Editorial

UNDERSTANDING EMPATHIC ARCHITECTURE

CHRISTINA E. MEDIASTIKA

Many people misunderstand between 'emphatic' and 'empathic'. These two words are very different in meaning. Empathy is the action of deeply understanding other feelings or experiences as if we feel or experience the same issue. From empathic, Rayport and Leonard-Barton (1997) introduced terminology of empathic design. The goal of empathic design is to identify latent customer needs in order to create products that the customers don't even know what they desire. Designers help customers to find their true needs by observing thoroughly upon customers behavior, activities, etc.

Later, many people may also misunderstand between 'empathic design' and 'empathetic design'. Landwehr (2007) explored the ambiguity of these two terms; these two are similar enough – but still are different in meaning. Compared to empathic design, empathetic design seems to have a less clear definition. An interview of Landwehr to Dr Latanya, a Professor of Government and Technology in Residence at Harvard University, disclosed that in empathetic, designers do not merely conduct observation prior to design but to really copy the behavior, activities, etc. of the customers. An example was taken regarding the use of wheelchair. Before designing pathways for customer using this aid, the designer should actually spend a day living in a wheelchair to get a feel for being handicapped. Landwehr have shown that "empathic design" is the most common official term and that the most common use of the term "empathetic design" is simply a misuse or mis-citations of the definition of "empathic design".

Therefore, the use of term "empathic" for this journal special issue is appropriate. Since architecture is the art or science of designing buildings, the term of "empathic design" could also be applied within architecture processes, which is then to be introduced as "empathic architecture". Beginning with several confusion of similar terminology, we encountered the fact that it was not easy to invite appropriate reviewers for this special issue, which lead to delay of publication.

Discussing about empathic architecture, people will find that it is often related to Sim Van der Ryn, an American architect and a pioneer in ecological design. He is also a researcher and a lecturer in the Faculty of Architecture at the University of California, Berkeley. For more than 40 years, he has been the key person of integrating ecological principles into the built environment. His collaborative approach and multi-disciplinary achievements show the way to an era that values both the integrity of ecological systems and the quality of life. In the book "Design for an empathic world" (2013), Sim introduced human-centered design and nature-centered design, where one should be aware that nature can live without human, but human cannot live without nature. Thus, living in harmony with nature is the best way in creating empathic architecture. From here, an understanding of empathic architecture may begin.

"Empathic architecture" is when an architect decides the best solution for a design problem by making the designer and the user practically the same person. In some cases, users may have difficulty to envision their desire toward modernity whilst also compromising with the issue of sustainability. Here, the role of architects to map users' need, way of life and desire is dominant. Rayport and Leonard-Barton (1997) identify five key steps in empathic design as: observation, capturing data, reflection and analysis, brainstorming for solutions, and developing design model or mockup of possible solutions. These steps are reflected in part or fully by papers submitted for this special issue journal, which mostly are case study of local issues, i.e. the Philippines, India, Indonesia, and Spain. Nevertheless, readers may learn on the empathic aspect of these local issue as reflection of more broaden similar issue.

The papers submitted for this special issue were initiated by International Conference on Empathic Architecture (ICEA) 2014, hosted by Architecture Department of Petra Christian University, Indonesia. The aims of the conference is to explore critical thoughts and studies on how empathic architecture has been and will be applied to help human and nature live in harmony from now and then. Since the environment is in rapid change that affects every aspect of human life, a question then arises on how cultural identity shall be maintained within this rapid change towards modernity. Empathic architecture could be one of the answers.

This thematically oriented issue also contains two non-thematic articles: "Do Utopian City Design from Social Reform Movement Resonate with a Modern Audience" by Tessa Morrison and "Toward Experiential Representation in Architecture" by Luis de La Fuente.