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creative connectivity and the making of place
living smart by design

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Arif Sarwo WIBOWO
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The Place Making of Salman Mosque

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to search a basic understanding to build a theoretical framework for the ongoing doctoral research. Using Salman Mosque as a case study, it deals with the search for the meaning of the perceptual space from the congregation point of view. The place can be understood as long as it has character. A space and place can be interpreted through one's experience.

The Salman mosque as a creative work of architect Ahmad Noeman produces a strong character of space and environment in the campus area of ITB Bandung. How is the meaning of the Salman Mosque perceived? Through a qualitative approach a number of respondents had been interviewed after the Friday prayer to obtain the user's experience. The result reveals a basic understanding of the meaning of Salman mosque in re-connectivity aspects and meaning of the mosque as a dynamic place, as well as a place to reminisce.

Keywords: *Salman mosque, place making, meaning*

INTRODUCTION

A well created space will construct meanings for the users, just like Salman Mosque, a spiritual building for Muslims, which located close to the ITB campus. It has a long history concerning the creation process as well as the activities within. As part of Modern architecture, the mosque is a masterpiece of architect Ahmad Noe'man. It was built in 1963 with the first part was the *minaret* tower, followed by the 25 x 25 square meters main mosque building completed in 1972. Salman's name was given by President Soekarno, after the figure Salman from Persia, an Islamic architecture expert.

In general, Salman Mosque is considered as a mosque that was built with a similar concept to the Malay palace tradition. The shape is unique, since it reflects the influence of pure forms modern architecture.

Salman Mosque is the first campus mosque in Indonesia, stands on strategic position close to Dago and ITB. This paper is discussing some material from the seminar theme, how the creative work of Salman Mosque interpreted by users as a building with power and appeal of both visual and functional aspects, as well as its ability to attract people and congregation. Through a qualitative approach on a number of respondents, the researchers obtained the meaning of Salman mosque in its ability to evoke "place attachment" as follows: (1) the ability of space to generate memories, (2) the ability to connect old friends who have been disconnected, (3) the ability of multi-functional space to mobilize various activities from different generations and backgrounds, (4) the ability of sacred and profane space that proportionally separated by Salman mosque.

LITERATURE REVIEW

PLACE MEANING

Place meanings are often rooted in a combination of memories of the past and experiences of the present. As Rotenberg (1993:xiv) suggests, to understand place meanings would require an understanding of how people interpret their places on the basis of their "*inherited understandings of the past and [their] experiences of the present*".

Place, as a socially constructed entity, is necessarily invested with human meaning. Far from being an inert and a historic form, place may be thought of as a process, a "process of becoming" (Pred, 1984). People are active participants in the historically contingent process of the making of place: within the context of their times, they construct places by investing them with human meaning. This view recognizes that all social life is "regionalized and regionalizing" and that place-making is situated in specific time-space contexts (Rogers, 1992:245).

Von Meiss (1994) reveals the urgency of meaning in a different perspective, that the space defines its element not from form imagination, but rather on something that is memorable in itself. Element of space is the value of the place itself and the most important thing of aesthetics is the imagination of the place.

Study of meaning is essential in the architectural formation of space-place, thus the ability to feel the space is not just to look at it, but one should have explored it in the space. However there is no doubt that the space will determine how the architecture can elevate the value of a work, obtaining people's responses from both observers and users as well as expressing that meaning.

METHODOLOGY

As a descriptive-qualitative architectural research, the methods employed in this research are (1) field surveying, (2) architectural documenting, and (3) informal interviews. Interviews were purposively done through the involvement of selected persons. 16 male and 13 female respondents were selected while they were attending the Friday Ritual Prayer. Research was conducted in the city of Bandung on April 2011. Qualitative methodological approach is adopted as the research strategy to attain a deeper understanding on the experiential responses of the respondents. Open in-depth interview technique was also conducted, and supported by sound recording facilities.

The respondents were requested to describe their purpose in attending Friday Ritual at Salman Mosques while at the same time it was holiday, where most people choose to pray at the mosque near the house. The questions comprise (1) the intensity of their attending activities, (2) their purpose, (3) their opinion about the Salman Mosque.

Responses given by each respondent were transliterated into a coherent text to facilitate a coding process. Initial coding was then conducted by grouping keywords into relevant categories and themes. Subsequently, axial coding was carried out to look for causal relationships among categories and themes that emerged. At the end, selective coding was done to sort and reselect the coding results and to draw conclusion of the research findings.

SALMAN MOSQUE AND OBJECTIVES

1. Historical

The Salman Mosque of ITB was established in 1963. This mosque is the first campus mosque in Indonesia, which was built in order to eliminate the idea that science and technology is separated from religion. Salman Mosque is a crystallization of idealism and principles sought by architect Ahmad Noeman. The mosque neither took the traditional character of the mosque nor the roofed dome mosque that has symbolically been synonymous with the Islam, but on the contrary refers to the concepts of modern architecture that was a trend at the time. Historically, the Salman mosque has also played an important role in the spiritual journey of ITB students. The birth of the Islamic student movement also involves a considerable influence of this mosque.

2. Familiarity: Insiders - Outsiders

As one of the mosque in a quite influential campus environment in Indonesia, the Salman mosque has a very diverse congregation, even during the holiday though. Congregation come not only from among the students, faculty and ITB staff but also the surrounding community and migrants from other cities such as Jakarta, Cimahi, Medan, Banjarmasin, Surabaya, Solo, etc. The mosque is located close to the ITB campus, and it makes a comfortable place for students and internal environment to be there. Although it is located outside the campus, the image that the Salman mosque is part of the ITB campus becomes an important point that cannot be ignored. The surrounding community who has a high religion understanding, and seeks the reward by praying in that mosque makes the Salman mosque as a ritual place in their daily routine has led the Salman mosque to a unique circumstance.

Furthermore, the Salman mosque is also visited by users from outside the regular congregation which consists of: (1) temporal migrants from Bandung and its surroundings, (2) migrants from outside Bandung and even outside of Java (3)

people on the trip, who is accidentally be near the mosque. The outsiders who are not so often being in the mosque, have a different level of familiarity compared to the insiders.

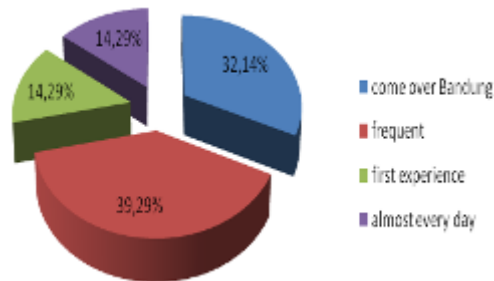


Figure 1: The mosque level of familiarity
Source: Dewiyanti, 2012

As one of a quite dynamic mosque, Salman mosque was differently interpreted by the congregation. At the regular Friday prayer, worshipers who come from outside was dominated by those who aim to do other activities, such as window shopping (39.29%). On Friday, the yard and surrounding of Salman mosque was crowded with merchants who offer cheap prices. The women assembly is quite a lot in the shrine, they are taking the family to worship and wait for midday (*dzuhur*) prayers. The number of pilgrims who come to campus to reminisce is equal to the assembly that comes with the purpose of recreation. The Salman Mosque is located in area close to various tourist destinations. Due to its strategic location, the mosque is also used often as a meeting point. Moreover, the mosque is also visually easy to be identified.

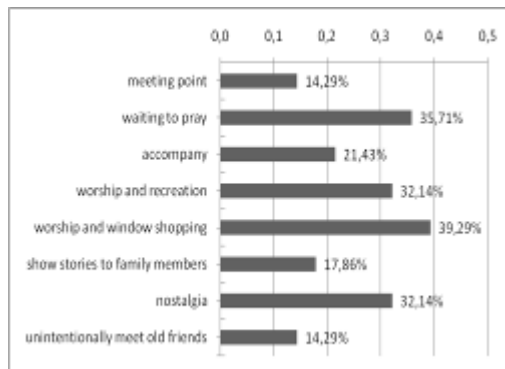


Figure 2: purpose of visiting
Source: Dewiyanti, 2012



Figure 3: commercial nuance along the pedestrian
Source: Dewiyanti, 2012

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS PLACE IDENTITY OF SALMAN MOSQUE

As a meaningful place to users, the Salman mosque in relation to its identity has been understood as follows: (1) a place to bring a peace of mind (71.43%), (2) a place that is near to the famous area of Dago street and ITB campus and easily accessible (60.71%), (3) a place with a pleasant appearance, (4) a place of worship with Imams who are considered good and highly intellectual, (5) a mosque with a positive atmosphere and has a historical background (46.43%), (6) a place which is

comfortable to use for a variety of activities both social and ritual, (7) a unique place with brave design at the time, (8) and great mosque appears in its simplicity.

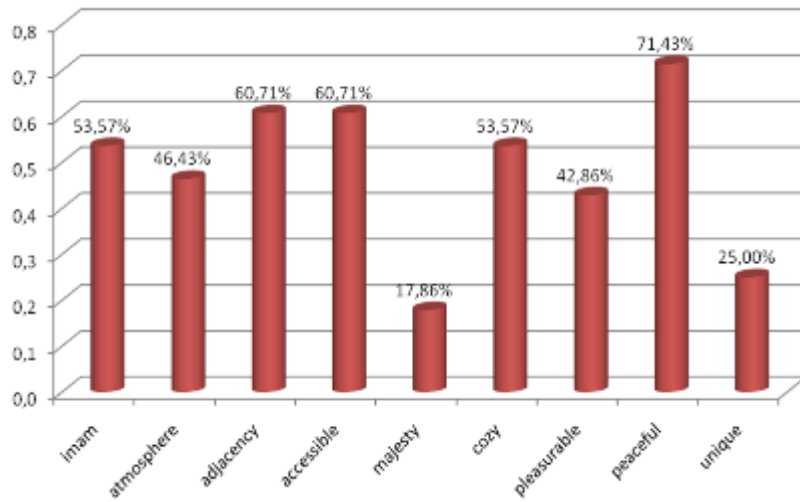


Figure 4: Salman mosque identity according to outsiders
Source: Dewiyanti, 2012

1. The Ability of Space to Generate Memories

As a place with a long history, the Salman mosque is more than capable to mobilize the continuity between generations. Pride of place is able to build inter-generational nostalgia for old users. Plenty of the congregation comes to the mosque just to reminisce, pass the memories to the family, relatives and even the next generation of the mosque committee. The Salman mosque is able to collect all the memory and to evoke one’s nostalgia (figure 5).

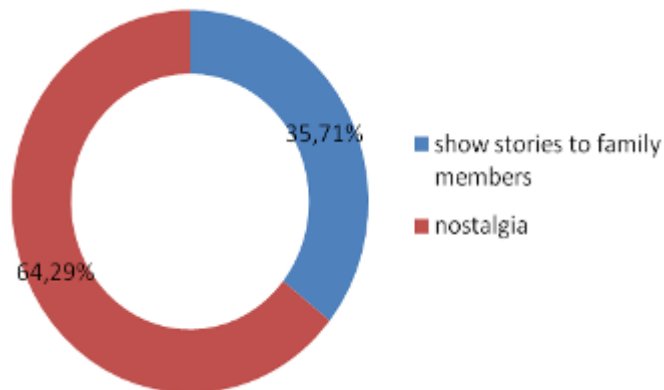


Figure 5: Reason of arrival diagram
Source: Dewiyanti, 2012

The exterior space is considered to be meaningful for them. The composition between building and the natural environment is mostly attracted to them. In the past, the unique shape of the building, made them very proud of being the member of mosque volunteer.

2. The Ability to Connect Old Friends Who Have Been Disconnected

Inadvertently, attendance at mosque giving a surprise encounter with an old friend who has a very long lost contacts. As a worship facility, Salman mosque is able to provide someone to re-appeal comes even when they were not resident in Bandung anymore. Pride, compassion, and astonish radiates from the face of respondents:

(....) I came all the way from Magetan, today is happened to be the holiday of my children and grandchildren. I want to show where my school used to be. Although it was difficult because of limited cost, I was able to survive college, thanks to this mosque services. In the month of Ramadan, there was much food in the mosque. Fellow colleagues could also help each other so that we can pass the class even though it was hard (radiated emotion attitude)
(....) I would like to show my grandchildren, the mosque and college so one day they also studied at ITB. Four years ago I was here, turned out to meet my old friend here too.....
Wow, boss he's now, great..... (proud face)

It can be concluded that the Salman mosque was able to reconnect the old friendship that have been cut off, as well as reviving the memory of a person and transmit it to the next generations. A space may become a place, if it can be recognized very well, so that they can have certain values and meanings that are not easily forgotten (Tuan, 1976:78)

3. The Ability of Multi-functional Space to Mobilize Various Activities From Different Generations and Backgrounds

a. The Place of Spirituality – Oneness of Place

"Oneness" of place represents the individual's potential for maximizing a sense of interconnectedness beyond the habitual and everyday use of a place. The Salman mosque is building or creating a spiritual atmosphere where one is able to blend with the neighborhood and make the campus activists feel at home. For them the mosque is a 'home', and there was always a longing feeling when they were not there. Unity between the physical environments with the atmosphere of the mosque became an attraction itself. The green open space is also the main attraction for them. This principle is a feeling "at home", a sense of belonging as described in the literature. Someone is bound to a place through a process that reflects their behavioral, cognitive and emotional experiences in social and physical environment (Bernardo, 2005). "Place attachment" engage in a positive bonding experience, sometimes occurs without awareness, which is growing all the time, affective, and cognitive between person and/or groups with diverse social and physical environment "(Brown & Perkins, 1992:284). In the end the behavior arises is the behavior of everyday life.

b. Salman Mosque as a Meeting Point

In accordance with Figure 2, the Salman Mosque is also used as a meeting point location (14.29%). This location was chosen because of its convenience aspect. For respondents who first come to Bandung, the location of Dago and surroundings are easily recognizable. For being the place chosen as a meeting point, it can be said that the Salman mosque becomes an icon for the area. Architectural icon can shortly be defined as "architecture as the medium and engine for urban development (Kiib 2010:40). According to Sklair (2006), the idea has two defining characteristics. First, it clearly means *famous*, at least for some constituencies; and second, a judgment of iconity is also a *symbolic/aesthetical* judgment: that an architectural icon is imbued with a

special meaning that is symbolic for a culture and/or a time, and that this special meaning has an aesthetic component. As he states: “It is this unique combination of fame with symbolism and aesthetic quality that creates the icon” (Jenks 2006:25).

c. Dynamic, Community-Forming Force

The environment, natural and built, can become a resource to bring people together into communities through a common commitment towards solving problems of the environment they share. Identity will evolve into a collective expression as individuals broaden their visual awareness and exchange with others their responses to threats against their adopted place. The Salman mosque as a community is a building functioned as a meeting place of a community, as a center of activity of a particular community, it is basically people of common or shared interests society, a community can be defined by their interaction, represent more than locality, capturing the current ethos of doing something meaningful together.

As an environment that is able to build a diverse community ranging from mosques and religious activities, social activities for the benefit of Muslims, a community of learning and teaching, the Salman mosque is also able to mobilize collaborative activities between students from other campuses. Its well designed exterior and interior spaces turn the atmosphere into positive and dynamic places for students’ activity. Because the environment is positive, the strength of the emerging community is also positive.



Figure 6: Student’s community
Source: Dewiyanti, 2012



Figure 6: Al Quran Studying Community
Source: Dewiyanti, 2012

4. The Ability of Sacred and Profane Space that Proportionally Separated by Salman Mosque.

There is a shift in the territories of space in relation to the activities of social, economic and education at the mosque environment. Some mosques were very accommodating to these activities, while at certain mosques mixing of activities is strongly opposed for the preservation of the sacred place. For the need of mosque to be able to accommodate people activities, the boundaries between sacred and profane zones are also growing. For the reason of economy, high prices and land limitations, some communities make the mosque surrounding as a market on Fridays. Public space used as trade territory, led to a shift of meaning. When the call to prayer starts to come, the area turned into a functional prayer room area for traders. Private zone is not clear, even still traversed by pedestrians and shoppers who do not hesitate to look for the merchandise in front of people who are praying.

The boundary between sacred space and profane becomes blurred. Amru bin Sy'aib said, "*Messenger of Allah forbade trading activities in the mosque.*" (Reported by Ahmad and Abu Daud in Musnadnya). When the space is used as a place of prayer, it means that space is bearing the mosque principle, while trading activity is still running. At an informal space that forms every Friday, it created a permanent space that seemed to be of agreement among the traders. The same trader will occupy the same space in the next week. This thing eliminates the difficulties in finding the same seller on the next visit of a frequent buyer.



Figure 6: Prayer in the area of trade
Source: Dewiyanti, 2012

CONCLUSION

The Salman mosque eventually able to create a space provides meaning for its users. As told by Antoniades (1990:54) and Louis I Khan, creating a space is the key of an architecture product. A space can become a place only if it possessed a certain character. These characters described by Schulz (1971) and Trancik can be activities and community cultural.

Salman mosque identity can be realized because of the place attachment in the form of physical objects, environments and activities. These place attachments are ultimately able to make the Salman mosque served as a place of Re-connect - Dynamic Creative - Memorable and Nostalgia.

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