

Communities and Nature Bond - Boundary Creation in Bali A Quest for Better Living Place

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Abstract:

When the term community is used, the first thing that usually comes to mind is a place in which people know and care for one another. The word community itself means a mixture of living things that share an environment. The individual living beings can be plant or animal; any species; any size.¹ Sharing interaction in various ways is the character of a community. The best force of community is that all individual subjects in the mix have something in common.

All human beings generally are instinctively connected to a certain community after having identified their specific kind of social interaction need. People often have a misconception that modern urban development works better just because they have been designed by architects or urban planners. A better living place does not only refer to those things that we can see or feel such as infrastructure, road, buildings, public place, but also depends on the unseen factors which involve things beyond culture, class, and religion. Through a process of socialization people start to create relations with each other and within the context of community they start to think about doing things which can improve their quality of life, which can or can not be depending on a certain distance boundary.

Community lays claims on their members. The interesting situation that occurs in Bali is that actually the local and international community works in contradictory claims for their members. The local community (the Village – *Desa Adat*) has a tight but yet democratic rules that control the members. Meanwhile the international community (of which I took the Bali Hash House Harriers as the role model) has a very loose rules and yet still maintain their boundary.

Another fascinating fact about the community in Bali is that both the local and international community has a strong bonding with nature, as if they have a universal understanding that to create a good life human has to always be aware of the nature.

In this paper I aim to provide urban Bali case study with real communities actions that is associated to the promising strategic role model to create better living place. Instead of showing communities as merely government-created society, I aim to reflect on the existing urban Bali communities as an institution that represents specific strength and have over time shaped a better living place for people. Therefore, this paper is about urban culture and real struggle over identity and place. It tells present condition of showing how communities work to be the foundation of realistic bond between human along with nature and eventually better living place.

I try to trace the origin of very authentic local Balinese community *Desa Adat* as well as the contemporary international community 'Bali HHH - Hash House Harriers. By reflecting on these communities, I hope this study could in turn encourage critical analysis of the concept of community in urban development, the politics of the built environment and communities outside of Bali.

Introduction

Bali is a famous island known around the world. To some people it means an interesting travel destination; to others it brings mental images of Hindu temple and beautiful half naked girls carrying beautiful offerings on their head. In general the ideas of Bali are very romantic and connected to the symbol of Island of Gods. But it is only when you really stay in Bali to live and work then you will find the true meaning of a piece of paradise on earth.

I moved to Bali three years ago from Jakarta to work as an architect. After being happily shocked by how much cleaner the environment is in Bali compared to Jakarta then I slowly started to discover another perspective on Bali. It is more than a holiday destination. There are more to see than the walls of glittering traditional and contemporary architecture. From behind the physical seen feature of an island come the unseen bonds between human, nature, and religion.

The Local Community background

Even in the 21st century, the Balinese people still keep the Balinese Village system as a foundation to ensure communities and nature Bond in Boundary Creation of Urban Bali. (*Banjar: Village ward; a social and political community within the desa or village*).

A Balinese Village is a self-contained, independent community with little republic ruled by a council of representative villagers, in which everyone has equal rights and obligations. It is a democratic government and has their own autonomy.

Village system is still alive in this modern era although there are two different kind of Balinese village ever since the Dutch came to South of Bali during 1906-1908. Old Village (or more known as *Desa Adat*) is often defined as a community of worship. An important part of its function does indeed lie in the religious field. However there is also another kind of new Village which is called *Desa Dinas*. The later part connects to the Republik Indonesia government system. But unlike the other Indonesian village, the Balinese villages survive and manage to make a difference in creating a better living place for the people.

Theoretically all the land in Bali belongs ultimately to the Gods, who lease it to the Balinese to work and live from it; consequently landownership in an absolute sense cannot exist in the Balinese mind. Thus the *Desa Adat* authority, as representative of these Gods, control the land of the village, the homes, private and communally cultivated rice fields, grazing-lands, and the grounds left wild that provide bamboo, rotan, wood, and so forth. From the lands adjoining the village a worthy member may obtain an agricultural plot or the ground for his home. If someone has to move to another village and is justified by the other member of the village to leave, he will then has to be released from the association and has the right to take with him the value of his share of the village property. His land and his house then will return to the village. However he will be confiscated without compensation if he leaves the society without explanation.

The village is ruled by a man called 'Klihan desa' which rules the village in the name of the council. The position can be hold by even the simplest and poorest villager that won the common approval of villagers.

Among the obligation and responsibility of the Village authorities are administering the society, preside over the meetings, manage and organize all of the Village festivals. Even though the tasks are not easy they are not rewarded by salary but there is social satisfaction to get the trust of the community to deliver the duty of this patriarchal community.

The village it self remains to be the safeguard of awig-awig (a collection of Village or Subak² regulations that are different for each village). The members of village then carry out their self-made regulation and perform their own safekeeping guards when needed (pecalangan) All possible cases that occur are carefully worked out in a simple logic of Village meeting.



Photo A: Balinese daily-offering (photo courtesy of Atika Salma)

The sense of community in Desa Adat are sustained by connections and continued conversations in routine meetings between the member of Desa Adat (which in reality divided per sub-communities that take form such as Banjar, Subak and Sekhe). The well maintained contacts with other members of Banjar or Subak allow the collective problem solving.

Bali Hash House Harriers

Hash House Harrier roots extend back to the old English schoolboy game of "Hares and Hounds," in which some players, called "hounds," chase others, called "hares," who have left a trail of paper scraps along their route across fields, hedges, streams, bogs, and hills. One of the earliest Hares and Hounds events on record was the "Crick Run" at Rugby School in Warwickshire, England, was first held in 1837. Hare and Hounds as an adult sport began in the fall of 1867 with a group of London oarsmen who wanted to keep fit during the winter. Also called "Paper Chasing" or the "Paper Chase," the game became very popular after its introduction on Wimbledon Common in 1868 by the Thames Hare and Hounds. Early clubs called themselves "Hare and Hounds" or simply "Harriers."

The Hash House Harriers as we know today was originally founded in Malaya (now Malaysia) by Albert Stephen Ignatius Gispert, an English chartered accountant. It was sometime during 1937 when Gispert (or simply "G" as he was known to his friends) acquired a taste for the paper chase with the Springgit Harriers in Malacca (also in Malaya). Shortly after being transferred by his accounting firm to Kuala Lumpur he gathered together a number of fellow expatriate businessmen to form a harrier group. The first run was held in in December 1938.

The group's name came about primarily because local authorities required legal registration of the club. While the "Kuala Lumpur Harriers" would have appeared a logical choice, "G" decided instead to use the nickname for the Selangor Club where a number of the local

harriers both lived and took their meals. It seems that due to its lackluster food, the dining room was commonly referred to as the "Hash House."³

Goals of the activity from the 1938 charter of the Kuala Lumpur Hash House Harriers

- To promote physical fitness among our members
- To get rid of weekend hangovers
- To acquire a good thirst and to satisfy it in beer
- To persuade the older members that they are not as old as they feel

Basically a hash consists of three main parts, none of which have anything to do with the marijuana or hashish:⁴

1. The Run (as known as Trail)

One or two hashers, called the hare(s), lay a trail. They mark their trail with chalk arrows, shredded paper, flour, or pieces of toilet paper hanging in the bush, depending on local tradition or terrain. They might pre-lay trail a day or a few hours before the hash, or they might lay the trail as "live hares," running ahead of the pack with only a short (15 minutes is typical) head start. At a given signal, the rest of the hash (the Harriers, Harriettes, hounds, or pack) set off in pursuit of the trail. The idea is to keep the pack somewhat together and this is achieved by setting false trails, cunning checks, and sneaky loops. The fitter front runners will often run twice as far as the more slothful members, yet still finish the run at the same time as the rest of the pack. The length and difficulty of the run depends on the hare and the terrain but will typically be between four and eight kilometers, or about 45 minutes to an hour of running with checks, false trails, and shortcutting.

2. The Circle (as known as Religion)

At trail end hashers gather to drink beer and observe religious ceremonies (which consist of drinking more beer), this time ritualistically. Circles may be led by the hash Grandmaster, the Religious Adviser, or by a committee of mismanagement. Traditions (and the degree of rowdiness) vary from hash to hash, but in general the Circle consists of awarding "Down-Downs" for misdemeanors real, imagined, or blatantly made up as a joke. Visitors are always given a Visitors Down-Down as are Virgins (first-time hash runners) and anyone else who comes to the attention of the Circle. The Circle can last a couple of minutes or half the night depending on the level of religious fervor of the hash. With changing times drinking has lost some of its importance and most clubs now modify their ceremonies to cater to non-drinkers and those stupid enough to think that hashing can improve their health.

3. The On-On (as known as On-On-On)

Some hashers suspend ceremonies for awhile to consume food provided by the hare(s). Other hashes, at the conclusion of the Circle, repair to a nearby restaurant or pub. This is the social part of the hash, and the party usually breaks up afterward. In some hashes, however, religion may continue during or after On-Ons, with the telling of jokes and singing of songs, and all members, visitors, and virgins should come armed with at least one joke or song lest they be called upon.

4. Individual Names

Hashers that come run enough will get an individual nick names that are being decided democratically by 'the circle'. Individual name were given in jokingly respect of their unique character.

5. the Hash work under the concept of mismanagement instead of 'management'

It is a fresh perspective of seeing chaos instead of order as a possible strategy to work things out. In the hash run people are seen purely as individual with no rank or hierarchy.

The Bali Hash House Harriers (Bali HHH) are an open membership that was founded by Victor "Nightjar" Mason⁵ - 17 May 1977. This unique running community consists of both international and local Indonesian runner. It's a mixture of athleticism and sociability, hedonism and hard work; a refreshing breaks from the routine daily life. Hashing is a fun combination attempt of running, orienteering, and partying, where bands of harriers and harriettes chase hares on six to ten kilometer long trails through village, rice-filled, river and jungle, all in search of exercise, friendship, and good times.



Photo B: Bali HHH run through ricefield, reconnect with nature (photo by Fransiska Prihadi)

The sense of community in Bali HHH were sustained by connections and continued running in voluntary runs all over Bali. The loose but still well-maintained contacts among hashers allow each individual to feel acceptance and friendship bond.

The Quest for Better Living Place

Imagine yourself being alone in a grand lobby of a hotel space. The feeling of loneliness and losing the human proportion feeling will immediately be gone if a group of people start spreading around the same lobby.

It is a metaphor to express that an individual needs community to give his/her a scale within the larger context of space that he or she lives. By being in a certain community (either by heritage such as the Balinese does or by choice as it is in the Bali Hash House Harrier), people would be in tune with the reality and can clearly address their problems. Once a community can define their problems then there's a chance to start finding ways to find solution and turning them into reality.

It seems to me that the mix of local-international community concept in Bali is an ideal strategy to encourage critical method in urban development.

Like the big grand lobby of the hotel space that I used as a metaphor, the government scale is just too big and people tend to grow fear of authorities. Therefore it is understandable that people find it useless to count on the formal government to do something to improve their quality of life.

What we need now are communities that balance both diversity and unit while on the same time preserve a good relationship with the nature. When the sense of community exists, both freedom and security exist as well. The Community then takes on a life of its own, as people become free enough to share and secure enough to get along. This is the "spirit of community."⁶

At the same time, Western cultures are losing this spirit of community that once were found in institutions such as churches, community halls and rural/urban centers. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg stated in his book *A Great Good Place* that human need three places: 1) The home, 2) the workplace, and, 3) the community hangout. With this philosophy in mind, communities in Bali can be an example of a great good place.

The local community that are part of Desa Adat (in sub-community can be a member of Banjar or Subak) have a living "Third Place" that takes physical form of Bale Banjar or Bale Subak. Meanwhile the Bali Hash House Harrier has a flexible 'back to nature' style and independent "Third Place" such as their run spot destination and cafes / local pubs.

It is very important for the individual to be able to retain their identity and have a larger group's goals at the same time. Therefore it will allow an open climate for opposition and an opportunity for sub-communities to grow in a quest for better living place.



Photo C: photo of Mount Agung – human are all in quest for better living place (photo courtesy of Priyatna Pribadi)

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community>

³F.A. Liefrinck (1886-87) Rice Cultivation in Northern Bali. Selected studies on Indonesia volume Eight.p.59-60. Subak described as complex of rice fields irrigated from the one source of water supply. The distribution of the water between the members of the subak association is regulated with the greatest care. When the river falls to a low level there would often be too great a loss of water due to evaporation and seepage in the channels if the distribution were extended too far. Therefore the subak will run a restricted distribution which may allow some sections of particular subak are to be sacrificed to save at least part of the crop. The decision is not made only by a single man but was taken in a subak meeting.

³ A Brief History of the Hash House Harriers <http://harrier.net/presskit/shistory.html>

⁴ Elements of Hashing, written by Steve "Modess" Trink
<http://www.angelfire.com/on2/hunterhhh/>

⁵ An Englishman Victor Mason spent more than 34 years in Bali working as a writer and has written several other books including *Birds of Bali* and *Butterflies of Bali*. He often had seen as an inquisitive traveler that has fresh perspective of seeing Bali as a magical.

⁶ ⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community>