Urban Appropriation: Creativity in Marginalization
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Abstract
This paper aims to investigate the subtle dialog, or possibly interaction, between the duality of the “formal” and the “informal” in high-density environment. Marginalized people are continuously reinventing their understanding of space and territory in the public domain. Resiliency and creativity emerged to commodify every possible inch of available space. The result is appropriation of urban space. Although the basis of such appropriation is economy (and survival), the action is capable of generating new economic activities in the city. Such condition developed intricate types of spatial intelligence, “marginal space intelligence” that characterized by negotiation, flexibility & adaptability, collaboration, and collectivity. Such arguments will be illustrated by various case studies from Jakarta and Hong Kong as examples of high-density environment. In high-density Asian context, the existence of both the formal and the informal is necessary to sustain the city at large.

1. Introduction
The formation of a city is a necessity for proximity to economy and social relation. As a city becomes denser with people and activities, space becomes a precious commodity. Thus, a city consciously commodifies and regulates the spaces. In time, proximity attracts growth of population, economic activities, and diverse functions. Such conditions stimulate a city to build higher, thicker and more diverse while, not oppressing its inhabitants (see, e.g., Uytenhaak 2008).

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Commodification of space pushes a development of land to be dense, complete, compact and large in scale. The self-sufficient developments create segregations within the city. Thus, slowly, a city becomes an agglomeration of isolated centralities. The segregations are worsen by the inequality of opportunities between different social classes, namely, the elitist (i.e. people who have access and power), the middle class (i.e. people who have access but no power), and the marginalized (i.e. people who don’t have both access and power).

Elitists considered a city as numbers, allocation of land-use and profit return. Although, they are in a small number, yet, they control the production of space. And, even though, the production of space relies on both public and private sector, yet, the private here refers specific groups, such as developers and speculators.

On the other hands, the middle class is identified as the largest consumers of space. They consume any available spatial products produced by the elitist. The shopping malls, the gated communities, and the mixed use developments. In addition, the extensive spatial consumption leads to an individualization and segregation, which isolate and marginalize the people without power and access to the city. Given the limitation, the marginalized people become resilient. They use any potential and capital available to reinvent and reproduce a space.

This paper aims to identify the potentials in the marginalized population to reproduce a space by re-appropriating or re-configuring the existing spaces. The paper also will investigate the subtle dialog and interactions between the duality of the “formal” and the “informal” in the context of high-density environment. The paper will question whether the act of appropriating can be identified as a form of creative usage of space or it is merely a survival act. It will be narrated by empirical studies of urban appropriation in high-density context of Hong Kong and Jakarta.

2. Theoretical Discussion

Proximity and propinquity are the bases of human spatial patterns (Soja, 2010). However, the spatial pattern is never innocent and neutral (Tunas, 2013). It is a social production that involves discrimination, injustice and cultural and political superiority of a race, gender or nationality towards others. In fact, marginalization results from a process of social and spatial injustice. Segregation of different social classes creates fragments and enclaves within a city. One enclave may able to gain easily the benefits of the city; others have to struggle (Soja, 2010).

In the absence of opportunities, the marginalized people rely on their social capital to sustain economically. Social capital refers to the resources that are accessible through social contacts, social networks, reciprocity, norms, and trust (Field, 2003, Putnam, 2000, Bourdieu, 1986, Coleman, 1988, Kleinhans et al., 2007), which is obtained by being a member of certain social network (Tunas, 2008, p. 37). In addition, social ties, frequent interaction, and long-term relationship are more likely producing a more intense social capital. It fosters strong social cohesion, sense of togetherness, social responsibility and control (Tunas, 2008, p. 46). Through strong social capital, the community tends to be more resilient and able to utilize the available resources. In fact, social capital is one of the best assets of the marginalized community, which has a significant role in a decision-making process (Tunas, 2010).

As social capital arises, informal space becomes an important resource (Tunas, 2008). Informal space is a result of communication and negotiation process between actors and other members of a community. As such, the nature of its production is entangled to the production of the informal economic activities and the social relations that arise from it. Thus, as informal spaces linked to the process of production, it is also the place for social struggle. And thus, informal spaces are also a manifestation of common goals to survive (p. 36). These are somewhat agreeable; however, the next question is to move forward to the process of production of space itself.

Lefebvre (1974) argues that the production of space is linked to three-part dialectic of perceived, conceived and lived. A conceived space (representations of space) focuses on the ideals space that is employed by the “elitist” (for example, scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers). However, the other two, perceived and lived or spatial practice and representational spaces, are more related to the everydayness of the people. The former represents a space as an act of production and reproduction of a society within particular location; the latter refers to a mental construction on how actually the space directly lived through its complex associated images and symbols (p. 39). Thus, a space is more than just a manifestation of an economic or survival acts.

In fact, a space is a representation of the intelligence of its inhabitants in their everydayness, which can be argues using the Spatial Intelligence theory of van Schaik (2008). He proposed that architecture (and its spatial implication) is a product of human spatial intelligence, i.e. a product of mental space. Van Schaik suggested that an individual...
constructs his/her spatial history from memories of his/her spatial experiences, and thus, spatial history constructs an individual mental space. Although, mapping individual mental space is a difficult task, yet, the traces are evident in the space that he/she produced. In addition, the position of human and space are equal, i.e. human produce spaces and the spaces reproduce human, and continues. Thus, accumulation and juxtaposition of layers of spaces and mental spaces are continuously reshaping and refining the space itself. And in time, this continuous dialog and refinement of trial and error will slowly crystallize into specific knowledge.

In addition, van Schaik (2008, p.59) argued that cities are the traces of tangible manifestation of mental space of the citizens. Buildings are superimposed in layers by a generation after a generation. Even then, cities are far more complex than just a representation of a mental space. However, on a scale of a neighborhood (for example, a size of a kampung) the manifestation of a shared mental space can be more apparent. In fact, we can observe that a city is a dialog and negotiation between formal and informal system.

In European perspective, ownership space is often understood by the distinction of “public” and “private”. Weintraub (1997) tried to capture different possibility of the public and the private polar in four types of distinction, namely government and non-government; citizen and the state; personal and sociable realm; or family and larger economic or political order. Even though, such formalistic dichotomy failed to capture the “informality”, however, such dichotomy is a useful categorization to start a discussion. Saskia Sassen describes that informality as “something built outside the regulatory framework of a state”, however, as Cecil Balmond mentioned, its establishment moving towards an emergence of an order, but it grows faster than the formal structure can accommodate (Brillembourg et al., 2005).

Perhaps, in order to identify informality, we have to define formality first. Laguerre (1994, p.11) argues that informality is a social construction, just like formality. Formal system has a clear structure and boundaries that can clearly identify and neglect certain behavior that doesn’t fit them, on the other hand, informal system can only respond to the formal system, either by accepting or resisting it. Although the concept of informality is quite diverse, Fitzpatrick (1988, p. 180) describes it as enclaves within the formal system that are used as an apparatus to expand its power. On the other hand, the government officials, social service providers, and economists often describe informality as parasitic systems as they do not contribute to the taxes that run the formal economy (Laguerre, 1994). However, more positive concepts theorized by Graeme Shankland (cited in Henry, 1983, p.3) mentioning informality as glue that unites different parts of a formal system.

Laguerre (1994, p. 7), on the other hand, defined informality as a structure of action. Therefore, it needs four components, namely, “a place (home, street, business) where the action is carried out; actors, whose action can be either formal or informal; a formal system that informalizes the informal system; and an implicit or explicit intentionality that has a specific goal.” In addition, informality requires a space; it doesn’t occur in a vacuum. It often appears in formal places that have been “informalized” or appropriated (Laguerre, 1994). Due to the failure of the formal system to fulfill the spatial needs of marginalized individuals or communities, they feel a necessity and right to appropriate formal spaces. Even then, the appropriation is very different from a possession by collective acts; it is merely an act to informalize public and private spaces to accommodate informal exchanges or social transactions, or simply for daily activities (Laguerre, 1994).

Both social capital and spatial intelligence are a useful tool to excavate the traces of shared mental space in the informal city. By acknowledging the limits that isolate the informal city from its surrounding, one might be able to identify the potentials and the form of a dialog between the informal and the formal city. The four components of informality (i.e. a place, actors, formal system and common goals) will help to unfold this dialog on the one of main resources of informality: space and mental space.

3. Case studies: a dialog of the formal and the informal

This section tries to define the “marginal space intelligence” that arises from the juxtaposition of the formal and the informal. The juxtaposition often happens abruptly in some cases, while grows systematically overtime in others. The juxtaposition can be identified with certain keywords, namely, “negotiation”, “flexibility & adaptability” and “collectivity”. These keywords will be, implicitly or explicitly, unfolded by using the four components of informality (i.e. place, actors, a formal system and common goals).
Qualitative observations were conducted within the marginalized population in two high-density environments, namely, Hong Kong and Jakarta. The observations focused on the phenomenon of the spatial production that involves juxtaposition of the formal and the informal. This will be identified by three main aspects: existing formal spatial conditions, architectural/spatial elements used to produce new conditions of space and various informal activities or usage of space within a particular timeframe as results. Often, the surrounding context becomes the point of departures for a particular phenomenon. The analysis of these case studies are also accompanied by the review on secondary sources and in-depth interview with different actors.

3.1. Hong Kong’s Case Studies

For the purpose of this paper, the observations focus on the phenomenon of two marginalized groups in Hong Kong, namely, Filipino domestic workers on IFC pedestrian bridge and Indonesian domestic workers in Victoria Park. Both observations focus on the appropriation of two different formal public spaces, namely, a connector bridge and a park.

The marginalized people are forced to reinvent their understanding of space and territory in a public domain. Resiliency and creativity emerged to commodify every possible inch of available space, which results in appropriations of urban public spaces. In the appropriation process, spatial intelligence emerges.

In an ethnographic research, Moira Zoitl (2008) found that the domestic workers are living in precarious conditions in Hong Kong. They have very limited private space within the employers’ house. With a temporary contract, these domestic workers developed minimal association and participation in the daily life of the locals (French, 1986). Being marginalized, these people opt to strengthen their relation within own ethnic group that share similar values and aspirations.

3.1.1. IFC Pedestrian Bridge

Sunday is the official holiday for around 300,000 plus domestic workers in Hong Kong. During that day, Filipinos and Indonesian domestic workers gather and express themselves in a public place. In the past, such activities were neglected by the public due to an inconvenience. However, these “invasion” are slowly accepted after the government ensures the safety and hygiene of the public areas affected by these activities (Singh, 2013). The adjustment of the policy accommodates the needs of domestic workers without sacrificing the convenience of other stakeholders of the public space.

Early Sunday morning in pedestrian bridges that connects Hong Kong Central MTR Station, IFC Mall and HSBC building’s Exchange Square, hundreds of Filipino domestic workers crowd the heart of Hong Kong. The space is strategically located within the vicinity of the MTR station and in proximity to services such as the remittance agencies, post office and markets.

In the 6-meter-wide pedestrian bridge, “rooms” sized around 3.44 m x 1.54 m defined by 2 carton box modules (each module is approximately 172 cm x 77cm) populated both sides of the bridge, which left the rest 3 meters for walkways (see fig. 1). Within the module of carton box, various activities are produced: chit-chatting, lunch gathering, Bible reading and discussion, dance practice, karaoke, small economic transactions (for example, manicure and pedicure or massage) and many other creative expressions.

Negotiation and a spatial adaptability are the key aspects that strongly appear, in this case. The space can contain various social and economic activities of the domestic workers that require privacy, while still serves its purpose as public circulation space that connects different parts of the city.
3.1.2. Victoria Park

Victoria Park is known as the largest park in Hong Kong with an area of 17 hectares. It is equipped with different programs and facilities, such as outdoor swimming pool, sports facilities, children playground and even a mini zoo.

Sunday in Victoria Park feels like an open air theater. It is difficult to distinguish between performers and spectators. Such conditions are vividly captured in a movie titled “Minggu Pagi di Victoria Park” (Sunday Morning in Victoria Park, 2010). The story of the movies portrays the difficulty of Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong that struggle in the daily life, some even deal with physical and sexual abuse or have limited privacy or caught in debt with loan shark. Even then, the movie also captures Victoria Park as the other place in which everybody expresses their uniqueness, especially in fashion and various productive activities. For example, a group of women with hijabs practicing tambourine and singing *qasidah* or reciting Qur’an, other groups are practicing make-up skills, photography or traditional dance, such as *Jaipong* dance or performance like *Kuda Lumping*.

The domestic workers are in a precariousness condition in both the lack of privacy in their private space and the instability of their job. In one of the interviews, a domestic worker admits uncertain issues regarding their future life after the work contract is expired, and she has to return to her home country. Such uncertainties force the domestic workers to utilize the public space not only as the place for social activities but also a productive space. In this case, the productive activities to upgrade their skills are the means to prepare for the worst in the future.

Both cases also show how individuals rely on collectivism in order to survive. The domestic workers developed a common understanding to resist their marginalized conditions, either the alienation by the city or the lack of privacy in their employers’ house, and work collectively to achieve a common goal.

Due to limited availability of spaces in Hong Kong, these workers learn to produce temporary informal spaces on top of formal spaces that are adaptable and changeable in an instant. A movement space or recreational space is turned into a productive space. Such condition blurs the inside and outside. And paradoxically, as they consume formal spaces, they also produce informal spaces. Time and event are the only things that separate it. The resiliency of the domestic workers can turn the condition of lacking resources into abundance of resources. The space itself is not embedded by any specific symbolical value. However, the struggle of these workers brings specific common values to the space.
3.2. Jakarta’s Case Studies

The observations of Jakarta’s cases focuses on two distinct Kampong, namely Bukit Duri and Kampung Pulo. The reason is practical, namely, there is already a Non-Government Organization, i.e. Ciliwung Merdeka (CM) established in the kampongs. CM focuses on providing capacity building to the residents and initiating various self-organized activities. Both observations focused on a street as the locus of production, exchange, and collaboration.

Bukit Duri and Kampung Pulo are the typical dense old kampongs of Jakarta. Its location, along the Ciliwung River, makes them vulnerable. They often claimed as parasites that harm the city. In fact, for the past 20 years, Jakarta stigmatizes and marginalizes them from many opportunities. However, both Kampongs are resiliently able to survive. In fact, a strong sense of community in Bukit Duri and Kampong Pulo becomes a powerful social capital that keeps them survive.

Both Bukit Duri and Kampung Pulo are isolated by clear boundaries. On the North-west is bordered by a huge area for National Train (PJKA) cargo storage, while on the south is confined by Ciliwung River, and in the North-east is bounded by the main road of Jalan Jatinegara Barat. Both are the old kampongs of Jakarta while the former existed since post-independence; the latter existed from the colonial era. The time allows them to develop a strong economic and social capital.

3.2.1. Bukit Duri

Bukit Duri is a residential quarters of the National Railway (PJKA) staff since 1960s. The plot sizes are varied. Approximately 75 to 150 square meters plots are situated along the major spine street. Most of the inhabitants are retirement staff of the National Train, tailors, carpenters, local entrepreneurs, merchants, and home industry owners. Bukit Duri is relatively accessible. It has 3-5 meters wide road that is shared with pedestrian and vehicle access, loading and unloading bay of the home industry and parking space for motorcycle and Bajaj (tricycle motorbike). Each side of the road is unique in function and usage. On one side, inhabitants construct a shelter as an extended service area of their domestic space to wash and dry clothes, to cook and prepare food or store furniture, carts or goods. The other side is mostly utilized as a seating area and parking space.

The road is filled with complex programs and activities. For example, a chicken slaughterhouse expands its service area onto the road. Its wastes are temporarily stored on the road before transported to a market or a landfill. Just diagonally across, other residents construct a temporary structure made of wood, corrugated metal sheet, and fiberglass. It functions a household grocery store that sells brooms, mops, dusters and other equipment.

Limited availability of space encourages the inhabitants to distribute their domestic spaces onto the street and unutilized area. It is both the potential and danger. On one side of the coin, this condition makes kampong looks chaotic and unappealing. On the other sides of the coin, it positively activates the street; makes it lively and animated and even productive. In addition, the extended living and working spaces in the public space constructs a space of appearance, where people are aware of each other activities. The appearance of the activities creates a greater possibility for cooperation. For example, we can imagine the waste produced from one domain, such as,
feathers from chicken slaughterhouse, may be resources for other domains, such as, local craftsmen to make duster or shuttlecock to be sold in the household grocery shop.

The economic mechanism of the kampong takes place in a very peculiar spatial setting (that is limited, informal, mixed use, etc.). The spatial setting of the kampongs forces people to stay in a negotiation state in order to sustain the economic cycle.

![Fig. 3. Bukit Duri Productive Streets (a) situation 1; (b) situation 2.](image)

### 3.2.2. Kampung Pulo

Kampung Pulo existed since the VOC (Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie) settled in Batavia in the 18th century. In fact, Kampung Pulo still retains some heritage from the colonial days, such as its urban structure of the main spine of the kampong and the law of *verponding* (right to a land in a form of tax payment) as its legal documents of land ownership. Kampung Pulo’s street is narrower than the one in Bukit Duri. Its main spine that connects the main road to Ciliwung River is barely 2.5 meters wide. Half meter drainage on both sides is narrowing the street clear width to 1.5m. However, interestingly, approximately 100 meter portion of the street is functioned as a street market (figure 4). It sells daily needs, meat, fruits, household goods and readymade food and opens daily from morning to noon while some shop opens at late night.

The lively street market starts early in the morning. Some merchants place a table on top of the ledge of the drainage to display their goods. Some use their private spaces to display the goods and greet the customers that pass by their house. Others use their verandas floor to hawk. Some portion of the drainage is slab over to allow food sellers to park their carts. Steps of stairs leads to a shop are used as a sitting area to socialize while shopping. Smaller alleys often use as a temporary storage place or a preparation area. The street is bustling with activities.

Programs are mixed and blended well with the built environment. A mausoleum of late religious leader is conveniently placed next to open air slaughter house. A serene veranda neighbors with a coconut grating kiosk. A bustle and busy street activities are just in front of private domestic space. Boundaries are dissolving. There are no clear boundary between living and working, production and consumption (and distribution), economic and religious space. Activities are superimposed in a single space; seemingly simple yet has rich and complex qualities.
4. Findings and discussion

To summarize few key findings of spatial intelligence:

- **Negotiation.** Every individual has the right to express their needs without violating other individual rights. Decision made by consensus and will constantly be evaluated. Boundaries are dissolving. There are no clear boundaries between living and working, production and consumption (and distribution). Threshold is something that always debatable and transformed.

- **Spatial Adaptability** is the ability to space to adapt and change its function. There are no strict rules to use a space. A 6-meter wide circulation space is a space for production, knowledge exchange and living room for gathering. It is multi-functional room; an event space. A space that constantly changes its character.

- **Collaboration.** Street and circulation space is central of informal activity. It hosts production, exchange, and collaboration. Limited availability of space encourages the marginalized populations to distribute their domestic spaces to a street. Streets become a space of appearance by what the living and working exposed. People are aware of each other activities that give a greater possibility of cooperation.

- **Collectivity.** Individuals form a multitude, and multitudes form a society. The “public” is assembled by agglomeration of the “private”. Strong social capital allows the inhabitants to contribute their “private” space for the existence of ‘public’. It also allows the public space to be appropriated as ‘private’ space. In addition, collectivity goes beyond the representation of space. Collective manifest into a community, who shared historical, social and cultural background, to strive for a common goal.

Going back to the discussion on social capital, it is clear that such appropriation of formal spaces to informal spaces requires a strong degree of social cohesion. Both cases show that, being marginalized by the formal city, people are forced to utilize available resources, both physical space, and mental space. However, in such process there are constant negotiation between the formal system and the informal activities. Although, in the cases of Hong Kong, the contribution of the formal system are more apparent than in the Jakarta cases, i.e. allowing the informal to happen by advocating unspoken policy to ensure the safety and hygiene for the convenience of other users of public space. Meanwhile, in the Jakarta cases shows the strength of the negotiation between privately owned spaces and public spaces.

Marginal space intelligence narrates how space can be collectively produced, embedded with meaning, as well as, motivates its inhabitants to move forward with certain goals. Spaces are a place for social struggle as well as celebration of the collective goals. The lack of resources is overcome by the formation of collective goals, dialog and negotiation, and the complex multi-layer of space. The absence of resources becomes the main resources.

These four aspects: negotiation, spatial adaptability, collaboration, and collectivity contribute to the construction of mental space and the spatial history of informal space. These aspects, consciously or unconsciously, have become part of the daily life of marginalized population. It has been practiced and perfected in time into some knowledge. This knowledge traceable within the space they produced. The production of space in kampong eventually is also characterized by the intricate process of mental spacing and the construction of spatial history, rather than only through the logic of economic production.
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