

Urban Kampung as a Space of Opportunities: Women's Strategies to Make a Living in High-Density Informal Settlements

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Abstract

Women who reside in high-density informal settlements contribute significantly to community livelihood, as proportionately they spend more time in the area than other members of their community. As they assume multiple roles and responsibilities, they rely on the flexibility of space in their dense settlement to complete their various tasks. This study focuses primarily on the spaces that enable women to earn income for the household without disregarding their domestic responsibilities and social needs. This study examines the relationship between human and space by observing homemakers in one of Jakarta's densely populated informal settlements, *KampungCikini*. The methodology incorporated in-depth interviews and field observations of their living and income-generating spaces. The study concludes that for homemakers, a high-density settlement is not a confinement but as a space of opportunities, mainly economic. The women that participated in this study employ spatial strategies to incorporate income-generating activities with their domestic and social life. The study emphasises the relationship between women and their settlement, with the view to influence the future development of informal settlements more inclusive for the needs of women.

Keywords: Women; Income generation; High-density informal settlement; Spatial strategies; and behavioral strategies.



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1. Introduction

Informal settlements are a significant aspect of urban life because it is home to the majority of the marginal community. These settlements exist across the globe but are prevalent in developing countries such as Indonesia. The term '*kampung*' describes an urban informal settlement for the low-income community, most of the time not equipped with suitable infrastructure and facilities (Tunas, 2008). The number of *kampung* dwellers grows annually, increasing the density and pushing its occupants closer together. The density of informal settlements presumably creates feelings of crowdedness for their inhabitants. Crowding is a subjective feeling; a negative perception of density, widely understood as when a person loses control over a crowded situation (Aiello and Thompson, 1980; Montgomery, 2013; Rapoport, 1977). In the case of a high-density living environment, crowding seems to be inevitable. However, as humans interact with their environment with the purpose of deriving benefit, distressing situations lead to adaptive strategies for need fulfilment (Berry, 1980). Addressing the issue of burgeoning high-density informal settlements and crowding, this study will focus on how homemakers, as the primary actors of high-density informal settlements, use available space particularly for income generating activities.

Women in these settlements assume multiple roles and responsibilities to their families, communities and themselves; they bare the roles of producing, reproducing and managing the community (Ban, 2018; Ghafur, 2002). Reproduction refers to the responsibility of taking care of family and household; production is the role in generating income; and community managing is the contribution to the growth of the community. Society also places immense pressure on women to handle all domestic obligations and needs, thereby requiring other activities to occur around or near the dwelling. This means most of their time is spent around the settlement compared to their children and commuting (to work) family members. Beyond domestic labour, women homemakers are expected to earn income for their households and for themselves.

The settlement community, typically comprised of the urban poor, thrives through informal economic activities (Tunas, 2008). Bounded by their domestic obligations, informal economic activities are a viable income-generating option for homemakers, as it is less time constraining and occurs in the comfort of their neighbourhood. Women's contributions to household income tend to be undermined (Miraftab, 1996) despite the fact that their contribution plays an important role in the informal economy and their household's sustainability (Tunas, 2008). Therefore, the study attempt to identify spatial and behavioural strategies applied by homemakers to fulfil their income-generating needs from their homes. In settlements, transformation of homes are a common occurrence and women have great involvement in this transformation (Chant and Mcilwaine, 2013). Due to the unique morphology of *kampung*s – that is, dense and without clear boundaries of communal and private space – inhabitants have a collective claim to the settlement (Brower, 1980). *Kampung* dwellers do not only occupy their own personal dwellings but also other parts of the neighbourhood. Adequate study of home-based economic activities requires a total contextual understanding

of the surrounding settlement (Kent, 1993). Therefore, the study will also take into consideration spaces surrounding the home and the neighbourhood.

As Lombard (2014) states, the portrayal of informal settlement tends to be negative due to the lack of understanding of the micro, community level. This study offers an understanding of living in *kampung*s, to create a better foundation for future informal settlement development. Ellisa (2016) previously studied high-density informal settlements, focusing on occupant's behaviour strategies and space arrangement. The study, set in *Kampung Cikini*, discussed various coping mechanisms of *kampung* dwellers living in crowded situations and covered spatial strategies employed in the domestic living space. It eventually classified a number of case studies into four dwelling categories based on how the inhabitant coped with crowding, one of which included using the house as an income generator. The author described that dwelling hosting income generating activities tend to arrange space to accommodate economic activities before considering space for comfort. It provided the foundation for this study, allowing us to focus more towards spatial and behavioural strategies in the context of income generating activities, as it a significant aspect for dwellings and formation of neighbourhoods in *KampungCikini*. This study poses to deepen the research to specific activities, to obtain a more detailed understanding of spatial and behavioural strategies in high-density informal settlements.

2. Methodology

To collect information and data about the way of life for *kampung* women, homemakers were studied as the most representative group of women in the settlement. Their age affords them the autonomy to make substantial decisions and transformation in the household and the community, and they are the group of individuals who spend the most time around the settlement. The chosen respondents were women homemakers, living with their family under the same roof, performing income-generating activities within their dwelling or neighbourhood, and were residents of *Kampung Cikini*. Living and income-generating spaces of nine homemakers were observed and in-depth interviews were conducted with each one to determine how they occupy the space in and around their respective dwellings. The field observation was done by measuring space, taking photographs, and producing detailed plans of respondent's dwellings, the space surrounding them, and relevant areas around the neighbourhood. This provided the study with information regarding space usage and detailed placement of furniture and home equipment. Interviews were conducted while observing respondent's behaviour to uncover how they occupy space while handling multiple obligations and how they felt towards their living situation. The information collected was analysed using spatial knowledge to obtain a deeper understanding of the spatial and behavioural strategies.

2.1. *Kampung Cikini*

The observation was conducted in *KampungCikini*, Central Jakarta. Covering 1.5 hectares of land, the settlement houses 3784 middle to low-income inhabitants (as of 2014). The ethnicities and backgrounds of inhabitants are diverse, with the majority of Javanese descent. According to a report of *Kampung Cikini* Kato (2011) 65.9% identify as homemakers, followed by an 11.1% of unauthorized self-employment. Since most are employed as homemakers, neighbourhood living is mostly made up of activities done around (i.e. alleys, front porch) or in the house (65.2%). Trips are mostly made for shopping or visiting relatives; on the weekends *kampung* dwellers tend to spend leisure time together around the settlement. As for household condition, 21.4% of dwellers earn Rp.1,750,001-2,000,000 each month; however, the sources of each income contribution were not reported on. Expenditures are primarily for utilities, food, and education for children. Although the income does not always cover the cost of their needs, inhabitants tend to find alternatives to fulfill them.

Dwelling units in *Kampung Cikini* vary in size and type. Dwelling types in *Kampung Cikini* are either detached single houses or rented tenements. Rented tenements are previously single houses, but the need for income and more living space impelled owners to turn them into tenements. This dwelling type accommodates an average of 4.2 individuals, with 25.4% housing 4 individuals per household. However, some dwelling could house up to 7-10 occupants. Occupants of the same dwelling are most probably immediate or extended family. Multigenerational living becomes common among *kampung* dwellers, as the limit of space and income leads younger generations to recourse to living with their parents. So, under the same roof a family might consist of three generations. Due to this, owned single dwellings are usually inherited from parents or family members, although ownership is uncertain from a legal standpoint.

Uncertain legalities occur because of the long history of this settlement, which traces back to the early 20th century. The Dutch developed the area when they were establishing an elite district for the upper class, which included a railway through *Kampung Cikini*. When the government closed down the railway, people in need of shelter immediately seized the vacant land. They built squats and houses in those empty spaces and migration to the site occurred at a rapid rate. So, the railway company and the government today legally own parts of *Kampung Cikini*, but inhabitants claimed to have achieved an agreement and acquired legal rights.

Kampung Cikini generally is a tight-knit community. Comprised of 13 RT (RukunTetangga or Neighbourhood Unit) and 1 RW (RukunWarga or Community Unit), inhabitants live side-by-side with cooperation and understanding. The women in particular are the main actors of the *kampung*'s daily life, because they spend most of their time around the settlement. Women in *Kampung Cikini* most likely know each other, especially those living in the same neighbourhood unit. They have strong bonds with each other, as they spend their days together striving under similar living conditions. Women tend to talk more about personal and household problems compared to men in the settlement and this provides them with decent social capital (Tunas, 2008). Social capital is important as women in *kampung*s rely on their interpersonal connections with each other; a strong social capital provides them

with more household help, information about jobs, and income opportunities. Weekly community activities such as *arisan* and reading Al-Qur'an together allow women in the settlement to accumulate a wealth of social capital. The tight-knit community also contributes to extending the boundaries of home. It broadens home to the extent of the neighbourhood in a settlement (Chant and McIlwaine, 2013), affecting how *kampung* women occupy space and relate with each other.

The morphology and arrangements of buildings in Kampung Cikini creates a unique spatial condition for women in the settlement. High-density obscures boundaries between private and public space, as alleys and streets are appropriated for personal/household needs and front porches and doorsteps are accessible to non-household members (neighbours, distant family). It is common for women in *Kampung* Cikini to appropriate public spaces by doing their domestic activities (i.e storing belongings, cooking) there without hassle.

3. Result and Discussion

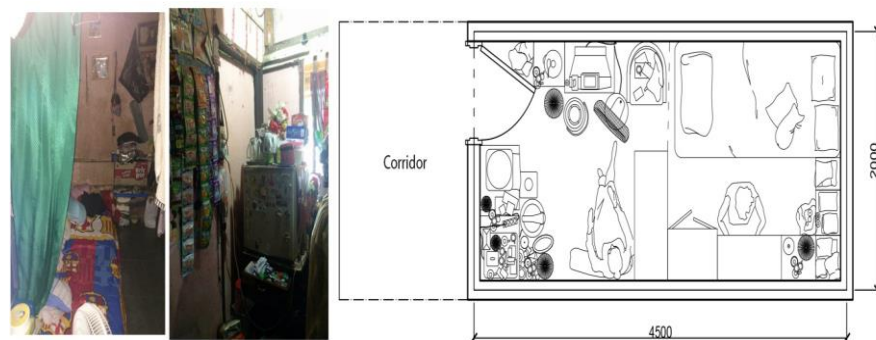
Out of nine cases studied, five samples were chosen to be presented in this paper as they represent distinct income-generating activities and spatial strategies of homemakers of *Kampung* Cikini. The selected samples illuminate various strategies of homemakers, who were all contending with high-density space, but lead different lives and income-generating activities. The study wanted to determine if there were observable patterns or consistency or if every strategy was unique. A food stall owner, an accommodation owner, a *warung* stall owner, a home salon owner, and a self-employed ornament crafter was chosen. Apart from the home salon business, these chosen line of works are common amongst households and homemakers in Kampung Cikini. The densely populated settlement creates conditions for a profitable market in daily needs such as food, dry goods, and hygiene products. Its strategically positioned by commercial areas (Cikini Gold Market, a flower market, and Cikini traditional market/*Pasar* Cikini), a renowned hospital, and a university, which establishes another profitable market for accommodation and service provision. Dwelling size for each case varies from 9m² to 60m². Three of the five cases live in a personally owned dwelling, one rents a room in a tenement, and one rents an entire landed house. The legality of land ownership is unclear, but most have lived in their house for years without disruption.

3.1. Yanti, Warung/ Stall Owner

Yanti and her husband rent a 2x4.5m room in an eight-room row house where they are the only long-term renters. In her minimum living space, she appropriates half of it for her business. She arranges her private space for sleeping and storing personal belongings at the back of the room, bounded by a shelf and curtain. She uses the front section of the room to store products and goods to sell, such kitchen utensils and food. This space also includes a two-person sitting space to watch television. She stacks and hangs belongings and products on the wall and on any flat top (table, fridge, floor) available at her home. The lack of living space and high-density of space is not a result of the number of occupants, but by the various belongings and objects stored inside the room. She shares a toilet and a stove in the corridor with other building tenants. This is not perceived as a problem, as other rooms are mostly unoccupied. She spends her days in the corridor with her mother-in-law and niece. The corridor is a public space she feels she could freely occupy but not use for personal needs (such as storage or personal income gain).

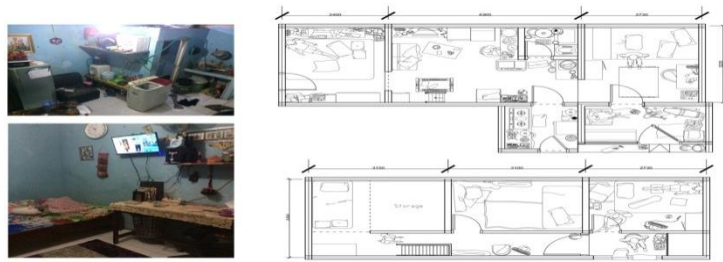
Her business is selling daily goods such as sachets of powdered drink, hygiene products, and dry snacks. Due to limited space, she hangs her products on the wall and from the ceiling so customers can easily look around and so she still has floor space. Her customers are mostly her neighbours, as she lives far from the crowded commercial area of Kampung Cikini. She is not allowed to open her stall in other parts of the building, but this is actually to her advantage as it is easier for her to open and close her business; if she is not inside her room, then her business is not open. If a customer approaches her space, she would get the goods they need or accompany them inside to choose.

Figure-1. Yanti's Dwelling Condition and Plan



3.2. Khadijah- Accommodation Provider

Khadijah lives in a home her late husband left her with two children, one in-law, and one granddaughter. Her two-story home is spacious compared to the majority of dwellings around her. After the passing of her husband, the sole provider of the family, she resorted to renting out two rooms on the second floor and subsequently cramped her household to the first floor.

Figure-2. Khadijah's Home Condition and Floor Plan

On the first floor, she sleeps with her youngest son in a room while her daughter, in-law, and her grandchild sleeps in the living room, appropriated as their bedroom. The function of the living room is then shifted to a space near the kitchen, where kitchen equipment, a fridge, a washing machine, and a television set are placed together. The room tenants get a private room but have to share a bathroom and a kitchen with Khadijah's family. This does not trouble any of the occupants as tenants are rarely at home, working all day. Weekends are the only time that there is full occupancy in the house, with Khadijah's family downstairs and the tenants either on the second floor or outside the house.

Like many homemakers of Cikini, Khadijah has a side income selling ice packaged in plastics. This is a common trade, as not every household owns a fridge, so ice is an important commodity. She stores plastics of ice in a fridge different from her personal fridge where she keeps food, which customers purchase at her front porch.

3.3. Muhati, Food Stall Owner

Muhati is a lifetime occupant of Kampung Cikini, she has lived there since she was born and does not plan to move. She used to feel crowded in her 3x4m two-story house when her three children were there, but since they moved away crowding is no longer an issue as it only houses her husband and her. She arranges her private space for sleeping and personal belongings on the second floor, while the first floor comprises a kitchen, a bathroom, washing space, and living room. The separation of space on the first floor is noticeable from the arrangement of a refrigerator, stove, washing machine, and a television.

Figure-3. Muhati's Soto Stall, home, and house plan

Her household income partly comes from her soto (traditional Indonesian food) stall she sets up across her house. In the mornings, after shopping for ingredients at a nearby market, she carries utensils and ingredients from her kitchen to a table (1x0.5m) across her front door. She does the cooking inside her house as it requires a gas stove, but preparation and consumption of the food takes place at the alley and her doorstep.

The alleyway is 1.5m wide, so when she prepares food with customers waiting nearby, passers-by must struggle their way through. She feels that this alleyway is still a part of her home since it is directly attached to her house, so she appropriates it to generate income. There was no prior agreement on the usage of the alley, but nobody complains so she continues with her business. She refrains from doing her business inside the house, as she does not want to lose more of her living space, even though she spends most of her time outside in the alley or on her doorstep. She feels that she needs to socialize and be a part of the community, but not wanting to be far from home, her solution is to sit by her doorstep and socialize with whoever passes by.

3.4. Muji- Home Salon Owner

Muji owns her own home salon that she opens daily. It is located in one of the most crowded streets in Kampung Cikini, a strategic place for a business. She lives with her husband and three children in a rented 11.1x3.1m house that she divides to accommodate her business – two rooms for her salon, a bedroom, a kitchen, and a bathroom. She arranged the space to separate her living and income generating activity, placing the salon on the far left near the main entrance and her living space on the far right with a smaller entrance through the kitchen. Connected by a corridor that runs through all the rooms, the arrangement makes it easy for her to handle her customers while regularly checking her daughters in the next room. The portion of her income generating space is bigger than the space she allocates for living, even though more individuals have to occupy her household space.

Figure-4. Muji's House and Home Salon

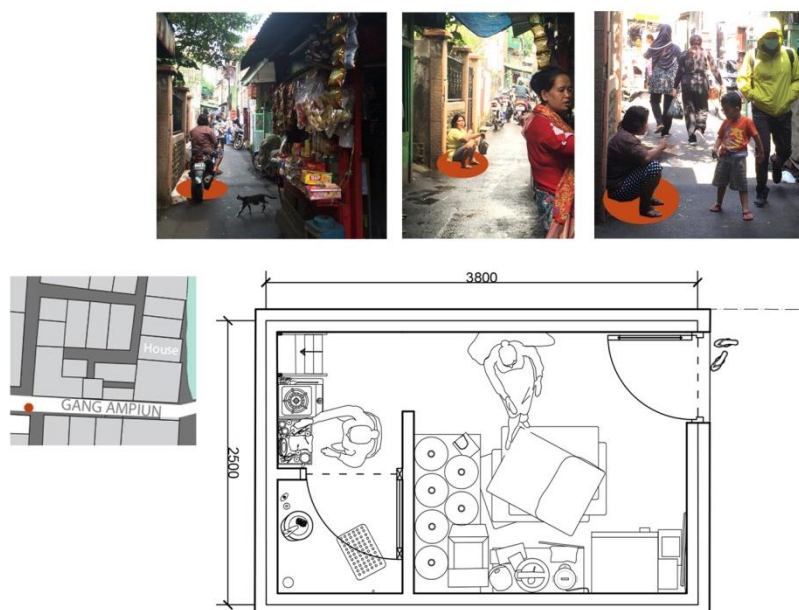


As for home improvements, knowing that there are issues concerning the legality of land, Muji holds back from making permanent changes to the space. She has dealt with a much more cramped living space before, in such that she sees her current living situation as a relief from crowding. She spends most of her time inside her home/business space and rarely leaves the house for leisure or socializing. She feels that her home is where her family is, and it is where she feels most comfortable. However, she does appropriate the side of the road in front of her house to store large belongings (plastic chairs and a bike) and to dry clothes.

3.5. Dede- Self-Employed Ornament Crafter

Dede spends most of her time crafting *ketupat* (a diamond shape woven container usually made from palm leaf), from ribbons provided by a supplier who is in the parcel business and sells it back at the end of each week. This is a common trade amongst homemakers of Cikini, since it does not require any financial or physical capital, just time, a pair of scissors, and simple training. Dede's earning contributes a small portion to her household income; her husband is the primary provider.

Figure-6. Dede's Spot at Gang Ampium in Relation to Her House and Dwelling Floor Plan



Unlike other women who prefer to craft in the comfort of their homes, Dede labours on the side of a busy street (*Gang Ampium/ Ampium Alley*) on the front path of a neighbour's house. She believes that the whole street and its surroundings are for public use, so she appropriates that single spot for her own use daily. She enjoys the crowd, sunlight, and the open-air, things she cannot get inside her house. She feels more at home on *Gang Ampium* as she finds comfort from a bustling street. Based on this observation, the study deduces she lacks an attachment to her own house. It is more a storage space than a home for her. In her 2.5x3.8m two-story dwelling, she lives with four other family members. She feels a sense of crowding from the space occupied by belongings, which include her husband's rack of water gallons he sells occasionally. After completing her domestic work in the morning, she immediately goes to her spot on the street and spends her whole day there, even when her family is in the house.

4. Discussion

The information gathered revealed interesting findings about how homemakers relate to their settlement and dwelling as a space to live and to work.

1. Living in high-density spaces does not pose as a constraint for *kampung* occupants to generate income in the neighbourhood. For homemakers who have control of the spatial arrangement in and around the dwelling, limited space is organised to serve multiple functions, including income-generating activities.
2. Women integrate income generating activities into other responsibilities and social needs through spatial and behavioural strategies. Muji's case represents this, as she arranges space linearly, connecting each room with a corridor, therefore easing her ability to multitask between her role as a mother and a hairdresser. In Dede's case, she positions herself in an open, crowded space so socializing and generating income can occur simultaneously.
3. Although integrated, there are efforts to separate income generating space and household space. Separation occurs visually or physically, as long as it establishes a feeling of division. In Yanti's case, she only requires a visual boundary from the curtain she hangs to partition her private quarters from her business. While Muji and Khadijah need physical boundaries to set apart activities done to generate income from living, because activities regarding their work demands privacy or seclusion. Personal and business-related equipment, and food supplies are also deliberately separated.
4. Most homemakers hosting income-generating activities in-house or near the dwelling use more space to accommodate economic activity rather than living and comfort. To some extent, as long as their primary need to rest (i.e. sleep) is spatially fulfilled, other needs such as spaces to eat, cook, store belongings, and consume leisure are not prioritised, and can occur in any other available space without necessitating significant boundaries for each activity.
5. Due to limited space inside the house, women would appropriate spaces attached to their dwelling (i.e. alleys and street) for personal needs (earning and domestic activities).
6. The status of home ownership contributes to the scale of income generating activities done by homemakers. This can be seen in the contrast in Yanti and Muhati's cases, where the former must open her business inside her home because she pays rent only for a room while the latter is the landowner so has the option to sell her food inside or outside her home.
7. How homemakers perceive their home influence how they strategize in organizing and dividing space to work and live. For example, Dede perceives her house as a place to sleep and store belongings rather than a home, so she finds another place of comfort to be productive.

5. Conclusion

As understood in the discussion points, crowding and density is not an issue or constraint for *kampung* inhabitants and their activities, including informal economic activities. Since it is easier in adapting to familiar circumstances and surroundings (Montgomery, 2013), having lived in this situation for most of their lives, dwellers have unconsciously established strategies to respond to crowding. One strategy is to appropriate space for personal or household use. Appropriating domestic space for income generating activities allows women to multitask effectively. Due to spatial constraints appropriation of semi-private spaces (i.e. alleys) also occur (Chant and Mcilwaine, 2013). Space appropriation is possible for women in *kampungs* because they have established social capital. As there is a societal tendency to create rules and regulations for space usage (Carmona, 2003) strong social bonds are beneficial as they permit personal use of public spaces. Space appropriation also applies inside the house.

In terms of behavioural strategies, there is no recurring pattern among the women participants, and strategies reflect their various priorities. For those who prioritise their households, activities tend to occur near or in the dwelling. Conversely, homemakers who prioritise generating income or their social needs use space not necessarily adjacent to their dwelling. The perception of how women perceive their dwelling also influences behaviour. Home is a place that bears more meaning than just a physical shelter to live. It is associated with the feeling of belonging, protecting, expressing affection, and comfort; for some it does not even have a physical form (Rybczynski, 1987; Wise, 2000). When a house is a home, women will find comfort in it, creating feelings of attachment to their dwelling and household. This affects how she strategizes to incorporate income-generating activities within it. She will attentively divide or join work to her living space, as to not cause dismay for her household.

High-density living has pushed women to be inventive in using available space for various responsibilities. The study observed that any available space could be appropriated to generate income. This overview of one aspect in the lives of *kampung* women shows that women have strong relations to their settlements in terms of space and activities; they strive to create a better living under any circumstance. There is a need for more studies about this relationship that apply other perspectives, spatial theories, and as mentioned before – regarding demographic background of respondents – embodied qualities in people. The need to understand *kampung* as a high-density informal settlement from a micro level is beneficial for urban development. Decisions and regulations inclusive to the inhabitants might just lead to *kampung* becoming a productive asset for the city.

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