

Cultural Microcosm in Focus: Landscape and identity in small village explored through design and environment-behavior theories

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Abstract

The cultural microcosm of a small village, in this case, Talun Village, is examined through environment-behavior studies, particularly the theories of Amos Rapoport and Kevin Lynch. The research uses a qualitative case study approach, including ethnographic fieldwork and visual documentation. It explores how cultural practices, social interactions, and environmental adaptations shape the village's landscape and identity. Key findings reveal that Talun Village's environment is structured around five aspects: acceptance, clear boundaries, appropriate rules, latent activities, and relation to other settings. The village features distinctive paths, landmarks, edges, and cultural influences on spatial organization, offering insights into landscape design and identity.

Keywords: Microcosm; landscape; environment-behavior theories

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1.0 Introduction

The interaction between culture, environment, and people can shape a space or landscape, giving it unique value. While often viewed broadly, this dynamic can also be significant in smaller areas. In this context, the concept of a cultural microcosm offers a focused perspective for exploration. A cultural microcosm serves as a valuable analysis of the interactions between culture, environment, and behavior in a small and self-contained setting (Ellen, 1986; Levinson, 2005; Rosso, 2009; Sun, 2020). This research features a small village, providing insights into how people, their behaviors, and their surroundings are interconnected, offering a detailed view of these complex relationships (Ellen, 1986; Gong et al., 2022; Lynch, 1960; Sun, 2020). Amos Rapoport's theory in Environment-Behavior Studies emphasizes the mutual influence between humans and their environments (Rapoport, 1977). According to Rapoport, the built environment impacts human behavior and cultural practices, while human activities and artistic expressions shape the physical environment (Rapoport, 1990). Therefore, understanding these interactions requires examining them at various scales, from individual buildings to entire communities.

Talun Village, located in Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province, Indonesia, is a representative case for exploring these dynamics in this study. It represents a specific cultural and geographical setting, reflecting regional culture while showcasing local adaptations and

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practices (Gong et al., 2022; Levinson, 2005). The village's distinctive blend of traditional and contemporary elements provides a valuable case study for examining the interplay between culture and environment (Ellen, 1986; Lynch, 1960). Therefore, this research aims to highlight how cultural practices, social interaction, and the environment shape the landscape and identity of Talun Village according to the theories of Amos Rapoport and Kevin Lynch. This research will cover its physical and cultural dimensions. It includes documenting architectural features, public spaces, natural elements, their meanings, and the social interactions they facilitate. Thus, the research objective is to provide a holistic understanding of the village's landscape by integrating visual documentation and ethnographic fieldwork.

Furthermore, community engagement activities will help reveal how residents interact with their environment (Benediktsson & Lund, 2010; Gong et al., 2022; Lynch, 1960; Tuan, 2001). This approach will enhance the understanding of the cultural landscape. Ultimately, this study will deepen theoretical knowledge in Environmental Behavior Studies and offer practical insights for designing cultural environments. The findings will be a valuable resource for academics and practitioners interested in the intersection of culture, environment, and design.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Contributions of Amos Rapoport and Kevin Lynch

Amos Rapoport presented the foundational relationship between built environments and human behavior, which is very important in understanding the cultural microcosm of Talun Village (Rapoport, 1990). In particular, his theory emphasizes that cultural variables's role in structuring environmental preferences and behaviors is most appropriate.

According to Rapoport, the effectiveness of a built environment is contingent upon its fulfillment of five key aspects: accepted by people and used by them, the appropriate definition of boundaries, congruence with appropriate rules, consideration of latent aspects of activities, and relation-and-lead to other settings (Rapoport, 1977). As such, the built environment expresses or communicates non-verbally the cultural values and social structures of people, according to Rapoport (Rapoport, 1990). The level and use of spaces in Talun Village are closely linked with cultural practices and social interactions, thus strengthening the argument put forward by Rapoport that cultural context is paramount in environmental design.

The most essential principles in understanding how the residents perceive and navigate the environment in Talun Village were imageability and wayfinding, which Kevin Lynch developed. This theory is concerned with physical elements constructing the mental image of the environment; path, node, landmark, edge, and district—which formulate a cognitive map of the community (Lynch, 1960). Especially in Talun Village, these things are crucial in shaping how residents interact with their environment to form mental maps, such as a sense of place and identity.

2.2 Recent Studies and Contributions

Recent studies into the themes of community participation and the creation of space offer contemporary insights into the dynamics of Talun Village. Gong et al. (2022) highlight the importance of participatory approaches in urban design, showing how involving communities leads to more responsive and inclusive spaces. This concept aligns with the participatory methods used in Talun Village, where local knowledge and cultural practices shape environmental design.

Badach et al. (2018) strongly emphasize grassroots movements and local involvement in urban planning, a concept that resonates with the participatory practices in Talun Village. Here, resident involvement ensures that designs reflect their needs and aspirations, aligning with broader trends in inclusive urbanism. Benediktsson and Lund (2010) provide insights into how residents engage with their environment, shedding light on the social dynamics and cultural practices shaping the village.

Putra and Tewdwr-Jones (2024) discuss how participatory design promotes equity by involving marginalized communities in decision-making and addressing their diverse needs and cultural values. This approach is crucial in Talun Village, ensuring that development practices are inclusive and responsive to the community's unique characteristics and needs.

This framework integrates classic community behavior theories from scholars like Rapoport and Lynch with modern participatory approaches, modeling the critical role of cultural context and community engagement in shaping the village's landscape and identity. The results illustrate how environmental design, rooted in the local population's cultural values and social practices, encourages readers to feel more connected and involved in the process, fostering a sense of community and shared identity.

3.0 Methodology

This qualitative case study explores the cultural microcosm of Talun Village using a comprehensive approach, using ethnographic fieldwork to understand daily life and cultural practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018) and combined with environment-behavior studies. The following sections detail the data collection, analysis process, and methodological justifications.

3.1 Ethnographic Fieldwork and Sampling

The study was conducted over six months (January to June 2024). A purposive sampling approach was used, selecting 15 households based on geographic distribution and architectural distinctiveness. Key participants, including village elders and community leaders, were engaged to provide insights into traditional customs. Residents were asked to share their perceptions of space, focusing on Lynch's legibility elements (path, node, landmark, edge, and district), though the researcher primarily identified these due to time limitations.

3.2 Data Collection

Data collection occurred in four stages:

- Preliminary Visits: Initial visits helped build rapport and understand the village layout.
- Ethnographic Observations: Observations of daily life and cultural activities were conducted at different times of day to capture temporal social patterns.
- Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with 15 participants focused on spatial organization, cultural practices, and environmental behavior.
- Visual Documentation: Photography and mapping were used to document key elements of the village landscape (Pink, 2007).

3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns related to cultural identity and environmental behavior (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tuan, 2001). Rapoport's five key aspects and Lynch's principles of imageability and wayfinding guided the analysis (Lynch, 1960; Rapoport, 1977, 1990). Data triangulation was achieved by integrating observational, interview, and visual data.

3.4 Methodological Justification

Ethnography was selected for its ability to provide deep cultural insights. Visual documentation and participatory methods ensured a comprehensive exploration of the village landscape. The study acknowledges limitations, particularly the reliance on the researcher's interpretation of legibility elements, due to limited participant input.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Observation based on Rapoport's Theory

Through this theoretical approach, an environment can be built effectively if it fulfills five aspects (Rapoport, 1977). Several things were found in these aspects of the observation object. The first aspect is accepted by people and used by them. It is a function of their evaluation of its subjective appropriateness as a behavior-setting system. Talun is a small village where traditional values remain strong despite its familiarity with technological advances. The villagers adhere to traditional customs. For instance, they still dry clothes on a line in front of the house or on a rope stretched across the yard, using a pole to support the clothesline.



Fig. 1. (a) Drying clothes in front of the house; (b) Drying clothes on a rope stretched across the yard.
(Source: Septian, 2024)

The second aspect is the appropriate definition of boundaries. The boundaries in the Talun Village area are comprehended. Each house has an area boundary. The side boundary is usually marked by the wall of the house itself and separated by a distance of 1-2 meters, which also serves as a trail. The front and back of the house are marked by artificial or natural fences (plants). The community respects the boundaries and avoids encroaching on areas that do not belong to them.



Fig. 2. (a) Boundaries between houses; (b) Boundaries dividing area.
(Source: Septian, 2024)

The third aspect is congruence with appropriate rules. Kinship in Talun Village is strong, with daily life centered around social interaction. Villagers often socialize on house terraces with open front doors. On the one hand, they share responsibility for cleaning the common area, especially the road in front of their houses, and maintaining communal cleanliness.



Fig. 3. (a) The villagers usually use the terrace to chat with neighbors; (b) Respective responsibilities in maintaining the common area.
(Source: Septian, 2024)

The fourth is the consideration of latent aspects of activities. The village still needs more parking spaces, as people prefer using vacant land for indoor spaces that generate material benefits. Meanwhile, parking lots are considered unprofitable because people pick things that must be paid for. In addition, there are rarely residents who want to manage parking lots. It leads to the habit of parking vehicles, especially motorcycles, in vacant areas. Residents often park in front of other's houses, causing resentment as it is seen as a territorial and manners violation.

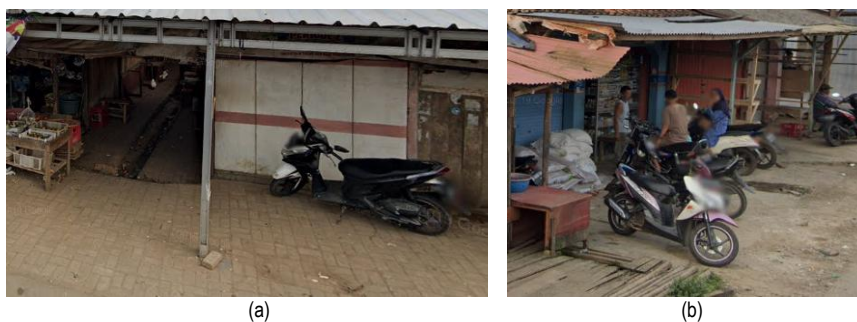


Fig. 4. (a);(b) The lack of parking spaces prompts villagers to use vacant areas as parking lots.
(Source: Septian, 2024)

The last aspect is related to other settings. Talun Village is a residential area near the market and only partially relies on it to fulfill the community's daily needs. The peddlers (who sell vegetables, side dishes, and snacks) come to the village area daily. When the peddlers come, people (specifically groups of housewives) will usually create a crowd around them. It encourages the children to play around the crowd because they like "buzz" moments.



Fig. 5. The crowd of women shopping at the peddlers encourages children to play in the surrounding area because there is a "buzz"
(Source: Septian, 2024)

4.2 Findings based on Lynch's Theory

The path within the observation object is an extensive road. Small roads also provide access to houses farther away from the main road. There are still paths around the houses that give distance between houses, which can be defined as paths.

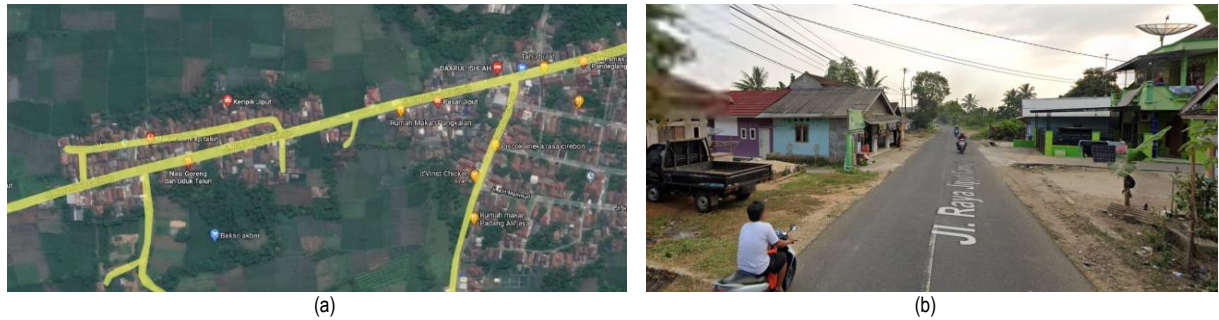


Fig. 6. (a) Path of Talun Village shown on the map marked in yellow color; (b) Path in the form of a road.
(Source: Google Earth and Septian, 2024)

The area's rural nature means no large buildings or significant monuments exist. The buildings that existed were limited to houses of similar size. It causes the definition of landmark here to be aimed at houses with a different visual image than others. Large multi-story houses tend to be landmarks in Talun Village (Fig. 7a). Due to their size, these houses serve as landmarks, and their owners often hold esteemed positions in the community, making them common reference points for directions. In addition to the large houses, the mosque is also a landmark due to its sizable structure and towering dome (Fig. 7b).

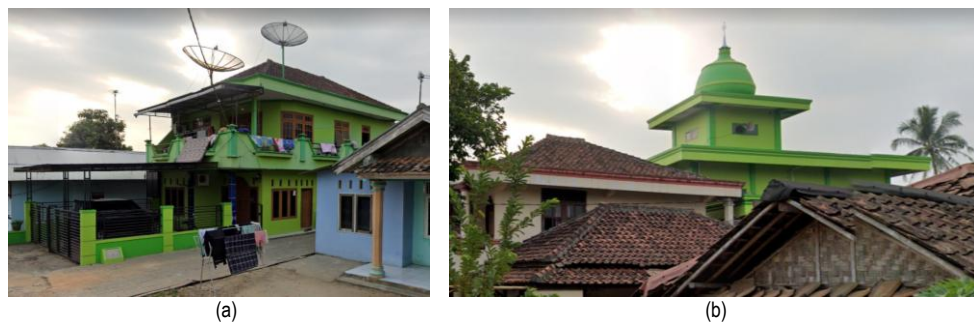


Fig. 7. (a) Multi-storey house and (b) Mosque are considered as a landmark due to its grand and towering shape.
(Source: Septian, 2024)

Moreover, Talun Village features extensive rice fields with clear boundaries between the houses and the fields. Typically, the rice fields are located behind the houses, separated by a river that marks the end of each area's character. Beyond the last house, the village's edge is identifiable by vacant lots of wild plants growing naturally.



Fig. 8. The red line indicates the edge of the village area.
(Source: Google Earth, 2024)

5.0 Discussion

5.1 Discussion based on Rapoport's Theory

While considered inappropriate in big cities, using public spaces to dry clothes is widely accepted in this community. Villagers perceive these actions as favorable due to the strong neighborhood relationships and mutual support (Gong et al., 2022). The community considers this practice normal and non-disruptive, often assisting each other in managing these items during adverse weather. The shared understanding and cooperation among the residents highlight their collective acceptance and adaptation to local customs.

In Talun Village, boundaries are clearly defined and respected, ensuring harmony and order (Lynch, 1960). Each house is separated by walls and trails, with front and back yards marked by fences or plants. These physical demarcations are well understood by the

residents, who honor and avoid encroachment on others's property. This clear definition of space helps maintain a respectful coexistence and reinforces community norms regarding property rights and personal space (Benediktsson & Lund, 2010).

Strong kinship ties in Talun Village foster continuous social interaction, creating a vibrant communal life (Gong et al., 2022; Levinson, 2005). House terraces serve as communal spaces where residents gather to socialize, and open doors symbolize hospitality and openness. Despite this welcoming atmosphere, residents adhere to the rule of waiting to be invited before entering someone else's home, demonstrating a deep respect for personal boundaries. Additionally, all occupants take responsibility for cleaning the portion of the road in front of their houses, maintaining communal cleanliness, and adhering to local norms (Putra & Tewdwr-Jones, 2024). This practice keeps the village tidy and strengthens the sense of community and shared responsibility.

Parking issues in Talun Village arise from residents's preference to repurpose vacant land for profitable indoor uses rather than for parking, which is considered financially unproductive. Consequently, vehicles are often parked in unused areas or in front of neighbor's houses, irritating homeowners. This situation is aggravated by the need for more willingness to pay for parking and the scarcity of individuals willing to manage such spaces. The encroachment on private property and public spaces reflects broader challenges in balancing economic activities with communal needs and social propriety (Enarsson et al., 2024).

Despite the proximity to a market, peddlers play a crucial role in Talun Village, serving as focal points for social interaction and economic transactions. Their presence attracts groups, especially homemakers and children, creating a lively and dynamic communal environment. These sellers act as social catalysts, facilitating economic exchanges and fostering social cohesion (Enarsson et al., 2024). Their influence extends beyond their immediate economic functions, contributing significantly to the village's social fabric (Tuan, 2001). The interactions around these sellers underscore the importance of informal economic activities in sustaining community ties and enhancing social behavior.

5.2 Discussion based on Lynch's Theory

Talun Village is small and has few road intersections, with only a few significant nodes. Key nodes include the intersection that leads to more distant housing areas and one that connects the village to neighboring regions and an Islamic boarding school.

The mosque in Talun Village stands out as a significant landmark due to its height, making it visible from up to one kilometer away. This prominence makes the mosque a crucial reference point for locals and visitors, serving as a vital navigational aid and symbolizing the village (Lynch, 1960). Its towering presence reinforces its role as a central marker for spatial orientation and community identity within Talun Village (Ah Gang, 2020).

The surrounding region features distinct areas contributing to the district's diversity (Tuan, 2001). Talun Village is an organized residential area known for its vibrant social interactions and, importantly, its generally peaceful environment. The occasional lively conversations only add to the relaxed atmosphere. Adjacent to this is the rice field district, characterized by its serene, natural landscape with expansive green fields. The boarding school district also stands out due to its focus on religious values. This more exclusive area houses both permanent residents and temporary students dedicated to religious studies and is physically separated from the main residential areas of Talun Village.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the cultural microcosm of Talun Village through the integration of environment-behavior theories by Amos Rapoport and Kevin Lynch. The findings emphasize the critical importance of cultural context and community engagement in shaping the village's landscape and identity. Observations based on Rapoport's theory reveal that Talun Village effectively fulfills vital environmental aspects, demonstrating traditional solid values and clear spatial organization. Specifically, the village environment is structured around acceptance by the community, well-defined boundaries, adherence to appropriate rules, consideration of latent activities, and its relation to other settings.

Lynch's principles of imageability and wayfinding are evident in the significance of paths, landmarks, and edges within the village's spatial perception, highlighting how these elements contribute to the people's sense of place and navigation. The village's landscape, characterized by distinctive paths, landmarks, and edges, underscores the strong influence of cultural practices on spatial organization.

However, one limitation of the study is the emphasis on the researcher's interpretation of environmental legibility, as time constraints limited direct input from the villagers. This constraint may have influenced the findings related to residents' mental maps. Therefore, future research should adopt a more participatory approach to better capture the community's perspective on spatial features.

To address current challenges in the village, such as parking issues, it is recommended that communal spaces be designated for parking, with a focus on collective management and maintenance. Strengthening communal ties through increased village activities, such as festivals or community gatherings, could enhance social cohesion while preserving the community's cultural values.

Future research could involve residents more actively in defining spatial elements through participatory mapping, ensuring their perceptions are well-represented. Moreover, expanding the research to other villages with different cultural contexts would provide valuable comparative insights, enriching the understanding of how artistic practices influence environmental behavior across various settings. In conclusion, the insights gained from this research offer helpful guidance for village development and cultural value preservation.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper contributes to design studies by demonstrating how cultural context shapes environmental design and human behavior. It provides insights into creating spaces that support community interactions and artistic practices, reinforcing Amos Rapoport's theory on the role of cultural variables.

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