

PUBLIC SPACES AND SOCIAL URBAN INTERACTION
A CASE STUDY IN JOHOR BAHRU, MALAYSIA

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DEDICATION

To my father, mother, sisters and brother for their enormous
financial and emotional supports

Dr.Sharifah
who always give me supports and encouragements,

All my fellow friends.

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IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, MOST GRACIOUS, MOST COMPASSIONATE

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“Wise father, mother, sweet sister and brother”

Thank you for your perpetual encouragement and support. Your unwavering love that have shaped my mind and opened the doors of opportunity leading me to become the person I am today.

I would like to thank all of the individuals who have helped me during my thesis study.

ABSTRACT

The different usage of public places in urban areas is the focus of this study. It concentrates on the use of public places in Wong Ah Fook located in Johor Bahru city centre. The study is going to examine the way that different people utilize public places and to examine how social interactions vary by age, gender or place. Moreover, this study investigates on the physical qualities of public places in the case study. The consideration of findings is on their relation of policies due contested and shared places, safety and security, interactional relationships, and the managing of public places. Regarding the aim of this study, two methods approaches which consist of questionnaire and observation approaches is undertaken. Therefore, eight types of existing public places that considered representative of the public places of the case study as whole is carried out. In addition, due data analysis, this study investigates on SPSS software and snapshots about public activities on study area for analyzing the data of questionnaire and observation respectively. As result, most well-known and active public places from the most to least are identified. Moreover, lack of facilities and elements due decreasing interactional tasks and factors which encourage people visiting each chosen public places are revealed. In addition, the duration of visiting public places and the favorable times for users to visit public places are investigated.

ABSTRAK

Penggunaan yang berbeza di tempat-tempat awam (public places) di kawasan bandar adalah fokus kajian ini. Kajian dijalankan mengenai penggunaan tempat-tempat awam di Jalan Wong Ah Fook yang terletak di pusat bandar Johor Bahru. Kajian ini akan meneliti cara-cara manusia yang berbeza-beza menggunakan tempat-tempat awam dan juga memeriksa bagaimana interaksi sosial diantara mereka berbeza mengikut umur, jantina atau tempat. Selain itu, kajian ini dibuat ke atas sifat-sifat fizikal tempat-tempat awam kajian kes. Hasil kajian akhir akan ditumpukan berdasarkan hubungan diantara keselamatan, interaksi sesama manusia, dan pengurusan tempat-tempat awam. Kajian ini menjalankan dua kaedah pendekatan yang terdiri daripada soal selidik dan pemerhatian pendekatan. Oleh itu, lapan jenis tempat-tempat awam yang sedia ada dijadikan kajian kes bagi keseluruhan projek ini. Di samping itu, analisis data, kajian ini menggunakan perisian SPSS dan gambar-gambar mengenai aktiviti awam di kawasan kajian digunakan untuk analisa bersama data soal selidik dan pemerhatian lapangan. Hasilnya, tempat-tempat awam aktif yang paling baik dan dari yang paling kurang baik dikenal pasti. Selain itu, kekurangan kemudahan dan unsur-unsur yang disebabkan mengurangkan interaksi dan faktor-faktor yang menggalakkan orang melawat setiap tempat awam yang dipilih akan dirumuskan. Di samping itu, frekuensi penggunaan dan ketentuan masa yang baik bagi lawatan ke tempat-tempat awam oleh pengguna juga diambilkira didalam kajian ini.

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Chapter1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The importance of public spaces as a significant part of the cities' elements in Malaysia would be the focus of this study and the evaluation of factors related to human activities in the public spaces is the main concern of it. These factors are considered based on their nature, location, participants and scenario of human activities such as their occurrences regarding to time, day, and in the weekends.

1.2 background of the study

Nowadays according to the report of the Jamejam newspaper (2010), open spaces are places where old adults frequently spend their free time. This is while there is the presence of many children and youths in such places that plays games or simply lingers there. The presence of people in the place is a good opportunity for casual interaction among them which will lead to mutual benefits for both generations.

In addition, the activities in public spaces with many characteristics and aspects that occur in such places are desirable and that could be the place for people to meet

and enjoy themselves. Creating those activities in the public spaces can provide an environment for users to contribute as self activity or third party activity (those activities that do not belong or is not initiated by person). For example, places that users can have social and commercial activity streets such as meeting are a significant part of everyday life. People rely on them for such daily activities such as traveling, shopping and interaction with friends and relatives.

Besides, Layne (2009) states that well designed urban public outdoor places can be valuable in providing safe and healing environments for social interactive activities between people. Forming the core of social life and community wellbeing, public open spaces can provide a wealth of new and challenging venues for improving interpersonal relationships between different age groups.

Furthermore, pedestrian traffic and activities is the key to create lively and safe public space. There are six types of traffic when arrival to the public spaces in different contribution happens: by bus, people arrive on foot, by train or tram, by car or on bicycle. Therefore, everyone is a pedestrian who is leaving his or her transport's mode behind and enter to the public space experiencing the surroundings at eye level. In addition, cycling, walking and limited vehicular traffic concern as good type of traffic in the public space. Moreover, the distribution of public spaces' traffic depends of the quality of them. Therefore, the public spaces with dominated vehicular traffic are not lively and cannot be exciting for users. Thus, people excitement for walking in public spaces and attractive activities will be the result of good quality of public spaces for pedestrians. The characteristic of the public spaces with the high quality is always demonstrated by the daily businesses or users who interrupting their walk that enables them to enjoy the city, rest, and have communication with others. According to Roulledge, 2009, Good condition for walking and for life on foot, along with a possibility for staying for pauses and experiences are the key to attractive and lively public spaces.

Now the questions are whether the public open spaces, specifically in this research, are good venues for casual interactions between people there? What could be the probable reasons of public spaces' failure or success in promoting and encouraging or declining and discouraging the interaction among users? Dose built environment play a role on the interaction?

Questions about the probable role of the built environment on peoples' behavior have been repeated several times by researchers in the field of built environment, behavior and design. Yet there is not a clear answer to reject or accept the role of built environment on people's behavior. Therefore in most cases, design or environment and behavior research studies emerge from a question relating to the physical environment and how people feel, see, understand, or interact with that environment (Zeisel, 1981, cited in Layne 2009).

Hence, it is investigated in this study how built environment affect or influence interaction among users as well as similarities and differences between their perceptions, preferences and needs of public open spaces to find their interactive needs and mutual preferred urban spaces.

This is also worthy of note that there is limited knowledge about the probable role of the built environment in supporting interaction in developing countries. In an effort to fill this gap, this study investigates users perception and preferences of open spaces which support their social needs simultaneously in the developing city of Johor Bahru located in Malaysia.

On the other hand, the public space must be attractive and it can be designed to meet the different needs of different groups. In this case, Routledge, 2009 argued that if the public spaces are very attractive one can, on a day with nice weather, expect the group of public space visitors to make up the majority of people in the public space.

Moreover, Neil, 2002, highlighted that Public place can have many forms and functions, and can be categorized into a hierarchy of open space including (neighborhood), district, regional and icon open spaces. Within the suburban setting, open space is often found in the form of local or neighborhood parks that provide for regular local use with infrastructure such as children's play equipment, informal ball kicking space and public tables and benches.

The best public spaces are often having node of activity complemented by areas for rest and people watching. The case study for this project will be on the public spaces in Jalan Wong Ah Fook. With some seating allow for natural surveillance and create environment one that a person can enjoy. There is some informal activity

along these spaces specially in Jalan Wong Ah Fook and Jalan Ungku Puan make the area vibrant during day time and allow for natural surveillance and increase the feeling of safety and security. The area also has some open spaces usually used as car park, have potential to add extra informal activity in these area especially in Jalan Wong Ah Fook (Abeeb, 2009).

The reasons for users to hesitate for visiting places are as follow:

1. Places will lose their interesting by taking the simple activities such as eating, walking and eating to the public buildings, parks and restaurants.
2. The inappropriate facilities for disable users such as people with wheelchair reduce the quality of public spaces.
3. Lack of sufficient protection from adverse weather effects such as lack of proper drainage system or shades decrease the public spaces' quality.

1.3 problem statement

Public spaces should be designed in the way to reach human leisure with comfortable sit-outs, shading and well-design walkways for pedestrians to provide an attractive space and sense of invitation for users. Unfortunately, some public spaces in Johor Bahru do not present a sense of inviting to attract people for sitting and rest due to congestion even on the pedestrian walkways, lack of proper sit-outs, pollution and absence of well-landscape open space and street lights. Thus, this study aimed to figure out the reasons for inactivity of some streets and public spaces in Wong Ah Fook to improve its quality by providing recommendations due public interaction there.

1.4 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to provide an appropriate theory of public spaces in Johor Bahro' city and provide recommendations to boost the public interaction there.

1.5 Research Questions

The main questions for this study are as follow:

1. What kind of activities of public spaces in Jalan Wang Ah Fook are the most significant activities for users?
2. Which places of the case study are involved of those activities?
3. How is the quality of those public spaces consisting physical activities in the case study?

1.6 Objectives of the Study Area

The objectives for this research are as follow:

1. To explore the significant places in the study area.
2. To investigate the places that public activities occur there.
3. To estimate the quality of public spaces in the case study.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study will focus on the behavioral patter of users in the public spaces. In addition, the main focus of the study is on the participants and their culture and their schedule of the activities in study area.

1.8 Research Methodology

This part explains the outline of the research methods and procedures for this study. The research methodology helps to obtain information and appropriate contents of every chapter. The research is dealing with the quality of activities and users' interaction issues relating to the study area. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative methods are employed by using 50 participants as study subjects. The research adopted three techniques to gather both qualitative and quantitative data: [1]. Questionnaire survey, [2]. interview, [3]. Observation. Analysis of data will be done using SPSS software and the qualitative analysis. An outline of the research methodology is shown in figure 1.1

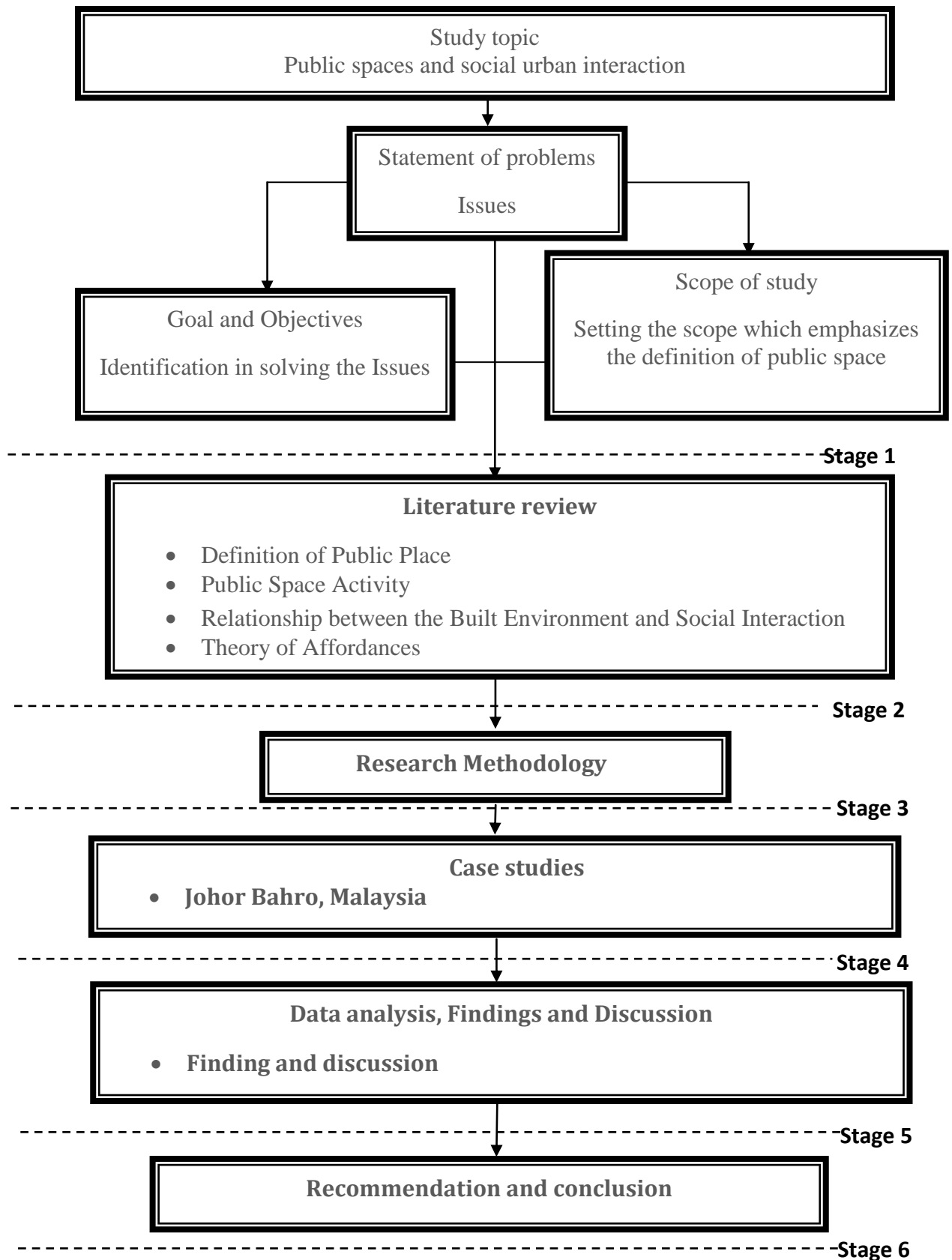


Figure 1.1: Flowchart of Research Methodology

1.8.1 Research Instrument

This research employs a combination questionnaire survey using, interview and mapping data for this study will be collected through distribution of questionnaires to the people who come to public space in this city every day or in the weekend. The questionnaire will divide to three sections: the first section will be background information such as the gender. The second and third section will be based on the objectives of the study. On the other hand, the qualitative instrument that utilized in this study is interview and observation. The rationale behind using these two methods are first reason is to triangulate and confirm the data that will obtain from the questionnaire. The second rational is to gain much information about the activity of open spaces in the city and what is good activity for public space. In terms of interview, a total of 10 participants will be selected randomly from the sample size in order to attend the interview sessions. English language will be the medium of interaction with the participants. However, the third instrument is the observation. The researcher will observe the area of the study in order to gain more information about the behaviors of the pedestrians in the study area and the activities in the public space.

1.8.2 Data analysis

The analysis of the data will be mainly using quantitative analysis. The data of this research entered by the computer by applying the statistical package for social science (SPSS) software. The analysis of the data will be based on the descriptive statistics, person correlation. In order to fulfill the objectives of the study all these statistical items will be applied. The descriptive analysis will analyze the frequency of the public space activity in the city and what is the role of activity of open space in the city. A correlation analysis between the public space and informal activity, the frequency and type of public spaces can be shown as human behavior in the study area. The qualitative data that obtained from interview and the observation will be analyzed manually and categorized based on the objectives of the study.

1.9 Significant of the Study

The significant of this study is to understand which open spaces, and why, are supportive of interactional studies among users, intend to inform urban designers and educate public space program developers about urban open space considerations that could help or hinder relationship development between the people. In addition, it highlights guidelines and recommendations as well as suggesting development options, strategies and criterion for successful activities in open spaces located in study area. This is carried out by analyzing problems and weaknesses of current activities in the public space. At the same time, the study identifies improvement factors that may influence the activity in the public space. These development guidelines and recommendations will act as a tool in designing feature public space for the environment and to improve the existing activity in the open space network to suit the better needs for users.

1.10 Structure Of Report

1.10.1 Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter generally introduces the background of the study topic. It states the problem and issues that lead to the study. This chapter also includes the scope of the study, goal and objectives. An outline of the study and organization of study methodology are also presented in this chapter.

1.10.2 Chapter Two: Literature Review

Literature review will present the suitable study approaches and information. It includes historic background, physical characteristic, guidelines for public spaces.

1.10.3 Chapter Three: research methodology

This chapter clarifies research method employed in doing this thesis that includes data collection and analysis techniques.

1.10.4 Chapter Four: Case Study

This stage is an introduction to the case study, the existing public spaces in Johor Bahru. This includes the historical development of the study area.

1.10.5 Chapter Five: Analysis, Findings and Discussion

This chapter analyzes the factors and reasons associated with existing activities and the quality of public spaces in the study area.

1.10.6 Chapter six: Conclusion and Recommendation

This chapter is as final chapter that summarizes the main findings of the research as well as highlights the contributions of this research. Finally, this chapter also makes suggestions for further research into this area and general conclusion to the research.

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