

From Legian with Love

A story about Shopping Space in Legian-Kuta

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It was October 12, 2002. The Telephone rang at almost the exact moment I was falling asleep. I tried to ignore it, but it kept up its stubborn ringing. Finally I opened my eyes and realized that it was only the sound of an incoming *s(hort) m(essage) s(ervice)*. It was a message from a good friend living in Bali,

“ A bomb blasted in Sari Club, Legian, many were injured. Lucky we canceled our plan to go to Hard Rock Club tonight”

Of course a very nature reaction of receiving the news were shocked. Then later, reading all about the Bali Bomb Blast in the newspaper pulled out a set mechanism in my memory of a trip to Legian, just a week before October 12, 2002.



Legian – 13 Agustus 2002 [photo.by. Happy Lim]

Kuta as kecamatan consists of three desa adat: Kuta, Legian, and Seminyak. It is once a rural area that has been imposed and interconnected by this linier urban element called jl.Raya Kuta-Raya Legian-Raya Seminyak. The street itself formed a single loaded side-by-side tourist commercial shops façade of Kuta.

A stroll down the Legian-Kuta was a toddling walk between shops, cafes, and hotels. One would automatically recall the famous cynical phrase that Bali was becoming ‘an island of a thousand shop houses’ instead of what it used to be ‘an island of a thousand temples’. But trying to close your eyes of that fact were useless attempt. It seems avoidable that shopping concept in Bali derives as one of the central factor that could boost local and national economic growth. And Legian, Kuta, was an interesting case of Indonesian shopping concept.

All these time, shopping has internationally (historically) preferred to do away with the outside, seeing nature as an unpredictable interference with the unfolding commerce. It has created its own interior realms (the bazaar, the arcade) to provide greater autonomy from exterior conditions. Shops were designed to create greater willingness for shoppers to spend more of their shopping times indoors equals greater likelihood to spend their money and increase sales. That explains the fast development of air conditioning as a life support for the consumer and escalator as mechanism of smoothness in shopping evolution.

Though it is a nicely scale of public space, one would find Legian sometimes annoying with all the traffic jam and sudden rhythmic changing of density in Kuta area which always fluctuated especially on holiday season. One might also notice the lack of public service (such as free benches to sit, public toilet, public pay phone) in Legian, Kuta.



Legian – 13 Agustus 2002 [photo.by. Happy Lim]



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The retail shops in Legian built out of modern and some *want to* be traditional Bali style of architecture. It consists of various local and internationally branded shops. It stands so close to each other performed an unexpectedly snake-shaped outline of building

Of course at some point of the block there are larger urban shopping space such as Kuta Center, Kuta Square, Kuta Art Market, Night Market. Whether they are singular buildings or larger urban shopping spaces, the concept are based on *coopetition*, naturally placed them self to compete and cooperate. (The term *coopetition* was first coined by Charles F. Sabel in 1982 to describe the integral relationship between cooperation and competition in dynamic economic system – “Work and Politics: The Division of Labor in Industry: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Kuta’s shopping space *coopetition* became interesting since it’s a natural happening. The retails keep close proximity to one another and intensify the rivalry among stores in their war for greater profits. It is sometimes a big bizarre shopping feeling for shoppers when they could see more than 5 shops in a row next to each other are selling the same things (wood craft, Hawaiian shirts, shorts, bikinis, etc).

One could take Singapore as a parallel example of similar linear shop space. (It is impossible to take Jakarta as an example compared to Legian, since Jakarta has a very different background history and development of shopping space). Singapore sees itself as a shopping center. The *coopetition* has announced by its minister of Trade and Industry (1991) as the key economic planning concept. Over the past two decades, shopping with *coopetition* concept has been a central factor in Singapore’s urban renewal policies to outlay new town developments. All stores and malls in Singapore were planned consciously to *coopete*. Orchard Road as a case in point is a linear boulevard located in Singapore’s Central Area. It has been

transformed into a shopping, hotel, office, and entertainment complex. The nearness of malls on the boulevard requires mall owners to compete for customers. But they also cooperate with one another in producing connections between malls to optimize traffic access.

For both case, it is interesting to seriously think that *coopetition* in shopping space have the potential value to create economic sustainable developments.

Doing shopping at Legian would leave people with different memory of done the very same thing or even buying the exactly same stuff in other place. Perhaps it's because Kuta's shopping space is ecology. It could be seen as an ecological network of exchange for the retail industry and its consumer participants. If we imagine shopping is ecology, the biodiversity of shops 'species' in Kuta's shopping space would never become a monotonous place to visit. Shops, shoppers, and shopping types found in Kuta are diverse. It's not only a matter of principle, but also a matter of survival and economic benefit.



Legian – 13 Agustus 2002 [photo.by. Happy Lim]



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Shopping space in Kuta is an unstable-always in transition space. It is not build under one typical style of architecture. It's simply a notion of newness. Shopping buildings in Kuta don't age; they die young. They are built cheaply, falling to pieces as they greet amount of money come as profit to the cashier desk of the shop. New types of shopping building in Kuta are generated in such a repetition. Faceless façade with big brand label neon sign are a typical design for the internationally known shops. Of course shoppers could find air conditioning in these kinds of shops as their life support. Meanwhile, next door of those branded shops, non-air conditioned local retails compete with their dynamic façade that is created from all the things that they display on sale for the day. Perhaps for the sake of economical reason, Balinese courtyard architecture with clear hierarchy system is slipping into Balinese mutant architecture with 'all you can build' system.

It is a pity that the fast growing tourism in Bali provoked commercial shopping space without an obvious good urban planning. And now, after the Bali Bomb Blast, Bali is indeed in a moment of waiting to get back on business again. Meanwhile, the unique Kuta's shopping space would be a glimpse of memory, freeze in time at the moment, from Legian with love.
