

Balai Banjar Reformation: Traditions and the commodification of vernacular public space

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Abstract

This article presents a study of spatial change taking place in a balai banjar – a form of public place within the Balinese traditions that exist at the neighbourhood level. The study addresses balai banjar's fundamental function as a center for communal action in sustaining both community and the natural environment. After Bali's integration into the Indonesian State, these roles have been extended to accommodate state functions. During the Covid-19 pandemic, balai banjar has been converted into a center for information and vaccination to combat the deadly viral infection. While the importance of this public place is undeniable, several balai banjar, have had their spatial structures rearranged to enable commodified functions. Using a qualitative approach, this study promotes a discussion by investigating spatial changes taking place with the balai banjar of Dangin Peken Sanur, Kota Denpasar on the Island of Bali. This study explores in depth both the origins and implications arising from the transformation of functions, physical form and spatial layout of this balai banjar. In summary, both positive and negative consequences result. The rationale supporting such change include behavioural modification, consequent upon technological advancement in communication, as well as physical, geographic and economic impacts.

Keywords: commodification, transformation, spatial reform, vernacular public place, *balai banjar*, behavioural change

Introduction

Throughout history, urban space has existed as a binary opposition between space owned by the public, and that of the private sector (Cuthbert & McKinnell, 2001; Cuthbert & Suartika, 2014). Today, space remains a battleground where the private sector increasingly encroaches on public places in order to commodify its use. Local governments frequently support this process since it reduces their costs in maintaining space that gives no economic return (Cuthbert & Suartika, 2014; Suartika, et al., 2018; Suartika & Cuthbert, 2020a; 2020b). This can happen in a variety of ways, but due to its incremental nature, the process of commodifying community places is not noticed until social protests take place. This occurs largely on the basis that a social threshold has been breached, one that stimulates opposition to development which is frequently seen as threatening to sacrosanct community values and traditions. This gradual takeover of public place is not limited solely to urban regions. It also occurs in tropical locations such as Bali, which has an embedded traditional social system that operates in parallel with that of the state. Often local *banjar* (neighbourhood – community association) find that they are unable to fulfil their responsibilities due to lack of funds.

Consequently, they tend to commercialize community resources. In this context, place has a high profile.

As Gehl (2010) points out, public place is the foundation of social democracy. This understanding embraces the concept of people's freedom of expression, and their right to move and act freely according to their own needs (Suartika, 2013; Cuthbert & McKinnell, 2001). Public place is therefore accessible for citizens to use as well as to enjoy (Jackson, 1974). Various studies of public place have been conducted to date (Carr, et al., 1992; Beng-Huat & Edwards, 1992; Low & Smith, 2006; Thwaites, et al., 2007; Carmona, et al., 2003). However, most concentrate on the actual development of public place in the west (Habermas, 1989; Low & Smith, 2006) but few in the East (Miao, 2001) (Suartika, 2013; Carr, et al., 1992; Hantono, 2017). In filling this gap, this study examines '*balai banjar*' – literally a place for members of a *banjar* to meet (Gantini, 2014; Adhika, 2015; Prabawa, 2016). The concept is open to various configurations of space and buildings, and constitutes a specific form of public place that exists in the Bali Island. This place is dedicated to a *banjar* – a neighbourhood-community association (Gantini, 2014; Adhika, 2015; Prabawa, 2016) - whose existence and use underpin unique communal traditions at the grass roots level.

Balai banjar is a spatial unit that underwrites democratic practices at the neighbourhood level. This is where the people's voice matters and where community communication takes place. People are listened to, and receive answers to their requests. Decision making processes and community actions are initiated here using the principle of "from people, by people, and for people." *Krama banjar* – (banjar members) – organize *sangkep* – meeting - routinely to discuss various matters important to the welfare of the *krama banjar* (members) as a whole. These include (among others), the quality of the natural environment the community inhabits, social codes and relationships, responses to disasters, art development, education of the young members of the community, ritual practices, and social sanctions. Disagreements, consents, differences, regulations and ideas are all expressed here before decisions are made. Accommodation of all these functions has generated a unique spatial tradition as to how a balai banjar is laid-out and physically constituted.

However, as the community advances, many balai banjar have had their original formation amended for various reasons. Many balai banjar evolve rapidly to accommodate new interests and functions. This condition is most acutely experienced by the various banjar that are located in urban settings. It is often associated with the increasing demand for spaces needed for commercial activities. Moreover, upon Bali's integration to the United Indonesian State, the use of a balai banjar has been extended to also assist state functions. Thus, its social function has at least been partially subsumed to perform functions that are not original. Consequently, the research question here is 'Would the roles of balai banjar be preserved in the face of such changes in function?'

Recently, several studies of balai banjar have been carried out (Gantini, 2014; Adhika, 2015; Prabawa, 2016; Wagiswari et al, 2019). While Gantini has explored the architecture of balai banjar in general, Adhika has discussed balai banjar as a communal place. Later on in their study, Prabawa and Wagiswari raise concern about the transformation of the architecture of many balai banjar in many communities located in urban areas. They take the balai banjar of Titih Community in Denpasar as his main focus. This article has taken all of these studies into consideration. However, none have attempted to connect the physical transformation of a balai banjar with the current living dynamic in which capital and profit generation are influential forces. The encroachment of commercialization into our communal space is also an unavoidable event, and seemingly accepted as a norm. Balai banjar as a culturally significant public place of Bali is not isolated from such forces. In filling this gap, this article examines the commodification of a balai banjar and the spatial transformations consequent upon this process. Analysis is deepened by exploring forces behind such transformations and their results. To illustrate the implications, investigation undertakes Balai Banjar of Dangin Peken Sanur, Kota Denpasar (BBDPS), as a case study. While the BBDPS has experienced a series of spatial and architectural transformations, there have not been any detailed studies carried out to date to address the above topic, either on this balai banjar or on any other banjar

Public place, commodification and transformation

The term 'Public Place' may be defined as an environment that the public is entitled to access without sanction. Altman (in Fisher, et al., 1984) reinforces this idea since it embraces the principle that everyone is allowed to be there. Furthermore, Beng-Huat and Edwards (1992) add that the term public/communal place also promotes the concept of accessibility. Given this perspective, the location of public places is therefore significant. In this case, the common understanding is that public place covers various spatial units, such as public squares and markets, urban parks, public paths, sidewalks, roads, and beaches. Hakim in Studyanto (2019) proposes that public places can be categorized into two types. They are: (i) enclosed public space and (ii) open public space. While the first category includes those that are contained in a building, the latter embraces those that are available, more generally, in the environment.

The above categorization is supported by Carmona et al. (2003) who identify three groups of public places. The first is the external public place, such as city parks and pedestrian paths, which can be accessed by the public. The second is internal public place that occurs in the form of public facilities managed by the government such as hospitals and post offices. The third type bridges both, namely 'quasi' public place, usually in the form of public facilities managed by the private sector yet regulated by boundaries and rules must be obeyed such as in restaurants and malls. In this context, public place is understood as an urban spatial element functioning as a forum. This is a meeting place used for three groups of activities pertaining to social interactions, advancing the economy, and cultural conservation (Carmona, et al., 2003).

Following this categorization, balai banjar is a quasi-public space. This vernacular form of public place is built on a *tanah desa* – a type of communal land (*ulayat*) in the Balinese tradition. It is organized and used mainly by *krama banjar* who are the main group responsible for its existence. Banjar is a well rooted form of community association, not only historically but in contemporary use. Every banjar has its balai banjar. The operation and continuity of the banjar and its public place (balai banjar) is the sole responsibility of this association. This reflects robust ties between a community and its environment. Every banjar has its own *adat/perareman* – customary rules and codes of conduct – that bind its members, including those indicating how a balai banjar is to be used. Sanctions for breaches and non-conformance to the rules are also well embedded within this customary law.

In a rapidly urbanizing setting, land development follows the guiding mandate of the market system, namely to maximize exchange values over use values and hence to further the process of commodification demanded by the globalization of capital. Within this system, space, time and social relations are collectively encompassed. This implies a process where capital accumulation necessitates turning resources, services, and the built environment into commodities in the service of capital accumulation. More to the point, use values are progressively transformed into exchange values, a process demanded by expanding Gross Development Product (GDP) (Piketty, 2014). Development capital among various other capitals (finance, commercial, industrial etc.) – is accumulated from land rent and construction, as well as surplus value from a commodified labour process. Furthermore, since social processes do not occur on the head of a pin, urban public space also becomes commodified (Chan, 2020).

The commodification of public space is inextricably subsumed to the processes outlined above, resulting in an endemic conflict between labour and capital over resources. Since there is no legal foundation for 'public space' – no nation state has sanctified such public ownership – the market system can colonize whatever space it demands, limited only by state sanctions and the price mechanism assumed by the market. Hence there has been increasing penetration of capital into commodifying the totality of urban space, and that of so-called 'public space' in particular. This process has reached a fail-safe point for example, in Hong Kong where sidewalks remain the last bastion of publicness. Even sidewalks have been replaced by second level privatized pedestrian links through the entire Central Business District (Cuthbert and McKinnell, 1997). Overall, the commodification of

public space not only involves a general movement from public or state interest to private ownership. This also signifies increasing social control through surveillance, where the *right to the city* becomes increasingly fraught and ambiguous (Cuthbert, 1995).

This process is frequently accompanied by political conservatism where a minimalist state apparatus permits the private sector access to write the rules it wishes to live by (Harvey, 2005). Hence exclusivity is promoted rather than inclusivity. This is hastened by granting plot-ratio benefits to developers. High rise structures are permitted to build significantly higher than planning controls permit, in return for a small space at ground level, which is then returned to the owners to 'manage.' For all practical purposes, the space is effectively privatized and commodified. This can frequently involve private policing, limiting freedom of action, increasing close circuit television. It also implies employing architects who can ensure by design policing, that few normal activities can occur except for access to commodified goods and services. This process is further advanced by the state having to provide parking and other services to private sector activities, as well as the increased leasing of public space for private functions.

Public space/place therefore becomes an easy target for commodification as opposed to space privately owned. Rights over public space are theoretically held solely by the state, or other government agencies such as the military. Here it is easy to argue a capital-logic position by maintaining that while the state is an agent of capital, urban planning is in turn an agent of the state. This is particularly true in developing countries where minimal social services are provided, and capital is given a relatively free hand to ignore the 'triple bottom line.' Here environmental costs are largely excluded from the equation to maximize profits (Suartika & Cuthbert, 2019). Given that private capital vastly outweighs GDP in most countries (from 200-700% greater) - the capacity of the state to resist its political influence and the commodification of space that this implies is minimal (Piketty, 2014).

The overwhelming implication of these processes is that the privatization of all public space is the endgame of capital. It is therefore vital that democratic processes controlled by the state, and in particular those of urban planning, need to live up to their own standards, frequently seldom attained in the realm of public space provision. Commodification overall is not necessarily a negative process since many services need to charge for their provision. The problem is the extent to which such charges limit public control over its own spaces and places, the traditions represented, the symbolic values they preserve, and the support they frequently give to highly constrained domestic environments. While commodification is a ubiquitous process, global capitalism is subject to uneven development, and Bali still retains large elements of a proto-feudal collectivism. While this study tackles an imminent problem in a single banjar, the overarching implications are quite profound, given that the balai banjar represents the core values and spatial arrangements of the entire culture.

Papageorgiou in (Hartiningsih, 2008) and Schermerhorn (1991) define change - intended or not -, as an evolution from the initial state, due either to influence or action enforced from outside, internally or both. In the context of planning practice, Silas (2000) states that a change in space use fundamentally relates to modification in human activity and behaviour. This statement comes with the realization that human responses to their environment depend on individuals rather than any collective perception (Triatmodjo, 2008). Consequently, when we analyze a built form and how it is used, Habraken (in Luthfiah, 2010) propose that a change can be identified by one or more of the following three activities: (i) Addition, which is an action to add an element onto an existing built form or a site. For example, adding a partition/barrier to create a new space to accommodate an additional function; (ii) Reduction/removal (elimination). This is an action to extract an element from a built form or a site. For instance, dismantling the wall of a room with the intention of expanding the space or

uniting two rooms into one; and (iii) Movement. This is shifting an element of a built form or a site, such as moving or shifting a wall in a room to another location. Each of these transformations apply to the current situation of the specific banjar selected in this study.

Research method

In answering the above research question, we explore the transformation of functions, physical form and spatial layout of a balai banjar. The chosen location for the study is the Balai Banjar of Dangin Peken Sanur (BBDPS). This is one of many balai banjar located in Kota Denpasar - the capital city of Bali - a Province of the Indonesian State. BBDPS has experienced varied spatial changes in terms of both form and function. While spatial change may have challenged the 'publicness' of this public place, preliminary observations reveal several contradictions that lead to the selection of this banjar as a case study. The encroachment of private sector interests into urban spaces dedicated for the community invariably generate public discontent. Paradoxically, changes to the functions and spatial formation of the BBDPS have consent and are considered acceptable in making a positive contribution to the community. How this takes place and what it means for the transformation of the balai banjar as a communal space is explained in the next section.

This study deploys a qualitative research approach. Data collection has been carried out by conducting physical observations of the current spatial form and functions of BBDPS. In-depth interviews were also conducted to investigate how this balai banjar evolved over the years and their reasons. In this respect, the current *kelian* banjar – banjar leader – is Bapak Made Sunatra, who by the time this study was conducted in 2020-2021, had been in this community leadership position for 20 years. Bapak Sunatra has been a great source of historical information about the journey his community has traversed. He has made a substantial contribution to this research.

As this study progressed, it encountered a serious challenge. The question arose as to how the forces behind these changes could be identified. In addition, we had to know how such forces affect the functions of balai banjar as a public place, a task amplified during the peak of Covid-19 pandemic. Having considered relevant public health measures, it was decided to embrace nine former and current *prajuru banjar* (*kelian banjar's* associates) who have pertinent knowledge, as the next group of respondents. This arrangement unfortunately left behind the initial plan to include selected numbers of *krama banjar*. Except for interviews with Bapak Made Sunatra (the *kelian banjar*), which were done in person directly, others were conducted by appointments online.

Balai Banjar – A public place within the Balinese traditions

Balai banjar has existed as a spatial unit in accordance with the customary governance of *adat* within the Balinese traditions. Windhu (1985) defines balai banjar as a communal place for deliberation, where people's interests and discontents are expressed and addressed. This is where *krama banjar* communicate their thoughts, ideas, and oppositions without fear of retribution. Its functions even go beyond these considerations. Balai banjar is also a place that promotes equity by accommodating the diverse interests of its *krama* (members), especially those of its youth, community art development, ritual practices, and the quality of the banjar's living environment. Immediate problems have always garnered great attention, reinforcing the main role of banjar to maintain the quality of its environment. By this means, it can best accommodate the needs of its *krama banjar* and their associated traditions.

Being a communal public place at a neighbourhood level, the following (among many others) are common activities: *sangkep* – community meeting – ; numerous forms of social interactions that also include those of children; art performances: dance and *gambelan* – Balinese traditional musical instruments –; informal learning activities; preparation for ritual practices such as those of *ngaben* – cremation ceremony –; *Nyepi* – new year celebration - and *odalan* banjar – a celebration for the birth of the banjar and its temple. The banjar and its balai

banjar have for long played an important part of communities across the Bali Island, especially at the neighbourhood level. Both have subsequently become unique, whereby social and physical features derived from local traditions and culture are fused together. Their existence has been imbedded within the daily life of the Balinese community and have been maintained for centuries up to the present time.

Given Bali's integration into the Indonesian State, the national government has no choice but to recognize the importance of both banjar as a community association and its balai banjar. The state is therefore obliged to recognize them as part of the Indonesian governance at a local level specific to Bali. Rather than accommodating the customary adat-based banjar, the Indonesian State creates a *banjar dinas* – state banjar. Banjar dinas works side by side with the banjar adat and it then becomes an extension of the state in implementing state policies, programs, and agendas at the grass roots level. Both are accommodated in one balai banjar. The function of a *balai banjar* has then been expanded to include basic state functions in advancing early education for children under the age of seven; maintaining public health through vaccination programs; promoting family planning programs; conducting civil registration; community waste management and maintaining the quality of the living environment. Hence, we can say that indigenous institutions have been co-opted by the state to reinforce its own agendas, and to a degree represent a potentially understated form of social control and sanction (Suartika, 2010; 2020).

Thus, in summary, a *balai banjar* holds a central position in the organization of a Balinese community at the grass root level in its various dimensions. First, it reflects Balinese traditions. Second, it is a symbol of democratic practices across the community. Third, it provides space for the current Indonesian state system in achieving development goals. More importantly to the current discussion on the environmental degradation, balai banjar has been the centre for action in protecting the quality of *Ibu Pertiwi* – the Mother Land/Nature. The last role is performed in two stages. The first is a coordination to embrace community participation. This is usually initiated and finalized through *sangkep banjar* – banjar meeting. The second involves community action which usually comes in the form of *gotong royong* – working together. Overall, a *balai banjar* orients its members to a common goal and actions conforming with prevailing consensus and codes.

The communal land of a *balai banjar* is usually part of the assigned territory of the banjar. Depending on the complexity of activities accommodated by a balai banjar, its site in general incorporates a predominantly roofed open building that covers enclosed storage, an open stage for art performances, an open seating area, an open area dedicated for food preparation, a *padmasana* – temple erected on the northeast direction of the site –, and a *balai kulkul* – a slender-roofed structure where a *kulkul* – a wooden bell which is used to communicate with the krama banjar – is hung. The balai kulkul is located on the outer most side of the site, close to the main access. Depending on the physical and social circumstances, this spatial arrangement may vary from one site to another. Communities take a huge pride as to how their balai banjar are represented both architecturally and symbolically. Thus, each banjar community prioritizes renovation as part of the routine activities in its agenda. Hence a well-resourced banjar often triumphs from good welfare and management.

Balai Banjar Dangin Peken Sanur's overview

Balai Banjar Dangin Peken Sanur (BBDPS) was inaugurated in 1950. and is located in the Sanur Kauh Village of the South Denpasar District – (Latitude: 8°41'1.66"S & Longitude: 115°15'3.63"E) (Fig. 1). In 2020, BBDPS had 350 families as its members, accounting for 1120 persons. Relative to the other Banjar, this is considered a large neighborhood community.



Fig. 1: Banjar Dangin Peken Sanur Administrative Area

Source: Gede Mahendra, 2021

As is the case of balai banjar in general, BBDPS is organized as a place to accommodate community activities. In terms of the environment, this balai banjar has always formed a base for community actions, especially when it comes to handling domestic waste, neighbourhood cleaning, sanitation, and raising environmental friendly behaviour among its members. In containing all these functions, its balai banjar was initially laid out as a single storey premise, as is depicted in Fig. 2.

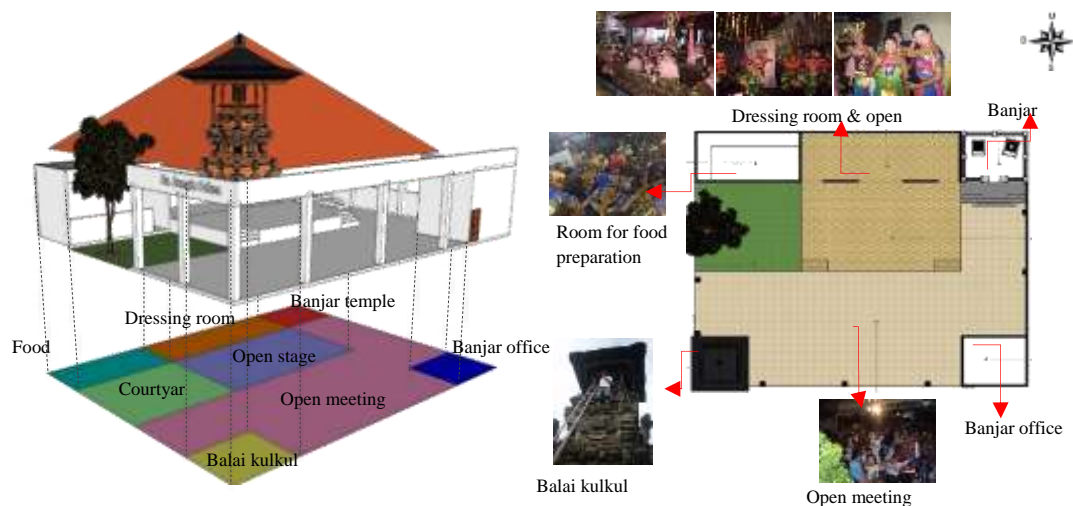


Fig. 2: Balai Banjar Dangin Peken Sanur

Source: Gede Mahendra, 2022

Physical and spatial transformation of the Balai Banjar Dangin Peken Sanur

However, in 2006 this balai banjar started to get not only a make-over but also fully reconstructed two storey premises. The whole building was completed in 2007. The first floor was turned into a commercial area while the second floor has been fully dedicated to prior functions. The commercial area of the first floor is divided into two uses, namely a community bank and a mini market. The balai kulkul is also repositioned from the southwestern corner of the site into its southeastern position. The reconstructed balai banjar is demonstrated in Fig. 3 and 4. The decision to make these changes is fully supported by the krama banjar and the construction was a self-funded community initiative.

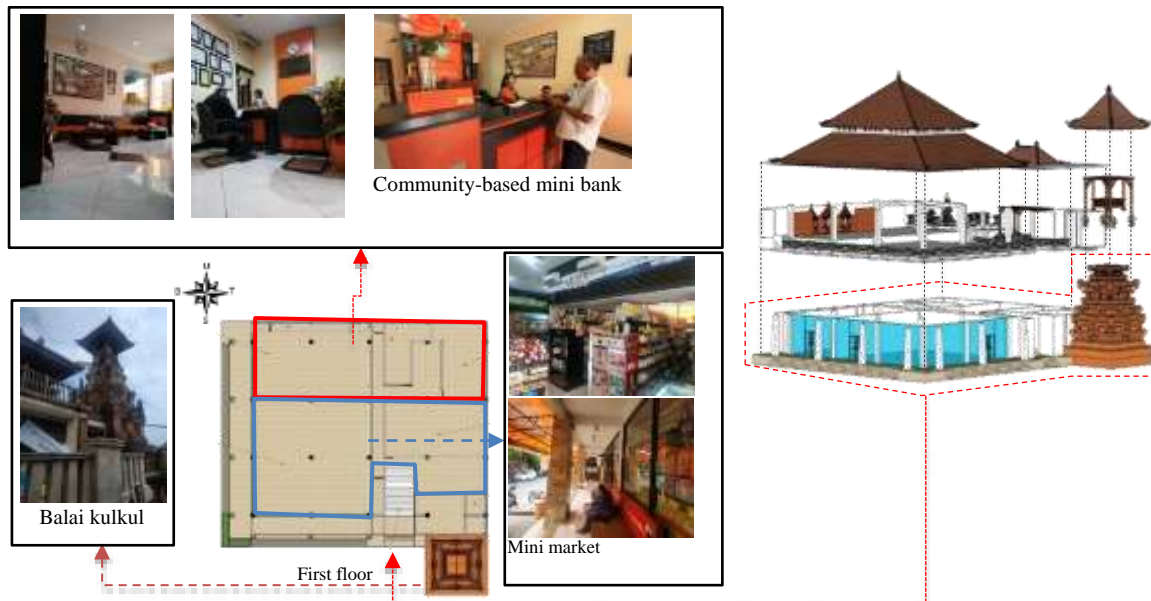


Fig. 3: The 1st Floor of the Reconstructed Balai Banjar Daging Peken Sanur

Source: Site observation, 2021

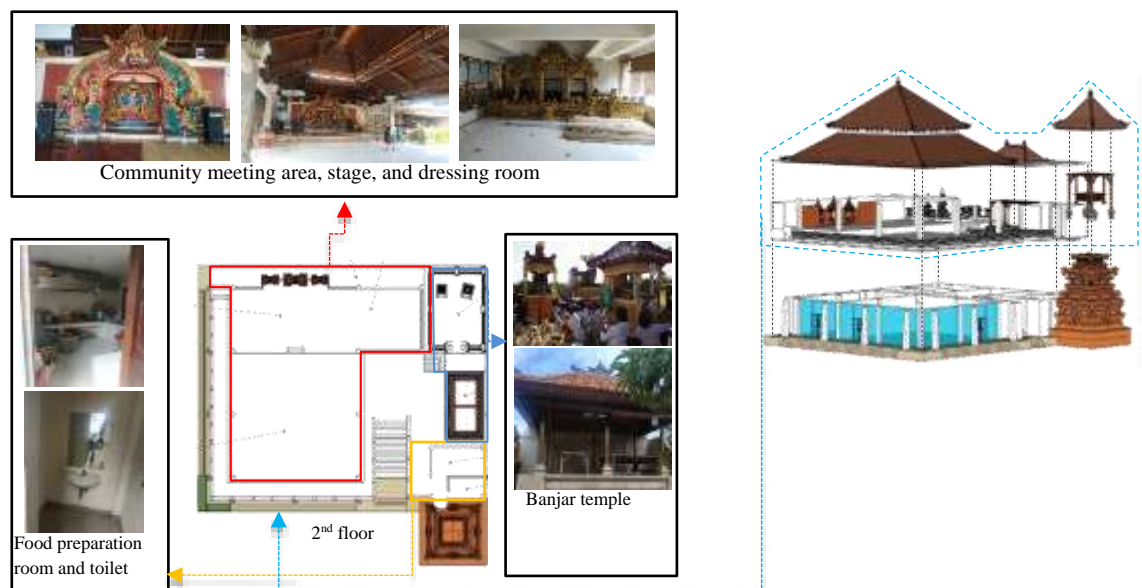


Fig. 4: The 2nd Floor of the Reconstructed Balai Banjar Daging Peken Sanur

Source: Site observation, 2021

Forces underlying changes in spatial restructuring

Observation and analysis carried out throughout this study suggest that the following are critical factors underpinning spatial reconfiguration of the BBDPS.

a. *Change in the means of subsistence resulted in the declining use of the balai banjar*

Initially, the change to the spatial formation of BBDPS reflects the fact that its use had been in decline by its krama banjar, except for essential actions such as *sangkep* – meeting; *gotong royong* – working together – mainly to maintain the quality of the neighbourhood natural and built environment; banjar temple celebration; and preparation for *ngaben masal* –

communal cremation. The number of banjar members who came to balai banjar for social purposes as had been the tradition and had reduced over time. Therefore, BBDPS has become an empty communal place that still requires maintenance. This has resulted from a natural progression – from an agricultural-based society into a service-based system. This has in turn changed the relationships between members of the community (labour) and the time and function of its deployment. Previously, the community had a more relaxed schedule before serviced-based employment was introduced - when work was more flexible and the coincidence between work and informal activities was defined in a more relaxed manner.

b. *Banjar is not a state governing body and balai banjar is not a state-created public place*

The decreasing use of the balai banjar is also due to the shift in the governance of the community. With Bali's integration into the Indonesian State, the traditional forms of communal associations were not recognized as a legal form of governance. The state assigned governing bodies at a village level are called *desa/kelurahan*. This reinforced the idea that the banjar was no longer the dominant center of authority and governance, and simply remained a tradition-based association. In some instances, when the banjar was converted into a state governing body by renaming it into '*banjar dinas*,' or 'state banjar,' the balai banjar has been colonized in order to accommodate varied state functions such as kindergartens; immunization centers; voting venues during both national and local elections; and a basis for demographic census and citizen registration. These circumstances have turned the banjar into a state functionary whose activities are tailored to fit in with state-imposed working hours rather than an informal meeting place for the krama banjar.

c. *A shift from a direct to indirect communication*

Behavioural change with regard to the declining use of BBDPS may also be due to technological advancements in communication. This started when electronic communications began to erode face to face relations. Introduction of the telephone first facilitated this, followed by the internet and its components such as emails and social media. Hence, open communications between banjar members were made more restricted since conversations were replaced with a variety of electronic 'platforms.' The result is quite simply a significant reduction in face-to-face contacts between the banjar members that consequently becomes a contributing factor in the declining use of the balai banjar. This leads to the physical transformation of BBDPS.

d. *Economic potential of the balai banjar*

BBDPS is located in a well-known destination in southern Denpasar (Fig. 5). This balai banjar is easily accessible by various means and is in relatively close proximity to various tourist attractions such as beaches, hotels, restaurants, bars, and a multitude of shopping opportunities in handicrafts and other commodities, as well as public facilities. This situation gradually expanded its high economic potential. Being in a major tourist destination alone adds to the site's economic worth. However, being constructed on a communal mandate obviates its sale and any potential for the exchange of development rights. Nonetheless, the community remains receptive to opportunities for economic benefits. This also applies to numerous balai banjar that are in urban areas. The last decade clearly shows this search for more diverse forms of economic development.

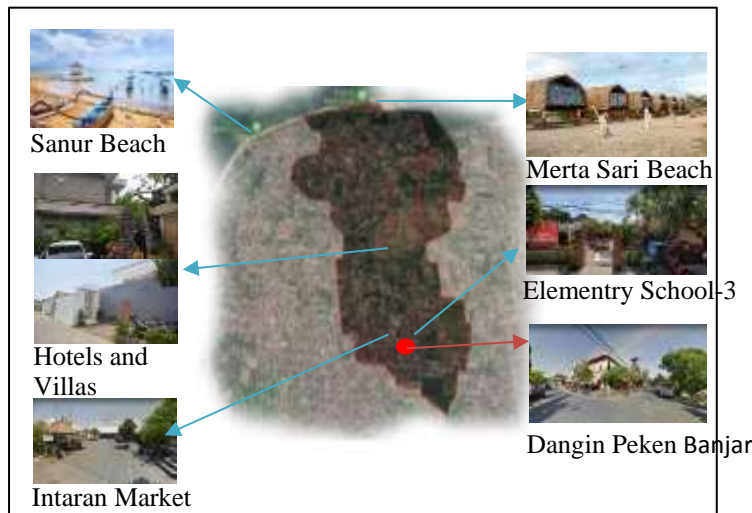


Fig. 5: BBDS surrounding Functions
Source: Site observation, 2021



Fig. 6: Location of the BBDS
Source: Site observation 2021

The spatial conversion of a balai banjar is often the chosen answer. Depending on opportunities, one or more non-communal functions may be added to existing uses. In the case of BBDPS, the community does this with singular care, as indicated in Fig. 3 & 4. Hence, the accommodation of krama banjar's prior interactions as well as profitable new functions are vindicated. Nonetheless, it also separates the use of the balai banjar into two different groups, e.g., those of communal and commercial activities. Such modifications are also in conformity with the building height limit of 15 meters applied across the Province of Bali.

e. Krama banjar as resource provider

As a consequence of balai banjar being deprived of any legal sanction by the state, it cannot depend on the goodwill of the government for its survival (Mahardika, et al., 2021; Dewi, et al., 2021). Its prolonged existence relies on the enthusiasm and resources provided by its members. In the past, resources were contributed communally, mainly from agricultural harvests. However, the shift into a service-based economy also brings an alteration in people's mindset from a community based in use values to one based on exchange. This includes how time, space, and energy are viewed to support the generation of economic resources. The process is represented in how social interactions are performed, how time is spent, allocated, and how space is transformed or conserved. In the past, time spent in conversation was seen as a way of life. Nowadays such conversation would tend to be evaluated against 'productive' work and income generation.

The krama banjar's duty to provide resources required for the operation of the banjar and the prevailing shift in mindset has substantiated the decision to lease the banjar in 2006. The rent obtained from this lease is expected to cover the financial cost of running the banjar and its associated activities. This has proven to be a resourceful decision. Since then, the krama of BBDPS has been relieved of *iuran banjar* – the regular financial contribution made by krama banjar to enable the conduct of various activities and programs. To the community's relief, the main banjar activities are now conducted using funds sourced from the lease of the balai banjar's ground floor. At the same time, certain traditions maturing over centuries have been either weakened or lost. A fundamental quality of traditional social life, that of mutual interdependence has been irrecoverably undermined. Whether the benefit compensates for the loss is a debateable point, but overall, such change seems clearly inevitable.

Nonetheless, this introduction of 'leasehold' into community values brings an extended list of unexpected financial benefits to the banjar members. For instance: (i) there is financial help given to members who organize *ngaben* - cremation (IDR 2,000,000.00 for each deceased

person), wedding ceremony (IDR 10,000,000.00 for each couple), and a birth in the family (IDR 5,000,000.00 for each baby), (ii) funds to expand community-based banjar business (printing office; *warung* – stalls; grocery store; and concrete production), (iii) funds to purchase community land for an elementary school and dry-cultivated land. Hence, the decision to spatially reform balai banjar has eased the fundamental financial burdens born by banjar members and is therefore much welcomed, despite the fact that exchange values have begun to permeate even the most basic of community functions.

f. Conservation of the balai banjar as a public-communal space

When the initiative to physical reform was first speculated, one fundamental condition was proposed by all krama banjar, namely that any changes must maintain the role of the balai banjar as a communal/public place. This principle established the current physical state of the balai banjar in which isolation of traditional and market functions are clearly zoned and placed. While the krama banjar wanted to embrace the economic potential emanating from their balai banjar's lucrative geographic location and to ease financial burden in sustaining their community association and its extended activities, they clearly did not want to sacrifice the balai banjar as the focal point of community life. The meaning of a balai banjar as the community itself is very fundamental here. It constitutes the banjar's identity. To date there have been no recorded cases of substantial conflict emerging from the reformation of the BBDPS, and no issues either with krama banjar or lessees to the property.

Implications of spatial reformation to the public nature of the Balai Banjar

The accommodation of commercial functions within the BBDPS does not appear to disrupt its basic mandate. However, the concern here is that non-communal interests tend to have unhindered access to a public place, which could potentially wipe out balai banjar and the traditions associated with its very existence. Development control by the Indonesian State to regulate the conversion of communal premises remains poorly formed and even more poorly implemented. The reason for this is at least partially due to the Indonesian State system governing a diversity of localities that exist across the Nusantara (Indonesian Archipelago) of more than 13,000 islands, 1340 ethnicities and 718 local languages. Given the capacity for civil unrest, the state intervenes only reluctantly in local affairs. Thus, in reality, there is no specified state system governing this issue. Moreover, public space is seriously limited, increasing concern for the conservation of those that do remain and for the expansion of space for public use. Apart from those resulting from road construction, Bali relies heavily on those public places that preserves its traditions, such as *wantilan* – public hall; *alun-alun* – ritual open space, *catus patha* – the sacred intersection in the city centre, *rurung* – lane, *pelaba* land – and agricultural land/open space to support the operation of a community, such as temples etc.

Nonetheless, the conversion of BBDPS resulted in a compromised traditional public place. Without realizing the social costs involved in sacrificing community to revenues (profit), the banjar community lost direct access to its balai banjar which is now located at the second floor. Physical access is mediated by the use of the first floor as a commercial and service area by both the mini market and the community-mini bank. This discourages the community use of their balai banjar even more, unless there is some imperative to do so, such as for *sangkep* and *odalan* banjar. This turns the balai banjar into 'a functional space' rather than a socially-informal space where members of the community feel free to congregate at any time.

This reordering of space also encourages outsiders to encroach on traditional activities. Compromised space then occurs that may hinder direct access by krama banjar to the balai banjar above it, especially during an event or celebration that involves everyone (Fig. 7). When this happens, a compromise usually takes place between the management of the mini market, the mini bank and the banjar to ensure every party's interests are respected. A mutual compromise and understanding is usually the norm here, thus avoiding any potential conflict. As necessary, krama banjar are often free to interact on spaces that are leased out to both the

minimarket and the mini bank. So far, all parties collude for the common good. However, the question remains, what happens when conflicts do arise?

Within the reformed spatial arrangement, the BBDPS also has sacrificed its courtyard, except that it requires consent from both the bank and the mini market. To ensure the proper handling of this matter, the banjar has amended its organizational structure to include a new division to handle the lease of the balai banjar. Once again, there is a compromise in direct and unhindered access to community space.

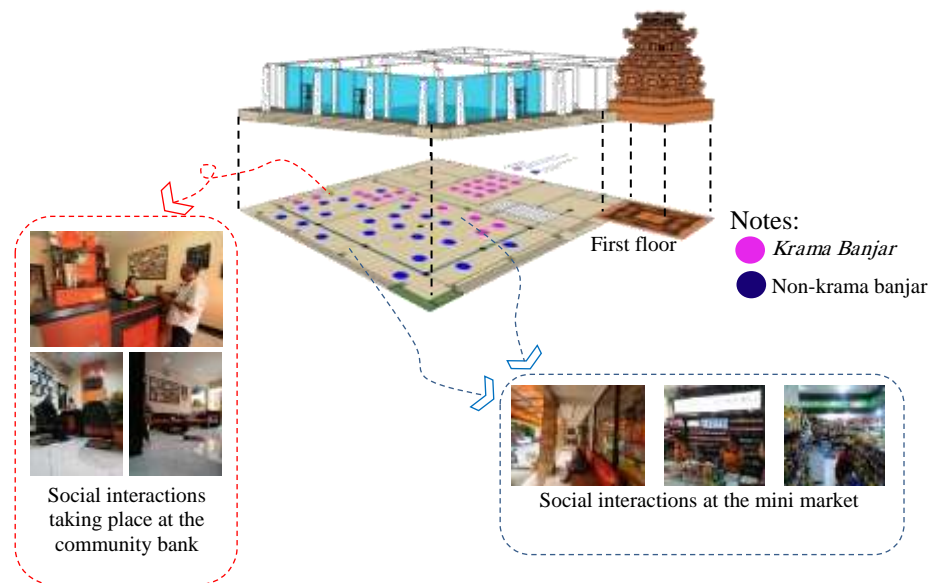


Fig. 7: Compromised Space
Source: Site observation, 2021

Conclusions

While evolution remains the only absolute, any reform of public place requires a thoroughly thought-out plan in order to guarantee that both access and symbolic values are enshrined in practice (Mantra, 1993). The commodification of public place may be seen as inevitable in order to provide necessary resources and to advance business interests. However, this should not be viewed as a win-lose situation (Mann, 1984; Suartika, 2013; 2020; Suartika, et al., 2020). The process should also consider the need to achieve a socially appropriate liveable living environment. Hence, the sustenance of existing public places should not be solely the responsibility of the vernacular government. The process should be enshrined in the legitimacy and enforcement of legal sanction. This mechanism should be embedded in the state planning system in order to guarantee the survival and successful operation of the banjar and its balai banjar in Bali.

This article has discussed an important topic, given the extent of the problem. Nonetheless the subject still requires further elaboration, since it extends to every traditional community on the island. It directly affects how the governance of traditional forms of public place should be preserved for posterity (Suartika & Cuthbert, 2020b). Meanwhile the relationship between legal authority and traditional practices remains a vexed issue.

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