Home-making and house building in the poor settlements:  
Towards a framework to study self-help housing

Wiwik D Pratiwi, M Donny Kurniawan, Anita Vitriana, Kiki Z Solihah and Medria Shekar Rani
School of Architecture, Planning and Policy Development, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia
wdpratiwi@ar.itb.ac.id, donny@ar.itb.ac.id, satukiki@yahoo.com, avitriana@yahoo.com, medria.shekar@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT
This paper attempts to explain the nature of home-making as a complex process implicit in house building for the urban poor. It aims to draw attention to the important activity that drives the acts of house building and makes home meaningful. The paper shows an outline of the process of home-making from the perspective of the urban poor and explains the desires and processes involved.

The paper argues not only that home and a sense of home are evolving perceptual and experiential entities but also that home-making refers to the construction of a structure that establishes many social and psychological aspect and relations of an individual and family within spatial dimensions (KKPP-ITB 2008a). The creation of home and a sense of home are not luxury to be achieved when quantitative requirements of space and infrastructure are completed. Rather, these goals must be accomplished in parallel. A shift in attitude is necessary in order to recognize the importance of home-making even for urban poor housing and to think about non-material issues in the process of housing provision. A sense of home is an important and fundamental experiential component of living, without which life makes less sense and has less value even with materially complete dwellings. The insights gained in this initial research, hopefully, could enlighten and enable researchers and providers of housing for the urban poor. By understanding the issues of ‘housing for the poor’ more holistically, one would be able to prepare appropriate interventions in housing policies. Such policies would help the urban poor dwellers have sense of home and making urban space a better quality of living.

Further, this initial study has shown that home-making and house building can be understood when home is seen as having ‘states of being’ (KKPP-ITB 2008a). In selected case study locations in Bandung, homes as socio-psychological entities were being made in a manner that was basic and simple rather than articulated and fully realized. Consequently, the meanings of home and satisfaction resulting from their being were poor. Therefore, when asked, some people would insist that they are homeless, indicating the necessity of further fulfilling spatial, material and social dimensions in order to feel a complete sense of home. Its meanings had socio-psychological connotations which had been only partially realized. There was an unfulfilled desire that seems to have been important of all motivations to make home: the desire to gain a complete sense of home. Motivations were identified which explain on the processes of making home, which include the desire: To own through the acquisition of a piece of land, to gain and conform to popular images and conventions, for social acceptance, social respect and personal dignity (KKPP-ITB 2008a), to order and organize space to fulfill household needs, and to form a community.

Keywords: Poor settlement, self-help informal housing, poverty alleviation, Bandung

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Jl. Graﬁka 2, Sekip, 55281, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
Telp. +62 274 580092, Fax. +62 274 580854
satriology@yahoo.com; sarwadi@ugm.ac.id

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