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Community Centre for Kampung Kota: An environment behavior approach

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Abstract

Kampung kota are parts of Indonesia's urban systems, its intensive communal life contributes to cities' structure, but the design of community centers remains insufficiently explored. This study aims to develop a culturally responsive design framework for organizing communal space through activity patterns identification and formulate corresponding design guidelines for Kampung Kota in Medan, Indonesia. The study adopts a research-by-design approach, begins with a theoretical synthesis, subsequent field surveys, environment-behavioral mapping and interviews, and design exploration. The result offer affordance-place by providing various choices for public interaction space, accommodating all ages group's needs, local-skill oriented construction, and express local tradition.

Keywords: Kampung Kota; Community Centre; Culture Responsive Design; Environment Behavior Approach, Medan Indonesia

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1.0 Introduction

Urban kampungs are an integral part of Indonesia's urban system and structure. They are living environments shaped by close social relationships, collective activities, and everyday interactions (Tamariska & Ekomadyo, 2017; Anggraini, 2021; Qi et al., 2024). These processes generate distinctive spatial characteristics, including close relationships between dwellings, flexible uses of space, and the coexistence of domestic and communal activities within the same spaces. Everyday interactions can foster solidarity, social capital, and traditions of gotong royong (mutual cooperation), which contribute to the social identity of urban kampungs.

Previous studies have examined kampung environments in relation to settlement spatial patterns, housing transformations, social structures, livelihoods, and everyday spatial practices (Geertz, 1965; Guinness, 1986; Funo, 1992; Kusno, 2020). Other studies have investigated neighbourhood spaces that support social and communal interactions among the communities that use them (Josey & Ramirez-Lovering, 2020; Octifanny & Norvyani, 2021; Perkasa et al., 2022).

However, the insights from previous research on the social, cultural, and spatial characteristics of urban kampungs have not been sufficiently developed into design principles for community centres. In particular,

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limited attention has been given to how the relationships between behaviour, culture, activity patterns, and spatial opportunities can be translated into an interconnected system of communal spaces. The novelty of this research lies in developing a design framework for a Community Centre that integrates cultural behaviour, communal activity patterns, and the spatial characteristics of urban kampung communities into an interconnected spatial system.

1.1 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to formulate and develop a design approach for a community centre that responds to the social, cultural, and spatial characteristics of urban kampung communities, while considering their everyday patterns of life and communal space requirements. To achieve this aim, the study has several objectives: to identify the social, cultural, and spatial characteristics of selected urban kampungs in Medan; to examine everyday activity patterns, social interactions, and the community's use of communal spaces; to identify the potential and limitations of existing spaces; and to formulate design principles and strategies for a community centre that align with the needs and characteristics of urban kampung life.

1.2 Significance

This study is significant to the fields of architecture and built environment design because it highlights the need for community spaces in urban kampungs. A community centre serves as a design response to the community's activity patterns, social interactions, and cultural characteristics. Understanding the relationship between environment and behaviour is essential for identifying spatial needs and strengthening communal practices.

1.3 Contribution

The contribution of this study lies in developing a community centre design framework through an environment–behaviour approach grounded in the social and spatial characteristics of urban kampungs. The framework connects the theory of the production of space and everyday urbanism through communal activity patterns, the value of gotong royong (mutual cooperation), and the spatial practices of urban kampung communities.

1.4 Scope

This study focuses on the social and spatial characteristics of urban kampungs, including communal activities, social interactions, space utilisation, and the need for shared facilities, as the basis for establishing design principles for a community centre within urban kampung settlements in Medan.

1.5 Structure of the Paper

The study begins by examining activity patterns, behavioural practices, and the characteristics of communal spaces in urban kampungs. The empirical findings are then translated into design requirements, which inform the formulation of design principles and a design framework for a Community Centre that responds to the community's social and spatial conditions.

2.0 Literature Review

The literature review examines the concepts of urban kampungs, social life, communal spaces, and the relationships between space, activities, and community interactions as the basis for formulating design principles for a Community Centre.

2.1 Key Concepts and Previous Research

The term kampung is used across various regions of Southeast Asia to refer to villages or groups of settlements, with meanings that have evolved according to different cultural contexts (Wilkinson, 1901; Thompson, 2004; Samsudin et al., 2020). In Indonesia, urban kampungs form part of the urban structure (Funo, 1992; Funo et al., 2002; Ellisa et al., 2023). Their spatial patterns can adapt incrementally, with communal spaces emerging through repeated use of streets, alleys, terraces, yards, and neighbourhood facilities.

In Lefebvre's (1991) theory of the production of space, space is understood as a social product shaped by spatial practices, representations of space, and the lived experiences of communities. The perspective of Everyday Urbanism highlights the significance of ordinary, informal, and temporary practices in shaping urban environments (Chase et al., 1999). This can be understood through the concept of affordance, which refers to the possibilities for action offered by an environment and perceived in relation to users' capabilities and needs (Gibson, 1979).

Based on these perspectives, communal spaces in urban kampungs can be understood through several key characteristics: flexibility of use, spatial connectivity, adaptability to different scales of activity, and connections to the community's social and cultural practices. The quality of communal spaces is determined not only by their physical form but also by the activity opportunities they provide, their accessibility, and their relationship with the surrounding environment (Gibson, 1979; Stevens et al., 2024; Qi et al., 2024). Therefore, the development

of a community centre needs to consider the relationship between the physical characteristics of space and the community's social needs as a basis for determining its programmes and spatial organisation.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

This study draws on five theoretical perspectives to understand the relationship between social activities, community behaviour, and the built environment. The theory of the Production of Space (Lefebvre, 1991) explains space as a social product; Everyday Urbanism (Chase et al., 1999) highlights ordinary and informal practices; Affordance (Gibson, 1979) explains the possibilities for action offered by the environment; Place Theory (Heidegger, 1971; Ingold, 2000) addresses people's attachment to their environment; while Universal Design (Connell et al., 1997) considers accessibility and the needs of diverse user groups. The integration of these perspectives provides the foundation for design strategies that are responsive to cultural behaviour, flexible in use, and contextualised to the identity of place.

2.3 Research Gap and Conceptual Framework

The five theoretical perspectives Production of Space, Everyday Urbanism, Affordance, Place, and Universal Design are integrated to understand the relationships between social activities, community behaviour, and the built environment. This integration establishes three main design principles: Responsive to Cultural Behaviour, which accommodates social practices and cultural values; Affordance, which optimises the potential and flexibility of spatial use; and Place, which strengthens community identity and attachment to the environment. These three principles are implemented through an interconnected network of indoor, outdoor, and transitional spaces, with Universal Design serving as the foundation for accessibility and inclusivity. This framework translates communal activity needs into contextual and adaptive design strategies for a community centre.

3.0 Methodology

This study adopts a research-by-design approach with an exploratory qualitative method to examine spatial characteristics, communal activities, and the cultural behaviour of urban kampung communities as the basis for formulating a design framework.

3.1 Research Approach/ Design

This study employs an exploratory qualitative approach and research by design (Luck, 2019; Aydemir & Jacoby, 2022; Uzunkaya, 2022) to understand activities in communal spaces and develop a design based on field findings. The process consists of three stages: theoretical exploration, empirical identification of activities, users, meanings, and spatial expressions of communal spaces in Medan, and design synthesis into activity and spatial programmes, communal typologies, site planning, spatial organisation, and architectural expression. The outcome is a set of design principles integrating cultural behaviour, affordance, and place.

3.2 Study Context/Setting

This study was conducted in eight selected urban kampungs in Medan, North Sumatra, Indonesia, where communal and social practices are sustained through the support of local social organisations. Community activities include long-standing traditions, such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation), as well as local activities organised by community organisations. The study focuses on residential environments where communal activities take place across various spaces, including house terraces and yards, alleys and neighbourhood streets, local shops, places of worship, sports fields, and open spaces.

3.3 Population, Sampling and Participants

The participants comprised local residents and other individuals involved in the use, management, or formation of communal spaces in eight urban kampungs in Medan. Purposive sampling was employed based on their knowledge, experience, and involvement in the social life of urban kampung communities. A total of 18 respondents participated through questionnaires and interviews. Respondent selection considered socio-demographic profiles, building characteristics, patterns of activity and social interaction, community participation, ritual and cultural practices, and meanings associated with communal life.

3.4 Data Collection Methods / Procedures

This study involved two stages of data collection: a literature review and field exploration. The field methods included site surveys and observations, mapping, documentation, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Field observations identified the physical characteristics of urban kampung environments, facilities and infrastructure, and activities in communal spaces. Mapping identified the locations and spatial layouts of communal spaces and their relationships with community activities. Questionnaires obtained demographic characteristics, preferences and perceptions, and patterns of communal space use. Interviews explored

communal activities, participants, schedules, spatial meanings, local organisations, and the formation and management of communal spaces.

3.5 Measures / Variables / Instruments
This study examines the physical and non-physical aspects of community spaces through three main variables: the physical characteristics of urban kampungs, encompassing demographic characteristics, facilities and infrastructure, and neighbourhood service systems; community life, including communal activities, participants, and timing and frequency; and the characteristics of community spaces, including space formation, community preferences and perceptions, spatial distribution, physical form, and accommodated activities. The research instruments comprised field observations, mapping, documentation, and semi-structured interviews.

3.6 Data Analysis
Data were analysed qualitatively through three stages: organisation, interpretation, and synthesis. Interview data and field notes were organised according to themes, including communal activities, participants, spatial meanings, local traditions, institutional formation, and spatial needs. Mapping and visual documentation identified spatial distribution, physical expression, accessibility, and patterns of space utilisation. Questionnaire responses were summarised descriptively to provide supporting information on respondent characteristics, space utilisation, and perceptions. Findings were interpreted through Responsive to Cultural Behaviour, Affordance, and Place to formulate spatial programmes, spatial relationships, and design strategies for the Community Centre.

3.7 Research Ethics
Participation in interviews and questionnaire completion was voluntary. Before data collection, participants were informed of the research objectives, the information required, and how the collected data would be used. Personal information was treated confidentially and used solely for research purposes. Participants were entitled to refuse questions or withdraw from the study without consequence. During observations and visual documentation, the researchers respected community privacy.

4.0 Findings
This section presents the empirical findings from eight urban kampungs in Medan, covering participant characteristics, activity patterns, and the characteristics of communal spaces as the basis for exploring design principles and developing a community centre design.

4.1 Participant / Sample Characteristics
The study involved 18 participants purposively selected from communities in eight urban kampungs in Medan, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Locations and Number of Participants

Sub-district	District	Number of Participants
Sei Siskambing D	Medan Petisah	2
Padang Bulan Selayang II	Medan Selayang	1
Medan Merdeka	Medan Baru	3
Teladan Timur	Medan Kota	2
Hamdan	Medan Maimun	4
Sei Mati	Medan Labuhan	2
Kwala Bekala	Medan Johor	2
Medan Helvetia	Medan Helvetia	2

(Source: Author's Tabulation of questionnaire and interview data)

Participants had experience or knowledge of social activities, interactions among residents, and the use and management of communal spaces. The data collected covered demographic characteristics, residential experiences, and patterns of neighbourhood space utilisation through questionnaires and interviews.

4.2 Descriptive Findings
Observations revealed that communal activities take place within and around residential environments, utilising various spaces, including living rooms, family rooms, terraces, kitchens, house yards, alleys, neighbourhood streets, local shops, places of worship, sports fields, and community health posts (Posyandu) (Figure 1).



Fig. 1: Communal Activities
(Source: Author's Documentation of communal activities and spaces in urban kampungs)

Communal activities include everyday interactions, silaturahmi, recreational play, economic activities, pengajian or wirid, arisan, gotong royong (mutual cooperation), organisational activities, rituals, and major celebrations. Family activities take place in family rooms, living rooms, and terraces, while inter-resident interactions occur in terraces, yards, alleys, and local shops. Organisational and religious activities utilise members' homes and mosques/madrasahs. Collective social activities, including merewang and event preparation, take place in yards, alleys, residents' homes, and sports fields. Rituals and celebrations utilise living rooms, terraces, kitchens, yards, and streets.

4.3 Measurement / Reliability Finding

This study employs an exploratory qualitative approach involving observations, visual mapping, questionnaires, interviews, and architectural ethnography. The information reflects the experiences of community members as both residents and users of communal spaces. The data were analysed descriptively to understand the relationship between activities and the use of community spaces. Statistical reliability testing, such as Cronbach's alpha, was not reported.

4.4 Findings by Research Objectives / Questions

The findings indicate that urban kampungs in Medan are shaped by social relationships and diverse patterns of space utilisation. Communal spaces emerge within and around domestic environments, including living rooms, terraces, house yards, alleys, local shops, places of worship, sports fields, and open spaces (Figure 3).



Fig. 2: Communal Spaces in Urban Kampungs in Medan
(Source: Author's Documentation of communal spaces in urban kampungs in Medan)

Communal activity patterns include everyday interactions, pengajian, arisan, gotong royong (mutual cooperation), rituals, and celebrations. Social relationships are centred on families, neighbours, local organisations, religious activities, and shared traditions. Activities take place in houses, terraces, yards, alleys, local shops, mosques/madrasahs, sports fields, and neighbourhood facilities. Existing spaces can be

repurposed; however, large-scale activities face limitations in capacity, parking, preparation areas, cleanliness, and potential disturbances to neighbours. The findings inform three design principles: Responsive to Cultural Behaviour, Affordance, and Place, translated into activity programmes, spatial typologies, spatial organisation, accessibility, and local architectural expression through interconnected indoor, outdoor, and transitional spaces.

4.5 Relationships Among Constructs / Variables

The findings reveal a relationship between community life and communal spaces. Daily and informal activities include family/neighbour gatherings in terraces and alleys. Routine and organised activities include group meetings, wirid, pengajian, arisan, and exercise sessions in members' homes, mosques/madrasahs, and sports fields. Occasional and large-scale activities include kenduri, funeral rituals, celebrations, and collective preparations in domestic spaces, neighbours' homes, and streets. Spatial responses include small seating areas, shaded terraces, flexible meeting spaces, multifunctional spaces, open areas, service areas, logistical access, and temporary tent installation. Spatial requirements are determined by activity type, participants, duration, formality, preparation, and connectivity with surrounding spaces.

4.6 Hypothesis / Proposition Testing

This study does not employ statistical hypotheses or inferential testing. Instead, the design principles are examined qualitatively against the field findings. The first proposition, responsiveness to cultural behaviour, is assessed through the alignment of spatial programmes with daily, social, religious, customary, and celebratory activities. The second proposition, Affordance, is examined in terms of spatial functions and capacity. The third proposition, Place, is assessed through local identity, social interactions, and residents' attachment to their environment.

4.7 Summary of Findings

The communal spaces identified through this study of urban kampungs in Medan foster social interactions, cultural practices, and the use of domestic and public spaces. These spaces are characterised by their flexibility and adaptability to various activities, both routine and occasional. These findings provide the basis for three community centre design principles: Responsive to Cultural Behaviour, Affordance, and Place.

5.0 Discussion

This discussion interprets activity patterns and communal space characteristics through Responsive to Cultural Behaviour, Affordance, and Place, providing the basis for community centre design that sustains traditions of communal togetherness (guyub).

5.1 Interpretation of Key Findings

Communal life in urban kampungs is supported by a network of domestic and neighbourhood spaces. Everyday interactions take place on terraces, in yards, alleys, and local shops, while large-scale activities depend on space availability (Figure 3). This pattern indicates that communal activities require an integrated spatial system comprising indoor, outdoor, and transitional spaces. The community centre is designed not to replace existing communal practices but to support their continuity through three principles: Responsive to Cultural Behaviour, Affordance, and Place, strengthening cultural practices, activity flexibility, and community attachment to the environment.



Fig. 3: Site
(Source: Site design)

5.2 Comparison with Previous Research

Previous studies have examined the characteristics of urban kampungs, settlement forms, community structures, and everyday space utilisation (Geertz, 1965; Guinness, 1986; Funo, 1992; Kusno, 2020). Other studies have highlighted the role of domestic and neighbourhood spaces in supporting social interactions (Josey & Ramirez-Lovering, 2020; Octifanny & Norvyani, 2021; Perkasa et al., 2022). This study identifies communal

activities distributed across terraces, yards, alleys, local shops, places of worship, and open spaces. In line with Lefebvre (1991) and Chase et al. (1999), its contribution lies in translating these social and spatial characteristics into design strategies for a community centre.



Fig. 4: Aktivitas dan desain perancangan ruang komunal
(Source: Author's documentation and visual synthesis)

5.3 Theoretical Interpretation

The findings indicate that communal spaces can adapt to activities, the number of users, and community needs. Based on Gibson's (1979) concept of affordance, physical characteristics such as size, access, shelter, and spatial relationships determine the opportunities a space offers. Therefore, flexibility in a community centre needs spaces with different capacities and characteristics, ranging from small spaces for interaction to open spaces for large-scale activities. Place theory (Heidegger, 1971; Ingold, 2000) explains that place identity is formed through people's experiences, activities, and social interactions. The three principles, Responsive to Cultural Behaviour, Affordance, and Place, connect community behaviour, spatial opportunities, and place identity as the basis for community centre design (Figure 4).

5.4 Contextual Interpretation

Communal life in urban kampungs in Medan is shaped by social relationships and the overlapping use of domestic and public spaces. Terraces, yards, alleys, local shops, places of worship, and open spaces support social interactions and practices of communal togetherness (guyub), such as gotong royong (mutual cooperation), arisan, kenduri, and Javanese–Malay cultural celebrations. The design should accommodate these activities through gathering spaces, shared facilities, and connectivity between indoor, outdoor, and transitional spaces. Safe and inclusive pedestrian access, complemented by familiar materials, vegetation, and shaded areas, can strengthen community participation and local identity (Figure 5).



Fig. 5: Types of Materials, Vegetation, and Supporting Elements
(Source: Author's documentation and visual synthesis)

5.5 heoretical / Academic Contribution

The academic contribution of this study lies in translating the relationships between cultural behaviour, activity patterns, and communal spaces into a community centre design framework. The integration of Responsive to Cultural Behaviour, Affordance, and Place connects communal life with design decisions, extending the concept

of a community centre from a single building to an integrated spatial system that accommodates social activities through shared facilities and open spaces.

5.6 Practical / Contextual Implications

The design implications focus on an inclusive, flexible, and integrated network of communal spaces. Planning begins with identifying and optimising existing spaces, determining additional facilities, and establishing connections. Facilities include a multipurpose hall, local shops and an MSME food court, a prayer room (musalla), playground, library, community spaces, sports field, daycare centre, and accommodation for wedding celebrations (Figure 6). Their development needs safe and inclusive access, shade-providing vegetation, and flexible spaces for temporary teratak structures.



Fig. 6: Communal Space Facilities
(Source: Author's documentation and visual synthesis)

5.7 Unexpected Findings and Alternative Explanations

Communal activities do not always require dedicated buildings, as houses, terraces, yards, alleys, local shops, mosques, and sports fields already function as shared spaces. Therefore, a community centre does not necessarily need to be centralised. Its development should integrate improvements to existing communal spaces with shared facilities to accommodate activities that cannot be adequately supported within the neighbourhood.

6.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

This study develops a communal space design framework integrating cultural behaviour, communal activity needs, and spatial characteristics through an environment–behaviour approach. This approach supports adaptive spaces that preserve local traditions while accommodating evolving activity needs of urban kampung communities.

6.1 Summary of the Study

This study addresses the limited research on community centre design responding to the cultural and social characteristics of urban kampungs. It aims to identify communal activity patterns through an environment–behaviour perspective and formulate design principles aligned with community needs and traditions. Using a

research-by-design approach in Medan, the study employs field surveys, visual mapping, and interviews to inform design exploration.

6.2 Key Findings and Overall Conclusion
The design of a community centre needs to accommodate daily and informal, routine and organised, and large-scale incidental activities. Spaces should be flexible, inclusive, and aligned with Affordance, forming an interconnected network of indoor, outdoor, and transitional spaces.

6.3 Contribution and Implications
This study contributes to architecture by developing a community centre design framework integrating cultural behaviour, Affordance, and Place. The framework conceptualises communal spaces as a network of open and enclosed spaces, providing guidance for translating community activity needs into spatial programmes, facility typologies, spatial organisation, and architectural expression.

6.4 Limitations and Future Research
This study is limited to eight urban kampungs in Medan and 18 purposively selected participants. The findings reflect the contexts investigated and cannot be generalised to all urban kampungs in Indonesia. The design exploration requires further testing to evaluate programme suitability, spatial flexibility, accessibility, and long-term effectiveness.

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study
This paper contributes to architecture and built environment design through community centre design concepts that respond to the cultural and social characteristics of urban kampung communities, particularly by formulating design principles and communal space typologies that support community activities.

Authors Contribution to Study
Research conceptualisation: Wahyuni Zahrah. Theoretical framework development and research methodology: Achmad Delianur Nasution. Field data collection and interviews: Dicky Andrea Sembiring. Literature review and manuscript preparation: Andalucia.

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