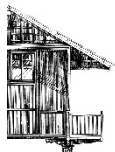


# Multi-sited Qualitative Research in Architectural Study: Researching Spatially Dispersed Migrants in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan

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## Abstract

The study of migrants' living arrangements in their destination cities falls within the scope of architecture, as it involves spatial mobility and its implications for the built environment. Migrants' place to live in destination city belongs to study of architecture as it concerns spatial mobility implicating a certain built environment in destination city. This article concerns addresses the issue of spatially dispersed migrants, focusing specifically on Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, one of Indonesia's prominent migration destinations. with particular reference to one of prominent migration destinations in Indonesia, namely Balikpapan East Kalimantan. This article aims to present the exploration of research site selection as well as its methodological consideration to tackle the aforementioned issue. To achieve this do so, it employs and highlights the prominence of multi-sited qualitative research, especially particularly the notion of 'follow the people'. This article follows draws on guidance of bodies of studies categorised as methodological reflection and employs, putting forward the narrative genre of presenting a narrative approach to present its findings.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is quite apparent that research involving a particular site namely a meso or micro scale region of a city –such as administratively enclosed regions i.e. RT (Rukun Tetangga), RW (Rukun Warga), kelurahan, district, and so on –has been a long-standing subject of methodological consideration regarding site selection in the majority of studies including architectural studies. Empirical studies on human life mostly are based on and contextualised in places that have varying degrees of importance and different levels of priority (Andrews, 2008).

While a particular site is of utmost importance to any research, it is argued that single-sited research is no longer adequate to comprehend phenomena in an increasingly changing and hybrid world where humans constantly move, mingle, and interconnect (Candea, 2007; Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2014). The world has changed through our own creations –such as technology, media, economic systems, as well as various other ideas –which make it easier for us to move from place to place and connect with one another (Appadurai, 1996). Since the 20th century, the occurrence of globalization, modernization, and industrialization has led to a significant increase in the spatial dispersion of various activities globally, as well as at the national and city levels. Many of these units subsequently accommodate heterogeneous activities (Sassen, 2018; Bakir, 2020).

The discussion on migrants' place to live in living arrangements in their destination city belongs to the study of architecture as it concerns matters of spatial mobility and implicating their implications a certain for the built environment in the destination area. Some existing studies on migrants' place to live living arrangements in their destination city focus migrants communities –relating to ethnic similarity and/or common place of origin –that are geographically concentrated in a particular region of a city (Beaverstock, 2011; Ishtiaque & Ullah, 2013; Liu et al, 2014; Shen, 2017; Thompson, 2016). That focus is closely correlated to with a single site in a city.

The existence of migrants who are spatially dispersed throughout the city or, rather than geographically concentrated in specific region of a city is seldom studied issue. This article concerns a qualitative study of this issue with particular reference to Balikpapan in East Kalimantan as to one of the prominent migration destinations in Indonesia, namely Balikpapan East Kalimantan. This area is ranked as the ranks third for receiving the most migrants in Indonesia, competing with the other two major areas i.e. DKI Jakarta and the Riau Islands (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2011). Unlike the past time in the past, the contemporary Balikpapan is no longer constituted composed of as segregated geographical parts exclusively relating to particular ethnic-based migrants groups and the n. Newly arrived migrants now commonly live dispersedly throughout the city.

The spatial dispersion of migrants in a destination city is an issue that cannot be addressed with single-sited research relying on a particular migrants' enclave. Therefore, it demands the identification of an alternative site as well as its methodological consideration. This article is a methodological reflection that aims to explore such efforts. Migrants' spatial distributions within the city, whether in the form of concentration or dispersion, concern the meso-scale of a place to live. A house as a micro-scale place to live, remains essential regardless of these two types of meso-scale distributions. A house is fundamental to human life and the primary place for family life, where individuals spend most of their time (Clapham, 2018). Thus, choosing migrants' houses as the sites of research is most appropriate for studying migrants' place to live in the context of their dispersed distribution within a city and the absence of a specific enclave.

## 2. METHOD

This article is primarily a reflective exploration of the methodological consideration highlighting the importance of multi-sited qualitative research, particularly the notion 'follow the people'. Reflexivity in qualitative research is generally described as researchers' engagement in a continuous examination and explanation of their research, including researchers questioning their methodological choices (Dowling, 2006). This article follows techniques that were employed in previous research articles focusing on methodological reflection. Several studies on methodological reflection focus on one or two facets of a method, rather than covering the entire method, such as inquiries into data collection (Prentice, 2008; Hockey, 2020; Astuti, 2017; Li, 2008; Uphadya, 2008; Moore et al., 2015) and ethical issues problematizing the relationship between researchers and their subjects (Berger, 2015; Primeau, 2003). In line with these previous studies, this article focuses on one facets, namely the consideration of site selection.

Previous studies have also revealed that methodological reflection should discuss problems inherently related to or overshadowing the phenomena under study, highlighting the urgency to further scrutinize specific facet(s) of the employed research method. This article has already pinpointed this necessity in the introduction. Additionally, while these studies do not prescribe any explicit procedure, they show that authors present the result and discussion in narrative manner. The narrative genre is how human actors understand themselves and the world around them by communicating their experiences and the general view of its main characteristics. The main characteristics concerns an articulate telling from a beginning to an end, granting the author a robust narrative entitlements (Georgakopoulou, 2008). Studies focusing on methodological reflection narrate the researchers' experience of finding and overcoming challenges while navigating their research. Accordingly, this article should conform to these ways of presenting.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 ENCOUNTERING THE CITY: BALIKPAPAN AS MIGRATION DESTINATION

Beyond reading statistical reports on migration trends regarding this city, strolling around and hanging out in various spots in Balikpapan, one of the preliminary stages in this study, provides a glimpse into the presence of migrants from different origins in Balikpapan. During these activities, it is easily observed that food and beverage street vendors, as well as market traders, are casually addressed by nicknames from the languages of ethnic groups outside

the province. For example, women selling soto are called "acil", meaning aunt in the Banjarese (an ethnic group originating from South Kalimantan). Similarly, "lele" derives from "pak lik", meaning uncle in Javanese, is used to refer to men selling meatballs around the city. In addition to these examples of verbal communication using languages belong to certain ethnic groups, people in the markets, including bargaining between sellers and buyers, also use these languages.

During the preliminary stage of this study, it was also observed that several small themed gardens on the side of the main roads in Balikpapan represent migrants' areas of origin, such as South Sulawesi and various cities in East Java and Central Java. Further examination revealed that these themed gardens were created by several migrant associations in Balikpapan, commonly called "paguyuban", "perkumpulan" or "keluarga besar". The results of these preliminary observations are in line align with Mutmainah et al (2014) stating who stated that there are several ethnic groups were present in Balikpapan in 2010, including Javanese, Buginese, Banjarese, Minahasan, Kutainese, Bataknese, Acehnese, peranakan Tionghoa, and so on. Additionally, preliminary interviews with several prospective research participants revealed a common saying that there are no natives or "orang asli" in Balikpapan.

While the presence of migrants in Balikpapan is easy to observe in public settings such as streets and markets, the question of whether migrants live in specific enclaves remains unresolved. The past and contemporary situations of migrant distributions in Balikpapan were briefly mentioned in the introduction. In a historical study about East Kalimantan from the 1930s to the 1970s, Magenda (2010) states that some areas in Balikpapan were exclusively associated with spesific ethnic-based migrants, such as Javanese, Banjarese, and Buginese. Pilot fieldwork for this study involving interviews with potential gatekeepers and informants, revealed that some of these exclusive areas now only retain their names, such as Karang Jawa and Karang Bugis, while their current residents are ethnically diverse. These interviews also revealed that newly arrived migrants are mainly live dispersedly throughout the city. One of the informants in this study, who is Javanese, mentioned that her neighbors are from Manado (North Sulawesi), Toraja (South Sulawesi), and other places. Thus, she lives in an RT (Rukun Tetangga) or neighborhood comprising people from various places of origins and diverse ethnicities.

### 3.2 FOLLOW THE PEOPLE: RECRUITING THE SPATIALLY DISPERSED MIGRANTS

In accordance with the notion 'follow the people', after determining 'who to follow' –namely the migrants, there is a subsequent question 'how and where do I find them?' This question demands scrutiny regarding the recruitment of research participants. This study relies on main research participants, specifically purposive informants. These are individuals who have experience with the phenomena being studied and provide the greatest richness as well as relevance for achieving the objectives of a qualitative research (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2015). Thus, the purposive informants of this study are migrants in Balikpapan. Recruiting the purposive informants presents a general challenge because it inherently restricts us from choosing individuals randomly. At first glance, Balikpapan's profile as a city of migrants seems to make recruiting informants easier since migrants appear to be everywhere in public places. However, there are several layers of challenges. The first challenge is that this study mainly concerns places to live rather than public places. Since migrants live in dispersed locations throughout a city, it

presents a greater difficulty than dealing with migrants who live in specific spatial concentration in a city. Practically, it would be less resource-consuming—in terms of time, money, and energy—to look for prospective research participants among people who live nearby than among those who live far apart.

Another challenge involves considerations regarding the following interrelated matters: rapport building and the heterogeneity of migrants' ethnicities and places of origin, which also involve socio-cultural differences between the participants and the researcher. Rapport—which generally refers to decent and pleasant relationship between the researcher and the participants that comprises understanding and empathy—is of utmost importance in qualitative research (Ritchie et al., 2014; Prior, 2017). Attempts to establish rapport include fitting into the participants' routines, discovering common ground with them, and being friendly (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Differences and similarities in gender, ethnicity, and social status between the researcher and the participant determine the success of rapport building (Bucerius, 2013). The interrelation of rapport and such heterogeneity, along with additional considerations regarding the availability of resources—namely time, money, and energy—necessitate the researcher to contemplate following questions: How and to what extent the researcher can build and achieve rapport in the context of such heterogeneity with limited resources? What are the strategies?

In regard to these layer of challenges, the recruitment of purposive informants in this study followed the instructions of Taylor et al (2015) that pinpoint the important role of individual called gatekeeper. A gatekeeper refers to an individual knowing the 'what and how' concerning access to potential source of data (Berge & Lune, 2017; Singh & Wassenaar 2016). Concurrently, this study also employs the snowball technique. It is a technique to find prospective participants based on references from one source to another (Yin, 2015). While the recruitment of participants—the gatekeepers and the purposive informants—in this study predominantly relied on migration networks and associations to which these individuals belong, as well as on similarity of ethnicity between one of the researchers and these participants, it also involve various other social networks such as university alumni, coworkers and colleagues, friendship, and casually loose acquaintances which belong to that researcher and the participants.

All gatekeepers and some purposive informants of this study were individuals from some previous personal contacts of one of the researchers, both way long-standing and recent. These personal contacts were informed about this study, particularly regarding the intention to find certain individuals who were willing and eligible to be recruited as informants. This informed intension was followed by asking for favor to find and/or become such prospective informants. It was anticipated that some of them might not be able to assist or participate. Those who were able, after expressing their willingness, were immediately involved in the pilot interview some time after. Those who were gatekeepers, after expressing their willingness, then informed some other prospective individuals who were their own personal contacts about this study while also representing the researcher to ask for the favor.

### 3.3 ENTERING THE SITES: THE HOUSES OF THE MIGRANTS

Migrants' respective houses are both the sites—where the research is carried out—and the places to live being studied. The researcher visited these houses to conduct data gathering, which involve interviews and observations, collects information about these

houses as places to live. Interviews are a useful method of data collection in qualitative research due to their intensive and descriptive nature, allowing in-depth exploration of perspectives, thoughts, experiences, intentions, interactions, and meanings of the phenomena experienced by the individuals being studied (Brinkman, 2013). The interviews were intended to gain such depth and richness of informants' perspective regarding their houses particularly in the context of migration. Also, in accordance with Taylor et al (2015), the qualitative interview should ideally be conducted like a casual conversation rather than the formal one.

The observations were mainly employed to observe daily activities and the specific places where these activities occur. However, not all of these daily activities could be observed due to time constraints. The researcher was not able to be in these houses for 24 hours a day and was also unable to observe private activities. Additionally, informants' usual daily life might not be the same as when the researcher visited these houses. When researcher came to these houses, the informants spent their time with the researcher and did nothing else. However, during several interviews involving several informants, informants talked to the researcher while performing certain activities, such as cooking, watching television, cleaning the house, folding clean clothes, and other activities. When the researcher visited these houses in the early stages of the data gathering, the informants more often invited researcher to talk in the room usually dedicated to receive guests and watch TV. As time went on, apart from these rooms, the researcher was often invited to talk in other rooms depending on the activities occurring at the time of the visits.

The time and duration of each data gathering session varied. The day and the exact time could be proposed by the researcher or the informants, with the informants having the final decision. Data gathering occurred in the morning, afternoon, evening, and at night; on any day of the week. However, it never be took place all day long. In such settings, it was imperative to 'read' the situation and determine the appropriateness of the time and duration of each session. For example, from researcher's personal experience, it is understood that most people would feel uncomfortable having someone at their house late at night, while some might not mind the situation. Based on this understanding, in the early days of data gathering, the researcher did not ask to visit at night. However, as time went on, there were many visits made in the evening, as requested by the informants. Also, after the researcher learned that certain informants had a habit of receiving guests during and until late at night, the researcher then proposed a time to visit accordingly.

## 4. CONCLUSION

A brief description of Balikpapan as a migration destination in the first section shows that migrants in Balikpapan mainly live dispersed throughout the city. This characteristic is then discussed in accordance with the notion of 'follow the people'. The determination of 'who to follow'—namely the migrants—is followed by the question of 'how and where do I find them?' This demands scrutiny regarding the recruitment of research participants, involving important points such as looking for purposive informants, relying on gatekeepers, and building rapport. The last section of the results and discussion demonstrates that migrants' respective houses are both the sites—where the research is carried out—and the places to live being studied. The researcher conducts data gathering in these houses, namely interviews and observations, collecting information about these houses as places to live.

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