DESIGN FOR INTERGROUP RELATIONS: COMMUNITY AND WELFARE CENTRE

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, who showed me greatest love and kindness that hold acceptance for imperfections and patience for growth.

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ABSTRACT

The community centres in Malaysia are found to be underutilised due to various reasons including simplistic functional design and bureaucratic management. Active communities are instead found in sacred places such as mosques, temples, and churches. Past researchers suggest the use of sacred places for community development. However, the inclusiveness of community development in sacred places is controversial due to its exclusive use and building language.This thesis proposes an alternative approach to utilizing faith's social capital for inclusive community development. That is, to integrate charity welfare, a universal activity across religion and humankind, into the community centre. The thesis explores architectural design approaches for the integration. It identifies the problem and need of charity welfare and community centre, reviews design principles for intergroup relations, and finally develops design approaches from the literature review and case study.

ABSTRAK

Pusat komuniti di Malaysia didapati kurang digunakan atas pelbagai sebab termasuk reka bentuk fungsian yang simplistic dan pengurusan tempat yang birokrasi. Komuniti aktif sebaliknya ditemui di tempat suci seperti masjid, kuil dan gereja. Penyelidik sebelumnya mencadangkan penggunaan tempat suci agama untuk pembangunan masyarakat. Walau bagaimanapun, keterangkuman pembangunan komuniti di tempat suci adalah kontroversi disebabkan penggunaan eksklusif dan bahasa seni binanya. Tesis ini mencadangkan pendekatan alternatif untuk menggunakan modal sosial keimanan untuk pembangunan komuniti yang inklusif. Iaitu, dengan mengintegrasikan kebajikan amal, sesuatu aktiviti sejagat yang merentass agama dan manusia, ke dalam pusat komuniti. Tesis ini meneroka pendekatan reka bentuk seni bina untuk penyepaduan program ini. Ia mengenal pasti masalah dan keperluan kebajikan amal dan pusat komuniti, mengkaji prinsip reka bentuk untuk penghubungan antara kumpulan, dan akhirnya merangkakan pendekatan reka bentuk daripada tinjauan literatur dan kes kajian.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problems of Community Centre in Malaysia

The existing community centre typologies in Malaysia has found to be underutilised due to architecture, program and management factors (Utaberta and Spalie, 2015). The architecture factors include the simplistic design of a long span empty space that could not cater to the diversifying 'modern rituals' of contemporary society (Rasdi, 2015, pp. 13–18) and generic building image that is not reflecting communal cultures (Nafari & Ismail, 2016, p. 244). Limited functions (Utaberta et al., 2018), locked and poor maintenance (Utaberta & Spalie, 2015) of community centre's program and management have also observed to led to little public presence of the buildings. The current models of community centre failed to congregate people to serve as a public communal space as it originally intended.

1.2 Alternative Place for Community Development: The Sacred Place

The issues invite a deeper look into the nature of community culture in Malaysia society. Prior to the formal establishment of community centre, the earliest form of place which functions akin to community centre in Malaysia were the sacred places such as mosques, suraus and temples for the different race under British colonisation (Rasdi, 1998). Religion is a big part of individual practices and communal living among multicultural groups. Recent research on traditional Malay settlements in rural area has shown the use of Mosque as the highest choice for social interaction whereas community hall and civic hall only ranked 7 and 8 out of 10 public spaces typologies surveyed (Jaffar *et al.*, 2020).

Some researchers in Malaysia proposed the adoption of Mosque as the place for community development among Muslim communities (Rasdi, 1998; Nangkula Utaberta, 2012; Baharudin and Ismail, 2014). Other Islamic countries such as Iran (Movahed, 2014) and Indonesia (Luthfiyyyah and Uyuni, 2019) shared similar implications. The arguments are similar, Mosque is a social center for the Muslim societies historically other than a place of rituals and worship(Nangkula Utaberta, 2012). Islamic teachings preach for collective practice – all good things if they are done together has more of a reward than the same thing done alone (Movahed, 2014). Muslims shared a common interest in spiritual pursuit and in the process of doing so, became a tightly knitted community.

The same could be said for Christianity and Buddhism. Referring to the Biblical phrase "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself", Christianity promotes kinship among the followers. Buddhism, though does not explicitly preach for kinship in their core values, promote formation of religious communities through the regular conduct of practices for meditation, study of scriptures, and taking part in ceremonies ('The Buddhist Core Values and Perspectives for Protection Challenges: Faith and Protection', 2012, p. 4). Religions at large, are valuable cultural and spiritual assets to promote community development.

1.3 Universal Program for Inclusive Community: Charity Welfare

Nonetheless, today we live in a multicultural society. Malaysian practices different religions and some are not even practicing religion. A Mosque, a Church or a Temple could potentially serve as means for community development for their respective followers, but questionably for intergroup interactions to take place and inclusion of non-followers. Existing community centre, though a neutral space, functionally and physically is not supporting the complexity of the needs for contemporary community development. Therefore, a more productive approach to exercise the influence of religion for intergroup community development perhaps is not changing to religious architecture typology but looking at the types of activity religion and public commonly share. The shared activity must then plan and put

together in spatial configurations and physical environment that is encouraging social integration and enriching a univocal culture.

The idea of charity welfare for intergroup community development emerges through empirical studies and urban observations in Kampung Bharu, Kuala Lumpur. It is observed, through site visits to the Malay urban village, that religious cultural practices such as the distribution of *bubur lambuk* (a type of traditional porridge) to the poor, needy and public in general is celebrated as an inclusive communal activity during Ramadhan month. The practice is perpetuated through Islamic teaching to contribute voluntary almsgiving, *Sadaqah* for their God, Allah's blessing and to ensure social balance, *Tawazun* by improving the level of welfare in society (Tajmazinani, 2021, p. 27).

In addition, charity is a common idea of benevolence and kindness across religions and innates to human biology. Sikhsm, for example practises charity in the form of *Langar*, a community Kitchen in gurdwara which serve free vegetarian meals, whereas Buddhist promotes contribution of *Danaa*, in form of material gifts for erection of temple, public spaces and immaterial gifts such as teaching. *Sadaqah* in Islam is also known as 'every act of kindness' (narrated by Prophet Muhammad, S.A.W, Sahih Al-Bukhari:6021). Compassion and kindness as a universal language and biology intuition is an affectious visual cue that could promote positive inter-group relationships (Keltner, 2004).

The instillation of charity welfare into a community centre could help to develop a place for inclusive community, improve the states of welfare and promote the value of kindness and mutual help among neighbourhoods. The value of charity and welfare also positions the building as a place to a level of moral humility ready to receive and accept anybody, regardless of their backgrounds and social status.

1.4 Research Problem

The research is exploring new social relationships for community centre program. It is founded on the intention to solve the existing problems of community centre and rejuvenates the typology as an inclusive social public space for community development through charity welfare program. However, there is no research yet to discuss the social, spatial and physical needs of charity welfare program, not to mention the implementation of it into a community centre.

The integrated program also draws in 2 groups of target users: the lower income groups who visit the place for welfare services and the common local community who seek for recreational and leisure social pursuit. The difference of needs and social class of these 2 target groups will require additional consideration in the design of spatial and physical configuration to facilitate the intergroup interactions. As such, the thesis will draw relations from the needs of community centre and charity welfare program for community development, the design principles for intergroup relations to the architectural design strategies for the new building typology.

1.5 Thesis Aim and Objectives

The thesis aims to explore the integration of charity welfare into the design of a community centre for community development. Henceforth, the research highlights the following objective:

(a) To identify the problem and needs of community centre and charity welfare program for community development
(b) To review design principles for intergroup relations
(c) To establish architectural design approaches for community development and intergroup relations in community and welfare centre

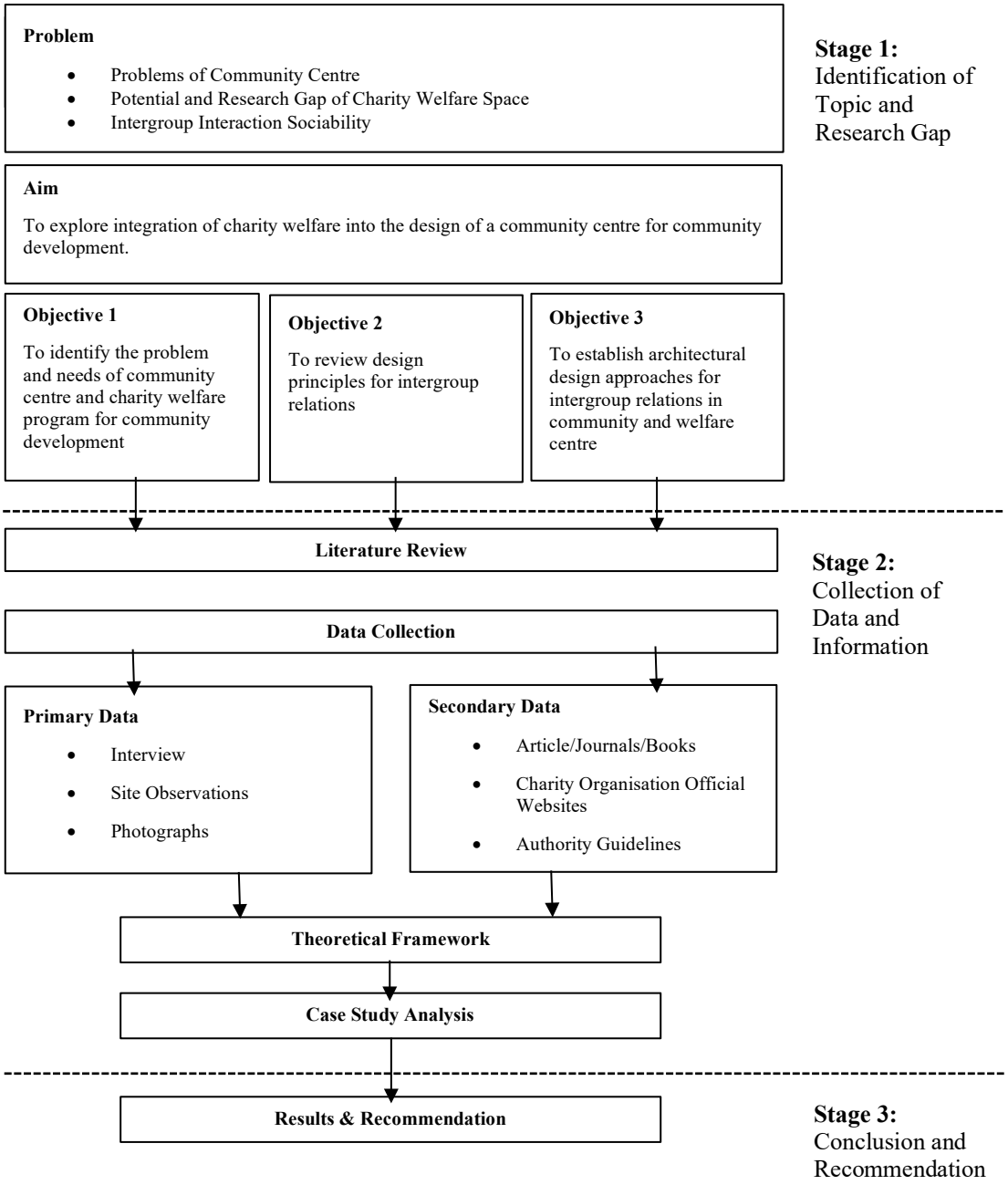
1.6 Research Methodology

The research uses qualitative approach for exploratory discussion. Firstly, empirical searches and literature review are adopted to develop a theoretical framework from the problem and needs of community centre, charity welfare program and design principles for intergroup relations. Next, case studies for community centre and welfare centre are analysed, compared, and discussed to establish a set of reliable design approaches for the new building typology.

1.7 Thesis Framework

Figure 1.1 shows the thesis framework which progresses from identification of topic and research gap to collection of data and information, and finally to conclusion and recommendations.

Figure 1.1 Thesis Framework



1.8 Research Significance

This thesis provides insight for the incorporation of charity welfare program into community centre in Malaysia context. The research's finding also contributes to a better understanding of architectural design for intergroup community development in community centre. It fills in the gap for the absence of study on welfare spaces and the actualisation of the intangible social integration strategies into tangible architectural design approach.

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