The essence of activity-materiality-character on the space and scope of Osing house architecture

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of a single architectural form has become a global problem. This is also observed in Indonesia as indicated by the specific traditional architecture known as Osing in Banyuwangi. Therefore, this study focuses on the issue of the essence of space created from the surrounding elements in Osing traditional architecture using a qualitative method which involved prioritizing new reading tools including the Lincourt phenomenological approach and the architectural anatomy of Salura. The results showed that the activity forms a linear circular pattern while the lower scoping elements form a geometric arrangement and have a linear movement direction. Moreover, the roof structure shows the dynamic quality of the elements which move from front to back. It was also discovered that the scope of the Osing space is a barrier with the activities within the house isolated and inwardly oriented. The use of local natural materials also provides a warm, rustic and simple character as well as a chance for sustainability. Furthermore, the structures and constructions show that the architecture prioritizes honesty and simplicity. This, therefore, means the essence of space in Osing architecture is in Jrumah based on the space which was found to be closed, natural, simple character, and prioritizing honesty. These findings are expected to be an additional source of knowledge on Osing architecture, serve as input for architects in designing modern houses in Banyuwangi, and input for policymakers in formulating a strategy to preserve this traditional architecture.

Keywords:
Activity
Character
Essence
Materiality
Osing
Scope of space

Introduction

The phenomenon of a single architectural form is observed in several countries due to the emergence of globalization (Lalu and Fauzy 2020; Lake et al. 2020). This is indicated by the forms of buildings, houses, tourist attractions, shopping centers, and public service offices designed and constructed with similar concepts.

The use of a single architectural form as a universal style is often found in developing countries such as Indonesia (Clarissa 2016). This is based on the tendency of Indonesian architects to imitate architectural designs considered to be modern from developed countries, especially the western world (Prananto 2011). Moreover, architects sometimes embed a certain architectural style to produce a single form in every place (S. et al. 2012). It is, however, important to note that Indonesia has a wealth of traditional architectural knowledge which can be used for future references as shown in figure 1. The diversity in these traditional architectures is believed to be a manifestation of the ideological values of society (Hidayatun, Prijotomo, and Rachmawati 2014) used as an identity for the
development of these regions (Harisdani and Lindarto 2019).

**Figure 1.** No. 1: Minang architecture; No. 2: Dayak longhouse architecture; No. 3: Batak Karo architecture; No. 4: Tana Toraja architecture
Source: (Editor 1001Indonesia 2016)

The advancement of the single architecture phenomenon in many areas is observed in several buildings with different functions ranging from residences, offices, hotels, and cottages. For example, a report in the Times Indonesia on March 28, 2017 showed that some government buildings and offices in Banyuwangi tend to be built in a modern architectural style as indicated in figure 2. This is also observed in the Village Office in the traditional village of Osing Kemiren which was constructed without the local architectural tradition as presented in figure 3 (Efendi 2017).

**Figure 2.** Modern style of hotel building in Banyuwangi
Source: (Saputra 2018)

Banyuwangi has a very specific traditional architectural wisdom which is the Osing architecture but discovered not to have been an inspiration source for many architects designing buildings in the area. One of the reasons for this is the fact that there are very rare references to be used by these architects.

**Figure 3.** Hotel and village office in Osing traditional village
Source: (AGODA 2016)

This research, therefore, focuses on the traditional Osing architecture in Kemiren Village, Banyuwangi in line with the phenomenon of single architectural forms in Indonesia. The issue raised was on the space essence created from the elements of this architectural style to determine the local wisdom concept to be used as a reference for contemporary architectural designs.
The previous studies on Osing have mostly focused on other aspects outside the field of architecture such as language (Wahyudiono 2018), art (A. Rosa, Ruja, and Idris 2020), culture (Indiarti 2017), and social aspect (Indiarti and Nurchayati 2019). It was discovered that no in-depth study has been conducted on the essence of space from the surrounding elements. This, therefore, led to the formulation of the research question in this study that “what is the essence of space formed in the Osing house based on the elements of its architectural scope?”

Osing architecture is developed from community traditions transferred for generations (Zulfikar 2020) without any written record of its conception found. This study, therefore, formulated a reading tool to obtain the space essence based on the scoping element by combining Lincourt's phenomenological approach with Salura's anatomical approach to architecture.

This study is considered an addition to the enrichment of Indonesian ethnography, an additional source of knowledge for the Banyuwangi people on Osing architecture, input for practicing architects in designing modern architecture in this area, and input for policymakers in formulating a strategy to preserve this traditional architecture.

Method

The use of the essence of architecture as the formal object of this study led to the application of the phenomenological approach relevant. Phenomenology is, therefore, defined as the science of appearances or the things observed by a subject (Ashadi 2018). It is also known as a method to study certain phenomena towards ensuring they become knowledge (U. Gunawan 2016). Moreover, the concept was also considered to have the ability of overcoming the dichotomy between architectural subjects and objects (Y. Gunawan 2016). It is a process of searching for essential ideas which cannot be expressed in an ordinary or general form based on an individual’s experience (Purwantiassing 2018).

An important figure in phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, stated the possibility of extracting meaning from an object by allowing it to express itself (Hanifati and Harjoko 2020). Husserl emphasized the importance of returning to an object due to its reflection of consciousness in its pure form. This, therefore, shows the importance of experiencing the objects of life deeply to determine the essence of truth.

Martin Heidegger later developed phenomenology as a method to purify philosophical knowledge. This was based on the observation of a synthesis between the subject and the object in the human world and this makes it important to reveal the meaning based on the fact that it is the original human reality (Hanifati and Harjoko 2020).

Phenomenology was developed in architecture as a way of viewing and thinking about space and place. This was pioneered by C.N Schulz influenced by Heidegger's philosophy to explore the meaning of both the natural and artificial existence and presence of space through existing phenomena to produce an essence of a place known as the Genius Loci (Norberg-Schulz 1991).

Another phenomenologist, Michel Lincourt, stated that phenomena are known through the senses because they are in human perception. This means “inhabited space as perceived by the person experiencing it” in architecture and this energizes the space to be intrinsically and organically linked to its physical environment in the most intimate way (Lincourt 1999).

The basic principle in determining the essence according to Husserl's thought is the conduct of reduction or epocho or bracketing. Meanwhile, Heidegger tends more towards philosophy while Schulz and Lincourt apply phenomenology to architecture. Moreover, the more reference provided for Heidegger by Schulz is matched with the development of 3 Husserl reductions including the phenomenological, eidetic, and transcendental phenomenological reductions (Zaprulkhan 2016) by Lincourt into 12 veils of phenomena which are covering people, activities, surrounding environment, evolution, materiality, order, ecology, form and space, energy, economics, character, and projections (Lincourt 1999). Schulz also emphasizes more on searching that leads to meaning while Lincourt conducts searches that lead to essence. This means Lincourt's approach is in line with this study.

Lincourt develops a sheath of phenomena to read or discover the essence of the urban aspect. It is important to note that this approach relates more to architecture with humans and objects discovered to be inseparable and needed to be reviewed reciprocally. Moreover, the Lincourt
approach does not remove a sheath just for the sake of the sheath but uses one to enter the next (Lincourt 1999).

This study, therefore, emphasizes the envelope of Activity-Materiality-Character for the Osing architecture (AO) used as a case study. This is associated with the tendency of the sheath of People, Surroundings, Evolution, Arrangement, Ecology, Form and space, Energy, Economics, and Projection to explore wider objects in scope and heterogeneous. Meanwhile, the Osing architecture focuses more on the scope of residential houses with relatively homogeneous users. This means the most dominant and interrelated sheath is the activity-materiality-character with the materiality serving as the link between activity and character.

This means the Activity-Materiality-Character are the main points to be explored in Osing architecture but a comprehensive exploration requires anatomical description. The architectural anatomy approach which is different from phenomenology is Evensen and Salura. Meanwhile, Evensen prioritizes the existential expression of space and buildings through the points of weight-motion-substance (Thiss-Evensen 1987) while Salura emphasizes the essence of space and buildings through the stages of scope.

This led to the division of architectural scope into fives spheres which include the environment, site, building, figure, and material scopes (Salura 2018). However, this study focused only on the building and figure to limit the architectural scope. This is in line with the three formal objects of activity, materiality, and character. The combination of these two methods is, therefore, presented in figure 4.

This study was conducted qualitatively through a phenomenological approach. The steps involved are arranged sequentially as follows even though they are not always linear in reality.

1. Record all existing physical objects by listing the original name and meaning to ensure they are easily traceable and known by parts.
2. The search for the building scope including the space and scope was traced to the main points of Activity-Materiality-Character to obtain their essence. This involved the use of an in-depth interview with residents at every search. The essence was, therefore, discovered to be like an elongated shape and simple geometric flowing from front to back.
3. The search on the figure scope was conducted on the elements of the outer enclosure of the building with the emphasis on the degree of openness and closure. This led to the determination of the essence of space which includes inward orientation, closed from the outside, and the non-reflection of the outside aspect on the inside.
4. Conclusion of the relationship between the sphere of form, figure, and material.

Case study

The Osing house was used as a case study due to its ability to represent the issues determined and selected purposively in line with the objectives of this study (Arikunto 2011). The criteria used include: (1) Having properties and characteristics representing an Osing house, (2) existing for over 50 years, (3) still inhabited, and (4) relatively not much has changed. This, therefore, led to the
selection of two Osing houses located in the village of Kemiren as case studies as indicated in figures 5 and 6.

![Study case position on the map of Kemiren village](image)

**Figure 5.** Left: Case study 1; Right: Case study 2

![House plans for case study 1(left) and case study 2 (right)](image)

**Figure 6.** House plans for case study 1(left) and case study 2 (right)

Osing is the name of one ethnic group in Banyuwangi, East Java (Dharmaraty 2020) and is considered to be the heir to the Blambangan kingdom (Indiarti 2016). Most of the Osing people live in Kemiren Village and are steadfast in maintaining and conducting their ancestral traditions (Nursafitri, Pageh, and Wirawan 2020).

The Osing house is easily recognizable from the shape of the roof which is based on the combination of the Cerocogan, Baresan, and Tikel Balung roofs. This leads to several variants of roof arrangement (Prasetya 2020) due to the addition of different spaces underneath the roof for each family. The house also has a north-south orientation with minimal openings which served as a reflection of the closed attitude of the community (Suprijanto 2002). It is also easy to assemble as an adaptation to their tradition of moving houses. Moreover, the construction is usually through the use of local materials in response to the local climate (Wijaya and Purwanto 2017).

The Osing house consists of the main room which is the Bale or the living room, the Jrumah or bedroom which is considered sacred, and the Pawon or kitchen as indicated in figure 7.

![The atmosphere of the Bale, Jrumah, and Pawon in Osing house](image)

**Figure 7.** The atmosphere of the Bale, Jrumah, and Pawon in Osing house
The additional spaces include the amper or terrace, Pendopo (hall) separating the Bale and Jrumah, and ampok which is the space next to the building as shown in figure 8 (C. F. Rosa and Antariksa 2018). It is important to note that the Jrumah has the highest hierarchy in the arrangement of the interior space.

Figure 8. The photo shows the amper (left) and ampok (right) rooms in Osing house

Result and discussion

The case study was analyzed based on the building and figure scope and the findings are presented in the following sub-sections.

The essence of Osing architecture in the building scope context

The shape of the space in the Osing house is geometrically elongated with a simple arrangement as indicated by the Bale in the front, Jrumah in the middle, and Pawon in the back. This describes the nature of activities conducted in the space.

Formal activities such as receiving guests or having family discussions on important matters are usually conducted in the Bale while resting and sleeping activities are in Jrumah which is the room only accessible to nuclear family members. Moreover, the intensity of the activity in this room is very low, especially during the day and the space is very private and closed. The other daily activities are usually in the Pawon where most of the family time is spent cooking and preparing food, eating with family, receiving close friends or relatives as well as light and informal family discussions. The intensity of activity in this space is, therefore, very high.

These daily activities form a linear circular pattern and the lower space elements were observed to form a geometric arrangement with an elevation which is parallel to the direction of linear movement from front to back as shown in figure 9.
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In case study 1, the floor elements in Bale and Jrumah use the same material which is a mixture of cement and sand pavement. The physical characteristics of the material are massive, hard, homogeneous, dull, and do not muffle sound while the non-physical characteristics provide a dim impression to the space but still feel natural. Meanwhile, the Jrumah floor is grounded with an elevation slightly below the Jrumah and Bale room. The physical character of the floor is rough, irregular, cold, and wet while the non-physical character is moist, dirty, and impermanent.

In case study 2, the Bale, Pendopo and Jrumah floors use black ceramic material which is physically hard, smooth, slippery, shiny and does not muffle the sound while the non-physical aspects are dark, formal, modern, and provide a contrasting impression to the space. Meanwhile, the Pawon floor is made with brick pavement which was discovered to be physically rough and textured while the non-physical aspect is dull and irregular.

The floor elements in case study 1 generally show a natural and simple impression while case study 2 indicates a contrasting perspective based on the use of modern ceramic materials for the floor, thereby, leading to the absence of the natural and simple impression. Moreover, the parallel floor elevation and the use of the same material arrangement in the lower scoping elements do not support the position of Jrumah as the main room in the Osing house and also indicate the separateness of the Pawon room.

The horizontal enclosing elements or walls in both cases were found to be low-dimensional and human-scale, thereby, giving the space an intimate and warm atmosphere. They are all discovered to be installed to be floating and not directly attached to the floor and this provides a light impression to the building as indicated in figure 10. It is, however, important to note that the arrangement of these horizontal scoping elements is both directing and limiting, especially in Jrumah.
The dominant material use for the wall is woven bamboo or *gedek*, except for the front wall of the *Bale* which is constructed with wooden planks or *gebyok* to provide a formal impression for the space. The physical character is smooth, fibrous, and shiny.

It was discovered from case study 2 the *gebyok* is on the front wall of the *Jrumah* room as well as the *Bale*. Its presence, therefore, gives a contrasting value to other interior wall elements as presented in figure 12.

The walls of the other interior enclosures in both cases are entirely dominated by *gedek* with wood frame reinforcement. These materials are physically light, rough, fibrous, regularly patterned, and have small holes or pores all over their body which serve as a filter to allow air and sunlight to enter the room as shown in figure 13.

The materiality of the wall covering elements in case studies 1 and 2 presents a natural, rustic, light, warm and simple character of the space. The presence of the *gebyok* gives a formal impression to the *Bale* room, while in case study 2 its use on the front wall of the *Jrumah*, supports the position of *Jrumah* as the main room in the composition of the Osing house.

The scope of the upper room or roof in both cases is in the form of an exposed arrangement with the shape of the inner space resembling the structure. The roof structure in case study 1 is Tikel Balung-crocogan-crocogan while case study 2 has Tikel Balung-Tikkel Balung. This repeated roof arrangement provides a dynamic quality to the upper cladding elements which move from the front to back.
The construction system in both cases involves a frame structure mainly built through the use of wood. Moreover, the main structure has four pillars known as *Soko Gede* produced using natural solid wood with quite large dimensions which makes them dominant over other structural aspects. This *Soko Gede* supports the *Tikel Balung* roof, thereby, expressing a dynamic quality which points upward and also provides a solid and important expression to the space below.

The *Jrumah* and some of the *Bale* rooms in case study 1 share a position under the *Soko Gede* structure and this means the position of *Jrumah* as the room with the highest hierarchy in the Osing house is weak. Meanwhile, it is entirely under the *Soko Gede* structure in case study 2 and this indicates its position as the space with the highest hierarchy.

All the roof elements were observed to be in the form of a wooden frame with a ground tile covering. The gaps between the pairs of tiles provide a way for sunlight to enter and also function as ventilation holes as indicated in figure 13. It is important to note that the physical characters displayed include lightness and roughness while the non-physical ones include being noisy, natural, impermanent, and simple.

The outer wall of the houses in both cases are ornamented but this does not affect the quality of the interior space. Meanwhile, case study 2 has ornaments on the top of the entrance frame of the *Jrumah* room which also functions as a ventilation hole. They are present as accents in the space and this strengthens the position of the house as the main room. It is important to note that ornaments in the form of wood carvings are recommended for residents of the house.

The essence of Osing architecture in the figure scope context

The analysis of the figure scope emphasizes the extent of openness and closure of the external elements of the building. This is necessary to determine the quality of the relationship between activities conducted inside and those outside the house.

It was discovered that all the outer walls of the building in both cases are very closed. There are, however, two very small permanent glass windows and the main entrance on the *gebyok* wall in the *Bale* room for case study 1. This small glass window establishes a non-significant relationship between activities in the *Bale* room and those outside as shown in figure 14.

In case study 2, there is only a ventilation hole in the *Bale* room extending to the top of the *Gebyok* wall called *Loji*. This also shows the absence of a relationship between the activities inside and outside the building as indicated in figure 15.

The *Jrumah* is very closed in both cases and this gives the impression of being sacred and mysterious. The *Pawon* room does not also have exit openings except for the access door to move in and out. Moreover, the entire outer space is mostly constructed using natural woven bamboo materials installed using the floating system. It was discovered that the closure of all outermost scope elements of this space creates a barrier which breaks the relationship between the activities conducted in and out of the building. This shows the Osing house is highly inward-oriented, especially in the *Jrumah* space.

All the elements of the scoping space in the Osing house arranged internally and externally in a unified structure and constructed using natural materials were observed to be attached with a peg system and this means it is easy to assemble and disassemble them as indicated in figure 16. The entire structure starting from the floor to the walls and roof also indicates simplicity and honesty.
Description: upper enclosing elements (roof covering), upper enclosing elements (roof structure), wall structural elements, enclosing elements of the inner space (walls), outer enclosing elements (walls), outer enclosing elements (walls), lower scoping elements (floor), outer enclosing elements (walls), outer enclosing elements (walls)

**Figure 16.** The structure and construction of the Osing house which is easy to assemble and disassemble

The building and figure scopes of the activity-material and character sheath are, therefore, interpreted as indicated in the following table 1.

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**Table 1. Interpretation of the building and figure scopes against the activity-material and character sheath**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architectural anatomy</th>
<th>Case study 1</th>
<th>Case study 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phenomenal sheath</td>
<td>Materiality sheath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building scope</strong></td>
<td>Activity sheath</td>
<td>Materiality sheath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear activity pattern, forming geometric space</td>
<td>Natural, rough, dull.</td>
<td>Not permanent, light, simple.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small dimension</td>
<td>The main Jrumah (dominant)</td>
<td>Soko gede overshadows activities on Jrumah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human scale</td>
<td>Inward oriented</td>
<td>The main Jrumah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Figure scope</strong></td>
<td>There are only permanent glass windows on the front side of the building.</td>
<td>Natural materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disconnect activities inside and</td>
<td>Limit</td>
<td>Inward oriented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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The essence of activity-materiality-character on the space and scope of Osing house architecture

**Architectural anatomy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phenomenal sheath</th>
<th>Activity sheath</th>
<th>Materiality sheath</th>
<th>Character sheath</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case study 1</td>
<td>outside the home.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case study 2</td>
<td>Activities in isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

The results showed some similarities in the essence of activity-materiality and character in both cases studies. This includes the disconnection of the activities inside and outside the building by the Osing space scope. The activities in the isolated Osing house also tend to be oriented inward, especially in the *Jrumah* space. Moreover, the use of local natural materials provides a warm, rustic, and simple character as well as sustainability opportunities.

The structures and constructions also showed that the Osing architecture prioritizes simplicity and honesty. Therefore, the answer provided to the research question is that the essence of space in Osing house is concentrated in the *Jrumah* with a closed, natural, and simple character which prioritizes honesty.

**References**


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**Author(s) contribution**

This is part of the thesis conducted to obtain the Master of Architecture at Universitas Katolik Parahyangan. The authors have considerable interest in traditional architecture and this led to the research on one of the traditional architectures in Indonesia which is known as Osing House. The interest is based on the belief of the authors that architecture is usually developed based on both material and spiritual human needs while considering the environmental context and sensitivity to local culture and traditions. The authors, however, experienced several difficulties when they started this research. The contributions of each of them are stated as follows:

**Ami Zamzami** raised the issue of the essence of the Osing house formed from its architectural scope.

**Purnama Salura** provided the direction and formulated all studies regarding the use of appropriate theories and methodologies to conduct this research.

**Yuswadi Saliya** also provided suggestions on the discussion process to achieve clear results.