Engagement and Well-Being in Public Space. Case Study: Suropati Park Jakarta

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Abstract: Well-being is a positive mental and physical condition of an individual in their life. One of the ways to fulfill the need of such a condition is through public spaces, which function as a place for citizen to do various activities. This paper aims to look on the decline in the role of public space to increase citizens' well-being through the activities taking place there. To understand how the engagement and well-being of its users work in public spaces, the author examines primary and secondary activities, and uses the Five Ways to Well-being and the active — passive engagement approach. The author taking photos, mapping, and actively observing Suropati Park as the object of observation to analyze this phenomenon further by using the qualitative method. Findings show that Suropati Park as a public space can generate the activities that support the well-being of its users, which can be seen through the occurrence of various types of active and passive activities carried out individually or in groups.

Keywords: Well-being; public space; five ways of well-being; active and passive engagement

1. Introduction

Public space is a place where its users can gather, interact, and do a lot of other activities which have an impact on users' well-being. Interaction as a basic human need as a social being can be generated and accommodated by public space and cannot be replaced by a virtual world[1,2,3,4]. However, most of the public spaces in the urban area have slowly lost their role as a place to fulfill users' needs[5]. There are many kinds of past research discussing about the quality of public spaces but only their technical performance, such as air quality, emissions, and noise, instead of relating to their users. There are also some researches on human's well-being in public space through sensory urbanism[6], user needs based on age categories[5], intervention which increases liveness of the spaces[7], improving public places activity by using ICTs[8,9], examining key factors to achieve sustainable society[10], and achieving energy sustainability by maximize renewable energy options[11] . In other words, none of these researches have attempted to explain how the role of public space has been declining in meeting the user needs. By examining the activities and interaction between users and relation to the public space elements as the concern in this study, the goal of this study is to look on the decline in the role of public space to generates activities to fulfill its users' needs and achieve their well-being.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Public Spaces

Public space is a place for its users with similiar or different backgrounds to gather, interact, relax, have fun, and do physical exercises, as a place that can accommodate social and communication, all of which benefit their physical and mental health. Social interaction, a basic human need as a social being, can be generated and accommodated by public spaces whose quality cannot be replaced by virtual interactions. In addition, public spaces also offer valuable benefits for the city itself[1,2,3,4,12]. Such as decreasing energy and economy resources to run 'public space' like a public mall to attract users[10], while open public space uses less resources to do the same. Less energy usage can help an area, region, or even a country to achieve energy sustainability and reduce energy dependant on other countries[11]. To attract visitors to a public space, the effort should begin from maintaining the public space itself. Through necessary, optional, and social activities, public spaces can be a 'place' to interact by bringing people to meet face to face, thus creating a sense of belonging[13]. Activities carried out by users in public spaces are also an attraction for people around them, not only because of their physical elements. Thus, the users and physical elements will self-reinforce each other in generating activities in the public space[4,13]. Without a

convivial urban public space, there will be a gap making the community more closed and causing more problems because the public space cannot function and fulfill the needs of the citizens[4]. Therefore, it is essential to see the quality of the public space from tangible elements and its relationship with humans as its users to see it in broader perspectives[4,6,14].

2.2 Well-Being

Conceptually, well-being is about a life that goes well, physically and mentally[15], or a standard of health and comfort, as well as the level of happiness of an individual. Feelings of pleasure, satisfaction, enjoyment, and involvement will be the characteristics of someone who has a good quality of life, which is ordinary or can be triggered by good experiences he has, although the subject may not always be in good condition every day and that is a natural thing in human life[16].

2.3 Well-Being's Relation to Public Spaces

As time goes by, open public spaces in the urban area have slowly lost their role as a place to meet its users' needs[5]. The users' physical, environmental, and social needs must be fulfilled to achieve good well-being, but they are often not fully catered to in the public spaces. Such a state can be caused by the users or by the public space itself, and it can have an impact on the frequency of activities in the public sphere. This condition is called a negative process, when the available activities are not able to become stimulants for another activity. This leads to the reduction in the number of users in public spaces, thus lessening other people's interest to carry out their activities there. It will eventually form a self-reinforcing cycle of negative things. However, self-reinforcing can be positive too. Because when users begin to do something, there is always a chance for others to join, either to do another activity or just seeing what others do[13].

There is an approach to observe how to improve the quality of life of someone, first coined by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in 2008[16]. The New Economics Foundation (2008) calls this method the "Five ways to well-being," as a day full of activities has much benefit on a person's quality of life or environment. The first method is to "Connect" the quality and quantity of social interactions with the surrounding people (relatives or strangers), wherever the activity takes place in a space or whatever the means of interacting are. The second method is to "Be Active" as actively engaging in physical activities makes the body fit. The third is to "Take Notice." One must become more caring and sensitive by exploring the surroundings. The fourth is to keep "Learning" and trying new things that people have only heard of to explore their potential. The final way is to "Give" sharing the goodness with the surroundings and expand friendships.

The quality offered or provided by a convivial public space has a significant and direct impact on the number of users, the quality of life of the population[17], a sense of community, tolerance in life[4], and can save a significant amount of healthcare cost for the public[18]. The users also promote a socially and psychologically healthy lifestyle to the spectators who have not implemented it or plan to do so routinely in the future. Good quality of life will support communal life, which in turn sustains or complements life outside our home and workplace[7].

2.4 User's Activities and Engagement

There are primary and secondary activities in public spaces. First, a primary activity is something that people do as the focus of one activity. Next, activities that are carried out by the subject while doing the primary activity are called secondary activities. To illustrate the concept, an example would be a person walking his pet while chatting with his partner. Walking the pet is the primary activity, whereas talking to his friend is the secondary activity[7]. This paper focuses on activities and interaction among users and context. Thus, observation on primary and secondary activities is needed so that the relationship between activities and the achievement of well-being through Five-ways of well-being can be determined more accurately. Citizens of the city seek and use public space to be able to fulfill their five primary needs in public space: comfort, relaxation, passive engagement, active engagement, and discovery. These five aspects called "Needs in Public Space"[19].

However, to narrow the focus of this research, only two out of five variables from Needs in Public Space are taken to be explored further. The first scope is the passive engagement, an activity that merely involves looking rather than talking or doing something[19]. In other words, it applies to users who stop for a while and interact with their surroundings without being involved in any form of interactions with other users. One example is relaxation in the form of people-watching, which is the act of observing people passing by from one sitting point[19]. The second variable is active engagement, an activity that involves more direct experience with a place and the people. For example, when a user observes plants and animals as the features on public space and interact with friends or strangers there. As if the two people know what is caused by the activities that occur there (social triangulation)[19]. Thus, passive engagement is a user who only uses public space, albeit not interacting with other users, while active engagement is when users not only use public space, but they also interact with other elements or participate in activities available there.

If we go back to well-being alone, engagement is also one of five elements that contribute to achieve well-being. When users interact with their activites, whether it involved other users or object, it can be called as an engagement when the users get into 'engaged' phase. Engaged phase is when users fully focused and absorbed on their own activities[20]. Thus, the achievement of

engagement can be observed by looking at the relationship between users and their activites [21] to collect data and processed it further.

3. Location

The public space chosen as the object of this research is Suropati Park, located in Central Jakarta, Indonesia. The quality of Suropati Park as a public space fulfills the criteria in accommodating physical and emotional needs to reach the well-being of its users through the activities that occur within Suropati Park. Locations that have met the criteria will facilitate and increase the chance of discovery of activities that support well-being. Moreover, Suropati Park does not categorize as pseudo-public spaces which designed for customer who wants to spend their money to get profits[22], and does not provide free Wi-Fi to reduce 'the heads-down' or users that too engaged with their own gadgets, not doing or interact with surroundings and public space activities [23].

4. Research Method

To observe and explain this phenomenon, the researchers applied the theories in Five Ways to Well-being and Needs in Public Space by looking at the activities taking place there and relating them to how the role of public space is carried out. Specifically, the researchers conducted an active observation and collected evidence from activities in the Suropati Park area with mapping and photographs to gather data for qualitative method. Mapping was done to see where and what the users do as their primary and secondary activities and taking notes on how long users do their activities. By using the qualitative method, those mapping of primary and secondary activities were examined further to analyzed by three aspects of Five Ways to Well-being (becoming three-ways of well-being to limit this research) which is connect, be active, and take notice, and find their relation to two aspects of Needs in Public Space; passive — active engagement.

5. Results and Discussion

The observations show that very diverse activities occur in Suropati Park, ranging from reading books, drawing, playing with gadgets, chatting with friends, buying and selling goods, picnicking, playing with animals, recording videos, practicing performance art, and participating in various sports that can be done either individually or in groups, such as jogging and yoga, to name a few. Because there are too many main activities in Suropati Park to analyze, the authors have shrunk them into two main categories as the most frequent activities in Suropati Park: art and physical activities.

Based on observations from artistic activities, there are two roles of the users who create art. The first are the artists who offer their services or perform in public

(Fig.1a), and next are the regular visitors who come for a specific purpose (Fig.1b). Both roles can be done individually or in groups. During peak hours, art performers are present and scattered in various areas of Suropati Park. However, their location depends on the following physical elements: seating, vegetation, intriguing details, and the number of participants in the activity. Users who are doing the activity by themselves are often seen reading, drawing, or painting on a bench located far from the crowd and using vegetation as visual barrier. Their secondary activities include using their gadgets or observing their surroundings (Fig.2a). On the other hand, those in groups choose to use a spacious area located on the more exposed area than the individual ones and mostly they do not need a bench because sitting on the ground does not have a maximum capacity (Fig.2b). Artists, especially painters, use surrounding elements such as trees, surrounding activities, or visitors' faces as objects of their art. While other artists are busy with activities such as theater practice, dancing, and playing music, they also become observation objects for other users. Judging from the duration of the performers in activities in the park, most of them continue with the same activity or stay at one place for more than 15 minutes. They tend to focus on their work—their primary activity—while chatting for a while either with their relatives (if they are accompanied by one person or more), or other people approaching them to purchase their creations when they are alone, which is their secondary activity.

Fig. 1: Examples of individual and group art activities at Suropati Park[24,25].

According to observations at Suropati Park, artistic activities are able to meet the criteria of active and passive engagement. Meanwhile, which impact the user will get depends on the 'chosen' role of the user while in the park. When a user chooses the role of merely observing around for his activities as an object, he can be categorized as passive engagement because only a two-way relationship between the user and its context (sitting on a bench and watching around) can be categorized as take notice. However, when a friend of a solo painter or musician comes to him, and they have some conversation, it is an example of when a passive user decides to interact with other users around him. In that case, each of them has reached the aspect of being connected, thus achieving active engagement (Fig.2a).
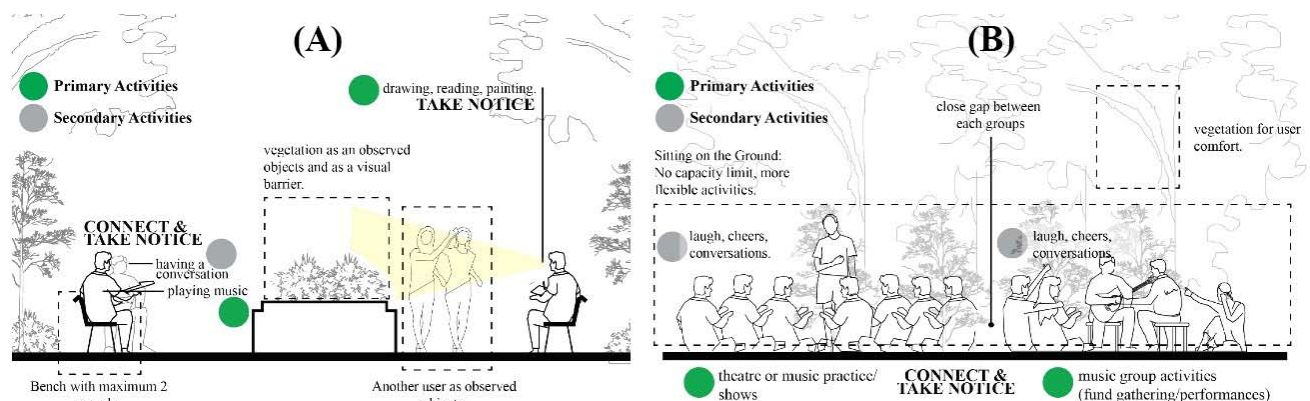

Fig. 2: Individual and groups on artistic activities at Suropati Park.
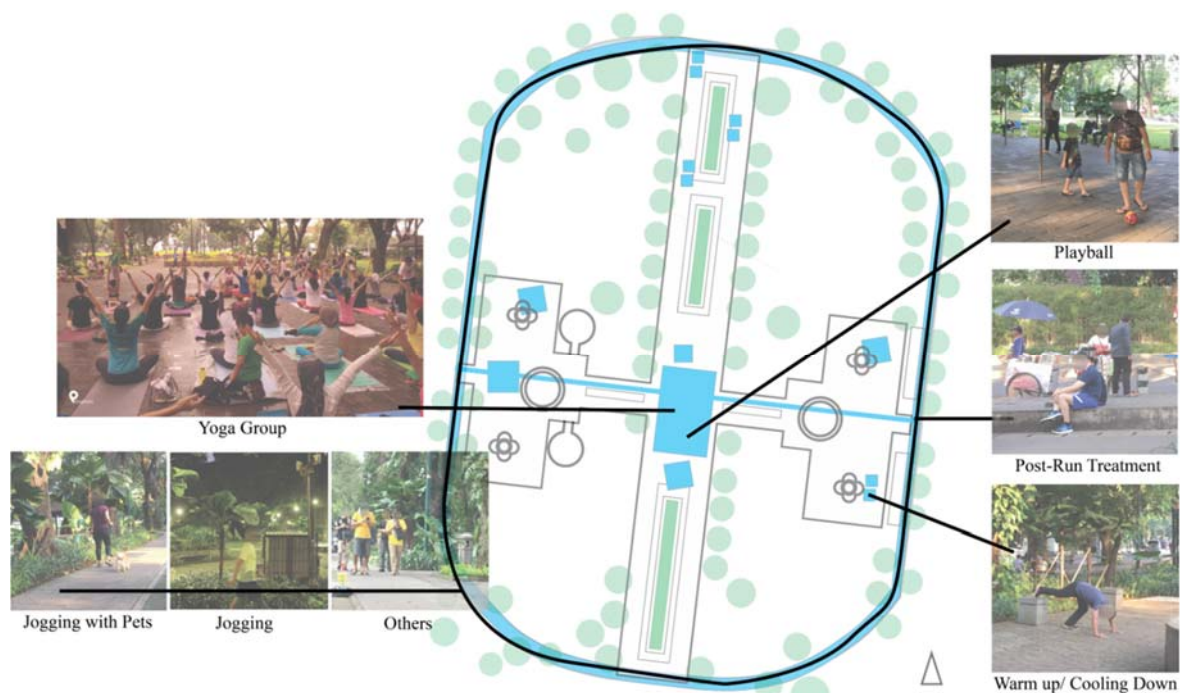

Fig. 3: Sport activities location on Suropati Park.

As the second main categories, physical activities can be seen from the existence of a jogging track that surrounds the perimeter of Suropati Park. Jogging track are appropriately used by its users just by looking at the intensity and frequency of the jogging track. They usually start jogging by warming up in the Suropati Park area, anywhere without a specific location (except the grass area). Although there is no specific zone for exercise, users can still carry out various physical activities (Fig.3), like yoga, pilates, playball, warming-up and cooling down, throughout the area of the Suropati Park pavement without problems and maximize physical elements around them to

support their activities (Fig.4). Moreover, it is not uncommon to see users who are doing sports while carrying their pets, which is their secondary activity. After exercising, the user strolls around the park to cool down or buy some snacks. It was discovered that users approach other users who bring their animals and then talk about their pets; some users are also found taking pictures with their pets, and their interaction can be categorized as Connect.

Fig. 4: Physical activities that maximize the physical elements of Suropati Park.

Various physical activities can occur because of the Suropati Park's design that is not limited to one specific function. Simply put, it is flexible in accommodating various physical activities. All these physical activities can take place in all areas by all users in the Suropati Park without having any sport-specific zone. Essentially, be active is when someone actively engaging in physical activities, and any physical activities involving dominant body movement of the users. Hence, 'be active' alone can be categorized as active engagement. Suropati Park's physical elements and users can reinforce each other to generate active engagement through physical activities. Because while the users fulfill their needs through physical activity as their primary activity, which is be active, they are directly 'connect' to the Suropati Park's as its context, and open opportunities to interact with another user. Therefore, physical activities are categorized as active engagement, either done by an individual or groups. Fulfilling two of the three aspects of well-being: Be Active and Connect.

Choosing Suropati Park as an object of research on public space with its quality that can accommodate the users need to reach well-being, can be studied with two main categories found in Suropati Park, namely artistic and physical activities. Artistic and physical activities are the ones that appear most often and are carried out with a longer duration in a series of activities. These two types of activities are generated by the elements and quality of the Suropati Park that can fulfill the well-being aspect through the activities and interaction of its users who relate to

three-ways of well-being and needs in public spaces. Nevertheless, not all activities from those categories can fulfill all of these aspects. For instance, artistic activities in certain conditions are considered as active engagement with the Take Notice and Connect aspects, while in other conditions can be passive engagement by only fulfilling the Take Notice aspect. Even so, both active and passive engagement are the needs sought by users to fulfill their well-being when visiting public spaces[19]

6.   Conclusions

Urban public space with its role as a place for people to do activities should not only be examined from the physical aspect, but also its relation to humans as users in order to understand the overall quality of the public space. Talking about humans as the users in Suropati Park means also talking about their well-being. The declining role of public spaces to meet the needs of their users is difficult to prove when we look at the variation, frequency, and duration of activities based on observations in Suropati Park. Suropati Park can flexibly accommodate various types of activities and interaction generated by users. Even developed into another form of new activities that makes any users more engaged in the context through their activities. That way, although not all artistic and physical activities achieve three out of the three-ways of well-being aspects, the users will experience the Take Notice (passive engagement) aspect as a minimum in achieving their well-being and needs in public space through the variety of activities while sitting or walking around Suropati Park. Eventually, they will get a value that has an impact on the well-being shortly after leaving the park and will come back to the park shortly as the citizen's public space choice.

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