

AcE-Bs2010, Kuching

ASEAN Conference on Environment-Behaviour Studies, Riverside Majestic Hotel,
Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia, 7-8 July 2010.

Spirit of Outdoor Spaces in between Urban Heritage Buildings

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Abstract

Positive outdoor spaces are lively and highly surveillance but negative outdoor spaces are leftover spaces that often treated as “no man’s land”. This paper will present an inventory of positive and negative outdoor spaces in which was conducted in the selected study site of Lebuah Armenian, Penang. The aim of the research was to identify the positive and negative spaces along the heritage street and suggest its potential development. This street was analyzed through researcher’s visual observation and end-users’ perception to revitalize as a space for urban heritage recreational development.

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Keywords: Negative outdoor space; positive outdoor space; revitalization; urban recreational development

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to unveil the research findings on the positive and negative outdoors in between heritage buildings. The study required a speculative exploration on designers’ visual observation and the end user’s perception towards the physical character of those spaces. The visual observation has a

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direct influence towards human mindset that relates closely to their present and future psychological experience and feelings.

In general the quality of urban outdoor spaces found in outdoor space in between buildings can be differentiated into two main physical characteristics: positive space and negative space. The discussion is on the quality of void space in between solidity of buildings blocks. Alexander, C. (1997) defined an outdoor space is considered as positive space when it has a distinct and definite shape as the shape of a room. Its distinct shape plays as important as the shapes of the buildings which surround it. Outdoor space is considered as a negative space if it is shapeless and valueless. The two kinds of spaces have entirely different plan geometries, which may be most easily distinguished by their figure-ground or character of its plinth of those spaces as viewed on-plan.

Z, Samadi and Hasbullah, M.N. (2008) describe positive outdoor as space when it has multifunction qualities. The space use as a meeting point, landmark point, outdoor eating point, buying and selling point, linkage point, art appreciation point, display and parade point, interactive information-directional point, interactive exercise point and photo-taking point. Positive outdoor spaces can be identified through the facade character that surrounded those spaces in which embodied the space which contributes the visual appropriateness and richness. End-users whom considered as the “actor of the scene”, normally play positive roles within the existing urban physical setting of positive outdoor spaces. Activity choice by the end-users in the street-life activity reflects the vitality of the urban outdoor space.

On the other hand, negative outdoor space has a reverse character from positive space as described by *ibid*, (2008) as a space without a sense of place. Its physical character is hardly grasped to any specific geometrical form and experience related in the users mind. At night, the space turns claustrophobic due to darkness, low surveillance, less accessible, less permeable, less attractive, dull, low legibility and the hardly used.

The physical characteristic influences by tangible and intangible factors in urban spaces provide an effect towards human perception to those spaces. Less attention and provision on the surrounding heritage buildings leads to natural deterioration. Therefore, this paper shares analysis on the visual observation in assisting the revival strategy of heritage streets.

2. Urban Heritage Development versus globalization

Shuhana Shamsuddin, et al. (2010) considered that an existence of heritage buildings within the traditional urban fabric has value-added for constructing the new of city-scape of heritage development. Even though, urban heritage buildings in the past have contributed social, cultural and economical vibrancy of a city but those properties must be physically robust to meet the current needs. The rapid growth of cities and centralization concept has created traffic congestion, which delayed delivery and transportation within the urban heritage quarters. The scenario leads to development pressures towards existing traditional urban fabric especially at outdoor places such as bazaar, caravanserai and timchehs in Iran.

According to Bruce, Caron (2003), Kyoto was one of the heritage cities in Japan that required a proper urban heritage management for two reasons. The first reason was the conflict between local cultural practices and new theories of urban planning. The conflict appeared when stakeholders with innovative intervention faced contradictory idea with those antiquarian. Therefore, heritage city management has to create a balance development to keep the social solidarity between the creative conservationists and the futurist stakeholders

Urban Transformation in South East Asia caused the existing traditional urban heritage fabric to be made elastic enough to deal with the upcoming development pressures towards the creation of mega-city. Besides Asian cities, Britain shares the similar issues in maintaining the traditional architecture in

updating her image with the current global trend. The architectural movement towards an international style often creates conflict of world's city image and identity. This issue was heightened that instilled a great concern from the highness Prince of Wales to patron an institution called International Network of Traditional Building, Architecture and Urbanism (abbreviated as INTBAU) in 2000. The aim was to control the urbanism from overpowering the local identity and cultural system of the heritage cities in Britain.

The scenario in Malaysia of urban heritage development received good signals from local authorities, general public and universities through research contributions, input and feedback. Apart from international recognition from the World Listed Heritage Sites by UNESCO in 2008 for two historical cities of George Town and Malacca; other unlisted historical cities also indicated their support of heritage appreciation. Heritage city such as Klang in Selangor and Taiping in Perak also reported having significant efforts in line the earlier listed. Jalan Tengku Kelana and Jalan Raya Timur in Klang shared the harmonious rhythm and cycle of Jalan Barrack, Jalan Panggong Wayang, Jalan Pasar in Taiping, Perak in balancing their urban transformations.

A lesson learnt from the previous research A.F., Bakri (2008) on ethnic enclave of the 'Little India' in Jalan Tengku Kelana in Klang reflects the culture of Indian community in Malaysia. 'Little India' Klang has never been declared; the street is known as the most colourful Indian street.



Fig.1. Sample of activities in front of heritage shop houses

Besides creative actions from individual vendors, heritage shop owners took advantage on the five-foot way to display their products and goods to create an outdoor parade area for business. The businesses reflected truly Indian in flavour such as sales of spices, betel nuts, ayurvedic products and henna. The five-foot way had created an active interaction space between users and sellers which compounded a unique ambience to the street. 'Little India' became more vibrant during Hindu festivals such as Deepavali, Thaipusam and Ponggal. Some of those spaces in between heritage shop houses were made vehicular-free to cater for locals and tourists business activities and provide more security, safety and pleasure.



Fig.2. The space in between heritage blocks of shop houses were occupied by street vendors

Even though Jalan Tengku Kelana, Klang provides a colourful experience but the street is closed that caused nightmares to end-users during Indian festive season. The narrow streets cause 'bottle neck' effect along the street. The traffic congestion is made worsen due to irresponsible drivers who parks along that street. Mazumdar et.al (2000) believed that application of architectural features of a dominant ethnic is important to increase the image of the area and its sense of place. It also could retain the memories of their country of origin.

3. Methodology

The conduct of this research employed two main methods: obtrusive and unobtrusive. The unobtrusive method involved data collecting and categorizing secondary data through content analysis and document analysis measures. The content analysis was used to analyze the character of positive and negative spaces for heritage streets. The obtrusive methods had involved perception survey towards end-users. The unobtrusive method provides the researcher with active participation with site analysis and interviews with the local in the study site. The visual observation measures through the researcher's five-sense activation in collecting primary data on psychological perception. The research was conducted at different times and days from January to March 2010 in Lebu Armenian, Penang. In conducting field work in the study site researchers had conducted visual observation as the sensory tools. Walking was chosen as the mode of movement for capturing photographs during the positive and negative space exploration.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Positive Outdoor Spaces.

Positive outdoor space integrates the lively current activity of working, living and visiting. The ambiance makes end users feel comfort and secure. Safety and surveillance are identified as the main ontological security in Lebu Armenian. The handmade of facade details had reflected Penang heritage identity as multicultural community: Chinese, Malay and Indian. The followings figure and table summarize the research findings.



Fig.3. Other images of positive outdoor spaces from Lebu Armenian, Penang

Table1. Seven dimensions of visual analysis

Seven Dimensions.	Physical Characteristic.
Plane 1: Outdoor flooring.	Various and mixed types of heritage mood could be read from the physical character of the outdoor footpath. The existing set of colorful and fully decorated flooring pattern made of old clay tiles at the covered walkway has further enriched the heritage ambience.
Plane 2: Outdoor walling system.	The natural deterioration of heritage façade reflecting the real age reflects discouragement of personalization quality by the occupants. The facade reflected the lack of appreciation towards historical value. The narrow lot size and non-parking space discouraged the current type vehicular accessibility the shop lot.
Plane 3: Outdoor ceiling.	A three-dimensional space of heritage volume of an outdoor interactive ceiling space had complimented the heritage flooring, and walling system. The hanging cultural element such as decorative lantern is introduced for enhancing the celebration mood and aura festive nights.
Plane 4: Outdoor street furniture.	An urban heritage recreation area requires a proper designed of hard and soft landscape. Garden seating and boulevard enhanced public interaction space. Covered or semi enclosed walkway from tropical climatic challenge such as rain and hot sun shall be provided within 400 meter maximum walking distance.
Plane 5: Outdoor Living Room.	The outdoor space has become a venue of antique sales and marketing took place in every evening. This activity has made full use of the outdoor space in between buildings as an outdoor living room.
Plane 6: Interior Activity.	The positive outdoor is highly influenced by the themed-interior. The re-adaptive usage such as converting the interior of heritage shop houses to boutique hotels, art galleries, cafe, souvenir shop and mini museum has physically change the old façade to meet the current usage.
Plane 7: Overall volume spirit of space.	The overall three-dimensional (3D); aura and ambience of the end user physical movement at public spaces; open up at least three dimensions of human visual perspective and offer celebration of human five senses in grasping the urban heritage environment.

4.2. Negative Outdoor Spaces.

The outdoor space without occupants was the major indicator for negative spaces in Lebuh Armenian. The physical character such as lack of richness of architectural details, minimum functional space and unfriendly narrow backstreet of the heritage buildings contributed to negative outdoor spaces. The traditional design of the heritage shop houses with small frontage (dedicated for carrier such as tricycle or locally known as 'beca' in the past era) reduced car parking space. In this space, emptiness and horror spirit are sensed at night. The negative outdoor quality along Lebuh Armenian, Penang is recorded in the following figure.

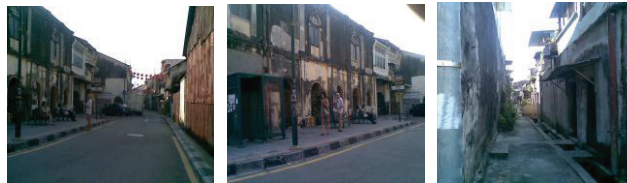


Fig.4. Images of negative outdoor at Lebuh Armenian, Penang

Urban heritage recreation area requires a proper designed of streetscape comprising of hard and soft landscape. The naïve facade treatment in which played as the background setting of the outdoor recreation theme had reduced the spirit of a positive-interactive space. Low pedestrian and vehicular traffic, passive shop-front and no window display reflect a passive activity contributes to a horror scene in the outdoor space of the heritage street.

4.3. Potentials and threats of the outdoor spaces.

The inventory on seven-dimensions (7-D) of outdoor spaces indicated that, more positive than negative spaces were found in Lebuhr Armenian. This result shows that the heritage street needs input from local. A full support from the local residents and heritage shop owners to plan a programmed event such as heritage walk, cultural night market and heritage festival along the street is urgently needed to ensure the revitalization success. Part of strategies to succeed in imposing heritage awareness was organized by George Town World Heritage Incorporation [GTWHI] and Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang [MPPP].

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, to create a positive space requires positive spirit. Self individualistic found among shop houses-owners due to lack of cohesiveness must be put aside to revive the outdoor spirit of space in between of heritage buildings. It should be replaced with a sense of unity in the process of reviving the space in between their heritage shop houses.

Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank in the first instance Bachelor Science in Architecture (semester 01, 2009) from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, on their active-participation during the public survey in the study site.

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