Reading the potential of urban pocket through narrative approach

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Abstract. Building setback areas in the commercial area have the potential to be social spaces due to its characteristic as an intersection between public and private. In fact, they are mostly used for vehicle mobility and parking. The purpose of building setback is usually related to security consideration, thus the building’s owner tend to make a clear separation between public and private. Building setback areas are interesting to be examined, especially when there are a lot of activities going on in them. Building setback area in Taman Kemang Street is one example which creates some urban pockets with different characteristic. The configuration of urban pockets will make some arrangement of urban void along the street with pedestrian connectivity. Taman Kemang Street has different activities between daytime and night. From the early observation, it is found that there are some actan, setting, and story. Those three elements can be observed and examined further as elements of narration. This paper attempt to find the characteristics of daily activities in building setback areas of Taman Kemang Street and try to read the story through narrative approach. The objective of this research is to get some design recommendation by reading the potential of urban pockets through narrative approach.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Kemang as commercial area has a specific character which is allowed space sharing between formal and informal sector. The formal sector is the building owners, while the informal is street vendors located at urban pocket spaces. Urban pocket in this paper is defined as the space outside of the building which is geometrically created between buildings, forming a pocket space surrounded by building façades. [1]. There are several kinds of urban pockets which is created from different building setback types. Sihombing [2] mentioned that there are three kinds of shared space in the area of Jalan Kemang Raya, Jalan Kemang Selatan and Jalan Kemang Dalam. The first one is not mutually beneficial, the second is profitable one, and the third one is symbiotic-mutualism shared-space. It is also found that Jalan Taman Kemang has a similar character of space.

From early observation, we can see that urban pocket at Jalan Taman Kemang is dominated by parking activity. However, there are different phenomena that can be observed during daytime and nighttime. Even though there are a lot of car parks at the urban pocket during daytime, it still looks more active, with social interactions happening. But it becomes inactive in the evening, even when there are not many cars parked there. These different phenomena cannot be observed only by physical analysis,
because there are no significant physical changes between the different time frames. One of the more appropriate approach to analyze these phenomena is the narrative approach, especially because it also looks at the relations of physical elements, events, and the characters that give life to the event.

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The problems of this research are: 1. How to translate narratology into the issues of urban pocket?; 2. How to use narratology as a reading tool for urban pocket at Jalan Taman Kemang; and What are the problems and potentials of the urban pocket at Jalan Taman Kemang, based on the narratology? Therefore, we could find an alternative reading tool of urban space based on their daily story by using narratology. From the examination, we are also able to find the strengths and the weaknesses of narratology as a reading tool for urban pocket.

2. Method
Narratology is the study of narrative structure in literary theory. This research uses narratology that is based on structuralism paradigm, which believes that a story has three levels of abstraction: story, narrative dan narration [4]. Every level has a constituent element. In this study, there are different levels and elements of narratology that are used to read the narration of urban pocket.

The method includes two steps. The first step is translating the understanding of every level of narratology and its elements into an understanding that is related to urban issue. The second is using the understanding to directly observe the case of study. The observation result is presented as a diagram, which also becomes a reading tool to identify the urban pocket’s problems, and potentials that could be to solve the design problem of urban pocket.

The basic understanding of narratology levels is derived from A Handbook of Narrative Analysis. This book summarizes the debates of three narratological structuralist: Gerard Genette, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, and Mieke Bal (fig.1). The similarity of these three narratologists lies on the division of abstraction structure and level. Herman and Vervaek placed the story as the most abstract level, followed by narrative as the second, and narration as the third level.

| Genette | Rimmon-Kenan | Bal | Herman & Vervaek |
|---------|---------------|-----|------------------|
| histoire | story         | fabula | story |
| récit   | text          | story  | narrative        |
| narration | narration | text   | narration        |

Figure 1. Three levels of narration as concluded by Herman & Vervaek
Source: Handbook of Narrative Analysis, processed by author 2019.

The method of translation of narratology ideas is by seeking the the closest idea of using looseness characteristic of urban pocket as an activity generator. The translation obtained is used as reading tools.
to examine urban pocket on Jalan Taman Kemang. The first step is by experiencing the space first-hand and interviewing some of the actants. The results are presented as diagrams and pictures.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Translation of the story, narrative, and narration levels

Story level is an abstract system of a story. This system consists of chronological events. Narrative is defined as a strategy to organize all the story elements in order to tell them to the reader. Therefore this level is still categorized as principles. The most concrete level is narration, where the authors show the way they deliver the organized story. This level will involve more technical aspects such as grammar or structure, choice of vocabulary, and storytelling techniques. When listening to a story, the reader will first face the narration level, and then try to construct the whole story in their mind. The reverse is created on the author’s mind. The author arranges the story at the story level, considers the delivery strategy of the story at narrative level, then chooses the delivery techniques at narration level. The full story may not be grasped by the reader, because the search depends on how many events the author wants to convey at the narrative level.

With the premise that exploring the city is in line with the process of reading a story, this study tries to translate the levels of narratology into the levels of experiencing the city. Pedestrians understand the city environment through the most concrete levels, namely the elements forming the city and the events that they experience. This level can be matched with the level of narration. From the urban elements, pedestrians can find patterns of the urban elements and the events that they experience. This level can be considered as the narrative level. If pedestrians analyze the events that unfolds in one place at a time as a whole, and from different perspectives, then they will be able to understand what kind of story there is in that place. This level can be matched with the story level.

Table 1. The understanding of narratology structure in literature and urban study.

| Level       | Understanding in literature                                                                 | Understanding in urban                      |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Story       | Full events that are arranged chronologically                                                | The whole pattern of events that exist at a place by chronological arrangement. |
| Narrative   | The strategy of conveying events to readers through a certain perspective.                    | Patterns of events that can be read by pedestrians based on certain perspectives. |
| Narration   | Techniques for delivering events to readers.                                                  | The Urban elements experienced by pedestrians |

3.2. Translation of elements at the levels of story, narrative and narration

The story level consists of setting, actant dan event. Settings are space and time that accommodate an event. Bakhtin calls it *chronotope* (*chronos* means time, and *topos* means place). He thinks that an abstract view of humanity and social reality can only be concretized if there are figures, events that blend with the chronotope [5]. Structuralists like Bal try to identify space with binary opposition such as outside or inside, up or down, far or near. In urban understanding, settings are defined as the location and time of occurrence of an event. What will be identified is: where did the event occur? When did it occur? And does it occur inside buildings or outside? At daytime or nighttime?

Actant according to Greimas is the role of an agent in a story that enables an event to happen. At the story level, agents have not yet gotten characters but are still in the form of tasks and their underlying motives. Greimas explained that there are six roles [4], which are: the subject (which takes action), the object (desired by the subject), the sender (which tells the subject that a particular object is important), the receiver (which benefits when the object is obtained), opponent (which blocks the subject from getting an object), and the helper (which helps the subject get object). In an urban environment, these
six actants also exist. This study looks at what kind of actants there are in the urban pocket by asking: who is involved in the place, what are the motives, and what are the objects that underlies those motives.

Barthes separates events in the function and index categories [6]. Function is an event that moves the story (moving horizontally) while the index is an alternative event (moving vertically). There are two types of functions: cardinal and catalyzer. Cardinal consists of crucial events that must exist. These events usually have a causal relationship, producer-product and other relationships that influence each other. Catalyzer is a connecting event between two cardinal functions. This event can be removed because it does not change the structure of the story. In urban understanding, this study will analyze events in the cardinal function category, namely important events in everyday life that have a strong causal relationship.

Narrative level consists of time, focalization and characterization. Time in this level is the relationship between the time at the story level and the time delivered to the reader. Genette divides time into three criteria, namely duration, order, and frequency [7]. Duration is the period of time that the author uses to convey an event to the reader. Frequency is how many times the story-level event is told to the author. And order is how the sequence of events is told to the reader. In understanding the urban environment, the relevant criterion used is duration. This study uses this criterion to ask how long an event occurs in a place.

Genette introduced the term focalization to replace the term point of view. The definition of focalization according to Genette is: the selection or restriction of information that the narrator or character in the story wants to say [7]. This definition was developed by Bal, into: a relationship between subjects who perceive something and objects to be perceived [8]. Based on location, there are two types of focalization, namely internal (the subject is in the story) and external (the subject is outside the story). Based on the number, there are three types, namely single (one focalization), variable (two focalization) and multiple (more than one focalization). In understanding the urban environment, focalization can be used to choose whose point of view is going to be used to uncover which information. The points of view, and how many of them there are, will influence how the event is revealed in one place.

Characterization is a concretization of roles that exist at the story level. At this level, abstract roles at the story level become certain characters. Rimmon-Kenan divides it into three types, namely direct, indirect, and analogy [9]. Direct characterization means giving real characters according to what is intended to be conveyed, indirect means characters that symbolizes other values, and analogy is a character which is analogous to other characters. In an urban environment, we can find out whether the setting or character has a certain value, analogous to something else or has a single meaning.

The last level is narration, which consists of two elements: narrating and representation of consciousness. Narrating is the correspondence between narrator and narrated [4]. There are two aspects in this element, namely the narrator types and properties. Narrator types determine whether the narrator is in the story or outside the story and whether the narrator has an all-round or limited view. The properties determine when he appears in the story, whether he can be seen or not, whether he can be trusted or not, and whether he can narrate well or not. It is difficult to translate this element directly into the urban experience because no one explicitly narrates our experience. Translation can be done by assuming that a researcher who runs in an urban environment is a narrator, because he will present his experience to the reader. Through this element, researchers ask how is the relationship between pedestrians with the events and their physical environment.

The final element is the representation of consciousness, which is how the author technically conveys the story to the reader through the arrangement of words. This is the most concrete element in a story because through the technique of composing words, the author can meet the reader. In an urban environment, this element can be translated as a physical element that constitutes an urban environment, because it is through this physical element that the event can occur.

Every translation from narratology to urban understanding produces questions that can be used to find out stories in the urban pocket. Translation of understanding and questions that arise can be seen in table 2.
Table 2. Translation of each element at each level in urban understanding.

| Level       | Elements         | Understanding in narratology                                      | Understanding in urban                      | Questions                                      |
|-------------|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Story       | Setting          | Space and time as a place for the occurrence of events            | Location and time as a place for the occurrence of events | Where and what time do significant events occur? |
| Actant      | The role (motives and mission) of the agent so that an event occurs. | The role (motives and mission) of the user behind an event in an urban environment. | What are the roles in the event?                |
| Event       | Events that move the story. | Events that occur in urban environments.                         | What significant events have occurred?      |
| Narrative   | Time             | The relationship between the time as told to the reader and the time as a whole in the story level. | The relationship between the time of an event (duration and frequency) compared to the event as a whole. | How long, when, and how frequent does the event occur? |
| Focalization| Relationship between the subjects who perceive and the objects perceived. | From whose point of view the urban environment is perceived. | Who experienced the event and what information was obtained? |
| Characterization | Concretization of roles at the story level | Concretization of the roles that exist in an event. | What is the character of the people and physical characteristics at the location? |
| Narration   | Narrating        | Relationship between the narrator and the narrated one           | Relations between pedestrians with events and their physical environment. | What does the observer experience? |
| Representation of consciousness | Representation of stories in words. | Representation of events in the physical environment. | What shapes the physical environment? |

3.3. Story, narrative dan narration at Jalan Taman Kemang

Questions in the translation table are used to find out what happened on Jalan Taman Kemang. The results of these observations will be delivered through several diagrams in the order of the most concrete to the most abstract level, in line with the readable level to the abstracted level. At the narration level, we could found narrating as below: Narrating (location: Wisma Semeru, on weekdays): Around 7 a.m., the researcher saw the atmosphere in front of Wisma Semeru is dominated by vehicles passing from Kemang road to Lippo Mall Kemang. Slowly, the pocket space was filled by workers' cars and motorbikes. In the pocket space, there was one street-vendor stall selling fried chicken and other fried food. Around 12 p.m., the pocket space was passed by the cars heading to Lippo Mal and vice versa. The pocket space was crowded with workers who eat at the stalls in the pocket space. Around 5 p.m., the workers went home, and the motorbikes and cars started to come out of the pocket space. Offices were closing. The pocket space was then slowly filled by cars whose purpose was to go to the dining area. From the car, people usually go directly into the restaurant. Other cars still passed from Lippo Mal and vice versa, but no one stopped to eat at the pocket space. Street vendors were still selling in the pocket space and on the road, but the area is quiet, not as busy as during the day. Not many pedestrians passed, and the street looked dark.
Representation of consciousness is translated as a physical element that shapes the environment. There are three types of physical elements in this place. The first type is fixed elements such as building facades, the presence of side walks, and several concrete benches. The second is semi-fixed elements like food stalls. And the third is non-fixed elements such as food carts, tents and chairs.

At narrative level, the experience gained at the narration level is abstracted or examined in order to find the pattern. In focalization, this observation uses the viewpoint of the observer who runs on Jalan Taman Kemang. The main events observed were located in front of Wisma Semeru and Tanamera. In that event, the characterization involved can be seen at figure 4.
The above characterization represents some groups. There are seven main characters that live the events on location. Each of these characters has a motive. Character changes will cause changes in motives and events. This change in motive will be seen in the actant analysis at the story level. Time is translated into the duration of events that are lived by the existing character. Each character has a duration and time of appearance. Intersections of the characters’ appearance will cause different events to occur.

At story level, the pattern observed at narrative level is abstracted again to look for more general patterns and more complete stories. For this purpose, according to place setting, Jalan Taman Kemang will be analyzed with a wider scope, and time settings will be analyzed chronologically throughout the day.

![Figure 5](image)

The events in the pocket spaces happen due to a meeting between the driver and the food seller. The events in the pocket space happen because of a meeting of workers, drivers and food vendors. Events in the pocket space do not occur because the visitors’ destination is inside the building. At night, the pocket space becomes inactive.

**Figure 5.** The pattern differences of events on the Taman Kemang streets, caused by the differences of the actants present in each time frame.

Source: Author, 2019

From the three diagrams above, we can see that there are changes in events that occur in the pocket space from time to time. In the morning, the events in the pocket space were assisted by the presence of drivers waiting for their employers and buying food. During the day, events in the pocket spaces occur because there are additional actors, namely workers. Whereas at night, the events in the setback spaces decreases. This can happen due to the changes of actants as in the diagram below (See Figure 6).

Based on changes in actants, events in the pocket space occur because there are drivers and food vendors. At noon, the helpers are increased by workers. At night, the worker is not at the location, so no one becomes the helper for the event in the pocket space. The new actor at the location are restaurant...
visitors whose purpose is to enter the restaurant and the need is a parking space. Because of this motive, the pocket space is only a place to put the vehicle. This change in actant is also followed by the disappearance of non-fixed and semi-fixed elements that support activities in the pocket space.

![Figure 6. Actant differences at each time frame, that occur due to character changes. Sumber: Author, 2019](image)

### 3.4. Problems and Potential of Urban Pockets

When we see abstractions from narration to the story, we can see that there are changes in the pattern of events in the pocket space, namely the inactivity of the pocket space at night. If a good pocket space means one that can accommodate public needs, then the lack of events in the pocket space on Jl. Taman Kemang is problematic. On the other hand, the existence of food vendors and street vendors in the pocket space has a long duration, so it can be a potential to revive the pocket space. The second potential is the nature of Jalan Taman Kemang, as the route between Jalan Kemang and Lippo Mall. If the actor passing through can be pulled into the pocket space by activating the food seller in the pocket space, there could be more events happening in the pocket space. How can diversity of activities arise in the pocket space?

The meeting of physical feature variables on the street and Open-Ended Space characteristics that produce loose space, creates parameters that determine the looseness of a street corridor. From the early research of Dewi and Andrean, it can be seen that the use of street features such as sidewalk, street trees, curbs and swales, street lights, pavement materials and other road features can affect the looseness or tightness of a space in relation to the activities [10]. In the case of Jalan Taman Kemang, due to the activity differences between daytime and nighttime, it is concluded that the fixed elements do not change; it is the semi-fixed and non-fixed elements that change.

To enable more events to happen, the physical elements in the pocket space need to be changed so that at night, the passers-by will be attracted to the pocket space. For example, by providing lighting, attractive visual elements, or add more street furniture. Arrangement of fixed, semi-fixed and non-fixed elements will help to promote or generate nighttime activities by adjusting them to the new actants.

### 3.5. The Advantage of Reading Urban Pocket through Narratology

As a urban issue discussion, the advantage of the narrative approach is being able to see the connection between users (by looking at motivation), space and time as a whole, and the events that occur. The urban approach used by Mehta [10] most of the observation is on the physical elements of an urban space. In the narrative approach, physical elements are considered at the narration level, but the consequences of those physical elements are also considered at the narrative and story level. By knowing the events and actants who support a place, designers can use existing trends so that the design they are going to make can work according to the existing pattern.
4. Conclusions

The translation of narratology into urban pocket issues was carried out by looking for similarities between the two concepts. In this study, the concept used came from Mehta's and Fernando’s research. The similarity of concepts is carried out through two stages, first at the three levels of abstraction, and second at the constituting elements of each level. The translation in this study is not perfect, because if there is further research using other urban concepts, the translation process will be different too.

Reading the urban pocket using narratology is done by direct observation based on the narratology elements that have been translated into urban concepts. The specialty of reading urban pocket using narratology is that researchers can see the relationship between the physical elements that make up the narology, the events that occur, and the actors that enable them to occur. Problems found on Jalan Taman Kemang based on narratology is the inactive characteristic of urban pocket space at night. The inactiveness is caused by changes in actant during different time frames. The actant change occurring at night are followed by change of motives. They came to enter the restaurants, and therefore what was needed was a place to park their vehicles. For this purpose, actors involved in the urban pocket do not have the need to interact or use urban pocket besides parking their vehicles.

With the use of narratology, we can see the motives of actors in a place as potentials. The first potential is street vendors who are still in the urban pocket at night. They can enliven the urban pocket if there is a promotional strategy for other characters to buy their merchandise. The second potential is the passers-by character who is going to Lippo Mal from Jalan Kemang Raya. If the urban pocket could meet the needs of these passers-by, it could become active again. Actors who place the elements will provide opportunities for the formation of activities and stimulate motivation or follow-up actions from other actors. To maintain a pattern that does not result in a conflict between activities, it is necessary to have control on semi-fixed and non-fixed elements.

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