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THIRDSPACE, URBAN INFORMALITY AND CREATIVE COMMUNITIES: REDEFINING CAFÉ IN CONTEMPORARY BANDUNG

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ABSTRACT

This paper critically examines the nexus between discourses on thirdspace, urban informality and creative communities in the contemporary city. While dealing with the broadest theoretical concerns emerging through empirical research, this study focuses on the phenomena of café and its implications on the quality of public space. The city of Bandung provides the context for development of a community-based creative city, in which the phenomena of café is situated, examined and redefined.

In the context of a developing country such as Indonesia, thirdspace are types of places that are socially produced and constructed primarily by communities whose main activities are within the informal sector. The informal sector should be firstly seen as community expression of the creative economy, with informality as a paradigm for understanding urban place-making. From the empirical study conducted, five variables emerge that describe the diversity of cafés in Bandung, which can be categorized in terms of scale, economic level, type, location, and duration. As integrated phenomena, these variables underline cafés' significant impact towards the production of social spaces. Its emergence in quantity, diversity and settings also describes the great potential of Bandung communities on developing creative responses in the making of public places.

The paper provides deeper understanding and empirical findings of the café phenomena in Bandung and its relationship to public space. Findings presented from this on-going research may inform policy-making on the design and planning of public spaces, as well as contribute to the building of theoretical discourse on creative communities and place-making in the contemporary city.

Keywords: *thirdspace, informality, creative communities, café, Bandung*

THE NEXUS: THIRDSPACE, URBAN INFORMALITY AND CREATIVE COMMUNITIES

While dealing with the broadest theoretical concerns emerging through empirical research on the contemporary city, this paper begins by situating the nexus between discourses on thirdspace, urban

informality and creative communities. Earlier theories seem less accommodating in revealing, expressing and explaining urban phenomena within a deep and comprehensive study of contemporary issues. Edward Soja's concept of **Thirdspace** (1996) offers an alternative way of understanding spatial discourse in the Post-Structuralist context, with possibilities for the existence of "other space". *Thirdspace* as the "other space" can be interpreted more widely, compared to earlier understandings of spatial phenomena.

Firstspace refers to *Spatial Practice* (*espace perçu* or perceived space), defined as producing spatiality that embraces production and reproduction, as well as particular locations and spatial ensembles characteristic of each social formation. Whereas *Firstspace* focuses on objective (real) phenomenon or space experienced everyday, *Secondspace* emphasizes more on abstract space or space imagined by architects and planners.

Secondspace are essentially *Representations of Space* (*espace conçu* or conceived space), defined as conceptualized space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocrats and certain types of artists with a scientific bent - all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived, with what is conceived. This conceived space is tied to relations of production and the order or design that they impose, towards a system of verbal signs - intellectually worked out - referring to written and spoken words e.g. language, discourse, texts and logos. *Secondspace* is also the primary space of utopian thought and vision, semiotician or decoder, as well as purely creative imagination.

Thirdspace, on the other hand, highlights **Spaces of Representation** (*espace vécu* or lived space). It is space as directly lived with all intractability, which stretches across the images and symbols that accompany it. The social space formed by communities incorporates inhabitants and users, as representational spaces containing all other real-and-imagined spaces. These spaces formed by the creative powers within communities focus on life of the everyday, which are revealed in various forms of urban public space.

In the context of a developing country such as Indonesia, *Thirdspace* reveals an understanding of the integration of various real phenomena of the city (**space, time, and actor**) without prioritizing one over the other (Damajani, 2008). *Thirdspace* are considered types of places that are socially produced and constructed primarily by communities whose main activities are within the informal sector. This informal sector should be firstly seen as community response to the creative economy, with *informality* as an alternative paradigm for better understanding the realities of urban culture and place-making.

AlSayyad and Roy (2004) propose an analytical framework for the critical investigation of informal urban development in the era of liberalization. They argue that **Urban Informality** is embedded in the social structure of an economic system, which become modes linking various urban activities, and that contemporary processes of informal urban development imply two important breaks with earlier understandings. Firstly, new forms of *urban informality* are taking place at the rural-urban interface, and secondly, they are emerging patterns of development on private or privatized rather than public spaces.

Informality is understood as a transactional mechanism for organizing commodification outside formal procedural and regulatory frameworks (AlSayyad and Roy, 2004). This mechanism has the potential to be sustainable by means of deep-rooted network, gaining social acknowledgement and associative identity. As a transformational logic, the process of *Urban Informality* works within a higher level of temporality. Thus, there a role for informal mediators in bridging interests of the State and that of grass-root enterprises. Such informal mediators have advantages in their flexibility and creativity to participate in maintaining control and monitoring the practices of access towards public space, which then becomes a basis in gaining freedom of action within it.

The paradox of **informality and formality** almost always emerges together in every form of the *thirdspace* phenomena (Damajani, 2008). Interaction of the two oftentimes raises serious socio-cultural issues, but on the other hand becomes a source of city liveliness and its communities' creativity. In the context of an emerging creative city, such as Bandung,

harmonious relationship between *informality and formality* becomes a goal that is worth working towards.

Scott (2000), in his seminal text *The Cultural Economy of Cities*, states that culture, economy and place are symbiotic of one another, and that in modern capitalism this symbiosis reemerges in powerful new forms expressed in the cultural economy of certain key cities. Although there is now greater understanding of the role of the creative economy in urban development through discourse such as the *Creative City* (Landry, 2000) and the *Creative Class* (Florida, 2002 and 2005), there remains a lack of critical examinations of these ideas and empirical knowledge from different cultural contexts, particularly of cities in developing countries (Soemardi, 2006).

Critics such as Malanga (2004 and 2005) argue that Florida's notion of the creative class as main proponent in positive development of the creative economy ignores the fact that most of their activities are made possible through tax increases, largely supported by the working class. Soemardi (2006) also adds the need for better understanding on how local knowledge of creative communities in developing countries, particularly the informal sector, contributes to the continuing discourse of **community-based creative cities** in both theory and praxis. Hence this following elaboration of café as public space through the analytical framework of nexus between *thirdspace*, *urban informality* and *creative communities* adds to the effort in bridging the gap between ideas and policies in urban place-making.

THIRD PLACE: SITUATING CAFÉ AS PUBLIC SPACE

Chaney (1996) defines **lifestyle** as a character of modernity that is dependent on development of a consumer culture, which becomes patterns of action that differentiate between one person and another. Café is part of this phenomenon. In the context of the contemporary city, *urban life* is a reflection of power constellation, which in operation is constantly affected by local, national and global policies. Given the limitations of the State in controlling and regulating urban systems, public space becomes a place where accumulation of power outside of the formal system becomes more dominant. Informal power as a result becomes the practice of operational urban space that does not comply with or actually in opposition to the formal plan.

Oldenburg (1999) defines **Third Place** as a place of refuge other than the home or workplace where people can regularly visit and commune with friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even strangers. They are often small businesses, including cafes, coffee shops and general stores. Third places are known for their quality of goods and services, familiarity and friendliness as well as other qualities that support social interaction.

With regards to place-making, social interaction often occurs in *third places* over the comforts of home, particularly due to the social life of streets (Mehta, 2007). This phenomenon modifies the act of eating and drinking, where people come to search external public spaces for this kind of social conviviality. Thus, the act of sharing food and drinks outside the home may be seen as a way of exchanging life-experiences and as a space of transaction (including ideas and information), where urban public space becomes the facilitator of this interaction. Within this context, *third places* become spaces where familiarity, comfort and safety can be found together in one place, affording social cohesion and interaction (Fonesca et.al., 2007).

Whereas Tinamei (2006) takes a *Semiotic* approach to the cafe society phenomenon, this research explores the *Third Place* phenomena of café and its implications on the quality of public space. The case-study focuses on cafes in developing countries such as Indonesia, and specifically at contemporary cities such as Bandung.

DIVERSITY: REDEFINING CAFÉ IN CONTEMPORARY BANDUNG

The city of Bandung provides the context for development of a community-based creative city. As a **historically-perceived place**, Bandung has been defined as several characteristics, such as *Paradise in Exile* (circa 1750), *The Sleeping Beauty* (ca.1884), *Parijs van Java* (ca.

1920), *The Garden of ALLAH* (ca. 1921), *Europe in the Tropen* (ca. 1930), and *Art-Deco City* (ca. 1950). While Bandung as a **contemporary city** is characterized with issues of *Everyday Urbanism, Urban Festivals, and Streets* continuously being defined as *Urban Living-Rooms*.

From the empirical study conducted, five variables emerge that characterize the **diversity** of cafés in Bandung, which can be categorized in terms of scale, class/economic level, type, location, and duration. As integrated phenomena, these variables underline cafés' significant impact towards the production of spaces for social interaction. Besides its diversity, cafes' emergence in quantity and settings also emphasizes the great potential of Bandung communities in developing creative responses in the making of public places.

The five variables that describe the **diversity** of cafes in Bandung include (1) **Scale** - the dimensions of the café (small, medium, large etc.); (2) **Class** - the economic level of its clientele (low, medium, high); (3) **Type** - Internet-, bookstore-, music- or gallery-café; (4) **Location** - part of commercial area, in front yard of house, on side of street, within public open space area; as well as (5) **Time** - morning, noon, late-afternoon, evening, more than once a day, *Spatio-Temporal*.

EPILOGUE: CONTINUOUS REDEFINITION OF CAFÉ

This on-going research is intended to highlight the potential analytical framework of the nexus between *Thirdspace, Urban Informality* and *Creative Communities* through the study of café phenomena in contemporary Bandung. Preliminary research findings presented in this paper offer an alternative way of understanding urban public space and provide empirical knowledge of the café phenomena in Bandung as a contemporary city. These findings are intended to inform policy-making on the planning and design of public spaces, as well as contribute to theory building on creative communities and place-making, in which the phenomenon of café is situated, examined and *continuously* redefined.

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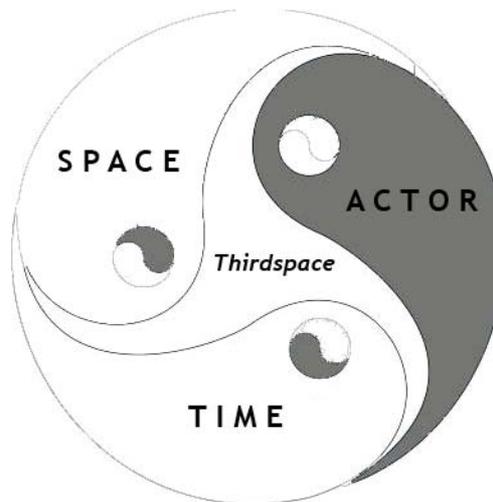


Fig. 1. Integration between Space-Time-Actor



Fig. 2. Public Space in Contemporary Bandung



Fig. 3 Thirdspace: Diversity of Cafes