping, healthy walking, celebrating the Independence Day, celebrating the Kartini's day, promotion of one product from one company etc. When they do the unorganized and special activities, they can meet friends not only from the same age but also from other generations. Typically the elderly meet friends in some places as follows:

4.1. Street

Banyumanik Public Housing was built to provide the middle-low income to have a house. The original house types could be properly lived by a family with a small family size. Only three till four persons can live in that house. To serve the inhabitant daily needs, the house has been enlarged and this effort caused the site became fully buillt. The orientation of house is to the front area. Since the house becomes larger and it does not have any open space, the street in front of the house becomes shared open space where the people can get the fresh air while they can meet their neighbors. The elderly as the subject of this study liked to use the street to make communication with other generations who live nearby. They chat each other while caring their grandchild. The people intentionally put a bench in front of the fence by the street side. As Mrs. Suparno (63 years old) said:

"Since my daughter moved to Jakarta and entrusted her daughter to me, I have a responsibility to care her daughter. My grandchildren likes to play anywhere out site the house. In the afternoon about 04.00 pm she plays with her friends on the street. So, while caring her I can meet neighbors then we talked and joked. This moment is the time to relax after being in the house all day"

The familiarity which is occure daily on the street is one of reinforcement of the kinship that have been built during the inhabitant live in their environment. As was said Ms. Sumiyati (63 years old):

"Yes.., we have a good relationship. We have been already living here 30 years. We often help each other, especially when we have an event or when there are among us who mourn..."

Alongside the street the elderly are also often seen chatting with friends or just greeting each other. The elderly have been purposely put benches which are placed at the curb in front of their house. While sitting at the benches and basking, they can chat and greet each other with their neighbors.





Fig. 2. (a) While the elderly are siting at the bench and chatting with friends they are caring their children; (b) The Elderly are chatting each other and basking in front of their houses. Source: Field survey (2011)

4.2. T- junction

At the t-junction the elderly often met each other. They like to be there because while talking they can look around and watching people passing by. They can greet friends old or younger who live in another alley. This is their opportunity to apprise their condition each other. At that place they can also care for their grandchildren. This event is often done by the elderly in the morning, especially on the holidays. Some of them accidentally made a bench at the t-junction. Sitting on the bench the seniors could do these activities and enjoy the breeze under the shade of the trees surround the bench. As stated by Mrs. Sukirman (80 years old):

"Almost every day I sit here. This place is convenient. I could feel the breeze. I was able to get together with friends. Here I can chat with friends, participate to care my great-grandchildren and see the atmosphere around. I've done this a long time. I think people who are around my house ... all people here is a family.... we've lived together for almost 30 years. I'm happy here."

That place is a place to unwind after the elderly finished their household tasks, such as expressed by Mrs. Sukur (72 years old):

"This place is convenient and ...after cooking, washing and cleaning the house, I like to sit here. Here I can meet friends and we can talk and ask about families..."





Fig. 3. (a) The Elderly are meeting friends while caring grandchildren T-junction. The permanent bench under the trees is used to sit while feeling the breeze; (b) The Elderly are chatting each other at a t-junction while looking around and watching people passing by in the main street. Source: Field survey (2011)

4.3. Greengrocer

Every morning in the Banyumanik Public Housing there are some places used for greengrocers. Many ladies come to those places to shop. Among them are the elderly. While shopping they talk each other. They do this routinely. This activity is an opportunity for the elderly to give news or information about family life to their friends. Greengrocers strategically choose places that allow the people to pass by, for example on the corner of the t- junction, on the corner of the mosque, in an open space located in the middle of the housing.

Mrs. Suparmi (68 years old) expressed about the shopping activity at a greengrocer which occupies the corner of a mosque near her house every morning:

"There is a traditional market near my house, but sometimes I shop at the greengrocer at the corner of that mosque. I often meet neighbors there and we exchange greetings each other."





Fig. 4. (a) The Elderly are shopping at a greengrocer in one place; (b) The Elderly are meeting friends when they are shopping at a geengrocer at the corner of a t-junction. Source: Field survey 2011

Mobile greengrocers are also places for the elderly to meet friends. The elderly and friends can get together for a moment where the mobile greengrocers stopped. The stopping places of the mobile greengrocers are not fixed. Sometimes the stopping places are in front of houses where the elderly live and sometimes in the middle of the open spaces. Usually these events occur in the morning. Mr. Agus (65 years old) said:

"My wife often shops at the mobile greengrocer. In that place she can meet friends and chat each other. That is one communication with neighbors that my wife can do"





Fig. 5. (c) The Elderly are shopping at the mobile greengrocer and they can meet friends; (d) The Elderly are surrounding the mobile greengrocer in the open space in front of their house. Source: Field survey (2011)

4.4. Traditional Market

About one year ago at Banyumanik Public Housing, the elderly had the opportunity to follow the health check program in a health institution located in one store near one traditional market located in the centre of Banyumanik Public Housing. The elderly flocked to that place every morning. They were willing to queue from 5 am to get a chance to follow the existing programs. But the program was only temporary, and now the program has stopped due to move to another location. Although there is no health program, the elderly still meet each other every day in the morning. They choose a place in front of the street to the traditional market for their meeting place. They make an appointment to meet there after the elderly doing a morning walk starting from their homes within the 100-500 m from the traditional markets. They gather there at 6-7 am. They sit lined up along a barrier road and looking at the atmosphere of the market activities both merchants and buyers who are busy passing. They enjoy the crowd around the market. From this place the elderly can look at all directions. Fresh atmosphere in the morning and the warm sun make the elderly feel comfortable to sit there for about an hour. While enjoying the atmosphere they actually want to maintain their existing brotherhood over the years. They already feel like a family. They come to know each other and share news and information they have. As Mr. Sukoyo (86 year old) explained:

"I come here every morning after my morning walk started from my house. My house is approximately 200 m from here. I'm glad to meet friends. We are here to share information about anything, especially relating to health. We exchange information about what medicines or foods that can make us healthier. We also talked about our families. If there is anyone is sick among us, then we can know and plan to visit our friends together."

The meeting has a great meaning to their lives and in principle it is intended to find a brother, such as those conveyed by Mrs. Endah:

"Besides we can enjoy the atmosphere surrounding the market, we want to find relatives here. We all here are like brothers and sisters because we have been together since about a year ago. I'd love to have more brothers."

The elderly one by one leave the meeting place after the scorching sun. They go home and retur in the next day to the same place.





(a) (b)

Fig. 6. (a) The Elderly are sitting at a road border near a traditional market while looking at the atmosphere of the traditional market's activities; (b) The Elderly are chatting and sharing each other at a road border near a traditional market traditional market. Source: Field survey (2011)

4.5 Multipurpose Building

Indonesian People have a tradition of celebrating national day as well as the Indonesian independence-day on August 17 and the birthday of Kartini who is the hero of women's emancipation. In those days the people organize a celebration with various events, like sports and competitions. At Banyumanik Public Housing, the residents also manage such kind of events and the elderly also participate in those events. On that occasion the elderly can join other young people. They can interact each other. The interaction has been started from the beginning until the end of the events. They help each other to succeed the events. The elderly have a responsibility to give advices and set examples to the younger generations to work together and care each other in their community life.

The activities are held in public buildings built as the result of mutual work of the residents and also supported by those who sympathize. It is as conveyed by Mr. Mulyono (65 years old):

"We work together to manage events in the national day anniversary. We want to give an example to the young generation that humans must care for one another. To make a social interaction with all generations, we have built multipurpose building that can be used for all activities of the residents"





Fig. 7. (a) The Elderly and other generations are celebreting the Indonesian Independence Day in front of the multipurpose building; (b) The Elderly and friends are celebrating the Kartini's birth day by doing ladies program in multipurpose building. Source: Field survey (2011)

4.6. Guardhouse

Guardhouse used as a guard post. In a social life, in Indonesia there is a residential neighborhood security system supported by the community itself. It means that who in charge of guarding of the neighborhood is the community itself. This activity is done by taking turns every night. Usually in every neighborhood there is one guardhouse located at the end of the alley or on the t-junction, in order to get an easier monitoring. Informally, the guardhouse can be used for chatting and joking. The persons who like to come there are men, including the elderly. Usually they do it in the morning, in the afternoon, on holidays or weekends at the evening. At that time the elderly often asked by the younger to give suggestions of any problems they faced.

The guardhouse is usually built by the community, but there is a guardhouse which was served by one elderly who had a desire to give a shade to passersby in front of his house when the rain comes. The guardhouse is also used for a gathering place of seniors and younger generations. This was explained by Mr. Sutrisno (78 years old):

"I have faith in my life, I should be able to give a help to anyone who needs it. I realize it by building a guardhouse in front of my house. I think, the guardhouse can be used by people who want to take shelter when it rains. And it is proved when it rains some pitchman shelter in my guardhouse. Guardhouse is also useful to gather. My neighbor and I often talk at the guardhouse at week and. Neighbors who live in front of my house who much younger than I often asked me to gather in that place. They asked me to give advices about life. It was my pleasure to share with them yes , that's the principle of my life"





Fig. 8. (a) The Elderly chatting with friends in a guardhouse in the afternoon; (b) A guardhouse built by the elderly for giving a shelter to other persons who passed by and for gathering with friends. Source: Field survey 2011

4.7. Open space

In every neighborhood there is an open space. This open space has been built since the Banyumanik Public Housing was built. The function of the Open space is to accommodate the social activities of the residents. A wide range of activities can be done there, such as sport, contests when celebrating the national days. Open space is occasionally used for the promotion of certain products. On that occasion all the inhabitants of Banyumanik Public Housing come together including the elderly. The elderly participate in these activities. They want to enjoy each series of the events. As Mr. Sukijo (61 years old) said:

"In the environment we live, all the inhabitants of both old and young people active in social activities. This happens because we have a motto that togetherness is wonderful. Activities we do together include a healthy walk, sport and dance. We perform these activities either in open spaces or at the meeting hall. Sometimes from several firms doing promotions with festival held in open spaces and all the people living in our neighborhood are involved in the event."





Fig. 9. (a) The Elderly are doing sport with fiends in an open space; (b) The Elderly are involved in one festival arranged by a vehicle company. Source: Field survey 2011

5. Discussion & Analysis

The elderly in Banyumanik Public Housing has been living for more than three decades in their environment. In daily life they do not just stay at home. Although the neighborhood has not been touched by the accessibility concept explained by Goldsmith (2000), Burton E (2006) and Smith (2008), the elderly also engage in activities that give them a chance to meet friends with the same age or younger generation. Some of them use the street to meet neighbors. In that time they can also share and discuss matters relating to their life and society in general, even they just joking. To look for a more relaxed atmosphere and can socialize with people outside his house, the elderly go to t-junction. Among them purposely create a permanent bench in that place so they can sit back and enjoy the views around them. In those places they get benefit other than fresh air, a more freely views as well as social communication with others.

The elderly regularly can also get the opportunity to meet neighbors and communicate each other through the presence of the greengrocers who get around in a residential neighborhood in the morning. Some greengrocers place themselves at strategic places on the corner of t-junctions and in the open spaces. The greengrocers attract them to shop. The elderly do not just shop, but they also have time to greet one another and ask for their news respectively. To meet friends who had been regarded as brother, in the morning when the air is still fresh, the elderly are looking for a strategic place near the traditional market. In that place seniors can also see the crowd around that market.

Open space and multipurpose building in the residential area are also the meeting places for the elderly and other generations. These places are in the center of the environment that allows residents including seniors can participate in several events organized by the residents. Small building which is no less important to be a meeting place for the elderly and friends from different generations is a guardhouse built by the community as well as by person who wants to share the love to others.

Based on the discussions above the places can be grouped into two types that is a real place an abstract place.

Real Place:

Real Place ia a place which has clear physical boundaries or places that is planned and constructed to meet certain activities of residents, and it can be classified as places with their physical coherence, that is multipurpose buildings, an open spaces, and guard posts.

Abstract Place:

Abstract place is a place which has no obvious characters physically either in relation to the physical identity nor physical coherence. In one case it is more likely to be abstract because the atmosphere of the crowd of that place becomes the center of attention and the elderly like to be stopped there. Places that are included in this category is the place near the traditional market, the t-junction, the street side. But though it looks abstract but still there is something tangible which becomes a complement of the place that is the barrier road that used to sit, the permanent bench at that the t-junction, the bench on the street side in front of the house of the elderly. Another cases are the greengrocers which can be included in the abstract place because some of them are mobile and occupy the street corners impermanent.

Based on the understanding of those types can be described that the sense of places not only formed by the physical setting that looks real as Berleant (2003) described in his theory, but is also shaped by things that are more abstract that are related to the crowd of activities in one place.

Places where the elderly have the opportunity to meet friends in Banyumanik Public Housing not just give the opportunity to the elderly to enjoy the nature of the neighborhood so that they might be healthier physically such Gale (2011), **Hyegyung** et al (2012) and Takano et al (2002) explained, but

those places also give meanings to them. Meeting with other people from different generations in some places served as impetus for the elderly to live more meaningful, varied and healthier. The elderly can share experiences and information both to his fellow elderly and the younger generation. Some of them also consider that what they do is a form of obedience and the love to God. By the meetings they also have a chance to get entertainments such as enjoying a joke as well as other entertaining atmosphere. More importantly, the elderly have interpreted those places as the places where they can get brothers who can be persons that always near and cares. By getting friends outside their homes, it seems that the elderly become happy in their aging in place, and they can **maintain their identity and well-being as** Wiles *et al* (2008) described. By this description, as Tuan (2001) stated, the elderly in Banyumanik Public Housing actually had shaped those places by using them for some specific purposes of their life, hence those places have meanings.

Thus the meanings conveyed by the elderly related to the places in which they can meet friends are:

- For sharing, which can be expressed in terms of sharing information on health / medicine, providing advice and examples to the younger generation.
- For the purpose of worship, likes providing a shelter for others, giving advice and examples of good life to young people.
- For getting entertainment, that can see when the elderly are chatting, joking and caring the grandchildren.
- For getting healthy life, likes getting the fresh air and doing exercise.
- For establishing and maintaining social relationship and brotherhood. This is the common sense that
 was found when the elderly meet friends.

6. Conclusions & Recommendations

The overall study results show that there is an active life of the elderly in Banyumanik Public Housing, Semarang, Indonesia. The length of stay and residential atmosphere seems to encourage the elderly visiting two types of places in the neighborhood that is the real places and the abstract places to get the opportunity to meet friends and give meanings to them. Based on this condition it is expected that the elderly have a healthy condition holistically. The results of these studies could be ideas in dealing with the housing provision which concern with the phenomenon of aging in place. To make a wider range of those ideas there are still needed similar studies in some public housings which have spesific characters so it will be got stronger results about places and those needed by the elderly which have meanings.

Considering that accessible neighborhood have a contribution to the active elderly to have good social contacts, then the further studies should also be related to the accessibility of the places in the neighborhood as well as the degree to which these places affect the elderly's life satisfaction in relating with aging in place.

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