

THE PUBLIC NATURE OF BACK DRAINAGE SPACE IN THE FORMER COLONIAL CITY OF YANGON, MYANMAR: "BY-PRODUCT SPACE OF PLANNING" AND ITS VARIOUS COMMUNALIZATION

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1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

This study focuses on a public land called Back Drainage Space (BDS), which is a space for drainage along the rear lot line of a city block in the Central Business District of Yangon, Myanmar, a former British colonial city built in the mid-19th century. Surrounded by housing complexes and with sewage pipes running under them, BDS is a space that is closely related to people's lives, however residents are prohibited to use it. BDS is a space with public nature that has significance as a "medium" that connects the people who live around it. Hannah Arendt likened the notion of public to the relationship between a table and the people who sit around it, and described the ambiguity of the table as both "bringing people together" and "separating" them. BDS which lie between the buildings is compared to the table and people with different positions exchange their opinions over the table and through this, public is formed. This will promote the fostering of the community by the local residents and sustaining BDS through its use will lead to the development of a city that retains uniqueness. This study aims to clarify its formative process and actual situation to demonstrate the significance and role of BDS.

The country faces various issues which are deeply connected to its colonial history followed by a half-century of military dictatorship, but after the transition to civilian rule in 2011 until the 2021 coup, the country experienced rapid development without enough time to reflect. The discussion should involve not only the policy makers, elites, and outside experts, but also ordinary citizens and basic urban facilities such as BDS need to be updated as it holds the potential to shape the city through the participation of the people. BDS described as "by-product space of planning" is not explained by the definition of existing spatial forms. Its ambiguous nature implies a role as a vacant urban lot that can respond flexibly to the changing needs of the society.

2. SURVEY AND ANALYSIS

In addition to the literature reviews and historical and spatial analysis of the subject, a series of surveys, interviews and FGDs were conducted. The survey of 115 BDSs revealed that the residents use BDS as places of everyday life and socializing, it is called [spontaneous communalization]. Disequilibrium, i.e., garbage dump situation, was observed in certain areas due to the neglect and natural deterioration and the space improvement project (PJ) was conducted by an external organization. The survey clarified the changes, effects, and issues brought by this [systematic communalization].

The survey of [local residents before and after the PJ]

verified the appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the BDS. The survey on [the roles of the government and residents' organizations involved in the implementation and operation of the PJ] revealed that existing residents' organizations were at the core of the PJ, and active exchange of opinions on the use and operation of BDS indicated that communication was encouraged through BDS. The survey on [post-PJ progress targeting concerned parties] revealed that various opinions and issues related to BDS were visualized, shared and discussed among the parties for the first time through BDS, and that this created an opportunity for them to start working toward a solution. And the survey on [ripple effects of the PJ] revealed that other organizations were triggered by the PJ which indicates the various potential of BDS as an important urban asset.

Based on the above analysis, six issues common to BDS were identified, namely safety, hygiene, amenity, crime prevention, management system and citizen participation. The study also pointed out that both external organizations and existing residents' self-governing organizations were "intermediaries" that played an important role in improving BDS. Formalization of the space and the relationship contributed in addressing community issues that transcend individual concerns.

3. CONCLUSION

The intervention by the external organization identified as [systematic communalization] and its confrontation and reconciliation with the existing local culture [spontaneous communalization] was examined. The public nature of BDS was discussed; 1) BDS served as a medium to encourage people's involvement, as shown in the cases of [spontaneous] and [systematic] communalization; 2) through the exchange of opinions among the concerned parties, individual problems became shared issues to be discussed among stakeholders; 3) communication was promoted and transition occurred from individual to community involvement; 4) the existing residents' self-governing body became the core for the implementation and operation of the PJ, and its role as an "intermediary group" between the inside (residents) and outside (government, etc.) was formalized, and the outline of an autonomous community began to emerge.

Based on the phenomenon manifested in BDS – spontaneity, informality, formalization, and intermediary existence, this research demonstrated that the ambiguity of the "by-product space of planning" allows for diverse communalization, and that public nature is formed by engaging the people through this "opened" space.