The Use of Urban Public Places in Jakarta for Adolescents' Hanging Out

Paramita Atmodiwirjo

Department of Architecture, University of Indonesia, Indonesia

Abstract

This study examines the adolescents' use of urban public places for hanging out activities in Jakarta, Indonesia and the multiple affordances that these places possess for adolescents' hanging out behaviour. The set of questionnaires was distributed among adolescents aged 11-16 in four schools in Jakarta to obtain the description of their utilisation of the available public places. The study found that the adolescents use various types of places to accommodate their need to hang out with friends. They use places designated as settings for entertainment and socialising as well as places designated for other functions. The findings also highlighted the potential of certain types of urban places such as bus stops, street corners and some unplanned places that become an integral part of adolescents' everyday activity spaces. Such places possess various affordances that support the adolescents' need for social settings. The study confirms the adolescents' use of the whole city as hangouts. In designing urban places, it becomes important to consider the adolescents' capabilities to perceive multiple affordances of urban places and to utilise these places for the activities beyond the main functions of the places.

Keywords: adolescents; public places; hanging out; affordances

1. Introduction

Adolescents' need for places to hang out in the cities have constantly become problematic issues. Being neither children nor adults, they tend to be situated in a marginal position in relation to the activity spaces in everyday life. During this period, adolescents develop the need to go further beyond their home and neighbourhood (Spencer et al., 1989) and beyond the institutions designated for them (Corrigan, 1979). Yet they have limited access to urban places, due to various constraints in financial terms, independent mobility and parental permission (Corrigan, 1979; McMeeking and Purkayastha, 1995; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997).

Previous researches have shown evidence of adolescents as active users of public places for hanging out (Noack and Silbereisen, 1988; Anthony, 1985; Matthews et al., 2000a; Vliet, 1983). This evidence shows their capability to appropriate various settings in cities that can fulfill their need for places to hang out. However, their presence in public places is often seen as a problem, and they are considered as a threat to other members of society (Malone, 2002). Exclusion of adolescents from public places is reflected in ever-increasing restrictions imposed against loitering and hanging out in public places (Childress, 2004; McMeeking and Purkayastha, 1995). The meaning of 'public' in public spaces for adolescents becomes questionable (Valentine, 1996). Despite the attempts to exclude them from public places, adolescents continue to demonstrate their capabilities to transform any available place to fulfill their needs (Lieberg, 1995).

The adolescents' appropriation of public places has often been considered as a misuse of space. Clear evidence can be found in many shopping malls, which have been constructed as spaces with the focus on commercial-related activities only where the presence of adolescents' hanging out is not welcomed (Thomas, 2003). Such evidence implies an understanding that public places should have specific function and adolescents' socialising activities in such places fall into 'other functions' that are deemed inappropriate.

In appropriating public places for their everyday activities, the adolescents tend to have "alternative scripts" in seeing the environment, which is often hardly understood by other society members (Spencer et al., 1989). The adolescents create their own 'scripts' in using shopping malls (Anthony, 1985; Matthews et al., 2000b), streets (Matthews et al., 2000a), stairs, alleys and other 'unprogrammed spaces' (Lynch, 1977) as places for hanging out. These are "the scripts that are to do with self-display, assessing the role of other and of ownself, establishing and maintaining solidarity..."
with one's group" (Spencer et al., 1989, p.230).

For adolescents, many urban public places possess multiple affordances. The term affordance was first introduced by Gibson (1986): "The affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (Gibson, 1986, p.127). The concept of affordances offers an approach in analysing the environmental features by considering their relation to individuals (Heft, 1997), and "by referring to what activities they permit or afford some individual" (Heft, 1988, p.30).

Because affordances are relative to individual, the same feature of environment can be perceived as having different affordances for different individuals and thus used in different ways. In this way, an environment – either an object or a place - may possess multiple affordances (Heft, 1997) or various degree of usability of affordances (Kytta, 2002). Studies have pointed out multiple affordances of various types of settings (Malinowski and Thurber, 1996; Clark and Uzzell, 2001).

The concept of multiple affordances may explain the facts that adolescents utilise places in ways different from what adults do in the same environment. While most people may associate shopping malls with shopping behaviour, adolescents perceive the affordances of this setting for socialising behaviour.

The concept of affordances offer more meaningful description of the environment than merely giving particular 'labels' to environmental features (Heft, 1988). This concept also enables people to understand the multiple affordances that exist in an object or a place regardless of its label. However, labeling or naming an environment, and assigning particular activities into particular kinds of places have become a common practice in everyday life (Franck, 1994). Somehow this has led to the tendency to create spaces that are "separate, autonomous, self-sufficient and complete, contained and fixed" (Franck, 1994, p.360).

To some extent Franck's argument has illustrated the modernist emphasis on the close fit between form and function, which Lawson (2001) called the "tyranny of functionalist space" (p.221). Lawson also criticised the common mistake of designer to treat a space by concentrating more on its central purpose. This argument suggests that associating a particular place with particular single function overlooks the natural occurrence of human activities and underestimates human capabilities in inventing alternative uses for certain places. The active involvement of users has resulted in the fact that the creation of places and the designation of activities in places are not entirely in the hand of the designers. This is true in adolescents' acts to appropriate public places for their socialising activities.

The adolescents' capabilities to perceive multiple affordances of public places eventually leaves an important question for the design professions regarding the extent to which it is necessary to design places for adolescents' hanging out activities. Creating special places for adolescents implies an architectural deterministic view in assuming that if adolescents are given special places, then they will hang out there and only there. It indicates a failure to address the attractiveness of public places for adolescents (Malone, 2002). "By defining places where teens are welcome, after all, we can immediately infer that there are other places where they are not" (Childress, 2000, p.249).

Recent approaches concerning the place of adolescents in the city have highlighted the need for integrating adolescents within the whole life of the city. Exclusion of adolescents from public places is a reflection of the modernist principle of designing the city through segregation of spaces. Jacobs (1961) was probably one of the first who criticised this and proposed her belief that there is no need for children to be separated from the rest of the city. Adolescents should be welcomed members of society in any public places they want to be, in a "community of differences" (Malone, 2002).

Such integration also means considering the whole of the city as a multiplicity of potential places for their activity spaces. Considering the whole city as having potential for hanging out places means opening the possibilities of 'free zones' (Lieberg, 1995) where there are aspects of freedom of action and freedom from adult authoritative supervision.

There is, however, a further question that emerged from the concept of 'the whole city as hangout': What types of places are there in the cities that offer such possibilities? It becomes necessary to understand the extent to which the adolescents utilise the public places that are designated for them as well as other non-designated places. Such understanding will provide valuable information to help determining the extent to which the design and planning of the cities should intervene with creating such places.

The objective of this study was to identify the types of urban public places where the adolescents like to hang out, and to examine the adolescents' use of these places in relation to the functions originally designated in each type of place. In particular, the research attempts to examine the extent to which different types of urban public places with certain designated functions can become the setting for adolescents' hanging out activities.

2. Research Settings

The research was conducted in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia. The city has an area of 664 km$^2$ and a total population of 8,589,443 (Population Census 2000). Around 8.3% of this total population is adolescents between 10 and 14, and around 9.3% is aged between 15 and 19. Therefore there were around 1.4 million of
adolescents aged 10-19 in Jakarta.

The adolescents in Jakarta normally attend junior secondary schools (for age 12-14) or senior secondary schools (for age 15-17). They attend schools six days a week. School hours normally begin at 7 am and end at various times in the afternoon between 12.30 pm and 14.30 pm. With such patterns of school hours, most adolescents in Jakarta have the rest of the afternoon as their free time, which they can spend for various leisure activities including hanging out.

In general, just like their peers in other countries, the adolescents in Jakarta are active users of public facilities. Shopping malls are one of the kinds of places where many adolescents can be seen. They like to spend their free time by walking around shopping malls, either as daily, weekend or holiday leisure activity (Surindo, 2000).

Jakarta’s local government has provided several places dedicated for adolescents. These places are called gelanggang remaja and sasana krida karang taruna (both mean youth centres) as the centres for youth leisure activities and development. However, it is evident that the existence of youth centres only plays a very small part in adolescents’ free time activities and these places are becoming less popular. The majority of youth centres are now left in an obsolete condition as they are not utilised and maintained very well. All these facts suggest that the presence of youth centres cannot be considered as the primary environments for adolescents’ free time. It is clear that much of the adolescents’ times were spent in other places, and which places they choose to go will become the issue examined in this study.

3. Procedures

The respondents for this study were taken from Year 1 and Year 2 of four junior secondary schools in Jakarta. In total there were 448 adolescents participating in this study, with 50% males and 50% females. Their age was between 11 to 16 years old, with average age 13.3.

The main data for this study was obtained through the distribution of open-ended questionnaires among the respondents. In this questionnaire, they were asked to describe three of their favourite hanging out places: two favourite places where they often go to hang out after school and one favourite place where they like to go when they have opportunity to go further. For each place, they were asked to mention the name of the places and the locations, what activities they usually do there and three things that they like about those places.

The questionnaire was delivered in Indonesian language. To ensure similar perception regarding the meaning of the term 'hang out' among the participants, at the introduction of the questionnaire, they were informed that what they had to describe was the place where they usually nongkrong (which means 'hang out') or berkumpul (which means 'gather').

The responses obtained from the open-ended questionnaire were then coded into categories. The findings are presented in the following sections.

4. Types of Urban Places for Hanging Out

The responses to the questionnaire have revealed a variety of places that the respondents like to go to hang out. Fig.1. illustrates the percentage of all categories of favourite places mentioned by the respondents. Among all the respondents, the majority mentioned that they had favourite places to hang out. Only 8.3% said that they never hang out after school, and a further 5.8% only had one favourite place. About 9.2% respondents said that they did not have any place to hang out when they could go further.

It can be seen in Fig.1. that the respondents’ favourite places to hang out after school include shopping malls (13.8% and 14.3%), other shopping places (10.5% and 8.3%), public transport stations (11.6% and 6.9%), and unplanned places (9.8% and 8%). Other places such as eating place, cinema, computer/game centre, sport place, cultural centre and park were mentioned by less number of respondents. Some respondents mentioned areas within their school as favourite hangout after school (11.8% and 5.4%).

The results indicate that the adolescents in this study are active users of the urban environments. They use a wide range of urban places in their everyday life. They use not only urban places which are intended as places for entertainment such as shopping malls, shops, cinemas, computer/game centre, but they were also active user of places that are not intended as places for entertainment, including public transport stations, unplanned places and areas around school. This finding clearly illustrates the adolescents’ use of both designated places and non-designated places.

Initially during the development of the questionnaire, it was assumed that the students would hang out after
school in locations close to their school. It was also assumed that they would only hang out further when they have opportunity such as in weekends or holidays. Hence the questionnaire asked for two after school hang-out places and one faraway hang-out places. However, the locations of places they mentioned suggest that they also go to faraway places even during weekdays.

For further analysis in this study, the three places mentioned by each respondent were combined altogether. Because the main interest in this study is to explore the adolescents' use of urban public places, the categories of 'house', 'out of town' and 'others' were excluded from the analysis. Taking out those three categories, there was the total number of 941 places mentioned by all respondents, consisting of 638 after-school places and 303 faraway places.

This data clearly illustrates the attractiveness of shopping places for the adolescents in Jakarta, as also found in other studies (Anthony, 1985; Matthews et al., 2000b; Vanderbeck and Johnson, 2000). Beside shopping malls, they also like other shopping places including bookshops (48%), supermarkets (28%) and stalls or street vendors (12%).

Apart from the use of shopping places for hanging out, the results in Fig.3. also indicate the frequent use of public transport station (which includes bus stop, bus terminal and train station) and areas around school (which includes parking lot, school ground and school canteen). These places are very close to the everyday life of the respondents because they naturally become part of their routine journey home from school.

In contrast to shopping malls and other shopping places that need planning and willingness to go there, areas around school and public transport stations offer easy access for the adolescents. Similar thing also seems to occur for the park and unplanned place which are also quite popular as adolescents' after-school hangouts. The majority of the parks they mentioned were located near their school, while the unplanned places include streets, street corners and bridges, mostly also located within short distance from school. All of these are also easy-to-reach places. The use of public transport station, school areas, and unplanned places illustrate the adolescents' relationship with non-designated places. Although these places are designed with particular function, the adolescents use these places for the activities beyond that designated function.

The results in Fig.2. and Fig.3. also show that other categories mentioned by the respondents were entertainment places, such as computer/game centre, sport place, cinema, and eating place. This indicates that adolescents are really active users of the entertainment places in the city. The choice of these places seems to reflect the adolescents' common interests in sport, commercial leisure and screen-related activities (Hendry et al., 1993).

5. Activities in Favourite Hanging Out Places

The following analysis takes a further look into how the adolescents use their favourite places for their activities. In the questionnaire they were asked to mention the activities that they usually did in each places. In total there were 1484 activities reported for all 941 places.

Fig.4. illustrates the respondents' activities while visiting their favourite places. It shows clearly that talking became the top activity among the respondents in this study (17% of all activities mentioned). This result is consistent with previous studies that found conversation as a primary activity in hanging out places (Oldenburg, 1999) and as the major element of 'doing nothing' (Hendry, 1983; Corrigan, 1979).
Fig. 4 also shows two activities related to consumption, shopping (10.6%) and eating (14.8%) as top activities mentioned by the respondents. These activities seem to be related to the adolescents' popular choice of shopping mall and other shopping places. Some respondents (12.3%) also mentioned that they usually just hang out, do nothing or 'play' when they visited their favourite places.

The rest of the activities mentioned by the respondents include those with clear purposes (such as playing game, watching movie, doing sport and reading) as well as those with a less clear purpose (such as watching around, walking around and gathering). The results suggest that the adolescents in this study use their favourite places for variety of activities. Some activities are related to the main function of the place while some others have less clear purpose.

Apart from the primary activities in each place, Fig. 5 also illustrates that the places were also used for various activities other than the name suggested. In some places, the secondary activities seemed to have much lower percentage than the primary activities. This can be seen in computer/game centre, sport place, cultural centre, cinema and eating place. These results indicate that these types of places are used mainly for one particular purpose.

However, other types of places seemed to be used extensively for other purposes apart from its primary activities. For example, shopping mall was also used for eating, playing, watching around and walking around. Other shopping places were also used for talking and reading (as the majority of the shops visited are bookshops). Public transport stations were also used for talking and hanging out.

The same thing also happened in places which names do not suggest any particular purpose. Unplanned places became the place for talking as well as waiting/sitting and hanging out. School areas became the place for talking and eating, while park became the setting for eating, talking, hanging out, waiting/sitting and doing sport.

The results suggest that the adolescents' favourite hanging out places in this study have become the
settings for more than just the primary activities expected to happen there. The high percentages of activities 'talking', 'hanging out', and 'watching around' in many types of places suggest the importance of these places as settings for socialisation. It indicates that in addition to their intended use, these places provide affordance for adolescents' interaction with peer groups and other people.

6. Characteristics of Favourite Hanging Out Places

This section explores the characteristics that make the places favourite for the adolescents in this study. The respondents were asked to mention up to three things that they liked about each of their favourite places. Their responses were combined altogether into 2168 responses.

Fig.6. Characteristics of Places Liked by Respondents (n=2168)

Fig.6. presents the characteristics of places that the respondents like. The majority of the aspects mentioned were related to 'activities' (31% of all things they like); they liked the places that allow them to do particular activities. The responses in this category could be grouped into 'functional activities' (in which the place is good because they can buy things, eat, sit, do sport etc.) and 'social activities' (in which the place is good because they can talk, have a chat, gather and watch their friends). From all the 'activities' responses, 48.1% referred to functional activities while 51.9% was related to social interaction.

The other top things that they liked was 'general atmosphere' (17.1%), 'people' (16.4%), and 'facilities' (16.1%). The respondents mentioned that they liked their favourite places because of the atmosphere. They said that these places were fun, interesting, exciting and good. This result suggests that the adolescents like the places with atmosphere that are compatible with their needs (Cotterell, 1995). The mentions of 'people' as the things they liked suggest the adolescents' needs revolve around settings of social interaction. They need to interact with the same-sex peers and opposite-sex adolescents (Noack and Silbereisen, 1988) as well as with adults other than parents (Hendry et al., 1993) and their favourite places seem to offer the opportunity for such interaction.

Meanwhile, the category of 'facilities' includes the facilities provided in favourite places (such as food stalls, seats, restrooms, play area, sport facilities, computing facilities), various things on sale or on offer (clothes, toys, books, CDs) and things they can see or watch (such as fountain and view). The result suggests that adolescents like to hang out in places with facilities that can support their activities as well as facilities that can fulfil their needs for stimulation (Gehl, 1987).

Fig.6. shows that there were other aspects too that the adolescents like in their favourite places. Some of these aspects are more physical and often become the designers' main concern in designing a place, such as environmental comfort, accessibility, size of space, maintenance and safety. However, these aspects were mentioned less than the aspects discussed above.

The results suggest the importance of place qualities related to activities, people and general atmosphere. The adolescents look for places where they can interact, places where things happen and places with atmosphere that they like. It is the 'place' and not just the physical 'space' that the adolescents seem to look for when hanging out. However, in some places adolescents also indicated the importance of 'facilities' and other physical aspects. It seems that physical elements of places also contribute to their affordances to support the occurrence of activities and interaction with others (Gehl, 1987), to 'invite' people (Hertzberger, 1991), and to provide the degree of social interaction and privacy desired by adolescents (Childress, 2004). This finding indicates the importance of both physical aspects and non-physical aspects of the environment, as well as the relationship between these two aspects.

Fig.7. shows in detail the aspects that the respondents like in each category of places. It describes the aspects with the highest percentage in each place category, which are labelled here as 'primary characteristics'. It also shows the other things that they like, which are labelled as 'secondary characteristics'.

The results in Fig.7. indicate that 'activities' become the primary characteristic that the adolescents like in almost all types of places, except in shopping mall. It seems very important for adolescents that a hang out place provides opportunities to do the activities they like, including social activities. The fact that 'people' was also mentioned in all places suggests the importance of the presence of others in favourite places, as the context for social interaction.

Facilities also become one of the secondary characteristics that the adolescents liked in almost all of other places. In particular it was these primary characteristics that they liked in shopping mall. The adolescents seem to like the facilities that enable them to do the activities they want, such as the provision of shop, eating place or food vendor and the provision.
of seating area. The exception can be found in public transport stations, unplanned places and school areas, where the facilities were not mentioned as the important characteristics.

Previous findings in Fig.5 showed that these three places were the ones that had the higher percentage of activities 'talking' and 'hanging out' which highly include social interaction. Therefore it seems that the presence of other people and opportunity to do social interaction become much more important than the provision of any physical facilities. Other characteristics also mentioned were 'general atmosphere' and 'environmental comfort', although they did not appear as important in all places.

The findings of this study suggest that the adolescents in this study use a wide range of urban public places as settings for hanging out, not only those designed for particular purposes, but also those places with less clearly defined purposes. Various activities that they do in these places indicate that such places possess multiple affordances for the adolescents, not only for activities related to the main function of the places, but also for socialising activities. The use of places for these 'other' activities were more clearly seen in places, which have less clear main functions.

Various aspects that they like in their favourite hanging out places indicate that the places offer certain features that provide opportunities for adolescents' hanging out, in relation to both their physical and social needs.

7. Implications for Urban Design and Planning

The phenomenon of adolescents' hanging out in public places has been criticised as a misuse of public facilities. The adolescents' social activities in such places are often considered inappropriate and do not conform to the normal function of the places. From another point of view, certain urban places as mentioned by the adolescents in this study offer opportunities to become the adolescents' fourth environments (Vliet, 1983) beyond the triad of home, school and designated play environments. These places offer chances for adolescents to have contact with friends and contact with what is happening around city streets. Such places may have an important role to promote adolescents' spatial exploration (Vliet, 1983; Spencer et al., 1989), to accommodate their activities during free time (Hendry et al., 1993; Corrigan, 1979) and to support adolescents' peer contacts (Noack and Silbereisen, 1988).

An interesting finding from this study is the fact that the adolescents actively use various urban places that are not designated for entertainment or meeting places. Examples of such places are bus stops, train stations, parking lots, school grounds, street corners and bridges. Compared to shopping malls and other entertainment places which cannot function as real 'public' places for adolescents (Valentine, 1996), places like bus stops may offer an opportunity for adolescents to do the main activity in that place to 'mask' their hanging out. In this way, the main purpose of the setting becomes the reason to legitimise other activities (Jameson, 1971; Gehl, 1987). At bus stops, the adolescents may say that they come for waiting and not for hanging out. Their presence in bus stops is understood as waiting activity, and this legitimises their presence in the bus stops. As a place for waiting, bus stops are normally unsupervised, as also is the case in most street corners and other unplanned places (Corrigan 1979; Matthews et al., 2000a). This is contrary to other public settings where loitering and hanging out are often restricted by the presence of authoritative personnel and regulations (McMeeking and Purkayatsha, 1995, Valentine, 1996).

There are some implications of these findings for the practice of urban design and planning. The findings have shown the possibilities of the types of places in urban environments that allow for adolescents' appropriation. It is important to understand the possibilities that such places in the city may attract adolescents to hang out. The results of this study indicate that when considering the use of urban places for adolescents, it becomes necessary to consider the use of places beyond their functional types.
Many studies on adolescents’ use of public places have concentrated on certain types of places such as shopping mall (Anthony, 1985; Matthews et al., 2000b; Vanderbeck and Johnson, 2000) or other entertainment places (Noack and Silbereisen, 1988). This study suggests that besides these types of places with designated functions, understanding ‘the whole city as hangouts’ should also incorporate various casual, everyday places such as bus stops, street corners and other unplanned urban places and the possibilities to promote the role of these casual urban places as the central point of adolescents’ activities.

The affordance of these casual urban places as the settings for social interaction is important as a part of activity systems in the cities, since such places are everywhere in the cities. With this knowledge, designers may be able to explore the places which have similar potential to ‘mask’ hanging out with the main activity of the place. For example, designers may consider multiple affordances of some public settings such as corner shops, other public transport stations or launderette and integrate this knowledge in the planning of the cities.

The multiple affordances possessed by urban public places suggest that the design approach that focuses on the separation of uses does not always seem to be right. In practice, designating particular areas for different users is usually based on the understanding that the different needs of users should be fulfilled by different design solutions. However, the findings of this study suggest possible overlapping of uses in a single space. Even in a place with a specific function such as a bus stop, there is a potential for emerging uses later after occupancy, in particular the occurrence of social interaction. It is important to encourage the variety of activities in a certain place within the community. In particular for the case of adolescents, this is a possible way to promote socialisation among them, without the necessity to create special meeting places. It will become an implementation of ‘the whole city as hangouts’, not only for adolescents but also for other community members.

References