

**Evaluation of Criteria of successful Urban Public Space Environment,
According to Young People and Professionals from Built Environment**

SABER MOHAMMED SALEH AFROOZ

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DEDICATION

To my beloved mother and father

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In The Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

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ABSTRACT

Public places in modern urban areas play an undeniable role in enhancing the quality of life within cities. Like any other urban space, public places need to be carefully planned and designed to perform their task as a venue for social interactions in cities. Consequently, for a space to present itself in a unique manner, it needs special setting and feature. Therefore, Questions are raised as for the criteria of successful public space's environment. This study examines the features, which creates the environment of a space and influence human behavior within it, through categorizing the features into physical feature such as edge, size, landscape, and non-physical such as sound, smell and illumination. The categories are structured to form a three level hierarchical model, which comprised of features, criteria, and sub-criteria. The model is an outcome of literature review and current guidelines analysis. Furthermore, to identify the values of these criteria and their sub-criteria, a ranking questionnaire was developed and distributed over two groups of respondent – professionals and young people. The respondents are assumed to share the same aim of having functional public space within their urban environment. The result of the responses showed that professionals and young people have evaluated the criteria in different manner; although there was similarity in their thoughts. Nevertheless, the study found that, some of the important criteria according to the respondents were not addressed in the current guideline. Hence, this study recommends some additional guidelines regarding the non-physical criteria of spaces, such as sound, smell and illumination in public place, for the current documents to include.

ABSTRAK

Tidak dinafikan tempat awam di kawasan bandar yang pesat memainkan peranan yang penting dalam meningkatkan kualiti hidup masyarakat bandar. Tiada perbezaan antara tempat awam dan ruang bandar yang lain, tempat awam juga memerlukan perancangan pembangunan yang teliti dan rekabentuk yang mampu berfungsi dengan berkesan untuk menjadi ruang interaksi sosial masyarakat bandar. Bagi mewujudkan ruang awam yang berfungsi dengan baik, ia memerlukan penetapan rekabentuk yang unik dan ciri-ciri khas yang berkesan. Kajian ini meneliti ciri-ciri tersebut dengan mengkaji ciri-ciri dalam rekabentuk ruang persekitaran dan menghubungkannya dengan pengaruh tingkahlaku manusia. Pengaruh tingkahlaku dikategorikan kepada tingkahlaku manusia secara fizikal dan bukan fizikal. Bagi menghasilkan model hierarki tiga peringkat, model mengkategorikan kriteria pada setiap ciri rekabentuk yang dipecahkan kepada sub-kriteria untuk setiap kriteria yang dihasilkan. Model ini merujuk kepada hasil soal selidik dan analisis mengikut konteks garis panduan semasa. Matlamat model adalah untuk menjadi model rujukan kriteria dan sub-kriteria terbaik dalam perancangan rekabentuk tempat awam.

Untuk mengetahui keberkesanan kriteria dan sub-kriteria ini, borang soal selidik digunakan dan diedarkan kepada dua kumpulan responden; professional dangolongan muda yang mempunyai matlamat yang sama iaitu untuk berada di persekitaran bandar yang menyediakan tempat awam yang mampu memberi fungsi yang berkesan. Keputusan daripada soal selidik yang dijalankan menunjukkan tidak terdapat perbezaan ketara dalam keutamaan kriteria dan sub-kriteria. Walau bagaimanapun, terdapat kriteria-kriteria penting yang telah dipilih responden yang masih tidak terdapat dalam garis panduan semasa. Kajian ini diakhiri dengan mencadangkan beberapa garis panduan baru yang perlu ditambah dalam garis panduan semasa rekabentuk tempat awam.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In their effort towards enhancing the overall quality of life within urban areas, professionals from built environment fields, have taken a wrong turn somewhere in the late 60s. That turn, shifted cities from being a place where people interact, socialize and perform their day to day activity, to becoming a place for cars and automobiles. While presenting his book "*Cities for People*" Jan Gehl (2010) termed this movement and approach in planning and urban designing as a "making cars happy" movement. The movement which considered public spaces, pedestrianism and the role of city spaces as meeting places for urban dwellers as a low priority aspect (Gehl, 2010).

To overcome this issue, all those who are involved in built environment fields started to reconsider their strategies in cities and urban areas planning, aiming to enhance peoples' interaction and socialization within urban spaces. Planners as the first line of defense against the motorized cities issues, started to rezone cities, provide better and more flexible means of transportation and dedicate more spaces and areas within cities for social interactions. Cities such as Barcelona, Lyon, Copenhagen, Melbourne and many other cities were among those fought back for their social values (Gehl & Gemzoe, 2003). In other words professional from built environment tried to make more social responsible decisions.

But the dilemma accrued when planners did not perform their task as they should. Moreover, the deeply rooted relationship between human behavior and their surrounding environment, and the effect physical and embodied features of an environment have on people's perception of a place been neglected (Sangar, 2007). This resulted in spaces allocated for social means, which fulfill neither people expectations, nor their needs.

Generally, when people experience a place for the first time, their traditional senses - sight, hearing, smell and touch- and the other senses - time, motion and feeling- create their first impression of a place, either by feeling of belonging and appreciation or by disparagement, disregard and ignorance. Consequently, people's first impression a place, affects the degree of participating they are willing to give, in the social activity in within the space (Hiss, 1990).

Mainly, social interactions occurs at presence of others in public spaces (Gehl, 1987), no matter what the spaces are originally planned for. For instance people interaction on sidewalks is a sort of unplanned social activity in a public place. However, this study targets the kind of public spaces that been allocated to form as gathering area, where people socialize, interact and get to know each other. In short, the scope of public spaces in this study has been limited to cover only spaces which are planned and designed to serve as a place for gathering, meeting and socializing. This study aims to examine features which shape these spaces, in order to come up with recommendations on how better places can be planned and designed.

Furthermore, this study will concentrate on the view of two essential groups of people in society. Firstly, professionals in build environment field, due to their role in influencing the urban public spaces' environment. Secondly, young people, who are one of the most essential social groups in modern urban societies and the drive of social interaction in urban public spaces, which they consider as a venue for expressing their thought, practicing democracy and increasing their social circle (Delaney et. al., 2002).

1.2 Problem of Public Space Zoning and their Quality

Professionals from the built environment fields often advocate that, policies and guidelines on how public spaces should be formed, and at what quality are not enough. As an example, regulations in Malaysia require 10% of land of every new development to be green space, but there is no stipulation on its quality. So, spaces often have been left as bare green open areas, without any special features or design (Saifulhazly Hamid, 2011). Despite the fact that people are the most essential and the most important users of the built environment, such lack of regulation and planning guideline affects the quality of public spaces, which in turn affect the quality of social life in the whole urban environment.

On the other hand, in every day experience of cities, there are always those well designed and planned places with high quality physical features, but when it comes to their functionality and effectiveness these places can easily be termed as “Functionally Dead Spaces”, where youngster avoid going to because they don’t live up to their expectations, match their desire and fulfill their needs. Figure 1.1 shows a public space in the Central Business District (CBD) of Dubai that is empty most of the time due to the lack of effective accessibility from the surrounding.



A. Functionality During Day.



B. functionality During Night.

Figure 1.1: Functionally-Dead Public Space in Dubai, During Day and Night.

Photo By: Dawood Afroz, 2012.

The current scenario is, lots of money and time are spent on providing good design, with modern feature and element. Moreover, some designs are irrelevant to the cultural context. Guidelines should be provided by planners to avoid such designs, and to direct designers to provide the kind of public environment that motivates positive behavior and social interaction among cities' young citizens. Therefore, carrying planning and designs process without guidelines and limitation on how spaces should be shaped are unacceptable and pointless. Moreover, the issue is that, how these guidelines should be writing? In order To insure their successfulness in meeting young people needs.

1.3 Research Questions

This study is aiming to underline the importance of considering the aspects on environmental behavior, while planning and designing public spaces. This study is constructed around a central thought that some guidelines regarding physical and non-physical element of a space, provided by planners and decision makers can affect the effectiveness of that space. This leads to the main question in this research, which is:

“How public space planning and designing guidelines can enhance the social interaction in favor of young people expectation and needs?”

In order to answer this question, the study explores the following questions:

- i. How public areas are categorized and which category contributes more to the social life in cities? This will be examined in chapter 2 through literature review.
- ii. What are the main key criteria of public space environment according to literature and current guidelines? And how to organize them in a multi-

hierarchical model? This will be examined in chapter 3 through literature review and case studies.

- iii. How differently young people and professional review and evaluate these criteria? This will be examining through questionnaire distributed to respondent who represent the two groups.
- iv. How the criteria sub-criteria can be adopted in planning and design guidelines based on their priorities? This will be determined through analysis of collected data.
- v. How existing guidelines can be improved to achieve better environment for interaction within public spaces? This will be elaborated through recommendation of further guidelines and polices to be manipulated in the existing guidelines.

1.4 Purpose and Objective of the Study

The aim of this research is to achieve a meaningful and practical understanding on how better and more functional public spaces can be planed, designed and used.

The specific research objectives of this study are:

- i. To identify different categories of Public spaces and their contribution to the social life in cities. And determine the social value of the category this study is targeting e.g. Plaza, Piazza and Maydan. (literature review)

- ii. To investigate the key criteria that influences the successfulness of a public space. (literature review)
- iii. To investigate the difference between professionals and young peoples' priority on criteria of successful public spaces, through a formulation of multi-criteria hierarchical model. (Questionnaire)
- iv. To integrate the important criteria and sub criteria in the existing guidelines in order to enhance their effectiveness. (finding and result)

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to question Universiti Teknologi Malaysia students, who are considered as representative of the young people in the society. The study was conducted in the university library, which forms as venue where students from different academics background gatherer and communicate. Furthermore, the data were collected in November, 2012. However, since UTM is one of the major educational institutions in Malaysia, with students from varies backgrounds, culture and age range, this research has a potential of being a part of reward in the future. On the other hand the students or “young people” view regarding physical and non-physical aspects of a public space was compared to the ones of professionals from built environment field.

Research areas such as social carrying capacity, defensible spaces, crowdedness in public spaces and personal space are capable of forming a separate research project, but at the same time they have great contribution to this topic, so a slight reference to these fields will be given when needed.

Other limitations were presented as the research was going on; in order to minimize the scope of the topic, and the narrow the angel which the public space

were viewed from. One kind of limitation was on type of spaces this study is targeting and aiming to enhance their quality. Which were limited to spaces that been purposely planned and designed to form as social interactions arena – Plaza, Piazza and Mayadin.

1.6 Significance of the Study

In their way back to the right track of enhancing the quality of life in urban spaces, planners need to reconsider their priorities in public spaces' planning. This study serves planners and professionals in built environment to get better understanding of young people needs, which will help in providing this sizable social group, with kind of public places that reach their expectation.

Urban planner and designer, strategic planners, policy makers, architects, developers, local government, social workers and psychologists will find this topic informative and related to their fields in a way or another.

In order to get the most comprehensive list of different tangible and intangible criteria, and integrate them in a holistic approach, criteria and sub criteria defined in this research was extracted from content analysis of literature works and existing guidelines regarding public spaces. These criteria were analyzed through merging point of view of two different groups, namely professionals and young people.

Last but not least, the hierarchical model presented in this study can have several potential uses. That range from being used as measurement of public spaces' quality, to forming the foundation for government's guidelines and policies regarding public spaces.

1.7 Research Methodology

According to French Philosopher August Comte, the best way to understand human behavior is through Observation and reasoning (Dash, 2005), so the content analysis of literatures and guidelines will be supported by observation from day to day life. The observation of human behavior in relation to their surroundings, or as it been termed the “positivism paradigm” of researching (Macdonald et al., 2002), is the core method in selecting criteria that effect public space planning and design.

Then the research applies a quantitative method to analyze the criteria and their sub criteria. A ranking questionnaire is distributed on two groups of people namely professionals and young people, then their ranking were analyzed by multi-criteria analysis software (Expert Choice) to come up with their final priority on the criteria. Among the methods used in the analysis were cross tabulation, pairwise comparison and scatter plot.

More detail regarding research methodology, sampling and analysis will be elaborated in chapter 4.

1.8 Organization of the Research

This study is divided to 6 chapters, each of these chapters will cover an aspect of the study; the deviation is as follow:

Chapter 1

Contains an introduction to the study and its scope, this chapter also introduces the research questions and the objectives behind them, followed by the method which the research has conducted.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 is the earlier part on the literature review; it give a brief background on how quality of lives in cities were lost then discuss the definition of public space, its categories and their contribution to the social life in cities. This chapter will also discuss the relation between quality of life and the social aspects in cities aiming to show the significant of this study.

Chapter 3

This chapter is the second part of literature review; it will focus of environmental behavior, physical and non-physical criteria of public areas and their sub-criteria. Literature and existing guidelines were analyzed to be the source of the criteria and sub criteria selection.

Chapter 4

Chapter four presents research structure and methodology; it also contains the tools and research methods used in data processing in this study. Within this chapter a model created using the Expert Choice software will be presented and introduced as a main data analysis method.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 elaborates the data analysis and the findings. This chapter will try to support the finding of the analysis with related literature and research works. The main aim of this chapter is categorizing the criteria and sub criteria and ranking them based on their importance to by respondent group.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 sums up the research findings, proposes some recommendations regarding the current public space guidelines, and also presents some potential uses of the outcomes of the study in future research works.

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