

THE ROLE OF NIGHT MARKETS ON URBAN QUALITY, IDENTITY AND IMAGE;
CASE STUDY: BAZAR JB NIGHT MARKET, JOHOR BAHRU CITY CENTRE

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of Master
of Science (Urban Design)

Faculty of Built Environment
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FEBRUARY 2013

Dedicated to Optimism and Perseverance...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, my thanks and gratitudes go to my supervisor, Professor Idid for all what I learned from him during the Master of Urban Design program, and throughout the course of this thesis; thank you for the opportunities that you gave me which helped me see differently and think differently. Besides, I would like to express my special appreciations to Dr. Tareef for his selfless help and valuable advises. My thanks and gratitude's also go to all the lecturers in this program, from whom I have learned a lot. I also would like to take this opportunity to express my love and deepest gratitude to my family, my parents and my brother, for their endless love, understanding and support through the duration of my studies. I never could have done this without the help of you. A very special appreciation goes to Din for all the times that was there for me and walked beside me in the times that I need it; I cant say how much your help, support and encouragemnets means to me. Finally I would like to thank all my friends and those who have willingly helped me out with this research.

ABSTRACT

Rapid development of new shopping centres and changes in the traditional retail and commercial activities in recent years has led to a loss of identity and 'placelessness' and hence the decline of public life in city centres. Besides offering a wide range of economic, social and cultural activities, night markets in Malaysia, contribute to the vitality and complexity of urban public places. It also regenerate the traditional identity and unique characteristics of the informal trading environment and street culture. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role and effect of 'Bazar JB' night market on urban quality, identity and image in the multicultural and historical context of Johor Bahru Central Business District. In order to achieve this aim, a combination of theoretical study and case study was used. The data needed are collected through site inventory and observation. Questionnaire survey was conducted through face to face interview to investigate the main physical and social attributes of the case study as well as visitor perceptions, evaluations and expectations of the features and attributes of this night market. Findings from theoretical study define the relationship between activities, physical setting and interrelated features between informal activities and the night market environment. These features have also shaped a specific identity for night markets as a unique socio-cultural trading centre in Malaysia throughout the years. Case study findings revealed the role of Bazar JB in the revitalization of Johor Bahru city centre and in enhancing the quality of public life in the declining public realm of this historical part of the city. It also provides a better understanding of visitors' values, needs and expectations, and identifying general and specific attributes of this night market. Informal activities as well as atmosphere and ambience are identified as significant elements of this night market that shape a unique identity and provide symbolic meaning and a distinctive image for the city centre nightlife.

ABSTRAK

Pembangunan pusat beli-belah yang pesat serta perubahan terhadap aktiviti jual beli tradisional yang berlaku pada masa kini telah menjurus ke arah kehilangan identiti, nilai setempat serta kemerosotan nilai kehidupan awam (public life) di kawasan pusat bandar. Selain mewujudkan kepelbagaian ekonomi, sosial dan aktiviti kebudayaan, kewujudan pasar malam di Malaysia menumbang kepada daya hidup dan kompleksiti tempat awam di bandar. Ia juga turut menjana identiti tradisional dan karektor unik suasana jual beli tidak formal dan budaya jalanan (street culture). Tujuan kajian ini adalah bagi mengenalpasti peranan dan kesan Pasar Malam Awam 'Bazar JB' terhadap kualiti, identiti dan imej bandar di dalam konteks kepelbagaian kaum dan sejarah di kawasan Pusat Perniagaan Johor Bahru. Bagi mencapai sasaran ini, gabungan diantara kajian teoritikal dan kajian kes telah dijalankan. Data dikumpul melalui kaedah inventori dan pengamatan kawasan kajian. Kajian soal selidik dijalankan melalui temubual bagi mengenalpasti ciri-ciri utama fizikal dan sosial bagi kawasan kajian serta persepsi, penilaian dan harapan pengunjung terhadap kawasan Pasar Malam Awam ini. Penemuan dari kajian teoritikal akan menentukan hubungkait diantara aktiviti, penetapan fizikal dan ciri saling kait antara aktiviti tidak formal dan suasana pasar malam. Ciri-ciri ini juga telah membentuk identiti spesifik pasar malam tersebut sebagai sebuah pusat perdagangan sosio-budaya yang unik di Malaysia sepanjang beberapa tahun yang lepas. Penemuan melalui kajian kes mendedahkan peranan Bazar JB di dalam memulihara Pusat Bandar Johor Bahru dan memperbaiki kualiti kehidupan awam ekoran kemerosotan "public realm" bagi kawasan bersejarah ini. Ia juga turut menyediakan pemahaman yang lebih terhadap nilai, keparluan dan harapan pengunjung serta mengenalpasti ciri-ciri umum dan spesifik bagi pasar malam tersebut. Aktiviti tidak formal serta suasananya adalah merupakan elemen penting bagi sesebuah pasar malam kerana ia membentuk identiti unik serta menzahirkan maksud yang simbolik dan tersendiri bagi kehidupan malam sesebuah pusat bandar.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study concentrates on the role of night markets on urban quality, identity and image. Key concerns of this study are environmental perception and generation of meaning and image through lived in experience associated with night market attributes in the urban context, and its influence on the quality of public life. The case study takes place in a night market in the Johor Bahru Central Business District, popularly known as 'Bazar JB'. An overview on the background of study and issues, goals and objectives of the survey, scope of study and the expected results is explained further below.

1.1. Background of Study and Statement of Issue

Public spaces are the stage for different activities and public life in the cities. One type of activity centres in urban context is open-air market or street market, which allow for a wide range of economic and social informal activities, and depending on the type of activities and goods offered, may carry cultural and symbolic values also. Evening and night activities are important elements of vitality in cities. Among different types of open-air markets, night markets contribute a great deal to the public life of urban spaces in the night-time by bringing people to areas where there may not be many other attractions.

Night markets were a common phenomena in Asia for many years. Informal activities like vending and street trading create an economic and social transaction base that offers opportunities for different levels of socialization in the urban context. Moreover, the presence of crowd and ‘buzz’ associated with large groups of people increase opportunities for informal socio-cultural activities like street art performances and event gatherings.

Rapid development and drastic changes in the traditional retail and commercial activities in recent decades have lead to a decline of the public realm in the city centres public life. New modern shopping centres and malls not only offer a wider range of choices, prices and variety, but they also offer other amenities such as restaurants, cinemas and sufficient parking spaces (Goh Sce Yuan, 2011). Nevertheless, this newborn element of modern urban texture drive out local businesses and provides no unique culture, products, appearance or identity and leads to loss of identity and uniqueness of the shopping environment, as significant types of public spaces in the cities.

Night markets, or “Pasar Malam” in Bahasa Melayu, have played an important role in the public life of urban areas for many years. Beside economic and social contributions, the unique informal characteristics and festive atmosphere of the night markets regenerate the traditional identity of the informal trading environment and street culture in Malaysia.

‘Bazar JB’, which is located in Johor Bahru, the second most populated city in Malaysia, is a centre of night market activities. After recent changes in the city centre, public life in the Johor Bahru Central Business District has been effectively degraded. The establishment of informal activities at Bazar JB was an effort geared towards the economic revitalization of the city centre. Today, Bazar JB attracts many people from different parts of Johor Bahru as well as from outside its boundaries to visit, shop or simply to spend time with friends and family. Therefore, understanding the influence and contributions of this significant component of the city centre, and its economic and socio-cultural aspects including identity, image and quality of public life in urban area is crucial.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the role and effect of Bazar JB night market on urban quality, identity and image in the multicultural and historical context of Johor Bahru Commercial Business District. In order to reach this aim, the following objectives should be achieved:

- i. To identify tangible and intangible components of night market as a public place in urban context in Malaysia through understanding the relationship between activities, physical setting and perceptual aspects.
- ii. To indicate the influence of Bazar JB on the quality of public life in Johor Bahru city centre through understanding the visitor's evaluation and expectations on features and attributes of this night market.
- iii. To identify the contribution of Bazar JB night market to the city centre's identity and image by understanding the perception of its visitors.

1.3 Research Questions

Three general questions are expected to be answered in this study:

- i. What are the key components and attributes of a night market as a public place in the urban context?
- ii. How do visitors perceive and evaluate the quality of activities and physical setting of Bazar JB night market and what are their expectations?
- iii. What are the features and attributes of Bazar JB that influence perceived identity, meaning and image in the historical and commercial context of Johor Bahru city centre?

1.4. Scope of Study

In this research, both theoretical and actual studies will be conducted in order to investigate the role of night markets in urban context. Theoretical study will concentrate on established theories and concepts associated with elements of successful public places related to night markets. The main concern is informal activities as a major contributor to quality of public life, while the physical environment as the other side of man-environment relationship should not be ignored.

The perceptual dimension of urban design and people's psychological ties to the environment is the other concern of this survey. Previous studies on tangible and intangible components of place, as a centre of meaning constructed out of lived experiences, will be covered in the theoretical study in general, and related to night markets in particular.

The actual study is limited to identifying the contributions of Bazar JB night market in the context of Johor Bahru historical and commercial city centre. Significant features and components of Bazar JB which contribute to urban quality and meaning, based on theoretical studies and site observation on one hand, and the historical profile and background and the socio-cultural entity of the study area, specifically those related to informal activities, on the other hand, are matters of concern for this purpose. Findings about perceptual aspects are limited to the results of interviews with visitors in the mentioned time.

1.5 Significance of Study and Expected Results

This study is expected to answer the research questions regarding the role and effect of Bazar JB night market on the urban quality and image of Johor Bahru city centre. The results of the research are expected to define the tangible and intangible components and place making variables in the case of night market and also identify the relationship between activities and the physical setting and environment of a

night market. It is also expected that the results of this study will show how visitors evaluate and perceive different attributes and features of Bazar JB.

It is hoped that this study will help Local authority and planning departments plan future improvements to revitalize the Central Business District of Johor Bahru and enhance the quality of urban public life in the declining public realm of this historical part of city by providing a better understanding of visitors values, needs and expectations, conserving desirable features and reducing unsatisfactory elements.

1.6 Research Method

This research is conducted through a combination of theoretical and actual studies. The method of the actual survey in this research is descriptive case study. Case study method is used to examine the phenomenon experienced (Groat and Wang, 2002). Case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within a real life context (Yin’ 1994). Relph (1976) argues that while meaning of place is rooted in it’s physical settings and activities, they are not a property of them, but of ‘human intentions and experiences’; hence, the role and effect of night markets on the meaning and image of urban space can be best understood based on users experience.

The case study in this research is Bazar JB night market. Information needed to conduct the case study is collected through observation and site inventory. Moreover, people’s perception of the environment is gathered through questionnaire survey via face-to-face interview method. The information collected from primary and secondary data, together with people’s responses, will be discussed later in analysis chapter using descriptive method.

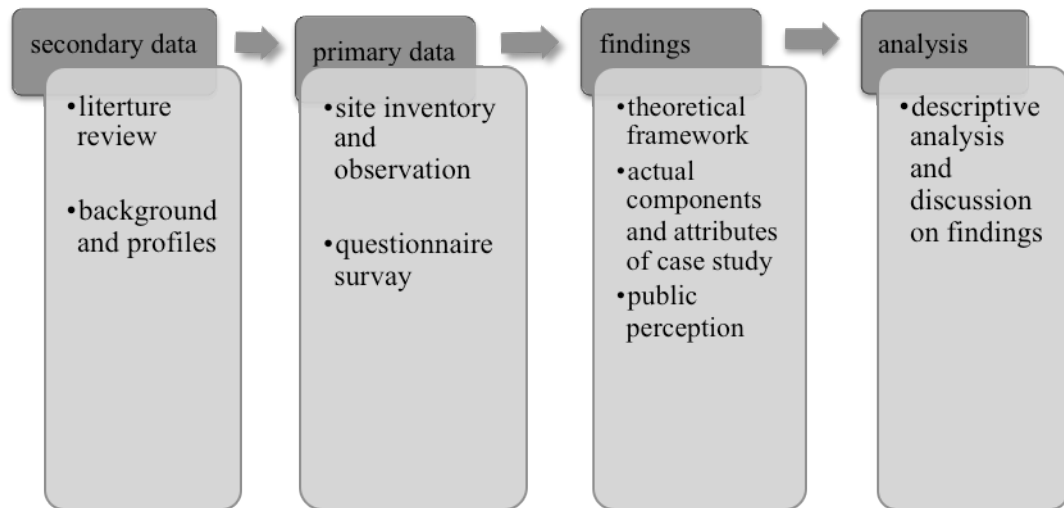


Figure 1.1: Research methodology process

Information needed is collected from both primary and secondary data. Secondary data sources such as previous studies and established theories associated with tangible and intangible components relate to the concept of place in urban design and common attributes and characteristics of night markets, specifically in Malaysia, are needed to provide information for the theoretical framework.

The other data needed in this research is specific to the case study. A profile of the study area including historical background, regional context, existing uses and socio-cultural entity has been reviewed. Sources of this information are either primary data, collected through site inventory and questionnaire survey, or secondary data such as previous studies and authority pamphlets and guidelines.

1.7 Structure of the Study

This research is conducted in three main stages. The first stage prepares the theoretical framework, the second stage provides data and information needed to conduct the study. Findings, analysis and conclusion will be presented in the last stage. This research is organized in five chapters; the overall content of each chapter is explained as follows:

a. Chapter 1

This chapter presents an overview of the research. First, a brief background of study and related issues is provided, then aims and objectives of the research are defined and the scope and limitations of the study are clarified. The expected results and significance of the study are then represented, followed by a description of the research methodology and structure of the study.

b. Chapter 2

This chapter provides the theoretical framework for the study. In the first part of this chapter, the perceptual dimension of urban design is discussed, and attributes that lead to generation of meaning and image in urban context are reviewed. Then, concept of place as a centre of meaning versus space is described, and components of place and sense of place as suggested in different studies are then reviewed to offer an inclusive definition of tangible and intangible components of places considering activities, physical setting, their relationship and the image people draw from these elements based on personal or cultural values. The second part of this chapter focuses on night market attributes in Malaysia, and presents an overview of the characteristics of informal trading activities, variety and type of goods offered and semi-static and periodic nature of night market.

c. Chapter 3

Case study methodology is described in the first part of this chapter. Then background and profile of the study area is presented. First, historical background and significant historical elements are reviewed. An inventory of the actual characteristics of the area including existing uses and activities, and the socio-cultural entity of population including different ethnics and religions and their informal activities in the area, is then studied. In addition, a review of future plans for the commercial city centre of Johor Bahru is provided. Next, informal street activities as part of urban culture in recent

years are outlined. And finally, an inventory of the formal and informal activities of Bazar JB in relation to its physical setting is provided.

d. Chapter 4

Findings from questionnaire survey are presented and analyzed in this chapter. First, visitor evaluations and expectations of Bazar JB features and attributes, including activities, physical setting, and interrelated features between activities and this night market environment are analyzed. Individual responses about intangible features and perceptual aspects including Psychological access, Receptivity, Symbolism and memory, Safety, Attractiveness and Uniqueness are then discussed. Finally, a summary of findings is provided to identify the influential attributes that Bazar JB has on the quality and image of Johor Bahru city centre.

e. Chapter 5

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overall summary of the findings and data analysis. Conclusions are drawn based on findings from the background study, site observation and questionnaire survey. Overall research outcomes reveal the place making attributes of night markets in Malaysia create a unique identity and ambience, and demonstrate the role of Bazar JB on the quality of public life and the image of Johor Bahru city centre. Suggestions are made in the end of the chapter.

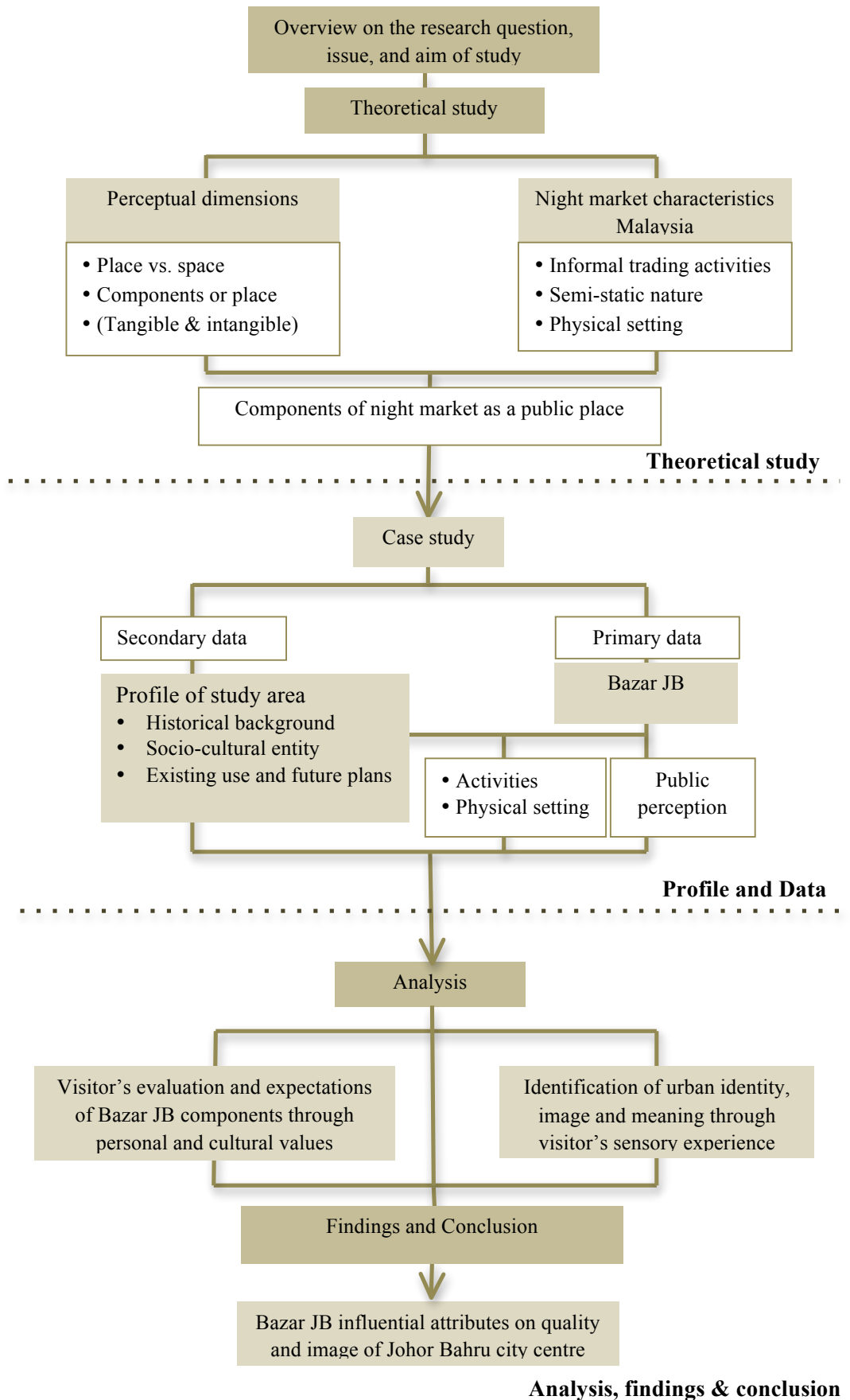


Figure 1.2 : Structure of the Study

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