

## An Exploration of the Relation between *Huta* and *Onan* across the Batak Toba Settlements

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Architecture is a space formed in a certain place, and is the result of the interaction between human culture and its natural environment. This culture is born from the principles or philosophies of the local community. As a "traditional" society, these principles or philosophies will not be separated from the surrounding nature, always based on the context of the place. The various principles or philosophies then give birth to various systems that must be carried out. In Batak Toba, the manifestation in the scope of architecture is the creation of spaces born from the system of society, kinship, belief, and so on. Indirectly, the various systems that give birth to the space will shape how social interactions between communities. Social interactions that occur can be in the form of relationships between individuals, between kinship groups, and or between villages. The Toba community recognizes the term *huta-horja-bius*. *Huta* is the smallest unit of *bius* inhabited by a small group of people who are intertwined with kinship between the king's clan and *boru*. Interactions that occur in the *huta* are relationships between individuals and between kinship groups. In Batak Toba culture, there is a term *onan* function, which is a place where economic, social, and legal functions occur, and in *onan* there is also social and economic traffic with the outside world. The purpose of this research is to identify each spatial relationship based on the interactions that arise, namely in the *huta* of Tomok Parsaoran Village as well as the public space along the lake that is suspected of being *onan*, and to find out whether the public space is the place where inter-*huta* interactions occur. This research is part of a long and ongoing research and is based on qualitative methods with descriptive, and analytical approaches. The analytical part is divided into a description of the findings and discussion results that identify each space based on the real situation.

**Keywords:** *Huta*, *Onan*, Public Space, Social Interaction, Space Relation

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Architecture is the product or result of the interaction of human culture with its natural environment, including climate, topography, location, and other factors (Sumalyo, 2005). A further understanding of the relationship between human culture and its natural environment is about how space is structured and organized depending on human goals (Aspinal, 1993). The spaces encountered are formed due to the

existence of place (Heidegger, 2006). Thus, it can be concluded that architecture is the space formed in a place, the result of the interaction between human culture and its natural environment.

In connection with this, Indonesia has places with abundant culture. One of them is the Batak Toba culture that has given birth to many principles of architectural form and function. The Batak community has a number of rules that regulate the order of life, such as the social system,

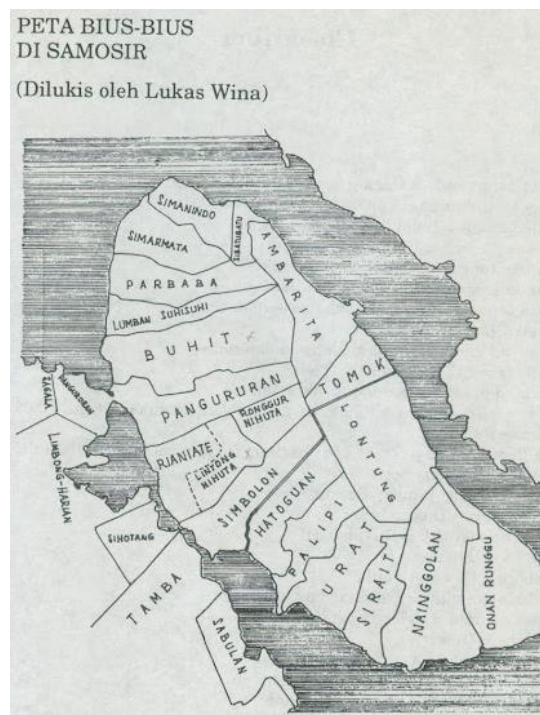
The Toba people in fulfilling their spatial needs will form territorial boundaries. Its realization begins with a village or "*huta*", then a collection of several *huta* will form a *horja*, in order to create harmony in its social aspects. The boundaries of the *horja* government are the same as those of the *huta* that are part of the *horja* (Silalahi, 2012). *Horja* are formed from a number of royal clans (Manurung, 2017). The number of *horja* will continue to grow, so it is necessary to organize them together, and a *bius* is formed (Silalahi, 2012). For example, in Tomok it is called *bius Siualu Ompu*, which is an alliance of the Sidabutar, Sijabat, Siadari, Sidabalok, Manik, Harianja, Sigi, Sitindaon (Silalahi, 2012).

In a broader sense, within the structure of Toba society, social interaction processes occur. For the Toba people, there are two cultures: individual and communal, both of which are embedded in the fundamental culture related to religion and kinship. These two fundamental cultures are the foundation that governs and binds their live and social interactions (Silalahi, 2012). According to Liddle Silalahi (2012), social interactions that occur can take the form of relationships between individuals, between kinship groups and or between villages (*huta*).

The purpose of this research is to identify the spatial relations based on the interactions that occur, namely in *Huta* of Tomok Parsaoran and public spaces along the lakeshore suspected to be “*onan*”, and to determine whether these public spaces facilitate interactions between *huta*. The case study for this research is located in Tomok, specifically in *Huta* of Tomok Parsaoran and the public spaces along the lakeshore.

### 2.1. Social Relationship

According to Georg Simmel in Abrutyn & Lizardo (2021), social relations are a relationship



Specifically, the smallest unit within a *bius* is the *huta*. *Huta* is a self-contained world that is closed in nature, inhabited by a small group of people connected by kinship ties, and it is the place where they live until the end of their lives (Situmorang, 2009). *Huta* is the smallest

that involves an interaction between individuals or groups and produces a pattern. The relationship between individuals or groups will form a network, and is visually depicted as a bipartite graph diagram. An individual will form affiliations with other individuals, so that more than one node (Abrutyn & Lizardo, 2021). Relations form mutual connections and mutually influence each other. In addition, relationships are systematic of occur regularly repeatedly with the same pattern (Umi, Rusli, & Sarmadan, 2019).

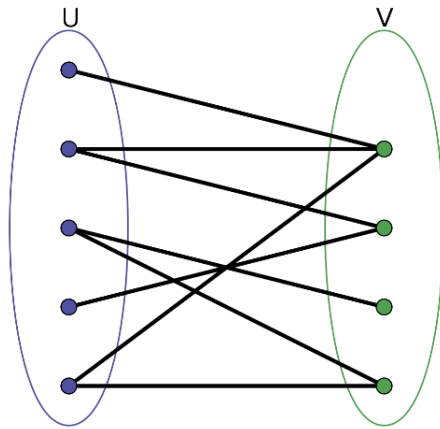


Figure 2: Bipartite Graph Diagram  
(Source: wikipedia.org)

In connection with this, individual relations can give rise to two distinct nodes, namely, actors and events (Abrutyn & Lizardo, 2021). According to Breiger in Abrutyn & Lizardo (2021), these characteristics are referred to as membership networks. These membership networks can be divided into two networks, each related to its consistency. In other words, there are two groups with the same member characteristics (Abrutyn & Lizardo, 2021).

Related to the two paragraphs above, it is mentioned that there are at least four stages in the occurrence of social relations (Umi, Rusli, & Sarmadan, 2019):

- Zero contact, a situation where there is no interaction between two or more individuals,
- Awareness, individuals become aware of the presence of others,
- Surface contact, the first individual becomes aware of engaging in similar activities as others in their surroundings,
- Mutuality, a social relationship is established between two or more

individuals, forming a group consisting of members with similar activities.

According to Fiske (2011), there are four forms of social relations, including communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing. The explanation of social relations is also supported by Cohen. According to him, social relations involve activities in establishing connections with other individuals based on a sense of communality. Individuals identify themselves with various social norms present in others (Cohen, 2004).

## 2.2. Harajaon Huta

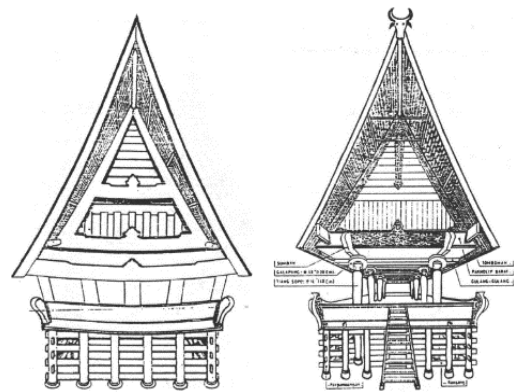


Figure 3: *Jabu* (Left) and *Sopo* (Right)  
(Source: Napitupulu, et al., 1986)

According to Sitor Situmorang (2009), *huta* literally comes from the word "city" or "kuta", which is a form of fortified settlement and is always in the shape of a square with an average size of 50 x 70 square meters. *Huta* is the smallest *harajaon* or government in traditional Batak Toba society (Silalahi, 2012). According to Vergouwen, a *huta* concerns only a few people, usually containing six, eight, ten, or a dozen houses, it is rare to find a *huta* with twenty houses (Situmorang, 2009).

A *huta* or village is generally grouped. The buildings in a village consist of two rows: the northern row, which consists of granaries or houses for storage called "*sopo*", and the southern row, which consists of residential houses or "*jabu*". They are separated by a spacious courtyard where events are held, and this area is called "*alaman*" (Napitupulu, et al., 1986).

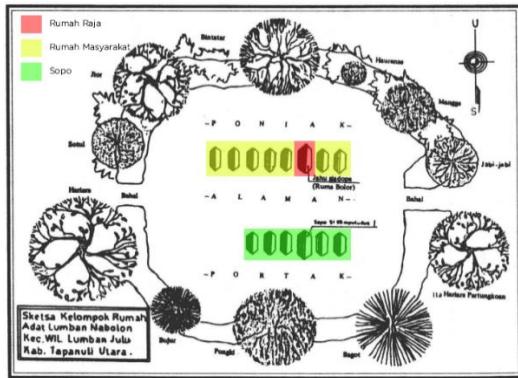


Figure 4: The Arrangement Scheme of a *Huta*  
(Source: Napitupulu, et al., 1986)

Behind the residential houses or storage houses, there is an empty space commonly used as a garden. The village is enclosed by stone or earthen walls known as “*parik*”, and on top of them, bamboo trees are planted. At both ends, there are gateways called “*bahal*”. Sacred trees like Hairara, Bintatar, and Beringin are always planted at the two sides of the *bahal*. Hairara tree is considered a symbol of life and maintaining cosmic order within the *huta* (Napitupulu, et al., 1986). Under the Hairara or Beringin tree, there is a courtyard area called “*partungkoan*”, used for gatherings, discussions, or negotiations that may lead to a transaction (Silalahi, 2012).

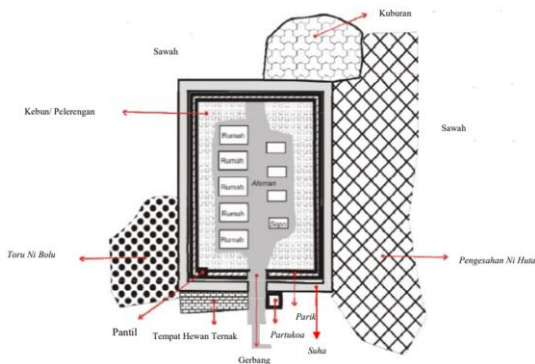


Figure 5: Thirteen Physical Elements of *Huta*  
(Source: Siahaan, 2005)

If reviewed in more detail, there are approximately thirteen physical elements in a *huta* (Siahaan, 2005). These elements include *jabu* (residential houses) and *sopo* (storage houses), gardens, rice fields, *alaman* or courtyard, *parik* or fortifications, *suha* or water channels, *pantil* or lookout spots, *partungkoan* or gathering and deliberation areas, livestock areas, graves, *bahal* or gates, *pangeahan ni huta* or reserved land that can be converted into rice fields, and

*toru ni bolu* or reserved land that cannot be converted into rice fields.

### 2.3. The Function of Public Space

In terminology, “*onan*” refers to the concept of traditional market in Batak Toba society, but its meaning is broader than just a “market” (Simamora & Siahaan, 2018). For the ancient Batak Toba community, “*onan*” symbolizes the open world beyond the *huta* (Situmorang, 2009). It is not only an economic function, but also a place for meetings, recreation, social gatherings, information exchange, and so on. In other words, *onan* also has social and cultural functions (Simamora & Siahaan, 2018). *Onan* plays an important role in organizing social traffic and trade between regions or the outside world (Situmorang, 2009). Here are the broad functions of *onan* (Simamora & Siahaan, 2018) :

- Economic function.** It serves as a meeting place for sellers and buyers, facilitating the process of transactions. In its economic function, *onan* is recognized in two parts: *onan na marpatik* (regulated market) and *onan manogot-nogot* (morning market). *Onan na marpatik* is held once or twice a week. Typically, there is only one major *onan* in a week. This is marked by almost all people from around the *onan* attending. If it happens twice, one of them is recognized as a small *onan*, as the number of people attending is not significant. *Onan manogot-nogot* occurs every day except during the major or small *onan* events.
- Social function.** It serves as a meeting place for people from various *huta* or *horja*. In its time, *onan* becomes the focal point where different *huta* converge. Here, social interactions take place, such as exchanging information, delivering invitations for traditional events, introducing children through special ceremonies (*mangebang*), finding potential partners, and so on.
- Legal function.** The *onan* is a zone of peace, a place agreed upon since its founding. The institutionalization of *onan* serves as a balance in upholding laws, justice, and order against threats to the land or *bius*. This is why the term “market peace” is recognized (Vergouwen, 2004). This statement implies that individuals or groups cannot have conflicts within *onan*. The institutionalization of *onan* aligns perfectly with its founding purpose. In *onan*, one can



find ancient trees (such as Hairara or Beringin) planted by the village or regional leaders who collaborated. Under these old trees, village leaders (*parampangan*) sit to receive requests, complaints, or discussions regarding community affairs (Vergouwen, 2004).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This research is part of a long and ongoing study. It is based on a qualitative method with a descriptive, analytical approach, aiming to facilitate further research that involves interpretation and analysis. The qualitative method was chosen because the researcher needs to understand and describe facts as something not rigid, enabling the exploration of direct connections between humans, space, places, and various events. Through this method, the researcher needs to closely engage with the study subject. The data used is divided into two categories: field data and empirical data. Field data consists of direct observations, firsthand experiences of the physical and socio-cultural conditions, and direct interaction with the space. Empirical data includes information from various articles, journals, and valid websites.

Regarding the collection of field data, the researcher visited the Tomok area, Samosir Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia, specifically focusing on the Parsaoran Village settlement in May 2023. The collected field data was recorded, sketched, and orally documented. Both field and empirical data serve as the primary foundation for the data analysis phase.

The data analysis phase is intricately connected to existing literature studies, which serve as a guide and comparison for the collected data. Literature studies include topics related to understanding “*bius-horja-huta*” as a kinship or social system that gives rise to space. Additionally, it explores the ideal pattern of a village or *huta* and the institutionalization of *onan* and its functions. This understanding forms the basis for analyzing and testing interrelated possibilities within a Batak Toba settlement, particularly in Tomok. Essentially, physical space is formed because it is influenced by various social values, traditions, cultures, and, most importantly, ideas or ideologies.

The following is a methodological framework that briefly explains all stages of the

research (inventory-justification-identification-analysis-conclusion):

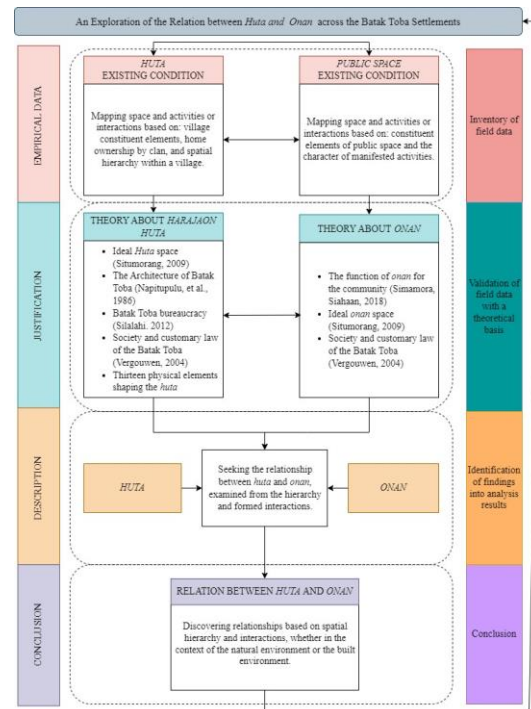


Figure 6: Methodology Framework

### 4. FINDING

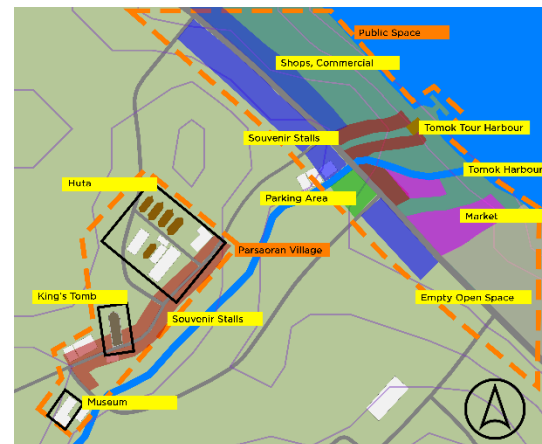


Figure 7: Existing Spatial Scheme of Parsaoran Village and Public Spaces

#### 4.1. The Existing Condition of Tomok Parsaoran Village

Tomok Parsaoran Village is a residential complex that continues to be developed under the label "tourism village". The Parsaoran Village complex consists of several functional elements,

including a *huta*, the grave site of King Sidabutar, a museum, and souvenir stalls. In the *huta*, there are two rows, from the main entrance on the left side there is one *Jabu Bolon* and three *sopo* which were later developed into (closed) houses. The closed *sopo* is called *Siaporik*. The Siaporik houses are owned by *boru* clans including Sijabat and Harianja. Across from them, there are three open *sopo* structures, commonly known as storage houses. Between these two groups of buildings, there is an open area or courtyard that is still used for various purposes (*alaman*). As the village develops into a tourism village, the *alaman* is also used for cultural performances of the "Si Gale-gale" dance.



Figure 8: *Huta* in Parsaoran Village; Top, 2003  
(Source: Herwindo, 2003) – Bottom, 2023

Additionally, there is the grave site of King Sidabutar. This tomb is located at the highest point of the village complex. The tomb can be said to be a sarcophagus, because it is made of stone and located above the ground. The king's grave site is also included in the tourist destinations in the Parsaoran Village complex. Furthermore, there is a museum located at the lowest point of the village complex. The museum is the most tourist destination at the end of the village

complex, in which there are equipment, artifacts, and so on.



Figure 9: The Tombs of the Kings

#### 4.2. The Existing Condition of Public Space

The mentioned public space is located at a lower elevation than the village area, specifically along the lakeshore. This public space has a much different character of activity than the village space. It is highly commercial in nature, serving as a marketplace. Facilities in this area include souvenir stalls, restaurants, shops, and a market.



Figure 10: Souvenir Stalls and Gate at Tomok Tour Port

In this public space, there is also a port, a place where people move from the water area to the land area, and vice versa. Tomok has at least five ports. When expanded to the village level, there are two ports as shown in figure seven. These ports are Tomok Tour Port and Tomok Port, located side by side but separated by a river approximately seven meters wide. Tomok Tour



Port is specifically for tourism (passengers), so along the way to or from Tomok Tour Port, visitors encounter numerous souvenir stalls. Tomok Tour Port does not have a physical terminal that leads passengers to the dock; instead, there is only a gate. Ship tickets are handed over and paid manually from individual to individual.



Figure 11: The Market Situation at Tomok Port

In connection with that, next to it, there is Tomok Port, which is still used for transporting vehicles. Along the way to and from Tomok Port, visitors will see a market selling vegetables, fruits, and groceries. Tomok Port also does not have a physical terminal, only ticket counters in the form of stalls, and across from it, there are food court area.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Harajaon Huta

In Parsaoran Village, it has been identified, that there are *huta* and sacred sites, namely the tombs of the kings. One of the most famous is the tomb of King Sidabutar, which is placed on the ground in a stone box, known as a sarcophagus. This tomb site is positioned at the highest point within the entire Parsaoran Village. Its presence is sacred and must be respected, which is one of the reasons why the site is located at the highest position.

In relation to that, tombs are inseparable from the elements of a *huta*. They remain part of a unified entity. Examining the theoretical basis, within the physical elements of a *huta*, graves or tombs are situated outside the *parik*, similar to the conditions in Tomok Parsaoran. Graves or tombs are located outside the *parik* but still remain part of the *huta*.

In the *Huta* of Tomok Parsaoran, it can be identified that there is a *jabu* and three enclosed *sopo* (used as living spaces) and three open *sopo*.

The *jabu* is identified as having a larger size with stairs inside, while both the open and closed *sopo* (*Siaporik*) are smaller in size with stairs outside. In total, there are ten houses. This aligns with what Vergouwen stated in Situmorang (2009) and involves a few individuals. The individuals referred to are the royal lineage (king's clans) and the *boru* lineage (*boru's* clans) within a *huta*. In Parsaoran, the king's clan is identified as Sidabutar, and the *boru's* clan visible from the front panel of the closed *sopo* includes Sijabat and Harianja. From the explanation above, it can be concluded that a *huta* is an exclusive form and creates a space for **social interaction between individuals and between kinship groups** Sidabutar (king's clans) – Harianja (*boru's* clans) – Sijabat (*boru's* clans).

### 5.2. Public Space

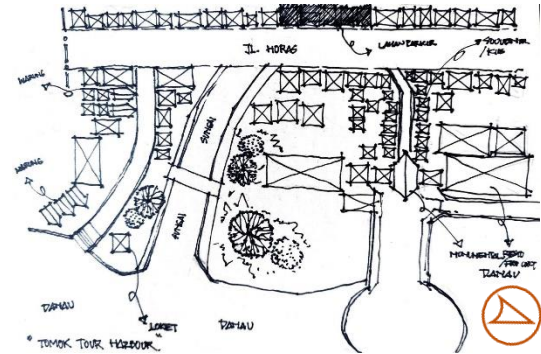


Figure 12: Clarifying the Concept of Public Space

Public space is the space marked in figure seven in the findings section. Public space contains various commercial facilities such as places for buying and selling transactions. In more detail, these commercial facilities include shops, markets, souvenir stalls, and even elements of a port. A blend of activities happens here, without any limitations. The activities occurring here are free, making it a profane space. In contrast to "*huta*" where something sacred is present.

Regarding the explanation in the above paragraph, the condition is similar to what is referred to in the theoretical basis as "*onan*". The condition of public space, when viewed from the perspective of activities, involves economic, social, and even legal functions, termed as "*peace*". This condition is evidenced by the fact that people from all walks of life mingle in this space, regardless of who they are. Social and economic interactions also take place here,

marked by the presence of port functions that bring logistics and passengers from outside Tomok, Samosir. It can be said that in this space, there is a meeting point **for individuals, kinship groups, and even villages** (groups of individuals and/or kinship groups). In conclusion, diverse social interactions occur in this public space, and its characteristics align with the intended functions of *onan*.

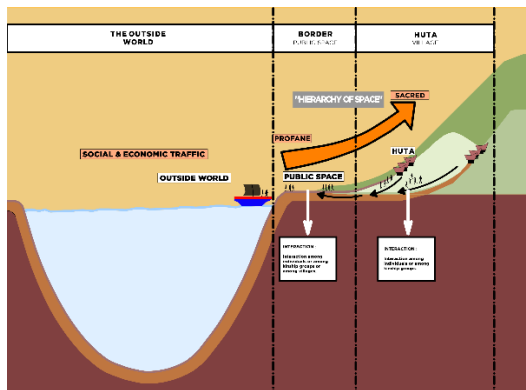


Figure 13: Diagram of the Relationship between *Huta* Space and Public Space (*Onan*)

Every space has interconnected relationships. It starts with the location of the sacred stone tomb of King Sidabutar. The tomb site is located at the highest elevation of the *huta*. *Huta* is the smallest and closed unit with clear boundaries. It is where social interactions occur among individuals and between kinship groups (king clans and their respective clans). A *huta* requires broader social interactions. Within the context of Toba Batak settlements, there is a concept of shared space or public space. This public space is where broader social interactions take place, particularly interactions between different *huta*. Various activities such as meetings, transactions, playing, and shopping occur in this space, creating profane activities. In the Batak Toba settlement concept, this place is called *onan*. Based on this understanding, it can be said that the public space near the Parsaoran Village is an *onan*. This *onan* can be developed into a large *onan*, especially with the development and construction related to tourism. It can serve as a significant potential to introduce the concept of public space in Batak Toba society to the general public, tourists, or visitors. This is because there is a port element as the central entrance and exit point to the Tomok area. The illustration below shows that each space is related to one another, especially in the physical

environment (the place where people engage in activities: *huta* with public space or *onan*).

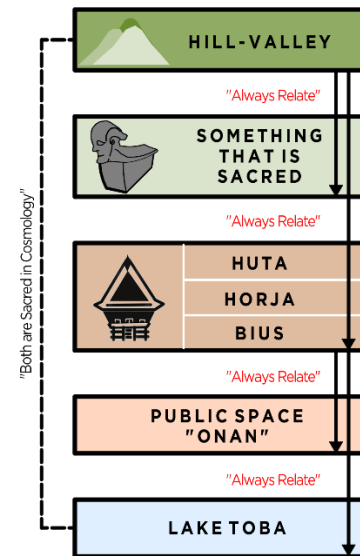


Figure 14: Diagram of the Study on the Relationship between *Huta* and *Onan* Spaces in the Tomok Parsaoran Village Area

## 6. CONCLUSION

In terms of spatial relationships, *Huta* of Tomok Parsaoran is the smallest unit within the Tomok community, consisting of a small group. The inhabitants belong to the royal lineage of Sidabutar and the *boru* lineage of Sijabat and Harianja. Thus, the interactions formed are between individuals and between these family groups. Within *Huta* of Tomok Parsaoran, there are sacred sites of the kings, including the stone tomb of King Sidabutar (sarcophagus). Its presence at the highest point in the *huta* signifies reverence and sacredness. It is considered one entity with the *huta*. Therefore, in terms of spatial relations, the *huta* is a sacred space compared to the public space (*onan*) along the lakeshore. Various profane activities occur in the public space by the lake. Profane in terms of its activities. Activities that take place include economic and social functions because there are commercial spaces such as restaurants, shops, markets, souvenir stalls, and even a harbor serving as a social and economic link between the Sumatra mainland and Samosir Island, specifically Tomok.

The proximity of public space to the *huta*, which serves economic and social functions, demonstrates its connection with the functions mentioned in the theoretical foundation of *onan*.



There are criteria that indicate that this public space is an *onan*, a place for interactions between individuals, family groups, and even *hutas*. Currently, this public space provides facilities for surrounding *hutas*.

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