Buk: An inornate folksy construction in creating cultural space

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Abstract. Indonesian society has its unique tradition reflected on how architectural elements are formed according to their own culture. One interesting phenomenon found in Malang sukho Hamlet, Malang Regency, Indonesia is a construction of a low wall called Buk. The Buk is a simple construction shaped as a barrier on the sides of the bridge in front of the house that sized to the proportion of human sitting and is usually joined with the house's fence. This construction eventually used as a place for various activities, such as sitting, chatting with neighbours, or gathering. Almost all houses in this hamlet own the buk. This paper tries to describe this phenomenon descriptively to get a more comprehensive understanding through the point of view of place attachment. This study provides another perspective in considering an inornate construction around society which built folksy by the locals. The result of this study shows that the Buk interpreted as a place and has an emotional significance to the culture and its people. The Buk has produced the social interaction and harmony between neighbours and be perceived into a cultural space by the community because of the activities therein and interactions formed between each other.

Keywords: Cultural space, genius loci, inornate construction

1. Introduction
Initially, this study was based on empirical observations of the behavior of Malang sukho villagers in Malang regency, Indonesia especially in Jalan Melati. The government state that 90 % of the Malang sukho villagers are Javanese, 6 % are Madurese, and the rest are other tribes. In accordance with Javanese culture that embraces the oral culture, the interaction between citizens or neighbors is still very thick. This interaction tightly has interwoven in the neighborhood since most of the womenfolk at there usually doing chitchat in the front of their house.

They built such inornate constructions to accommodate their habit. The elements they build are a low wall called the Buk. The shape of Buk itself is like a roadside barrier (ID: kanstin) that corresponds to the proportion of human sitting and usually merges with the fence of the house. Historically, Buk itself was adopted from a simple construction of bamboo called the Gek that inherited from Sunan Draja, one of the Islam spreader (sunan) in the land of Java.

Now, Buk has various functions according to the community activities such as sitting, chatting with neighbors while watching their children playing. The uniqueness of this phenomenon is that people who have Buk really accommodate and let other people or neighbors use it freely even though it is a part of their house. Almost every house in the hamlet has a Buk.

The place attachment is a psychological bond between individuals and a specific place which gets embedded with meaning. The meaning presents as a form of relationship between somebody and the
background. People's interaction with places endorses place attachment. The impression of place or sense of place will be obtained from the arrangement of physical settings (forms) and activities that occur and generated meanings therein [1]. Thus, based on the phenomenon of *buk* in Jalan Melati of Malangsuco hamlet, this research aims to identify more about the locality that affects the formation of the *buk* in the society which ultimately forms a cultural space. Moreover, this study aims to describe the relationship between the inornate elements of the local neighborhood with the behavior of the locals associated with place attachments.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Buk as a part of society

According to field observation and interviews with the locals of Malangsuco, *buk* has a certain meaning that cannot be separated from their social life. According to them, it usually used for *Jagongan* (Javanese language, especially in the area of Malang, which means chatting while sitting relaxed). A long time ago before *buk*’s construction was made from cement and bricks, their ancestors knew a construction called *Gek*. The *Gek* is a simple bench made by bamboo and usually formed with backrest. In the past, the locals usually put a *Kendi* (teapot from clay and filled with drinking water) on the *Gek*. Societies believe that is as the evidence of teachings from Sunan Drajad, member of *Wali songo* who lived between the 15th to 16th centuries as one of the Islam spreaders in East Java. At that time, Java was experiencing political and economic instability. The conditions make Sunan Drajad declares *catur piwulang* (four advice) as teachings to care for others (Nashihin in [2]).

Placement of the *Gek* construction is almost similar to the *buk*, specifically in front of the house. The difference is the *buk* usually located upright in the front of the house (figure 1a), while the *gek* is made parallel with the direction of the house behind (figure 1b).

The expansion of Indische architecture makes cement, sand, and stone became the basic materials for construction. Since it made from those materials, during the Dutch colonial period, the *buk* was used to restrict the house or road from a ditch or stream (figure 2) that shaped like an elevated concrete barrier (*kanstin*).
2.2. **Genius loci of space and its attachment to a place**

Space, as defined by Tuan in Hashemnezhad [5], is an abstract term for a complex set of ideas. In giving the meaning to space, people usually based on the posture and structure of the human body and the relations between human beings. Thus, they organize space in order to cater to their biological needs and social relations. While space is an obvious and abstract area, the place is not regarded as a subjective and abstract concept [6], it rather as an area or a part of space which obtains its specific character through the determinants inside it and has a meaning and interpretation. The place is the basis of direct reciprocity with the world and the human life scene and it means beyond the situation and origin. Therefore, it is full of meaning, physically existed, contains human experiences and is considered as “the center of sensible value” [6]. It could be concluded that space is an abstract framework of place.

Moreover, place identity is defined as individuals’ thoughts of their identification with the physical environment. This part is generally formed through models of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, perceptions, meanings, purposes, and behavioral tendencies associated with the background or environment [7].

Meanwhile, Pangarsa [8] philosophically said that the temporality is very influential in establishing the concept of space particularly in the Nusantara. The Javanese likens this to the saying “urip kuwi mung mampir ngombe” (the life is just a stopover to drink). The consequence of this space conception is the settlements in Nusantara create a special form of space in the center, which is usually called halaman (courtyard).

Mostly, the pattern of settlement of the Nusantara houses formed in a lined pattern extending to a circle. This linear pattern extends face to face and separated by a courtyard, providing an opportunity for the courtyard in the middle to become a shared space [8]. The character of the courtyard itself then formed as an organic unit of the house and unites each component at there. Thus, it can be assumed this courtyard as part of the house. In this place, all forms of genius loci are formed as manifestations of the community’s activities at there in interpreting the space in which they carry out their daily routine.

Schulz in Casakin and Bernardo [9] explains there are at least three important and interrelated concepts of space, namely; character, identity and genius loci. The meaning of the genius loci itself is a concept contained behind the physical and cultural aspects that can be known through a deep understanding of the factors that shape it. Genius loci are the life of a place (spirit of the place) where life makes a place that can ‘live’. Genius loci can provide a certain atmosphere somewhere so as to elicit special characteristics. A ‘place’ is a ‘space’ that has a distinctive character and is the overall result of the existence of things having shapes, structures, and colors. According to Shields [10], the cultural context of images and myths adds a socially constructed level of meaning to the genius loci, the classics’ ‘unique sense of place’, said to derive from the forms of the physical environment in a given site.
Space is something that deviates significantly from culture to culture. Depending on where people live, the amount of space or distance that is proper in social conditions can be very various. Since the idea that culture not only takes place but makes space, the limits of place are deemed contingent, their seeming solidity, authenticity or permanence a (temporary) achievement of cultural orders of signification that are open to various interpretations and expressions [11]. When the concept of genius loci embedded into space, then it can be approved as a cultural space [12].

Place attachment is conceived of as an affective/cognitive chain between people and their environment [5]. Furthermore, Altman and Low in Hashemnezhad [5] imply that ‘places’ focus on the environment in which people attach emotionally and culturally. Moreover, places, in general, refer to a space that has been given meaning within a personal, group, or cultural process. Cross in Hashemnezhad [5] defined the sense of place as a sequence of relationship with place and social activities. In his research, Carmona [1] draws a relationship between activity, physical setting, and meanings in creating a sense of place (see figure 3).

**Figure 3.** Diagram of sense of place proposed by Punter and Montgomery [1].

In creating their *buk*, the locals of Malangsuko assumed that this construction has a bond to their environment and become a tradition as an obligation within constructing their house. For that when it is understood as a place and has an emotional meaning with the culture and its people, then the *buk* becomes a place that has a strong attachment value with the Malangsuko Villagers as well as creates their cultural space.

### 3. Methodology

The focus of research is located along Jalan Melati in Malangsuko hamlet, Tumpang District, Malang Regency, Indonesia. At there, almost throughout the house has an ornate construction in front of their house, called *buk*. This research runs qualitatively by describing the phenomenon of *buk* at there. According to Creswell [13], in qualitative research, there are some approaches to conduct this kind of study, such as narrative and grounded research. This study has used those methods. Primary data obtained through field observation and interview. Interview session to the locals has been deployed as the basis in developing this issue by digging information as their experiences in using the *buk*. Then, all gained data would be articulated to the appropriate works of literature. Theories were used to concretizing the concept of space and place attachment on the *buk* by describing villagers’ genius loci.

### 4. Results and discussion

The *buk* which still used by the villagers of Malangsuko has based on a tradition where entire houses at there have culturally characterized. From the interviews, locals said that the new construction was brought by the Dutch government in the colonialism era and combined with the culture of a society.
that had existed before. At that time, the locals built the Gek in front of their house as the communal space. Usually, it was constructed by bamboo due to the limitation of materials provided. The locals put a kendi (clay teapot) on their Gek as the tradition which inherited by Sunan Drajad to provide water for thirsty people who passed. Since colonialism takes power, they try to implement new material in the constructions, such as cement and adobe. With the new materials, the buk has various functions. But commonly it used for the barrier of the gutter. Sometimes, it built in front of the house joining with facades (figure 4).

Along Jalan Melati in Malangsuko, commonly, the buk was built as the barrier of the house’s passage on the gutter or drainage channels as seen in Jalan Melati, Malangsuko (figure 5). Due to the limited availability of land, the community builds the buk by placing it attached to the house’s facade. Because of the limited inner space and yard in their house, daily activities also use the outdoors as a place of activity, even the alley ahead. Children are not afraid to play on the alley as they feel safe. The strength of the sense of togetherness in the hamlet made the alley in front of their house like a playground. It could be assumed that the hamlet’s alley is a unifier component in the neighbourhood. Pangarsa [8] stated that the alley as a way to pass is different from the alley as an ‘our’ open space. Even though blood relatives no longer inhabit the house in the hamlet, the ties of ‘our’ were related and aired the residents. Therefore, it is not surprising if the alley becomes a playground, a place for chatting, and holding ceremonies or rituals. Thus, the sense of place aroused responding those kinds of interaction.

The sense of place is a personal perspicacity of people about their environment and their conscious awareness about places. It is about the psychological and physical concept. In here, the buk occurs as the physical parameter likewise throughout the alley. Thus, the bond between people and place is reciprocal. Peoples take various interests from the places and then conduct some consequence to it, both positive or negative. The positive effects include intense interaction, all become relatives, create ‘our’ space as well as ethical value by local norms. Despite sometime, the locals could seize those space as the road may be closed during their activity or ceremony.
Figure 5. *Buk* was built above gutter and drainage channels in Jalan Melati, Malangsuko [Author, 2017].

The genius loci formed in Malangsuko hamlet, related to the element of *buk* could be identified as the result of social interaction. The interaction gives its own meaning to the *buk* so inseparably creates its own atmosphere which eventually forms an identity and at once characterized the neighborhood. It is triggered by the viscous culture intertwined among others and harmoniously manifested to their lives. Thus, between the neighbors, there is still a thick interaction since it bonded by their congenial environment (figure 6). People who experienced more place attachment toward their neighbourhoods interacted more with other residents and watched over their communities more often [7].

This phenomenon unsurprisingly transpires since this site characterized by a simple way of life, togetherness, and an inherited copious communal interface. This setting is usually still evident in the Kampong area since as a culturally housing environment, the people have the authority to determine their lives according to their locality [14]. This neighbourhood has become a space that has been interpreted by an activity that forms a preferential characteristic in it. Therein, the *buk* is not only perceived by physical senses but also embodies emotional connection to the place. Shamai in Hashemnezhad [5] classified this phenomenon as an attachment to a place where the *buk* becomes an inornate unique identity that has significant roles in bonding the neighbourhood. Moreover, this connection then becomes such a Genius Loci for the locals who live in this hamlet.

Figure 6. Social interaction in the *buk* [Author, 2017].
Furthermore, the meaning of the place as explained by Tuan in Hashemnejad [5] acknowledged that space is formed through one’s experience and emotions. Space does not necessarily have a certain limit of absolute and visible. In Malangsuco’s *buk*, it can be attributed to this phenomenon where physically this construction, which sized no more than 2 m × 0.5 m, has created a place as an interaction space even more than its size.

![Figure 7. The parameters created around the buk](Author, 2017).

Meanwhile, place attachment can also refer to the richness of meaning that comes with familiarity [5]. Familiarity occurs as the results of the daily routine in the neighbourhood. If there are some people who sit in the *buk* then it will create a space where interaction would be intense happen. As the results of locals’ chatting, the *buk* will creates a space and characterized culturally differs from the whole area itself. It is also evident in this phenomenon that the cultural space is formed by society because of the activities and interactions that they build among themselves.

Places have an effective role in bonding cultural, social and personal ties in urban neighbourhoods. Since Nusantara society spends more activities outside their home [15], they need a place where they can gather to interact. For them, the climate is a blessing which is truly grateful. Indeed there are challenges posed by the climate, that is the blazing sun and heavy rain. Therefore, the leaves become the shade and it has seen in this neighborhood. This interaction is not only the main function of a place. There are extra benefits such as making it easier for them to care for their children while playing. This role is flexible in accordance with ongoing activities. When morning to noon it becomes a deserted place due to local’s routine, but it would be crowded in the afternoons by locals interaction when their children play with each other. Even more, crowded in the evening when a local’s event is held.

![Figure 8. The buk according to the sense of place triangle](Author, 2017).
The view of space is connected with culture and time. Mostly it classified as here-there, inside-outside, sacred-profane, public-private, or any movement in space, travel across space [14]. Nevertheless, in the view of Javanese society, this setting is unobvious, as found in this case study due to the meaning of such private-public space, sacred-profane is usually amalgamated in the same place depends on the time and the situation. Eventually, physical boundaries arguably blurred. This ambiguity has solely occurred since the functions are flexibly created from the existed space.

Someday, space can turn into a sacred place, for example when the alley serves religious activity. A private place to a certain extent becomes public anyway. Spaces outside the houses typically do not have a rigid physical boundary as an indication of public properties. Open spaces are then become as a shared space, which is not possessed by anyone [14].

Moreover, the *buk* itself could be defined as neighbourhood space too. Ferguson and Ferguson [16] said that neighbourhood spaces that are formally shared among the household, owned by a group and accessible for everyone could be defined as a great social space. They are placed for casual interaction and developed for maintaining social linkages. However, the more space that develops into public space, the more user involved therein and at once, invites others with incidental or economy purpose. In the case study, as a result of the hilarity in front of the house, this place at once invited the peddlers to trade in the neighbourhood (see figure 9).

![Figure 9](image.png)

**Figure 9.** The expansion of space formed from the *Buk* along Jalan Melati of Malangsguko (a) *Buk* formed a neighborhood space (b) *Buk* as public space which everyone can access [Author, 2017].

![Figure 10](image.png)

**Figure 10.** *Buk* in forming cultural space [Author, 2017].
The *buk* as a place of public could be defined based on the terms of place on the simple terminology as ‘a place for all’ or ‘a free place’ where there’s no rules applied but custom and norms. It is considered as a space which citizens of a polity has access and enjoys free right of use [17]. As Tuan in Hashemnezhad [5] believed, the concept of place is signified only with existence of human. A place without the people is just only a geographical spot. He defined the place in two common standing: first, are customary symbols and second is people’s experience. The first definition is assumed by spatial formations and the second is affected by people daily activities [5]. Here is an illustration of the cultural space that created by the *buk* and its user (figure 10). From the analysis, empirically, the characteristics of space formed in the Malanguku hamlet occurs due to a relationship between culture, habits, and their way of experience of space. This design is a pattern of cultural adaptation to the built environment in accordance with the needs of society.

5. Conclusion
The *buk* interpreted as a physical place that has emotional meaning to the culture and its people, especially in Malanguku hamlet. It has rooted from genius loci of a rural community which has thick social interaction and harmony between neighbors. The *buk* evolved from an inominate construction into a social place. Since formed culturally, this space extends according to the range of interactions between humans in the *buk*'s proximity. Some factors influencing this phenomenon include cultural factors, religion, and the habits of the local community. Ahead, this kind of element should get more attention, especially as a local unifier in a neighborhood. Its locality value may enhance the locals to enriching their quality of life as well as a form to maintain their empathiness among others. Moreover, reflecting the emotional aspects of the sense of place and organizational commitment in neighborhood research may help planners urge residents to positively communicate, engage, and act upon society initiatives.

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