

# The Role of Place Attachment in Community Adaptation of the Cemetery Kampung in Semarang, Indonesia

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## Abstract

*This study examines the community adaptations in a specific urban settlement called an urban kampung. Cemetery kampung has a strong character that manifested in the community livelihood. It is a distinctive practice that occurs only in the Javanese settlements. Housing that assimilates with the cemetery area makes the community constructs specific adaptations that respond to the limitations in the neighborhood and life. A changing urban context also reflects adaptations of the community related to attachment to the places.*

*This paper examines the typology of community adaptations based on place attachment. This research employs a qualitative approach within which it uses case study as a method, and looks at the cemetery kampung: a settlement located in the biggest cemetery area of the Semarang City. In-depth interviews were conducted for data collection from 20 key informants who understand and experience the adaptation process. It is based on the premise that place attachment contributes to community adaptation.*

*The research shows that the cemetery has a strong root in building community's social context in urban life. The adaptation is built on place attachments caused by the existence of the cemetery as the main identity. Cemetery as source of life, property inheritance and identity as cemetery community shape the adaptations rooted from cemetery-based activities in the cemetery kampung as the role of place attachment. This study confirms that a place rooted in the community will have an impact on improving people's lives and become an input for a more humane urban informal settlement management strategy.*

**Keywords:** place attachment, community adaptation, settlement, kampung, cemetery

## Introduction

This article gives a different perspective in discussing community adaptations as a result of place attachment in a specific urban space called cemetery kampung. Adaptation is explored beyond climate change but as a survival issue. Cemetery kampung is a terminology of urban kampungs in the Javanese settlements that assimilate (Istanabi et al., 2018) with the

cemetery area in the Semarang City. Urban kampung as a third space in cities (Damayanti, 2018) becomes an important spatial entity to understand the process of adaptation, which is a dynamic process. These settlements are often informal and occupy the burial area for some reasons (Krausse, 1975; Larasati, 2019; Sunarjan, 2014). Krausse argues that lack of land control contributes to squatters in the cemetery area in the cities in Java while Larasati and Sunarjan consider about the legacy of land for generations behind the cemetery land occupancy.

Cemetery kampung has a strong character that manifests in the community livelihood. It is a distinctive practice that occurs only in the Javanese settlements (Erniati, 2021; Farida, 2019; Pradana, 2019). Housing that assimilates with the cemetery area makes the community constructs specific adaptations that respond to the limitations in the neighborhood and life. A changing urban context also reflects adaptations of the community related to attachment to places.

The cemetery kampung is a traditional settlement area located in a city center neighborhood that is in contact with the largest cemetery in the Semarang City. The terminology 'the cemetery kampung' is used as the area is located close to the cemetery area and forms a life that is integrated with the cemetery activities. The settlements that are in contact with the cemetery have a clustered and dispersed condition. This condition occurs due to the process of land tenure for the settlements formed organically following the unoccupied burial grounds in the past. The cemetery has created a sense of place that results in several forms of community adaptations. People are connected with the place through everyday place attachment (Brown et al., 2012).

This research focuses on the non-physical adaptation of a community in specific yet extreme urban space such as the settlements located in the cemetery area, in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. Poverty and marginalisation of the people in the cemetery area cause the community to develop means of survival as informal workers (Sunarjan, 2018; Winoto, 2018). Efforts to survive in this article are related to place attachment that has been formed collectively (Mihaylov et al., 2020) in the community of the cemetery kampung. The process of community adaptation becomes interesting because living around a burial area creates a particular place attachments among the people. Therefore, this study aims to find a typology of community adaptations that occur as a result of place attachment in a cemetery kampung.

The first part of the article is organized around the description on the cemetery kampung phenomena and a theoretical review about place attachment and community adaptation in the specific urban area i.e urban kampung. The latter part emphasizes the discussion of the cemetery kampung via a case study in three kampungs in the research area. The discussion starts on the development of the cemetery area as a discourse in the context of this specific urban area. The community adaptations are explored through the place-based community activities to reveal the typology of the adaptations.

## Review of Literature

This research highlights the place attachment in a specific urban settlement called the urban kampung. Images of irregularity, substandard and a series of negative perceptions on the physical appearance often appear related to the notion of kampungs. In fact, Kampungs are equated with high density, slums and illegal settlements, and with poor settlement infrastructure (Abrams, 1966; Cohen, 2015; Wiryomartono, 2014). Along with the development of research on the kampungs, there has been a shift in terms but most still refer to the same image. Although originally synonymous with slums or squatters, the kampung was later given other terms such as spontaneous settlements, slums of hope, or autonomous settlements (Funo et al., 2002).

The change in these terms indicates a change in perceptions that have arisen about these settlements. Kampung is basically a passion for community life in a residential environment that has a neighborly relationship and knows each other. According to Rocychansyah, the proximity of this environment gives a view of the kampung character as a representation of a compact city, although not entirely. This can be seen from the density, infrastructure, and land efficiency in the form of a mixed land pattern (mix use). Mixing residential and non-residential

land uses allows the kampungs to become livable and guarantees their sustainability (Roychansyah & Diwangkari, 2009). This strong relationship forms a community as the essence of life (Marco Kusumawijaya dalam Sutanudjadja & Pujiyanto, 2019). As research on the kampung develops and the level of welfare of the residents increases, views on the kampungs are increasingly moving in a different direction.

Previous research has looked at kampungs more in terms of their physical characteristics, but behind that, there was an order that emerged. Behind the informality that occurs in the kampungs, an order appears that is mutually agreed upon within the system (Budiarto, 2003; Jones, 2019). This order can be in the form of norms, traditions, agreements or feelings of a goal that is not stated in writing, even though the goal is to survive (Murray, 1995). Kampung as a settlement in an urban area becomes a land of hope because it provides a more affordable housing for the low income communities (Indrianingrum, 2017). People create attachments to keep staying in the area.

Place attachment is defined as the development of affective bonds or links between people or individuals and specific places (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). Place attachment grows as an individual stays, utilizes and creates meaning in a setting such as a house (Brown et al., 2012). Sometimes people keep staying in a dangerous place and still feels comfortable there. People create bonding to the environment because of external threats, a new situation or life turning points (Brower, 1980; Fried, 2018). Research on place attachments highlight the bonding of individuals to physical settings by creating actions that give meanings to places.

Scannell and Gifford (2017) has found that place attachment resulted in three dimensions of attachment. These are the person or actor, the psychological process aspect, and the place aspect (Scannell & Gifford, 2017). The first and latter are important to the current research, as it refers to the characteristics of the place. It can be divided into two sub-dimensions of economic and social aspects. The economic aspect of place includes cemetery-based activities such as livelihood that have arisen in the area and the social aspects include “social ties and belongingness” to the neighborhood.

This research echoes the scale of place attachment that portray the collective attachment rather than individual attachment (Mihaylov et al., 2020). Mihaylov argues that the discussions about communities can range across a greater scale such as the neighborhood or the village, city and environments.

Place attachment is often associated with the spatial adaptation process and is even associated with community adaptations to climate change (Amundsen, 2015; Gooden, 2019; Junot et al., 2018). This concept of adaptation in a community does not only occur in terms of the environmental aspect. The adaptation generated by place attachment can also occur due to the specific setting of housing in specific urban spaces (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993).

According to Mazumdar & Mazumdar, a sacred place can generate place attachment through resident’s adaptation but modern land use in the sacred places can minimize people’s attachment. Place attachment also contributes to the satisfaction of living in shrinking areas (An et al., 2021). To secure identity is to ensure continuity in the physical and social aspects together with meanings and attachments held by the people (Ujang, 2012).

The adaptation process that occurs in the cemetery kampung is very interesting because it occurs in distinctive environmental conditions. Actions that shape the attachments vary among the physical conditions which can contribute to the attachments but does not determine place attachment. There should be physical social processes that can create positive bonding (Brown et al., 2012). The research argues that if place attachment undergoes change and transformations, the process that creates the bonding also changes. The process that creates bonding is related to the adaptation strategies (Amundsen, 2015). Attributes such as natural environmental qualities, cultural values, mobility, length of residence and recreational opportunities have been shown to affect the development of attachment (Beery & Jönsson, 2017).

However, the discussion of community adaptation due to the place attachment process in specific urban area i.e cemetery kampung is still limited in discussions. Although researchers

have studied the cemetery kampung as a unit of settlements (Erniati, 2021; Farida, 2019; Larasati, 2019; Pradana, 2019), those do not discuss the way place-based adaptations have occurred.

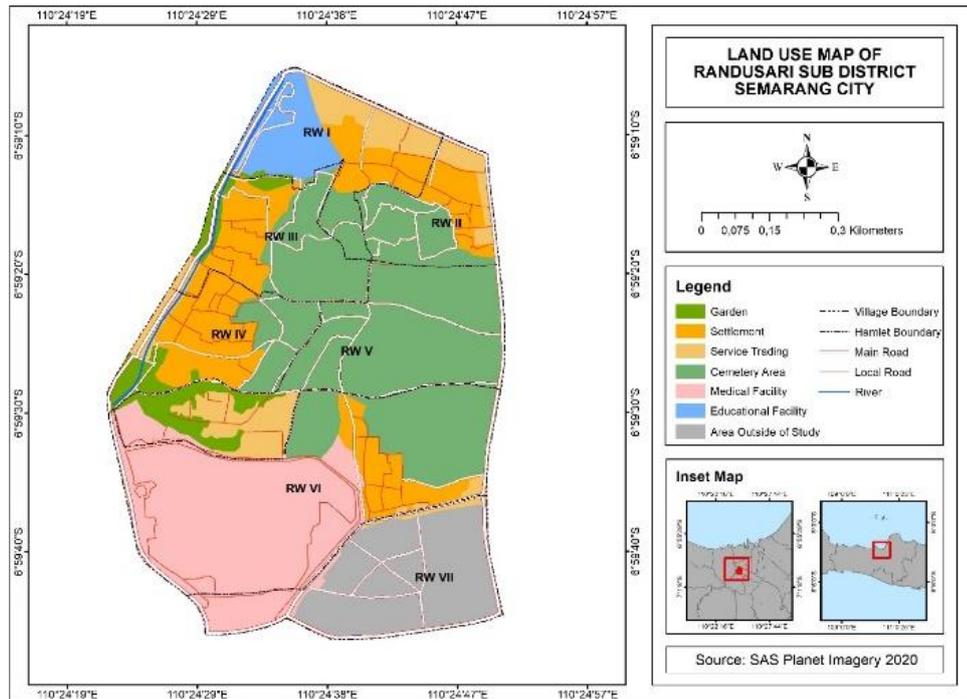
Following studies have shown the relationship of place attachment and adaptation but do not focus on the non-physical adaptation resulting from place attachment. Dayaratne (2021) examining the Sri Lankan migrants adaptations in Melbourne, point out that adapting to a new place also forces the immigrants to make such attachment through establishing community activities rooted culturally with the temple. According to Tyas (2018), prone areas as specific urban spaces also attract people to live for economic, physical, social and psychological reasons, including place attachment. Therefore, this article argues that place attachment contributes and can explain the background of community adaptation in the specific urban settlement i.e cemetery kampung.

## Methodology

This study identifies the role of place attachment in the adaptation of the cemetery kampung community. There are three stages of qualitative analysis carried out. The first analysis is of the growth of the cemetery kampung to explain spatially how the character of the kampung exists as referred to in this study. The second analysis is of the manifestation of the cemetery kampung to the activities of the growing community. The third analysis is of the adaptation forms of the community in their current place of residence. These three analysis link the discussion about the form of community adaptation related to the existence of a cemetery as an element of community adaptation.

A descriptive qualitative approach was employed in the research to examine the cemetery kampung at Randusari Sub District, Semarang City. Randusari Sub District is located in the city center of Semarang, Central Java and has an area of 66 Ha. In the area are located some significant urban-scale facilities such as Bergota as the largest public cemetery in Bergota, Cathedral Church, National Hospital of Dr. Kariadi, Pandanaran Commercial Center, Pasar Kembang (Flower Market) and Randusari Market. The cemetery kampung consists of three groups of kampung adjacent to The Bergota Cemetery Area (BCA). The three kampungs are Kampung Wonosari, Kampung Bergota and Kampung Randusari (settlement part in Fig.1).

Each of these kampungs has a particular physical character but share the same image of cemetery-based activities. BCA is located in the middle of the Randusari Sub District. Half of the Randusari area is this cemetery area (30 ha) and the rest of it are the kampung settlement and the commercial districts (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1:** Map of Randusari District and Bergota Cemetery  
Source: SAS Planet Imagery, 2021

Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews involving 20 key informants who understood the adaptation process that occur. The snowball technique was used to locate the key persons. It started with the kampung community leaders who understand the character of the study area and continue to identify the interviewees who have undergone the process of adaptation in the community. The interviews were held from September to November 2021. Primary observations were also carried out in the area to obtain the real images of place attachment and adaptations.

## Findings

### Growth of the Cemetery Kampung

Cemetery kampung refers to an indigenous Javanese settlement in the Randusari Sub District. The settlement is associated with the early development of the Semarang in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Brommer et al., 1995; Budiman, 1978; Nurhajarini & Fibiona, 2019). Map documents were explored to obtain the growth of the area. The oldest map is the year 1916 and it clearly shows the land use in the Randusari area (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2:** Development Map of the Bergota Hills Settlement Years 1916, 1942 and 2000  
Source: Processed from Semarang.nl and Army Map Services US Army, 1943 and Google Map

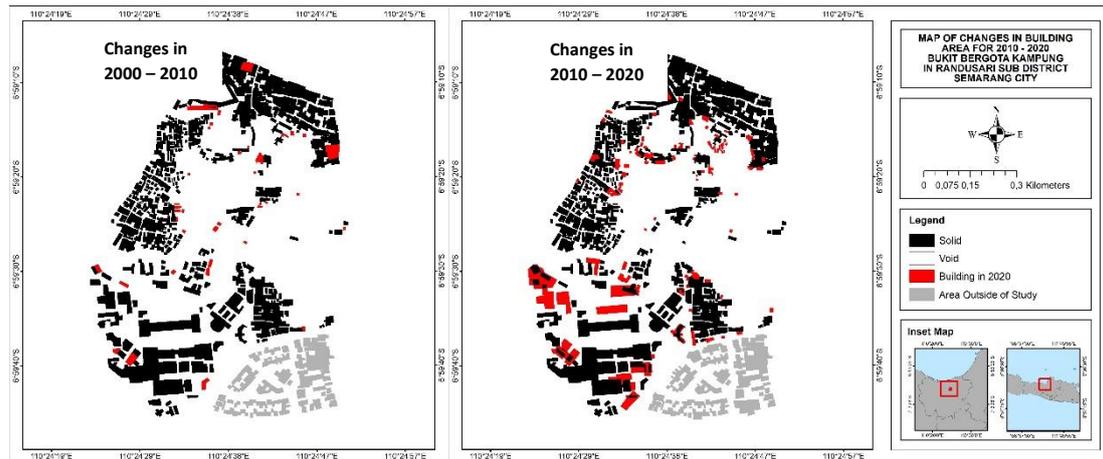
Kampung embryos have been formed at the northern area (green spots) and several spots in the middle inside the cemetery area. The map in 1942 began to show the developments on the West area of the settlement. Based on empirical research, the kampung still exists with old houses in the original architectural typology of the Indisce Empire (Fig. 3). This style has developed in Semarang in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is a characteristic of the houses of the rich. This trace can also explain when the settlements in this study area were established.



**Fig. 3:** Old Houses with Indisce Empire Style  
Source: Author, 2021

The maps also show a cemetery plot and forest in the middle of the Randusari Sub-District area. This shows that the cemetery has existed and grown in 1916. This is in line with the informant's statement that the settlements on the West and the South areas have developed from vacant land and not from the cemetery area. The cemetery has existed since the settlements developed. After 1942, maps do not show the land use in the Randusari Sub-District. Therefore, the secondary land use documents were traced from Google Earth. The development of cemetery kampung was obtained mostly from the information about the Bergota Cemetery Area (BCA). According to the sources, the Bergota Cemetery Area was controlled by the Dutch Colonial before being handed over to the Semarang Government in 1965. Since then, BCA has become the property of the Semarang city government and is managed as a city public cemetery. The status of the BCA as government land causes limited land tenure by the community. Dwellers with ownership documents live on the North (Kampung Randusari), West and South (Kampung Wonosari) areas of the cemetery, while the settlements located on the cemetery ground (Kampung Bergota) are squatters because they do not have land ownership documents.

Based on the observations from the 2000 map, settlements have developed very rapidly and have formed permanent settlements. The cemetery area still functions as a cemetery, while the forest area has turned into a settlement. Up to the year 2000, rapid developments have occurred in settlements that did not stand on the cemetery area, while settlements that stood on the cemetery land have experienced slow developments. On the other hand, settlements on the cemetery land (Kampung Bergota) have shown rapid developments after the 2000s through the conversion of the reserve cemetery land into settlements. This propagation took place quickly, so that in 2010, a new kampung was established which came from the conversion of the reserve cemetery land. The growing has happened massively and in one large area on the northern part of the Kampung Bergota. This development can be seen in Fig. 4 (circled red spots on north) on the 2000 and 2010 maps.



**Fig. 4:** Map of the Development of Cemetery Kampung in year 2000, 2010 and 2020  
Source: Edited by the author from Google Earth, 2020

To sum up the discussion above, cemetery kampung grew organically in the urban space on the vacant land around the cemetery. Along with the development of residential needs, kampungs develop and merge with the cemetery and other urban spaces and form residential enclaves in the middle of the city. Fig. 4 shows that the development of the cemetery kampung propagates from the edge of the circulation route to the cemetery area where the land reserves are still available. During the period 2000-2020 or 2 decades, the growth of buildings in the northern part of the BCA has increased rapidly. The interviews indicate that there was no attempt to prevent the expropriation of the cemetery grounds for settlements, even though the authorities were aware of this phenomenon. Encroachment on burial grounds is very common in cemeteries in Indonesia, especially in the island of Java and is generally caused by a lack of supervision from the city officials (Krausse, 1975). This is what also has happened in the cemetery kampung especially in the northern side of the BCA.

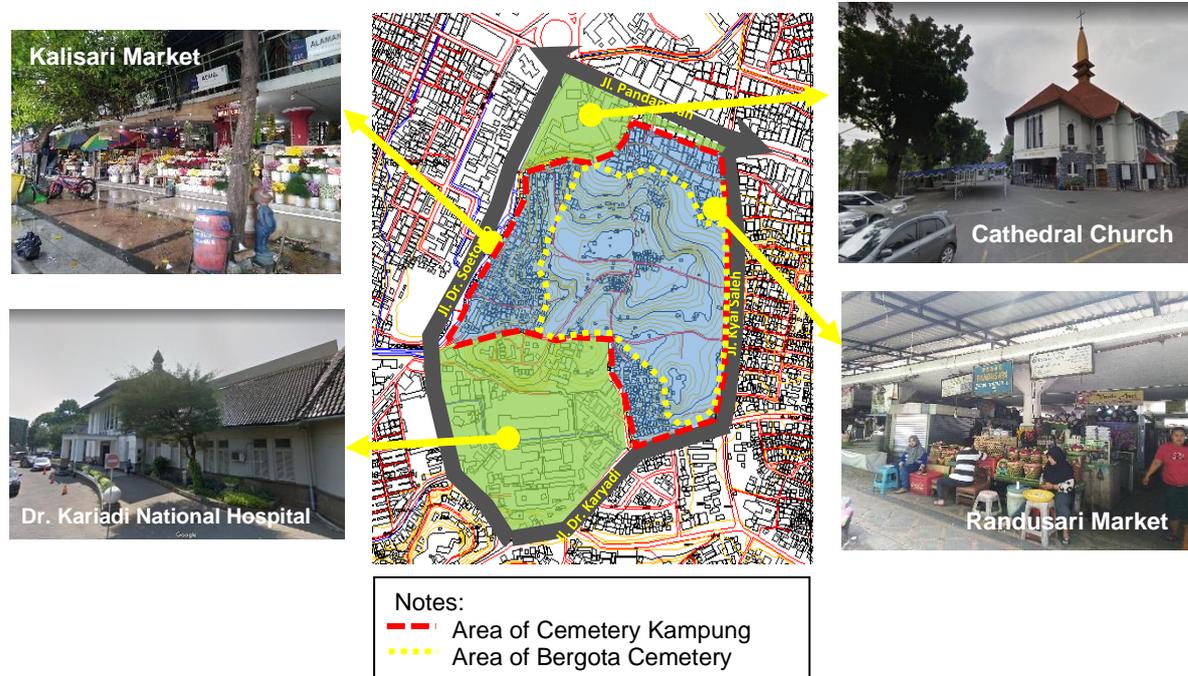
### **Cemetery-Based Activities as Community Adaptations**

The growing of settlements around the cemetery has created a livelihood for the community. The cemetery has become a source of life for the low-income people that mostly live in the kampungs around the BCA. In order to extract the community adaptation resulting from the place attachment role, we observed activities that were related to the cemetery activities that were significant as an economic source.

The cemetery kampung cannot also be separated from the activities related to the flowers. The flower market near the kampung is the Kalisari Flower Market and the Randusari Market. Randusari Market and the Kalisari Market are a flower trading center in the city. The markets are located along the city road with rows of fresh flower and plant kiosks. These two flower markets have different types of flower commodity. The Kalisari Flower Market sells fresh flowers, bouquet and flower boards for special occasion greetings. The Randusari market sells sow flowers and strands of jasmine flowers for death and wedding needs. A small number of flower traders in these markets are residents of the cemetery kampung and most of the workers of these stalls are residents of the cemetery kampung.

Residents adjacent to the Kalisari Market work as artisans of paper flowers which are supplied to flower shops at the Kalisari Flower Market. Artisans are housewives who do paper flower crafts in their houses on the sidelines of other household activities. Paper flowers are done manually with improvised equipment using used paper as raw materials collected from various locations through the residents' waste bank. The flowers made by the residents are then distributed to collectors who are their own neighbors, which will then be sent to the stalls at the Kalisari Flower Market. They do this work individually to increase household income because it can be done on a part-time basis.

Meanwhile, around the Randusari Market, there are jasmine flower strand artisans who are housewives too. This activity has been ongoing since the 1990s and has been getting stronger since the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. When the pandemic hit, customers ordered flowers via text messages and made payments via bank transfer to the artisans concerned. Consumers tend to come to the trading center at the Randusari Market because they want the final product in the form of handicrafts and not raw flowers.



**Fig. 5:** Location of the Cemetery Kampung and the Cemetery-based Activities Centre  
Source: Author, 2021

The Randusari Market is also a center for selling death equipment which is lined along the road to the cemetery. The business owners and employees are residents of the cemetery kampung. Both florists and death paraphernalia open their stalls 24 hours a day because death can happen at any time. The goods traded are coffins, tombstones, cloth covering the bodies, wood holding the tombs and other equipment. Average traders have continued the business from their previous family and have started developing since the 90s.

The next cemetery-based activity is the ambulance business. This business is growing in the kampung adjacent to the National Hospital of Dr. Karyadi. This business was started by residents and has grown until now so that it becomes the foundation for ambulance needs that cannot be met by hospitals. The informants said that there was an agreed queuing system to determine the turn of departure. This activity has become a mutualism between the residents and the hospital so that the need will always exist if the hospital cannot accommodate the need for an ambulance. The Covid-19 Pandemic gave this business much fortune. The national hospital as the referral hospital for the Covid-19 around the Java Island made the ambulance owner in demand for taking patients or corpses.

Activities mentioned above support the funerals. There are activities that directly touch the ground: the grave caretakers. For generations, the settlement that grew up in the BCA has become a residence for most of the grave caretakers and their extended families. The grave caretakers have been responsible for the continuity of the cemetery in BCA for decades. This authority is given by the city government and can only be passed on to the family of the previous grave caretaker if they have died or are sick; thus it is inherited. The grave caretaker is an activity carried out by the residents of Kampung Bergota who are given the authority to care for the grave plots at the BCA. Activities that occur from generation to generation and at the

same time become residents of the cemetery area do not occur in other parts of the Semarang city. The researcher had difficulty finding the initial generation, but several key informants who are 79 years old say that he is also a caretaker from his father's legacy. Residents of the kampung carry out this activity from generation to generation. Based on the tracing, it is known that this activity has been going on for more than three generations. Besides grave caretakers, there are grave diggers, beggars and other informal workers who grow in the cemetery kampung. Grave caretakers and grave diggers will work together to provide burial grounds and the grave burrows them if there are people who need them. These activities occur in the area of the Kampung Bergota. They receive wages from the grave owners families for maintaining and cleaning his/her family's grave.

The above activities are major activities that occur in the cemetery kampung and have become a source of livelihood for the community. This activity becomes very distinctive when the people of Semarang city are also familiar with activities that occur only in the kampung around BCA. People identify these activities as 'death business' as the people of the cemetery kampung rely on someone's death to earn money. People are very sarcastic, but on the other hand, according to the residents, this job actually opens up jobs and is also honoring the dead.

### **The Role of Place Attachment in the Cemetery Kampung Community Adaptation**

The relationship that occurs in the cemetery kampung is between the BCA and the non-physical adaptation of the community that occurs. This adaptation is seen from the development of community economic activities that have taken root and have become a source of life for generations. The mutualism that occurs in these cemetery-based activities binds the residents of the cemetery kampung. Place attachment has a contribution to the quality of life of the community socially, economically and culturally (Junot et al., 2018; Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). Place attachment relates to the bonding of individuals or communities to a certain place where they feel connected (Scannell & Gifford, 2017). This attachment grows as people inhabit, use and attach meaning to the environment in which they live.

The community of kampung makam regard the cemetery as their source of life. This dependence has created an attachment that grows as the needs for the cemetery services have increased for citizens in the Semarang City. One of the participants said that she started to learn how to make paper flowers after looking at her neighbor and asking to join as an artisan. The same thing also has happened to the strand flower artisans. Culture and predecessors also bond the cemetery caretaker group to their cemetery neighborhood. This phenomena is in line with Scannell & Gifford's statement that belonging and identity can be supported by place attachment especially when a place bonds someone to their culture or ancestors.

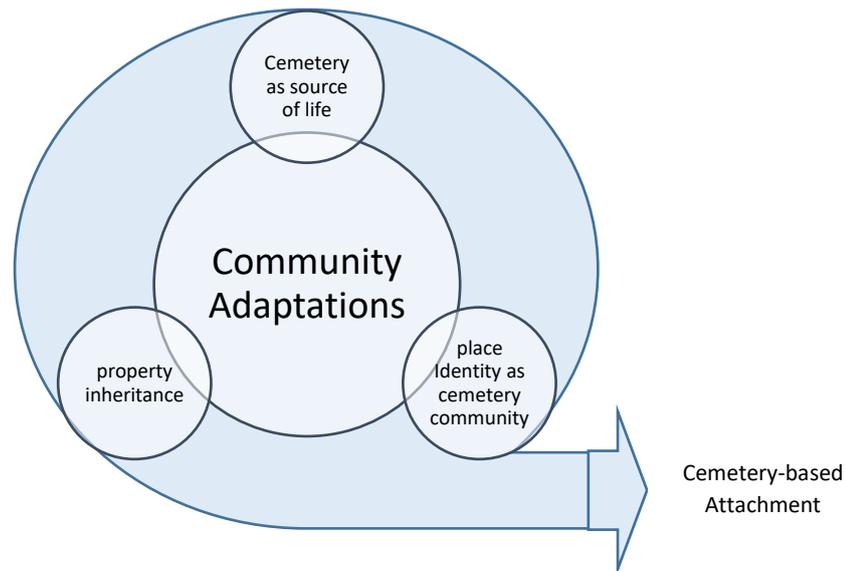
The cultural ties that occur in the cemetery caretaker society show that most of the people in the cemetery kampung are indigenous people who have inhabited this location for generations. There is a family agreement that underlies the social behavior of the community, especially related to the funeral business activities above. The culture of cemetery caretakers in inheriting the graveyard through generations indicate place bonding and place identity in the cemetery kampung. Although grave yard is a public asset, the maintenance of the graveyard and the tombs above is in the caretaker's right. Right here means the action to maintain and receive income from the service.

The existence of the graves of Islamic religious leaders such as the Kyai Sholeh Darat and the tombs of other important figures has caused the BCA to be respected by the wider community in the Semarang City. The area is no longer a haunted place but has become part of a tradition that has been preserved. One of the traditions in the Javanese culture called *nyadran* binds the living with the dead (Mumfangati, 2007). Besides traditions, the cemetery-based activities have become a center for funeral services at city level. The findings confirm that culture increases place attachment especially in graves.

The bonds formed negate deficiencies where others should be problems. Living with the dead or having an identity as a cemetery community is not a pleasing thing for anybody. The participants talked normally about meeting with spirits, passing through the graveyard in

murky shades and their neighbors or relatives as the only property market. The non-physical adaptation process shows the bonding that occurs due to the economic and life pressures.

Most of the people in the cemetery kampung are low-income people with a low level of education. This adaptation does not occur revolutionarily but results from the generations of efforts that produce strong social bonds. Transformative adaptation usually disrupts a place and threatens place attachment (Clarke et al., 2018) but did not occur in the cemetery kampung despite the impact of the Covid pandemic. Pandemic actually strengthened place attachment because of the pandemic positive affect towards funeral-based activities. There is always death as well as services to respect death.



**Fig. 6:** Typology of Community Adaptation in Cemetery as Place  
Source: Author

Cemetery as source of life, property inheritance and identity as the cemetery community shape the adaptations rooted from the cemetery-based activities in the cemetery kampung as the role of place attachment (Fig.6). Cemetery kampung provides resources to support these activities and mutual to the broader community that is related to those. An unusual urban space such as a cemetery has a role as a sacred place and a peaceful place (Harvey, 2006; Nordh et al., 2017). This study confirms that beyond those roles, the cemetery is also plays a role as a cultural image of the urban. This cultural image reflects the place attachment among the communities. The cemetery-based activities has become important to the community as those can be their living and help them to build their identity at the community level.

## Conclusion

The cemetery kampung is a traditional settlement area located in a city center neighborhood that is in contact with the largest cemetery in the Semarang City. The terminology 'the cemetery kampung' is used as the area is located close to the cemetery area and forms a life that is integrated with the cemetery activities. The settlements that are in contact with the cemetery have a clustered and dispersed condition. This condition occurs due to the process of land tenure for the settlements that formed organically following the unoccupied burial grounds in the past. The cemetery has created a sense of place that results in several forms of community adaptation. People are connected with the cemetery through everyday place attachment.

The research shows that the cemetery has a strong root in building community's social context in urban life. The adaptation is built on place attachments caused by the existence of the cemetery as the main identity. Survival and economic motives underlie the community

adaptation that occurs. Social ties among the community and the culture rooted in the city enhance the attachment for generations.

Cemetery as a source of life, property inheritance and identity as a cemetery community shape the adaptations rooted from the cemetery-based activities in the cemetery kampung as the role of place attachment. This study confirms that a place rooted in the community will have an impact on improving people's lives and become an input for a more humane urban informal settlement management strategy. The research is limited to the specific urban space in the Indonesian cemetery area of community non-physical adaptation. Further investigations are needed to explore the governmental context that supports place attachment in a particular urban space.

### Acknowledgement

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