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The Space is Not Ours, the Life of Public Open Space in Gated Community in Medan, Indonesia

Achmad Delianur Nasution*, Wahyuni Zahrah

Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, University of Sumatra Utara, Indonesia

Abstract

As a place of where the middle up income people live, the study investigated the using of public open space in two gated communities in Medan, Indonesia. The study found that most of the visitors not satisfied with the public open space, but they use it intensively, almost every day at the afternoon. The study indicates that the public open space in Cemara Asri is more livable public open space than Taman Setiabudi Indah due to the quality of space. The study reported that the visitors in the two public open spaces are mostly people who live outside the gated community.

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Keywords: Public open space; gated community; livable space

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

In Medan, Indonesia, the growth of privatized public space – e.g. malls, cafes, and theme park – and gated community is faster than ‘no purchase necessary’ public open space (POS). The phenomenon is a respond to the middle up income people needs that avoids the unification with the poor. The existing urban-scale public open space (POS) is very limited, both in quality and quantity. The most users of that POS are the low-income people, and the POS gives a positive influence to their quality of life (Nasution and Zahrah, 2013). Meanwhile, the privatized public

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +62-821-631-52525; fax: +62-61-821-3250..

E-mail address: aan.nasution@gmail.com

open space still provides a positive contribution to community quality of life (QOL) by generating a livable public life (Nasution and Zahrah, 2012).

Besides the urban-scale POS, there are still a few neighborhood-scale POSs in Medan. The POSs located both in a planned and unplanned settlement. In the unplanned settlement, the low-quality neighborhood-scale POS is more livable than the urban-scale and gives a positive contribution to the community QOL (Nasution and Zahrah, 2013). It is important to study the life of POS in the planned settlement to get the whole description about the livability of POS in Medan. In Medan, most of the planned settlement is a gated community. When a POS is managed and owned by a private institution, it is categorized as a privately owned public space (POPS).

1.2. The objective

Many studies all over the world confirm all benefits of public space to QOL, such as health, social interaction, and economic value. There is a public space but managed and owned by a private institution, namely privatized public space. The opinion about the ‘handicapped’ of privatized public space, still in debates. The issue includes the ‘filtering’ of the users by controlling the access. How high the ‘isolation grade’ of it in relation with the using of the public space? Does the control of the settlement relate to the life of POS? Does the middle up income people need and use the public space in their gated-environment, which separated with the outside community?

The objective of the study is to identify the life of the POS in a gated community as the indicator of the successful of the place. The study is necessary to get some description of the role of this kind of POS in public life among the condition that the growth of privatized public space is higher than the free-access POS. The life of the POS in a gated community can be the indicator of how intensive the community uses it, and next, how high the users take the advantage of it to their QOL.

The study aim is to get an explanation of how the POS in a gated community gives a QOL contribution to the public life. In Medan, the development of gated community and the other kinds of privatized public space keeps going higher. Thus, the study can contribute to formulating an adequate policy about the role of the private institution to improve QOL of an urban community.

2. Public open space in gated community

2.1. Successful public open space

Public open space is a place for the community to gather and doing many kinds of activities freely. It is essential to understand how a place used by people and fulfill their needs. The parameters used to assess the successful of public space relate to physical and non-physical factors. Whyte (1985) said that the ability of space in accommodating various social activities is one indicator of a good POS. Gehl (1987) argued that a successful POS should accommodate a larger recreational-optional than necessary activities, and a high environment quality support it. Among various approach in determining a successful public space, Project for Public Spaces proposes a comprehensive parameter. After evaluating thousands of public spaces around the world, PPS has found that successful ones have four fundamental qualities. The first, they are accessible. The second, people are engaged in activities there. The third, the place is comfortable and has a good image. The fourth, it is a sociable place: one where people meet each other and take people when they come to visit (www.pps.org).

2.2. Gated community in Indonesia

The gated community rises from a ‘culture of fear’ of the middle up income urban people to many criminal threats. The condition then forces a segregated community (Boyers and Manzi, 2006). Blakely and Snyder (1998) define gated community as “residential areas with restricted access that makes public spaces private. Access is controlled by physical barriers, walled or fenced perimeters, and gated or guarded entrances. Gated communities include both new housing developments and older residential areas retrofitted with barricades and fences.” One of the gated community natures is the control of access. It is adjusted depending on the owner needs. The condition makes the ‘publicness’ of the privatized public space disappear. As a consequence, it prevents the opportunity for

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