Try and Find it - Understanding Public Space and Civil Society in Bali

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Abstract. An ethnographic study using qualitative research methodology underwrites the following study. Within the current urban planning practice, the concept of public space exists in contradiction to private ownership. Within the global capitalist system, land is commodified like any other good and is subject to ownership via the market mechanism. The endgame is for all land to have this status. In this context, there is business. This paper, however, offers to renge on this perspective. It tries to understand public space within a system where use-value is the dominant concept. Taking Bali as its laboratory, this paper examines a hypothetical typology of public space that brings use values to the fore and denies the primacy of land as solely a profit-seeking medium for land rent, surplus value extraction from labor and profit on built form. While no doubt these processes will still take place, they must be assessed in the context of environmental ethics and fundamental human needs. In conclusion, this paper seeks a benevolent and humane planning practice that places people before profits. It implements this idea by saying that the creation of spaces whose use values can be accessed by all members of society must become the central planning strategy.

Keywords: communal infrastructure; public space, planning practices, land values, public/rights over land

1. Introduction

The ensuing overview of public and private realms lays a conceptual framework for ensuing discussions focussed on the built environment. The remaining three sections respectively discuss communal space and civil society in Bali; adopted forms of communal space; and necessary connections to a sustainable living environment for Bali.

In a globalized capitalist world, privatization is recognized as an essential part of development. It involves a conflictual process whereby public rights to space are converted to private interest and ownership. It frequently happens to various elements of a public realm. This process invariably focuses on the conversion of public space and assets, to private control, and not the reverse- for example littoral zones including beaches, forests, sacred sites, culturally important landscapes and settings, and natural features. This has a palpable effect, particularly on the public space of a city and human settlement, such as streets, open spaces, plazas, green open spaces, and public facilities. This privatization of the public realm is often facilitated and accelerated by the closing public functions, redesigning existing public space and the construction of business-focussed commodity architecture that is privately operated and where digital monitoring becomes the norm [1, 2, 3].
The use of the word ‘public’ in either ‘public realm’ or ‘public space’ has a correlation with certain historical phases and social conditions. It is also associated with the word ‘common’ as in ‘the commons’ a right to space established as common grazing land in the Magna Carta [4]. Throughout the Middle Ages, the term ‘public’ and ‘private’ and of the public sphere were understood as res publica (public matters). This understanding is embedded in the definition of Roman Law. We call something ‘public’ when it is open to all and contains an element of both public recognition [5], as well as shared interests. It also embraces the need to live together or live under the same rights [6].

Under the umbrella of the built environment, the term public also embraces spaces contained within settlements that exist for sole use of the public and are often protected in law [7]. They represent places for all sorts of social interactions in streets, playgrounds, parks, and areas designated for conservation that are, in theory at least, out of reach of private sector avarice [8]. These are spaces that can be accessed by everyone without restriction regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, physical handicap, or other characteristics. Problematically, state governments are usually forced to charge entry fees to offset maintenance costs and are frequently exported to the private sector to manage.

These are the places where people come together for social and/or economic purposes [2, 7, 9]. In general, public and private spaces are distinguished by attributes pertaining to the level of access, control and behavior sanctions associated with their use [10]. Some territorial forms may be considered publically accessible with certain terms and conditions. In this regard, Altman views that “the public does not necessarily relate to ownership, but rather to use. Some privately owned places and spaces are accessible to the public and some publicly owned areas are not” [7, p.1]. If this was not the case, capitalism would grind to a halt since the entire commercial sector would exist out of bounds for the general population. Capital is forced by its own logic to encourage interfaces with the general population so commodity circulation can take place.

In our attempt to comprehend public space in a deeper manner, one has to understand the matrix of power that mediates its existence within the built environment. The key element is the state and it is important to recognize why the state arose in the first place. As one might expect, there is a variety of interpretation [11]. For the sake of argument we adopt a capital logic position that proposes that the state arose to serve the interests of capital. In the process of capital accumulation, social reproduction and its development were viewed as an unnecessary diversion and a debt, thus reducing profits, by giving money to the poor. Capitalists focussed on creating more capital through trading commodities. As capitalism became more advanced, social reproduction had to be organized as a healthy, educated workforce was necessary to guaranteed production and advancing technology. Capital brought the state into existence to administer the overall process, one that focuses not on profit, but the social consumption of resources that were funded through taxation of those who were being reproduced. Jonas Brodin (2007) distinguishes the terminology of public space into two references. The first is symbolic (referring to an abstract mental construct) and the second is literal (referring to a collection of physical objects) [9]. Both necessarily combine in designating specific states of being. So the symbolic attributes of a public space rely literally on the specific forms that are adopted and the social meanings they incorporate. This does not necessarily work in reverse since no symbolic meaning might be present in the built form.

In the symbolic conception of public space, we find the expression of power in various forms, usually manifested in monumental architecture which emphasizes the social hierarchy in the form of gods, emperors and kings, heroes, the power of the state and the manifestation of conflict such as war. Public space then manifests itself as the limits to capital, which capital will obviously want to resist. It is also clear that most monumental architecture is located in public spaces, a clear reminder of the power differential between the people, organized religion, the state, and private capital. In many ways this can be considered an oppressive context since the public does not even dictate who their real heroes are.

Public space, therefore, relates to our concept of civil society that in principle requires the existence of public awareness of shared values and equality, rooted in democratic politics. Hegel [12] maintained that it is only through the state that civil society can prevail, in contradiction to Adam Smith [13] who considered that the innate rationality of civil society would lead to the general good. Civil society can also be seen as a necessary transitional stage between feudalism and capitalism.
Hence the state cannot be seen merely as a form of government since it also incorporates elements of
civil society in its functioning. This is a totally different concept of social relations that operate on a
principle of domination [6]. Arguably the concept of a civil society arose in the 18th Century which
differentiated society from the state and operated on the basis of a self-organizing social life.

There are five visions of civil society, which are: 1) social-ability; 2) market-based which is shifted
from a confined economy into a digitally-driven market supported by a sophisticated computerized
information system; 3) collective choice, organized in groups and associations; 4) concerted public
actions; and 5) focuses on communal cultures [14]. From this point of view, public space seems to be a
representation of civil society on the one hand, and representation of a state on the other, although as
we have argued above, a more sophisticated analysis would envision a degree of overlap between
them [8].

Nowadays the existence of public space is not merely about people's rights. The discussion is,
however, more about various interests competing to use the very public space. Many facts have
demonstrated that many public spaces which are supposedly open for public needs, have their uses
confined by private sectors who hold rights over spaces adjacent to these public territories. Shopping
centers, malls, access between buildings, sports facilities, etc which are open to the public during the
day are invariably shut off at night. Hong Kong Central is a perfect example of how an entire city
center can be partially closed at night and even weekends since the private sector controls pedestrian
access between most buildings.

Apart from such expropriation, practice, the encroachment of business and economic interests into
the public realm are also of an alarming and challenging concern in this context. State and local
governments now hire out a diversity of public spaces for rent to raise revenues by catering to private
sector interests. In line with Altman's views, the public does not have to own a right to use a public
space but they are born with such a right since they are members of a community and part of civil
society. Paradoxically and in contrast with this idea, there is no constitution in any developed society
that guarantees any individual 'rights' to space whatever. This is a utopian ideal that is denied in
reality. The only functional right is that of ownership as the basic tenet of the capitalist system.

Contextualized by the preceding considerations, this paper aims at emphasizing the use-values of a
public space that conveys certain meanings and attributes that are of functional and symbolic value.
The spaces do not belong to the public unless we also consider that the public and the state are in a
coalition against capital. Otherwise it functions for both parties, increasingly in the private interest, so
a more sophisticated view of the state apparatus is required.

2. Method

The following text is based on an ethnographic study. Data collection was carried out by a series of
interviews and the examination of relevant human settlements in Bali and their associated public
spaces. It attempts to investigate the existence of public space as a communal event where use-
values dominate. The above overview of public and private realms lays a conceptual framework for
ensuing discussions focussed on the built environment. The remaining four sections respectively
discuss built form and the Public interest, adopted forms of communal space in Bali, concept, and
forms of communal space in Bali; and communal space and sustained living environment.

3. Built Form and the Public Interest

In discussing the public versus the private realms and how the two alter each other, Michael Brill
suggests using the term ‘intrusion’ in order to bring a more neutral sense regarding the possibility of
each (private or public) bringing benefits to one another [15]. In the context of human settlement, the
intrusion of the public into the private realm occurs when this settlement is seen as a public entity in
which every private place (home/dwelling) owner is required to follow a series of building traditions,
codes, and practice; not interrupt public consensus in regard to built forms. On the other hand,
discussion over the intrusion of the private into the public realm can be demonstrated by a place that is
owned, created and managed privately but used by members of the public.

This often occurs in many counties and is encouraged and facilitated by the government’s policy
and done with a certain mechanism. Tax incentive and corporate social responsibility (CSR) is
most common one implemented in the context of urban planning practices in Indonesia. In contradiction to this circumstance, the intrusion of the private interest into public space leads to what has been stated as the privatization of public space. Popular among common practices are the exclusion of public access to certain spaces; the private claims and uses of public spaces for private needs; and privatized development of trendy gated communities [3, 7, 16]. In order to contextualise these ideas, three case studies as examples of privatization of public space are given below.

Firstly, limited access of public space - in a city park for example - occurs when an organization has acquired a permit to take over the use of the park for business purposes, either temporarily or on a permanent basis. Such a practice is legal under government consent. On different occasions, limited public access is also due to badly designed public space. A park often lack facilities and features that are suitable and fulfill the need of the public as users. This is inline with the concept of ‘public’ that bears the idea of equality. Public parks are a pivotal element in determining the livability level of a city. This is dependent on its location, accessibility, vegetation, facilities, maintenance and other features [17].

Lapangan Puputan Badung Gusti Ngurah Agung is an example of a central and successful public park in Denpasar. In terms of access, this park is open to the public. The park is also well equipped with all sorts of facilities dedicated to sports activities, games, kids, art performances and other temporal uses. Figures 1 – 5 demonstrate the current situation of this park as an example of a well used and people-friendly public space.

The central part of the park (Figure 1) is well used for a variety of dynamic activities. It has no physical boundary that segregates one part of the park to another. The most common activities organized in this park namely: soccer, cycling, kiting, meditating, picnic and even parenting. A kid corner (Figure 2) exists on its peripheral, precisely on the northwest corner. It is a space dedicated especially for children to have fun. It is literally a children’s playground, equipped with an assorted of popular playing equipment. Here, parents can observe and control their beloved ones from a close distance while socializing with each other in a clustered park bench. On the other side, the northeast corner is known as a chess corner since the main attraction is the provision of giant chess grounds (Figure 3). Apart from being used for chess exercises - which is dominantly by senior citizens-, the area is often used for chess competitions (Figure 4). Others part of the park is dedicated to teenagers, oftento hold art-related activities (Figure 4).
Secondly, privatization is commonly experienced by public spaces located in areas with high economic value, such as city main streets or coastal areas with potential tourist development. Paved pedestrian on main streets is often treated as a private area (see Figures 6-8), used especially for commercial activities. It is claimed as part of a local shop to exhibit all sorts of merchandise. At the end, these pedestrians can not accommodate people passing by.

Suartika on her study denoted Sanur as one of the famous littoral public realms in Bali. She found that excessive tourist development at Sanur coast has failed to provide transitional space to separate the coast and tourist facilities constructed along Sanur Beach. This has incurred limited access to the beach by the public. She suggests that the physical development of Sanur should be suspended so the public needs and meanings embedded in the coast (littoral) can be retained[16]. Under the influence of global tourism, the intrusion of private interest into the public realm is not improving. The most current pictures of this area are displayed in Figure 9-12. These images show that there has been an occupancy of public spaces[18] and the weakness of formal and social institutions to prevent such occupancy.
Figure 9-10. The occupancy of the beachside paved pedestrian  
(Source: Swanendri, Survey 2019)

On Sanur beach, the pavement pedestrian along the beach originally is meant to be a delineation between public realm (beach) and private realm/private property (hotel, restaurant, shop), thus an intrusion among two of them are becoming obvious (Figure 9). The occupancy of public spaces on the beachside of the paved pedestrian has blocked the view to the beach which one is the truly genuine 'attraction' for this area, even though it's only occurred in the busiest part of the area (Figure 10).

Figure 11-12. Flags, umbrellas and semi-permanent enclosure as territorial marking  
(Source: Swanendri, Survey 2019)

In some parts of the area, certain flags and umbrellas are becoming a kind of territorial marking (boundaries) for the part of the public realm/public space that has been claimed by the private interest (Figure 11). Furthermore, these public space occupancies are intensified by adding a more physical semi-permanent enclosure and wooden flooring on a 'reclaimed' public realm/public space to increase the quality of the space (that often used as dining area) as well as define the territory (Figure 12).

The third mechanism of privatization of the public place is internationally known as gated communities that promote socio-spatial segregation of the city. Gated communities first emerged in the US in the 1980s [3, 8], quickly followed by others around the globe including Indonesia when on 1990 Bumi Serpong Damai emerged in Jakarta as the prototype of gated communities [19]. In Bali the characteristic of a gated community is alike: a restricted access neighborhood which enclosed by circumferential walls. They are equipped with high-quality facilities and occupied by middle classes and upwards. Hence, social classes are segregated from each other and privatization of housing expands. The phenomenon has been seen merely as a mechanism of supply and demand for the property market [20].
4. Adopted Forms of Communal Space in Bali

The conception of civil society has a long history and can be traced back to Aristotle (quote – ref?). Nowadays, civil society is now understood as the intermediate realm between the family and the state which is the realm of culture, ideology, and politics. To enlighten it, Mary Kaldor emphasized that “civil society is the process through which individuals negotiate, argue, struggle against or agree with each other and with the centers of political and economic authority. Through voluntary associations, movements, parties, unions, the individual is able to act publicly” [21, p.585]. Thus, the main basis of civil society is unity and social integration referring to shared values; guaranteeing a balance between individual freedom and the stability of society based on shared life values.

In the context of Bali, civil society will be strongly related to the existence of desaadat (adat village) which has grown over the centuries into a system of self-government due to its inherent autonomy and traditions. Bali is not only well-known for the beauty of its natural landscape but also and religious traditions that characterize Balinese community life. The basic philosophy is Tri Hita Karana -three causes of happiness- that ensures the harmony of the universe and human life, namely harmonization of human to God, harmonious relationship within member of the society, and harmonization of human life with the environment [22]. Thus Balinese structure their lives in relation to the gods and nature, expressed in their daily life as well as in the landscape of village planning and building that nowadays reflects the ongoing conflict between a proto-feudal society and globalization [23].

The term of desaadat was reaffirmed in “Peraturan Provinsi Bali No. 4 Tahun 2019 tentang Desa Tradisional di Bali (Provincial Regulation for Bali Number 4 Year 2019 in regard to Traditional Villages).” Previously, the entity was called as desapakaraman based on “Peraturan Provinsi Bali Nomor 3 Tahun 2001 tentang Desa Pakraman (Provincial Regulation for Bali Number 3 Year 2001 in regard to Desa Pakraman)” which was then amended by “Peraturan Daerah Provinsi Bali Nomor 3 Tahun 2003 (Provincial Regulation for Bali Number 3 Year 2003 in regard to Desa Pakraman).” Desaadat is a communal association at a village level whose operation is based on local codes, tradition, and culture. It usually has one or more banjar adat (neighborhood associations) working under its command. Parallel to these institutional practices, there are state-imposed institutions working at both the village and neighborhood level called desa dinas and banjar dinas. Further explanation of how these four associations work and cooperate can be explored further from Suartika (2010)[24].

Desaadat and banjaradat play an important role in the life of each community member which is based on agreement and shared values, including social capital of the community. Lisa Wood [25] summarized that social capital is often characterized as the glue that holds society together, with core aspects: networks, norms, and trust, mutual goals/actions. These traditional forms maintain social capital and organize and facilitate the dynamic activities of the community all of which have spatial implications. To contain all of the related activities, the existence of sustainable public space is vital in Balinese life, not only for sacred activities but also for those of the non-sacred form of interactions. In Balinese communal space, use value is the dominant concept that promotes a series of social interactions. So, such a space has great social, cultural, and economic importance.’ Its existence also expresses liveability of the desaadat as an institution as well as a community. Thus in the perspective of civil society, desaadat along with its inherent characteristic has been proven as an intermediate realm between the Balinese (an individual) and the state.

5. Concept and forms of communal space in Bali

Spatial practices in Balinese society are generally influenced by belief systems, natural conditions, and economic potential that lies in these settlements. Therefore, basically, humans build (architecture and built environment) mimic the good nature of the universe (macrocosm) and the human realm (microcosm) and try to achieve balance and harmony with the environment through the utilization of local potential such as natural resources, human resources as well as the surrounding physical pattern of architecture. The main characteristics of villages in Bali (in terms of rural and urban areas) are communal life and the existence of liveability communal space that not only accommodates communal activities but also becoming a container for social capital on daily lives of a community member.
The form of these communal spaces can be taking place in the form of open spaces and confined spaces. In some (traditional) settlements in Bali, the existence of a communal space can easily be identified. It is usually placed at the center of the settlement and most of the time is the core territory for both sacred and profane activities. It is also usually grand on a physical scale that makes it obvious compared with the surrounding structures [26, 27]. Such a practice can be observed in many traditional villages of Karangasem Regency, namely Timbrah, Asak, Bungaya, Tenganan, Kastala, see Figure 13.

**Figure 13.** Main communal space situated in the middle of its human settlement structure  
(Source: Swanendri [28])

This communal space has become a center for a community that can be shifting in accommodate between sacred and profane activities in regard to a certain time and boundary, as demonstrated in Figure 14-20.

**Figure 14-16.** Communal space in Timbrah Village is used for profane and scared activities  
(Source: Swanendri, Survey 2015, 2018)
One of confined communal space exists in Bali, such as bale banjar, - hall for the neighbourhood association. There are many kinds of activities can be performed in the bale banjar, both in term of sacred-profane. These include activities relating to preparation for religious ceremonies, center for learning traditional dances and musical instruments, samua/sangkep - community meetings, the conduct of community welfare issues, and public election. The type and the size of banjar hall can be varied from a simple semi-open building (Figure 21) which is exist most common in a rural area or less densely populated area, or a huge wantilan (an open hall) type of building so it can be utilized to accommodate various kinds of activities which is exist most common in an urban area or densely populated area (Figure 22).

Figure 17-18. Communal space in Tenganan Village during Mekare-kare Festival
(Source: Swanendri & Mantra, Survey 2019)

Figure 19-20. Communal space in Tenganan Village during Mekare-kare Festival
(Source: Swanendri & Mantra, Survey 2019)

Figure 21. A simpler type of the bale banjar
(Source: Swanendri, Survey 2018)

Figure 22. A wantilan type of the bale banjar
(Source: Swanendri, Survey 2019)
6. Communal space and sustained living environment

It is widely understood that the relationship between humans and their environment is basically dynamic and reciprocal where it is not only that the environment influences behavior but also in vice versa, (human) behavior can perform series of adaptations to change and develop their environment to fulfill the certain behavior. Regarding that, one of the important issues in successful public spaces design is the chance for the community to adjust and improve their relationship with designed space.

In achieving communal space as a sustained living environment, the quality and its liveability should be addressed in the way of participation, sense of attachment and ownership. This quality is simply considered from the way people experience using the place and right to control the use, or in other words how a communal space as a form of sustainable public space consent to its use-value and fulfill the concept of ‘public’. And all of these, from the perspective of civil society, promote and ensure a dynamic life and lesser control nor pressures from the state as well as the economic forces.

7. Conclusion

Consequent to the global capitalist system, both in an urban and rural context, the privatization of land occurred. In the process, it often leads to a conflict in interests between the public realm and its need to fulfill the demands of civil society for public space. Learning from Balinese traditional settlements, where use-value is a dominant concept that promotes the opportunity for the community members to meet and interact, participate and support the formation of social networks. Another important feature of (Balinese) communal space is the existence of control by public or community itself that implies communal space as spatial form that is to be accommodated as a part of central planning strategy in order to achieve a liveable and sustained living environment.

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