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REBUILDING SPACE IN PERANAKAN HOUSE IN LASEM, INDONESIA: PERCEIVED SPACE CONCEPT

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Abstract

Indirectly and unconsciously, globalisation era affects the changing of activities in dwellings that urge the owner to presents different features and requirements. That was challenging and become an internal problem of the owners or the heir of the house. Therefore, the preservation of Peranakan houses in Lasem becomes an urgent task. Rebuilding Space becomes an action by the homeowners as a form of preservation. This study aims can be simply stated. It is to understand which components could support the embodiment of “new places” within the main building of Peranakan house and to encourage the reader to think differently about the meanings of space. To answer the aims, the method began with a survey, interviews and observations by documenting tangible activities and spaces within the main building of the case study was a Peranakan house called Kidang Mas in Lasem, Central Java. The research discussion supported with one of trialectics concept called Perceived Space. The researcher found the reproduction of space was created together with the production of social space which originated from changes in private to public activities, and it was seen that space is not a mere place or container.

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Keywords: Peranakan house, Lasem, trialectics, space re-production, perceived space.



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1. Introduction

Space is possible to develop or change afterwards when human needs are increasingly complex due to internal and external influences. Thus, it causes rebuilding space. The definition of rebuilding is to make extensive repairs or to restore to a previous state. Therefore, in general, rebuilding means reshaping or reconstructing, in this case; space. The space intended is not constructed from massive boundaries but is created from experience which formed by various and continuous daily activities that are inherited by the house inhabitants. Lefebvre once states within the book of Soja (1996) titled Thirdspace: “Perceived Space links to the experience and repetitive routines of everyday life” (p. 66). In line with Fuchs (2018) states daily routines include into perceived space also known as a spatial practice which has various activities namely daily routines, production or reproduction of social relations surrounding the spatial form.

Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) concerned about the formation of culture and social spaces. He provides a distinct perspective in understanding space; not only exists as physical construction but also contains philosophical ideas. He also believes that in every culture there will always be another typical form of life which is rooted in tradition. Through his critical thinking, he yielded a space production concept known as the trialectics of spatiality consisting of three components, namely Perceived, Conceived, and Lived space. His concept further developed and applied to space by Edward Soja (Table 1).

Table 01. The trialectic components of spatiality – perceived, conceived & lived space

| Lefebvre’s Terminology of Space | | |
|---|--|--|
| Perceived | Conceived | Lived |
| Spatial Practice: Concrete, Real, Physical, Tangible | Representations of Space: Imagined, Concept, Intangible | Spaces of Representation: Real + Imagined, Tangible+Intangible |
| Edward Soja’s Terminology | | |
| Firstspace | Secondspace | Thirdspace |

The research focuses only on Perceived Space which defined as primary space which produced and reproduced by social and culture that has each characteristic. Kerr’s perspectives (1994) enlighten the statement that spatial practice embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation. Spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion.

The researcher emphasizes the factual conditions on the site to be able to provide a vivid picture of rebuilding space occurs inside the Peranakan house in Chinatown, Lasem. The researcher chooses one Peranakan house called Kidang Mas as a tool to encourage the reader to have another angle on the meanings of space. It also provides an understanding of what could affect the embodiment of rebuilding space through Perceived Space perspective. The statement is the same as Soja (1996) who argues about the Perceived Space: “... is also seen as a method to produce the material form of social space and presented as a medium and a result of human experience through their activity and behaviour”.

Peranakan house - Kidang Mas was chosen based on several reasons; firstly, the house located in one of Chinatown in the historical site in the upper coastline of Java called Lasem (Figure 1). In fact, around the 16th century, Lasem had become an important region under the Majapahit Kingdom. Then continued, during the Dutch colonial period, Lasem still had its charisma as an important port city, and in the 19th century, this area became the centre of the opium trade which was legally traded at that time. Beside that Lasem also known as the biggest Chinese immigrant before Cheng Ho from Ming dynasty, China came to the place. He mentioned that there were many Chinese communities in Lao Sam or Lasem (Suroyo, 1994; Pratiwo, 1990). A German sinologist Franke, Salmon, and Xiao (1997) stated that Lasem is struck by the fact that its centre looks like a small traditional Chinese city in southern Fujian, China which never found in other places in Java Island. The Second reason; Kidang Mas has become an attraction due to several reasons; the house looks taken care of and looks alive, because most of the generations were living, staying in the house and keep continuing the batik business. Therefore, this house consists of private activities such as family activities and public ones which involving people from outside such as batik workers or people who come with an interest in batik, either buyers or researchers. Another factor that supports the selection of this house is the friendliness and desire of homeowners to share stories and information about what is happening in the house and about the surrounding culture. This is significant because it is difficult to find such personalities in Lasem.

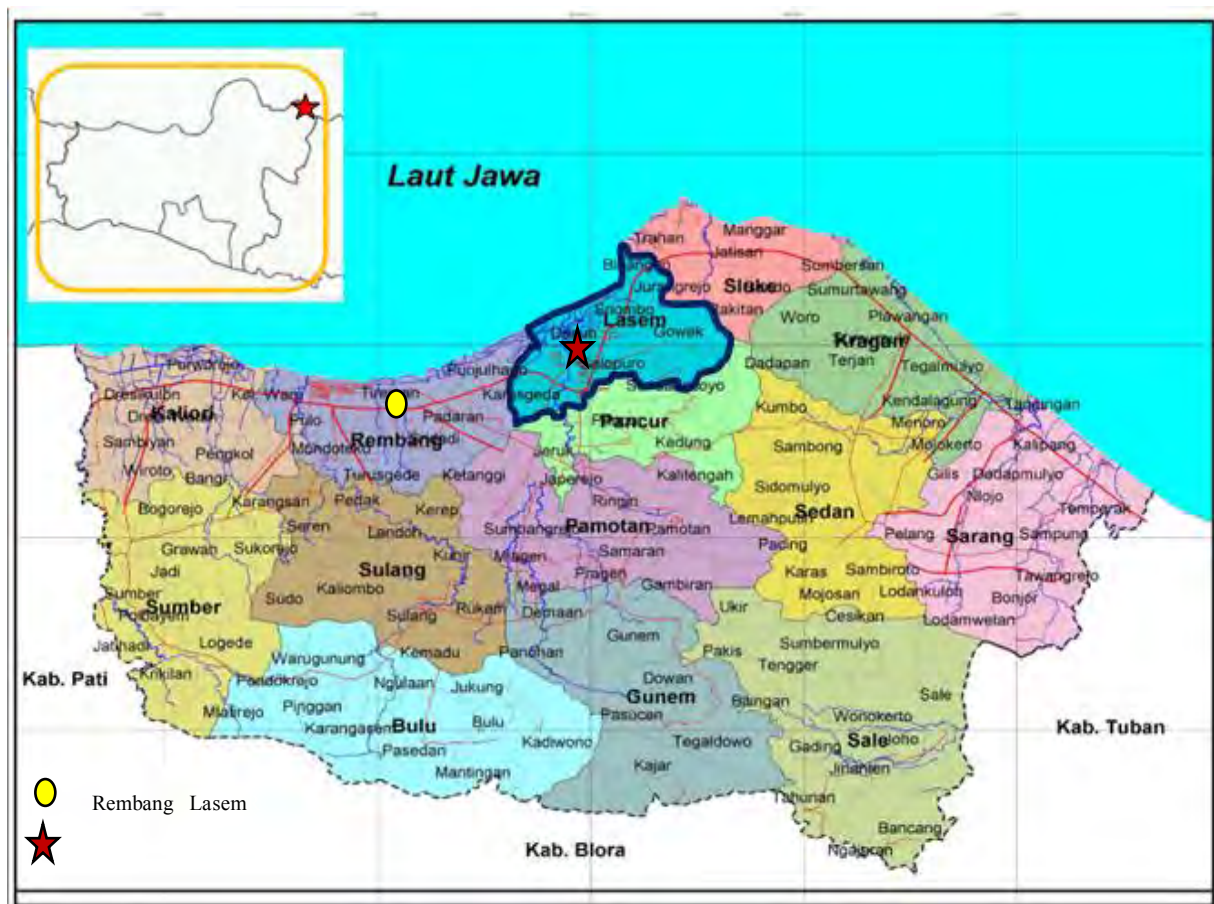


Figure 01. The Location of Rembang and Lasem, Central Java

1.1. The Establishment of Pecinan, Lasem

The remarkable historical background makes Lasem full of attractive historical heritage. The definition of attractiveness is not something has to do with luxury but to the richness of cultural and historical values. These historical heritages are Peranakan house buildings whose locations are divided into three Chinese villages called *Pecinan*. They are Soditan, which is considered to be the first settlement of the Chinese community formed around 1470 originating from the massive migration of Chinese to Javanese in the 14-15 century, then Karang Turi which was formed in 1740, and Babagan which was formed in the 1800s (Darmayanti, 2017). The establishment of *Pecinan* was generally based on two factors; social and political. The social factors were formed because of the needs of the Chinese community in carrying out their various social, cultural and economic activities. While the political factors formed because of *Wijkenstelsel* regulation made by the Dutch Indies around the 18th century (Pratiwo, 2010). Based on various activities of the Chinese community, in general, the *Pecinan* area consists of residential areas, markets known as *Pasar* and temples or local people called *klenteng*.

1.2. The existence of peranakan houses

The existence of the Chinese community in Lasem results in its particular cultural products, namely the existence of the Peranakan house. Based on Onghokham (1990), the term Peranakan was used by the Javanese for Chinese people born and raised in Java. There are two types of *Peranakan* houses in Indonesia, namely shophouses and bungalows (Figure 2). The second type was originally intended as a residence while the first one not only a residence but also for business purposes. Although, the house type dominating in Lasem is bungalows, historically political conditions, especially in the Dutch era have encouraged homeowners to make their houses “participate” in their business journey. At that time was generally used as opium storage. According to Suroyo (1994), those who stayed in Lasem in the 19th century grew very rich as opium traders and they owned a large house. Another business in Lasem is Batik Tulis, even though it is not as famous as opium, but its presence has existed before. Based on *Serat Badra Santi* from Majapahit kingdom (1432-1527) stated that the Chinese had influenced the existence of batik industry in Lasem. The technique of batik-making and the motif was introduced by the wife of Bi Nang Un, named Na Li Ni around the year of 1413. They are known as Admiral Cheng Ho’s ship crew (Nurhajarini, Purwaningsih, & Fibiona, 2015).

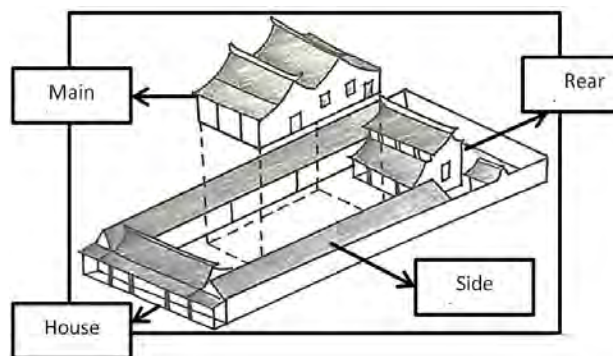


Figure 02. Type of Peranakan House, Lasem – Bungalows

2. Problem Statement

The preservation of Peranakan houses in Lasem has long been a cultural problem and since the young generation moves away, preserving the house becomes an urgent task. A lot of houses were abandoned because their inhabitants died or were left behind by their heirs to look for better opportunities in the city. But, recently there is a growing awareness of the need to Preserve Lasem's cultural heritage and that being done unconsciously. Since the researcher came to Lasem for the first time in 2017, continued in 2018 and recently in July 2019. There were significant changes in Peranakan houses in Lasem, some were indeed increasingly damaged, but some were looking better, due to the owner's efforts to preserve the house that carried out in "rebuilding space" within the house in several ways to adjust the situation. Soja (1996) gave enlightenment through his statement: "The Perceived Space or equally with the spatial practice secretes the society's space." The first common way to preserve is an older woman (non-family) is frequently employed as a housemaid to take care of the house; the second way, one family member stay in the house at least four times in a year, with duration depending on the agreement between the heirs – generally for three months as experienced by Mr Junaedi, aged 79 years old who lived in Babagan Village; the third way, all the heirs of the house agreed to change the house into a public space such as a guesthouse, a museum or a restaurant, and one family member stay there to supervise – happened to Mr Himawan who currently stay within the Peranakan house that turned into museum, guesthouse and café, known as Rumah Oei; and, the fourth way is to occupy the house by running a family business that has been passed down for generations – experienced by Mr Rudi Siswanto as the sixth generation who own Batik Kidang Mas atelier and stay in the Peranakan house.

These various cases show that the house no longer is seen as an entity of everyday family life. The house is not just a collection of systems that works like a static machine, but it is dynamic, continues to grow, make a change, extend or even diminish according to its local character and condition. That statement supported by Babere (2015) who argues that "spatial practice was born and seen as space used by various factors that intervene in the process of creating a material entity." Thus, the researcher argues that when the function of the Peranakan house began to change, there must be some alteration within the activities which influence the spatial embodiment. The activities in the "old" house are no longer creating a space, but are already at the rebuilding stage or even creating new spaces in it.

3. Research Questions

- What are the factors influencing the formulation of rebuilding spaces?

4. Purpose of the Study

Based on the curiosity from research question, this article aims to get the reader to get another perspective on Perceived Space through the process of rebuilding space that occurs inside the house. In addition, it is also expected to provide better understanding to the activities that support the embodiment of "new places" inside the Peranakan house of Kidang Mas; main building based on the Perceived Space perspective that consists of concrete, real and tangible. This is in line with Soja's statement saying that:

“The firstspace are concentrates on the proper “illustration” of the surface appearance of a spatial in social processes...” (Soja, 1996)

5. Research Methods

This qualitative study implemented one of the trialectic of spatiality concept approach from Lefebvre-Soja: Perceived Space. The research step - a field survey of the Chinatown in Lasem and recorded for the Peranakan houses in three Chinatown. The survey involved visual documentation and in-depth interviews with the residents of the Peranakan house - Kidang Mas have been conducted. The residents were the fifth generation, Mrs Tjan Djoen Nio and the sixth generation Mr Rudi who married to Mrs Vina who has lived in the house since 2014. Kidang Mas was located on Jalan Babagan, Gang 5, Number 1, Babagan Village. The period of visit to Kidang mas started in November, December 2017 and continued in September 2018 and June 2019. Through visual documentation and exploration of the spaces and activities inside the main building, the researcher hold on the basic components of Perceived Space, namely real, concrete, tangible and physical to answer the research questions about what kind of factors that influence the form of rebuilding space. While the information obtained from the interviews could answer the second research question.



Figure 03. Peranakan House – Kidang Mas, Kampung Babagan, Lasem

There are numerous studies on Peranakan houses in Lasem that have been published such as those by Pratiwo (1990) and Nas and Pratiwo (2002) focusing on the development of the house, while Onghokham (1990), Suroyo (1994) and Nurhajarini et al. (2015) discussed the history of Lasem. Based on the studies, the researcher has not found yet the publication discussing rebuilding space issue within the Peranakan houses in Lasem. Therefore, the researcher believes using a spatial approach from a trialectic concept can further open up the problem of various activities within the Peranakan house – Kidang Mas that have steady elements of tradition and locality (Figure 03). Through this approach, the visitor, the local people or even the homeowners may give more attention to their environment and even develop a sense of the place. Furthermore, it is expected to enhance the sense of belonging of local people and homeowners to their place so they could appreciate more on the historical objects that have previously been considered worthless.

6. Findings

The formation of a space is based on experiences that occur in a particular area. Lefebvre divides these three experiences or moments, one of which is the perceived space which involves spatial practice. Spatial practice is known to be a concept that shows material dimensions of social activities and their interactions. The spatial classification emphasizes concrete aspects of activity (they can be captured by the five senses: seen, touched, felt, smelled, and heard) and occurs continuously so that it becomes part of everyday life (Lefebvre & Nicholson-Smith, 1991). In Peranakan house - Kidang Mas, daily space becomes a system that supports various social and cultural activities. The activities are possible in involving both family members and non-family member. The space formed is a representation of the expressions of each individual with their fundamentals on social and cultural beliefs. This article discusses some of the rebuilding space that occurs inside the house through the presence of a front terrace, prayer room, and back terrace. The formation process of rebuilding space occurs due to the presence of new practices in certain areas. The activities are created as a response to the surrounding situation without neglecting the cultural roots that have been passed down from generation to generation. As in the prayer room, which was originally only used for prayer rituals, other activities are currently being served; namely the storage for fully finished batik clothes. It even becomes a place to choose the batik to be sold. Spatial practice intended here helps in affirming one space and making it more valuable. Like the terrace area of the Peranakan house - Kidang Mas which is currently used by residents not only to welcome guests but also welcome batik lovers or researchers. It could be said that residents are interpreting the terrace as a social space, a place where communication activities occur and even the practice of batik trading. The area could be interpreted as a playground for children of the residents as well as a place for Lasem batik workshops (batik sketches activity). Therefore, the meaning of the terrace becomes more specific (Figure 4). In this case, the terrace has become a physical place framed by the relationship between activities that create “space” as a distinguishing definition of space in general. The terrace becomes a different space from the other spaces inside the house.

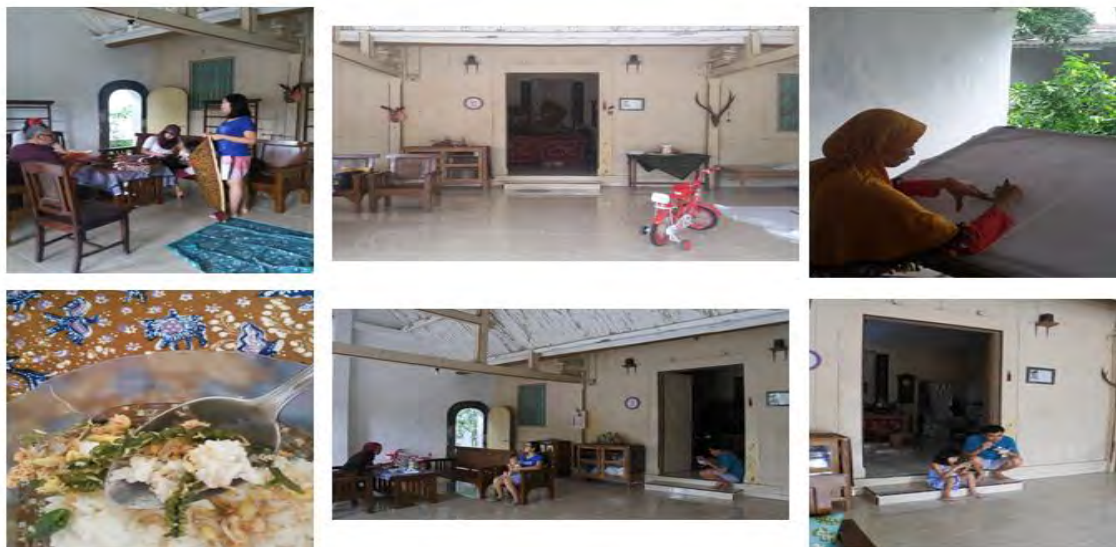


Figure 04. Activities at the Front Terrace – Kidang Mas

The spatial practice also ensures the continuity and relationships between activities and people within the house. Batik sketches relate to the introduction to the production of each batik to batik lovers and buyers. This can also benefit the oncoming researchers to data collection until getting a lunch “invitation” cooked by the owner or buy from outside the house. As a playground, it gives a distinctive ambience, far from being a disturbing impression, more to friendliness, warmth and acceptance. When compared with the initial function as a family area, a variety of new activities will create rebuilding space. Something similar occurs in the back terrace area; initially, the back terrace was intended for family gatherings that are “intimate”. The activities of dining together, gathering, and chatting generally occur in that area. However, changes occur, there are additional activities; namely, as a place to fold batik clothes that have been completed and ready to sell and send to the customer (Figure 5). Likewise, the area is often used for discussion or just talking between family members or with guests whose relationships are close.



Figure 05. Activities at the Back Terrace – Kidang Mas

The changes in these spaces and the addition of new activities provide real impacts on circulation or flow within the main building of Peranakan House-Kidang Mas – include B as a front terrace (Serambi), C as a prayer room, D are the bedrooms, E is a family room, F as a back terrace and G is a bathroom. Initially, circulation was only intended for family members (blue arrows), then it developed together with the circulation of batik workers and guests (red arrows) (Figure 6).

The flow becomes significant because it will leave historical traces in the house, it could be part of a life story which is also a legacy for future generations. The explanation is in line with Soja’s statement below:

“... a memorable schema for Perceived Space or Firstspace analysis defined by the flowing movements of people, goods and information..” (Soja, 1996).

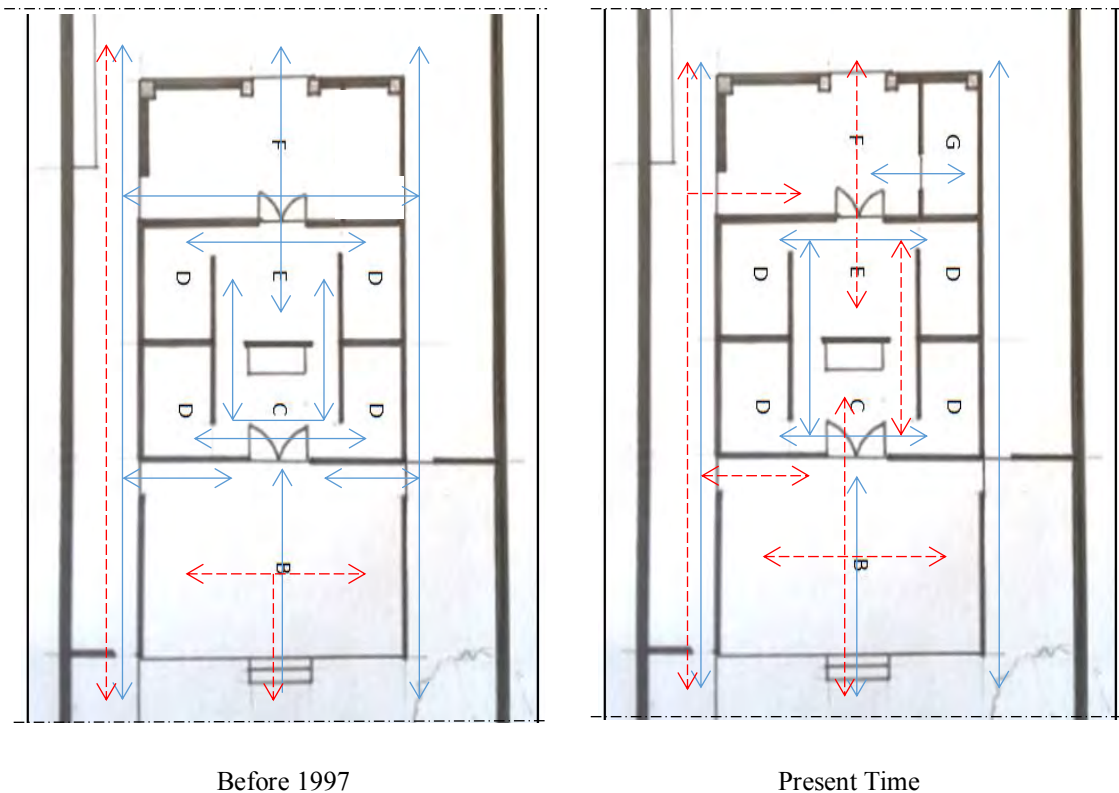


Figure 06. Sketch of Circulation in Main Building, Peranakan House – Kidang Mas

7. Conclusion

Perceived space is includes into one of social space moment within trialectics concept. It also as a process of producing the material forms of social space which includes activities and behaviour, all of which make it possible to produce experiences. Perceived space is consistently defined through the Peranakan house of Kidang Mas, and it creates the dynamics that occur in the inner world.

Why is it called the inner world? The answer is because nature is the originator or seed provider for the continuity of the activities. This is largely framed by cultural constructions originating from the families from generation to generation by responding to the surrounding environment.

The description concludes that consistent interaction and experience are important elements in rebuilding space inside the Peranakan house-Kidang Mas. The existence of new spaces is due to the response of the owner of the house to the surrounding environment; economic, social and internal culture-tradition factors (Table 2).

Table 06. The Influencing Factors of Rebuilding Spaces in the Peranakan House of Kidang Mas

| Factors | Reasons | Responses |
|----------------|---|---|
| Economic | Indonesia got monetary crisis in the year of 1997. A lot of business struggle and even collapse. | Add the new business and become major family business – Batik Tulis that involves people from outside the house (the Batik workers) since 1998. It affects the circulation within the house and changes the private (blue arrows) circulation into public circulation (red arrows) (figure 6). |
| Social | The Peranakan House in Lasem included in the category of heritage buildings that attracts a lot of attention from researchers, historical enthusiasts and tourist. | Before 2014, the house only for family or invited guests. Start from 2014 (the return of Mr Rudi to the house), the house is open to batik buyers and researchers. Usually they interact around the front terrace. Only those invited could enter the batik workshop in the back of the house. It affects the circulation around terrace and the function of the terrace. |
| Family Culture | In 2014, Mr Rudi brought his wife and daughter to move from Jakarta to continue the family business (Batik Tulis). His wife is willing to move on certain conditions. | Fulfilling the request of Mr Rudi’s wife to provide a bathroom in the main building that affects circulation due to new activities on the back terrace. In addition, the child’s presence also requires new space to leisure activities. These activities are often carried out on the front terrace. |

The cause of the existence of the new spaces that are getting stronger is the “inheritance” of knowledge from generation to generation; about way of life and about batik. The embodiment of the space is also indirectly formed based on experiences involving the five senses that occur between the owner, batik workers, buyers, and researchers. Therefore, the definition of rebuilding space is not limited to changes that replace something, but may also be an addition to activities that complement the previous activity. Through this, it could be seen that the perceived space through the rebuilding process has a distinctive beauty that can be identified through the five senses and is tangible. The beauty is owned according to whatever activities and various experiences that occur in it, the beauty can be a distinct identity that distinguishes it from other houses. Through this article, it also discovered that the reproduction of space created together with the presence of social space. However, this space is not just a place or a container but separated by physical and conceptual boundaries.

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