Neighborhood Unit Concept
To Maintain The Quality Of Settlement's Environment
In Perumahan Menara Kudus Area

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Abstract

The issue of ideal urban housing is frequently discussed in urban housing planning and development. The concept of ideal housing environment desired by urban community is comfortable and safe housing to reside and able to fulfill a well planning standard and environmentally sound. It shall have easy, safe, and comfortable access prioritizing pedestrians, infrastructure completeness, as well as enable the interaction among residents. This requirement is a universal ethic expected to be fulfilled in the housing area by its residents. This ideal condition of housing environment is then acknowledged as Habitat Bill of Rights. However, along with the urban development, housing area planning has been far implemented from the expected physical standard. This condition, in advance, will cause physical, social, and cultural quality degradation within a settlement area. Based on the high demand on ideal housing that is directly proportional to the environment quality degradation, it will be easier to find solutions by understanding Neighborhood Unit Concept, which is a concept focusing housing area planning in the smallest scope of the community. This paper aims to explain the concept of neighborhood in old settlement in Kudus – Indonesia which is characterized by Moslem religious in the area of Menara Kudus. The neighborhood unit concept implemented in Menara Kudus area has successfully united physical element of settlement with the community's socio-cultural aspect so that the neighborhood social interaction among the residents are created by referring the similarity of the location and purpose. The residents' capability to maintain the neighborhood unit makes the environment in this settlement better improved and sustainable. The balance between the residents' physical and social closeness is indeed able to maintain the existence and sustainability of residents' living quality I this housing environment to be better (comfortable, safe, accessible, and has good quality.)

Keywords: neighborhood concept, environment quality, environmental planning

INTRODUCTION

Physical planning and infrastructure development shall lead to better living quality for human which is manifested by concerning the concept of sustainable development. Sustainable development is a development fulfilling present needs without ignoring the ability of future regeneration to fulfill their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development/ WCED in its report Our Common Future which is acknowledged as Brundland Commission, 1987).

Living quality standard is needed as well and that during the process to reach a better living quality, the main concern is how to utilize the concept of the planning of physical environment order (as a basic unit of human habitat). Physical order defines the quality of living environment is various aspect such as optimum settlement infrastructure provision and social facility distribution by minimizing the use of motorized vehicle and concerning more on the utilization of housing environment facilities which emphasize on the destination reach by walking (walk-able).

'Living quality' is frequently defined as the quality of the social and physical environment in which residents seek for desire and need fulfillment. The quality if living (QoL) covers character and external quality in which residents run their life. In this case, QoL concept is implemented in social, physical, and environmental field which enable the residents to life comfortably, healthy, productive, and safe.

The form of quality is portrayed on the settlement design. Design here is related to the basic residential which is constructed by various elements, housing units, road, path, open space, public facility, utility, and other related infrastructure enable each of the component to be well-functioned to fulfill the urban community needs.

Environment is a fundamental unit of human living space. In many terms, moreover, environment is the physical layout of the environment unit defining the quality of living environment.

Neighborhood unit is the residential environment which is hierarchically managed in city-wide to the smaller scale which can be divided into smaller community units which are equal to Rukun Tetangga-RT (neighborhood). Neighborhood unit may also be defined as a concept identifying settlement environment which has larger material and regional scope rather than household scale but is smaller then city (Rohe and Gates, 1985:4).

Neighborhood concept is a concept adapting post World War II settlement development mode of which settlement design implement the paradigm of neighborhood living which creates spatial community in the settlement area (Rohe, 1985:107). Therefore, neighborhood environment is not only seen from the territorial unity which is suitable with some groups of people with their strong social bound. Perry expresses his theory on settlement environment which principals cover:

1. The main road shall not pass the environment of settlement. Instead, this road shall be around the settlement area to attain safe traffic
2. Road pattern shall be managed in such ways in order to be able to serve the traffic normally by concerning the healthy air quality within the settlement area.

The population in the settlement area must be supported with education center (which population is predicted to be 5,000 inhabitants). Moreover, there shall no students to walk more then half mile to safely reach their school.

2. The Development of the Old Menara Kudus Settlement

2.1 Physical Environment of the Area

The area of the old Menara Kudus Settlement was a place for Moslem community to settle in. this area has complex expressions as well as performs unique identity which is a characteristic of Moslem kampong in Java. This area may be categorized as the oldest settlement in Indonesia and is located in Kudus downtown. The development of this settlement, which consists of Kelurahan (village) Kauman and Kelurahan Langgar Dalem, imitates the lifestyle and religious custom of Arabians in densely populated area in which most of the residents are *santri* (students at Moslem school), that is located around the mosque) Geertz, 1989:180).

Figue 1: Kudus Tower

Figure 2: Al Aqs Mosque Or Al Manar Mosque

The area of old settlement around Menara Kudus that is located in Kota Sub-district, Kudus District is similar with the term suggested by Geertz. This settlement area is a densely populated area with its narrow settlement roads around Al-Aqsa Mosque in Menara Kudus. The major livelihood is trade and most of the residents are santri. The area of this settlement was the center to spread Islam in Kudus done by Sunan Kudus. It is a settlement area that is located around Menara Kudus which becomes Walisongo (saints of Islam in Java) religious recreation. Below are pictures of traditional houses.

Figure 3: Traditional Houses

Figure 4: Alley as Environment Street

2.2 Community Social Environment and Neighborhood Interaction

Based on Clarence Perry (1929), the typology of neighborhood environment which is based on social closeness due to physical closeness is differentiated as follow:

- Social Acquaintance Neighborhood which characterizes the existence of the strong interaction network among the residents due to physical closeness

- Homogenous Neighborhood in which residents interaction is less strong. It is created by the shared agreement on the value applied within the group
- Neighborhood Units in which bond is no longer based on the residents' interaction but rather on the common need on facilities such as schools, palce of worship, recreation, and shopping facility. This type has relatively wide area and is more heterogenic.

The residents' social characteristic has a very strong religious culture. The majority is Moslem. The prominent activities are housewives gathering, Communal service, juggling money, *pengajian* (reciting Qur'an communally), *majelis taklim* (muslim assembly), *tahlilan* (communal praying), *yasinan* (reading surah Yasiin communally), etc. The neighborhood relationship (with its special condition of building of which walls separating the houses are thick and high) is the interaction among the residents that are still occurred even though the residents in this area tend to do religious activities. Below are pictures of the closeness of social aspect in a form of *pengajian* by the housewives that are held in Al-Aqsa Mosque, Menara Kudus.

Figure 5: Housewives Pengajian

The existing socio-cultural tradition is used as an interaction tool between neighborhood/ residents within the limitation of the building and environment, so that the peace and comfort of living together is well maintained and is not deterred by the walls separating them. The activity done in social aspect is mainly religious.

Muhammad Dajrot in Suprapti (1998, 11-13) expresses Moslem settlement, which in Islam point of view, serves as a media to realize Islam values in life. Moslem communities need places to actualize their existence, meaning, status, and real result of their own efforts. The settlement must be able to portray Moslem characteristic within the residents so that the comfort and peace can be realized/ it is seen that the building characteristics or the residents social living in this area imitate the life style of Islamic nations, that the life in this world is to seek for blessing from Allah SWT. By having Moslem as the majority of its residents, each of activity or interaction, therefore, is done in the

mosque and the elders of the residents. Besides the social relationship, the residents also have special characteristic for their neighborhood interaction. The neighborhood interaction among the residents in this settlement may be seen in the table below:

Table 1: Neighborhood Interaction in Menara Kudus Settlement

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE (%)
Know each other, care, good neighborhood relationship	42	52,5%
Know each other, good neighborhood relationship	30	37,5%
Do not know each other, poor neighborhood relationship	8	10%
Total	**80**	**100%**

The kinship level in this old settlement is considerably high even though there has been decreasing of kinship level and that the communal service experience differences to be compared with the condition before.

3. The Concept of Neighborhood Environment in The Area of Old Settlement of Menara Kudus
3.1. Physical Closeness
In the area of Menara Kudus settlement, the principals suggested by Clarence Perry are implemented by maintaining the area special characteristics. It is due to the land limitation with the shape of the building that is characterized by the thick and high wall as well as circulation of the narrow alleys which function as environment street in which spatial fulfillment to the planned area to be open and public space is not specifically available.

However, there is communal space such as mosque which may substitute the open space and at the same time functions as interaction place which is characterized by the religious residents. The residents' interaction is seen through the development of the space which is based on the former residents, which in fact in line with the ideas suggested by Clarence Perry which cover the principals such as the concept of the travel distance which can be safely reached, main road that is around the settlement environment instead of passing it, the availability of facilities which can be reached by walking (walking distance) as well as children playground which uses private garden in each resident's house. The existence of this old settlement is well maintained until this present time and that the residents living in this place states to feel comfortable and safe since they can adapt

themselves to the development and demand of needs from the present residents.

The concept of neighborhood unit in the area of Menara Kudus settlement in term of physical closeness may be seen through the maintained building shape and environment of the old settlement. It is portrayed through the shape of the traditional houses such as: maintained traditional houses, high walls separating the buildings, narrow alley as the environment street, the ability to reach a place by walking (walking distance), main road which is around the settlement area.

3.2 Social Closeness

The neighborhood interaction may be classified into three aspects, that are economic aspect, communality aspect, and religious aspect, which are explained as follow:

a. Economic Aspect

Economic aspect is the aspect of the residents' livelihood influencing the pattern of settlement. Most of the residents livelihood is becoming entrepreneur by having their own home industries such as textile or convection, embroider, printing, and furniture which have successfully improved the residents' economic condition, so that their income is increasing and thus the residents in this area are considered as middle to high class residents.

b. Communality Aspect

Communality aspect is a bond of shared living on the residents which is seen though the high socio-cultural value and interaction among them. The unique traditions on this old settlement such as "*buka luwur*" and "*dhandangan*" encourage the community interation level in this settlement area to remain performed. The community still keeps the traditions well which are passed through generations from their ancestors so that the peace and life comfort is not possible to realize.

c. Religious Aspect

Religious aspect is related to the religious life in the community in which all social interactions performed are based on religious aspects. The community in this area emphasizes more on religious activities that are made to be regular meeting in the social interaction. This is what commonly happened in Islamic nations. The area of this old settlement around Menara Kudus demonstrates its Moslem characteristic so that the comfort and peace can be realized.

The concept of neighborhood unit based on social closeness on the old settlement is included on the first typology that is Social Acquaintance Neighbourhood which characterizes strong interaction network among the residents due to physical and social closeness.

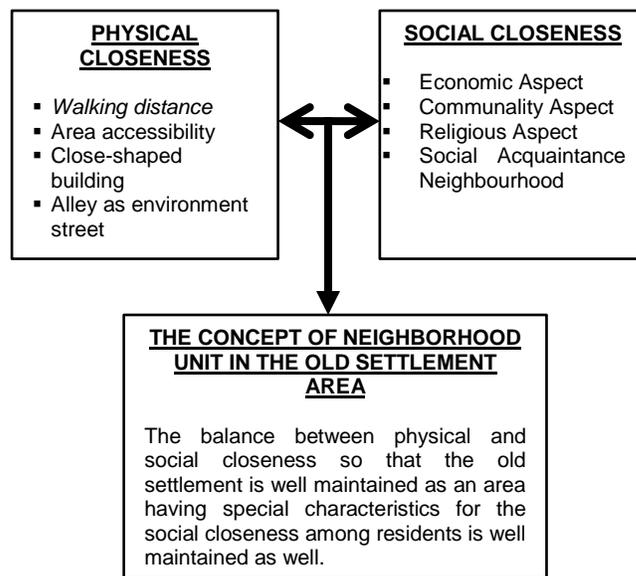## 4. CONCEPT OF NEIGHBORHOOD UNIT

Figure 6: The Concept of Neighborhood Unit in The Area of Old Settlement in Menara Kudus

Social closeness in this area is well-developed socio-economic condition, well-preserved communality aspect, and well-maintained community's religious aspect so that they create a solid unity.

Physical closeness is seen through the shape of the building and the environment of old settlement with its special circulation and building shape such as high wall, narrow alleys which are functioned as environment street, and fulfilled interaction place through the walking distance.

From the balance of those two aspects above, a concept of neighborhood unit is then created by maintaining the physical and environmental condition. The strong socio-cultural (community social and socio-economic) helps the sustainability of the environment and the present as well as future living quality od the community.

The firm neighborhood concept in the settlement area of Menara Kudus is expected to keep maintaining the physical condition, considering the fact that this area needs to be preserved for it has traditional buildings and special socio-cultural conditions. As does the interaction among neighbors which also needs to be maintained and well implemented, so that the sustainability of the settlement area to be residence area with good quality remain able to fulfill the need of its residence.

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