

PARTICIPATORY ART
AS DRIVING FORCE FOR URBAN REGENERATION
IN BANDAR PENGGARAM

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Specially dedicated to my dearest family members who always support me with love.

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ABSTRACT

Rapid economic growth and development has caused the cultural heritage and urban character of Bandar Penggaram Batu Pahat to disappear at an alarming rate, despite increasing governmental and public concern, without effective legal policy and protection. The purpose of this study is to identify the role and methods of participatory arts that could be employed in urban regeneration to improve the social sustainability of Bandar Penggaram. The objectives of this research is to determine the role of participatory art in alleviating the social issue for urban regeneration, to investigate the methods of integration of participatory art with the existing urban context and lastly to identify the suitable building typology and programme that can utilize public participatory art to initiate the urban regeneration in Bandar Penggaram. The awareness of the local community in conserving and preserving the urban character is still very low compared to those listed in the UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as Malacca and Georgetown. Besides this, many of the locals have moved out from the old town to the residential areas nearby and left the shophouses abandoned, especially at night. This has made Bandar Penggaram a dead town after 7.00 p.m. There are no proper gathering spaces for the people in the town to carry out their social activities. Hence, it is critical to develop a suitable community-oriented use of public place for community empowerment and social interaction. In the context of the urban fabric, art and culture is one of the significant elements that help in developing public spaces. This research was conducted by using on-site observation, face-to-face interview, questionnaire survey and case studies as the main source of data collection to achieve the objectives. From the findings, four design frameworks are proposed, which is for urban planning, building architecture design, building typology and programme. To cultivate the participation of the community, the quality of the public space as place is very important. In short, the research proposed the integration of public participatory art into the urban fabric of Bandar Penggaram as the driving tool to regenerate the town. Finally, the studies and data in this research are further utilized to assist in the Design Thesis project.

ABSTRAK

Pembangunan dan pertumbuhan ekonomi yang pesat telah menyebabkan kehilangan warisan budaya Bandar Penggaram Batu Pahat kerana kekurangan dasar undang-undang yang berkesan. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti peranan & kaedah seni yang wajar digunakan dalam pembangunan semula bandar bagi meningkatkan kemampanan sosial Bandar Penggaram. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan peranan seni penyertaan bagi pengurangan isu sosial dan mengkaji kaedah integrasi seni penyertaan dengan konteks bandar yang sedia ada serta mengenalpasti jenis bangunan dan program yang sesuai dalam pembangunan semula Bandar Penggaram. Kesedaran masyarakat setempat dalam pemuliharaan dan pemeliharaan imej bandar masih rendah berbanding dengan bandar-bandar yang disenaraikan di Tapak UNESCO World Heritage seperti Melaka dan Georgetown. Selain itu, ramai penduduk tempatan telah berpindah ke kawasan perumahan berhampiran dan meninggalkan rumah kedai terbengkalai. Ini menyebabkan Bandar Penggaram menjadi sebuah “bandar mati” selepas pukul 7 malam. Tiada ruang perhimpunan yang disediakan bagi penduduk di bandar untuk menjalankan aktiviti sosial. Oleh itu, bangunan awam yang berorientasikan masyarakat harus disediakan untuk memperkasakan masyarakat dan interaksi. Dalam konteks fabrik bandar, seni budaya adalah salah satu elemen penting yang membantu dalam pembangunan ruang awam. Kajian ini dijalankan dengan menggunakan kaedah pemerhatian, temu bual, soal selidik dan kajian kes sebagai sumber utama dalam pengumpulan data untuk mencapai objektif. Dalam penemuan tersebut, tiga rangka seni bina telah dicadangkan, iaitu perancangan bandar, reka bentuk bangunan seni bina, cadangan untuk jenis dan program bangunan. Untuk mengalakkan penyertaan masyarakat, kualiti ruang awam sebagai tempat adalah sangat penting. Pendek kata, penyelidikan yang dicadangkan untuk mengintegrasikan seni penyertaan awam ke dalam fabrik bandar Bandar Penggaram sebagai salah satu strategik untuk menjana semula bandar. Akhir sekali, kajian dan data dalam kajian ini akan digunakan untuk membantu dalam projek Tesis Design.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Study

Urban regeneration is one of the most noticeable challenges faced by the old town in Malaysia. The issues arise from new socio-economic trends which are caused by several factors namely a change in demography, decentralization of people and jobs, emigration of young generation, physical degradation of urban environments and physical decay which is caused by underused of limited resources. In the past, capitalization of cultural resources as a catalyst for urban regeneration has become one of the main focuses in urban governance. Aside from the culture-driven urban regeneration that is strategized for community development, adequate strategy to engage communities and focus their collective resources to succeed the implementation of urban regeneration projects is also important.

By considering the diverse methodologies and ideas of utilizing art and culture in urban development, the main point is to determine their role and significance in the urban regeneration process. The purpose is to highlight the needs of the strategies in integrating art and culture into urban regeneration. The success of

culture-driven urban regeneration can be witnessed through the Guggenheim Museum, which injects a new life into Bilbao city.

Cultural activities can help rejuvenate social connections in many ways. Firstly, art can help to encourage community participation and create a sense of community effectively. Research suggests that the community-based arts festival is an impactful cultural intervention strategy for inducing community mobilization (Grundy & Boudreau, 2008). Culture and heritage outline an integral piece of the economic analysis of a place. The comprehension of the current heritage and culture of an area is a crucial part of a successful urban design and more for an urban regeneration project (Jain, 2017).

Art can be crucial in making quality public spaces, narrating local stories and signifying civic pride. Public art can further develop strong communities and strengthen cultural identity. It is common perception that art plays a vital part in urban design, place making and spatial activation for community benefits. The community benefits include the increase in public safety, sense of community interaction, ownership and concern for the community environment and confident level of the community which greatly enhance the passive surveillance of public facilities. Participatory art is a way to deal with art-making that involves audience directly in the production of arts which allows them to become co-authors, editors, and observers of the work. In this way, participatory art is only complete with the interaction between the observer and the creator which entangle urban governance and ordinary multiculturalism, civic participation and social attachment.

The elementary issue for community-based arts was not whether more individuals would gain from exposure to the widely recognized incredible masterpieces, yet this could be an alternative for “direct participation in living culture production” (Kelly, 1984). Art can act as a means of communication and expression that connects both artists and locals with their diverse communities. Public

participatory art can help to achieve social cohesion in the city, which is also an important aspect in regeneration efforts. Hence, this dissertation would also seek integration of public participatory art and urban spaces as common ground for communal activities.

This study acknowledges the trend of urban regeneration and hence attempts to initiate culture-driven regeneration in one of our urban fabrics by weaving the intervention of public participatory art and cultural amenities into the existing fabric. Ideally, through nurturing new cultural activities, it can convey enough vitality to the dead town thus revitalizing the conviviality of the town.

1.2 Problem Statement

Rapid economic growth and development has caused the cultural heritage and urban character of Malaysian towns to vanish at an alarming rate, regardless of increasing governmental and public concern, without effective legal policy and protection. Numerous historical cities and towns in Malaysia have experienced issues on preserving the urban character due to the demolition of historic buildings. In spite of the fact that our country has an extravagance of cultural and physical heritage, UNESCO has only recognised two of our states, Penang and Malacca as World Heritage Sites. This issue has sparked the idea to contemplate the protection and redevelopment of the urban fabric in other states of the country. Batu Pahat, hence, is proposed to be the study area (Figure 1.1), considering its urban setting is situated in the middle of a robust commercial activity area which in recent years has gradually resulted in physical defects and substantial traffics. Nowadays, Batu Pahat is suffering from decay of the quality of social living and economy, whereby these two elements are interrelated.

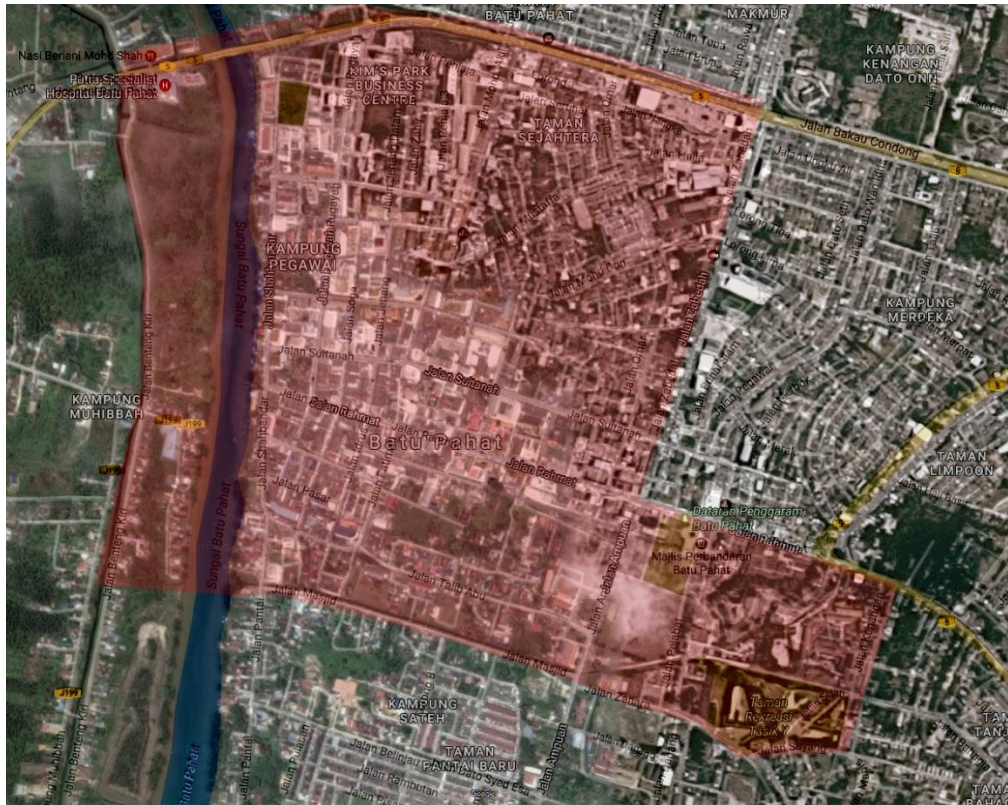


Figure 1.1: Study Area in Batu Pahat (area in red) (Source: Google Earth, 2017)

The main issues in the study area are as follows:

1. Decline in the number of population in the town

The opening of the North South Expressway caused this town to lose its role as a transit point for people travelling from the north to Johor Bahru. Young people aged between 20 and 39 are moving out from Bandar Penggaram to other bigger towns, such as Johor Bahru for better job opportunities and social life. Besides this, many of the locals moved out from the old town to the residential areas nearby and left the shophouses abandoned, especially at night. This made Bandar Penggaram a dead town after 7pm. The town has lost its vitality and is slowly becoming a dead town due to the decline in the number of population and economic contraction. Hence, it is essential to inject a new form of catalyst that would regenerate the town both socially and economically.

2. Low awareness of the local community towards conservation and preservation of cultural activities

The isolation of the town from larger settlements is often followed by poor infrastructure, uncontrolled and illegal constructions, demolitions and excavations. The lack of cultural programs and interpretation makes these sites unappealing to the public. This situation is often resulting from the appreciation of the local communities. At the community level, cultural conservation could help in creating an urban identity and pride of the community. Developing and facilitating such a platform gives credence and justification for the town to provide a distinct urban identity through cultural expressions and manifestations. In facilitating active community participation, the support of the people will make the conservation effort a success.

3. Deficiency of proper public spaces or community hub that empowers the locals and enhance the social culture

During the first site study, it was seen that there are a number of murals done by the locals within the site. However, these have been demolished by the local authorities before the second visit, which shows the non-appreciation of the local authorities towards community art. Constantly, there are still some cultural exhibitions and activities that are carried out by the NGOs in the town, but the lack of appropriate spaces in the town causes the venues to be scattered. Most of them are spaces rented from a nearly abandoned mall which is hardly noticed by others. This has reduced the appreciation of the people towards the cultural events. Beside this, there are no proper gathering spaces for the people in the town to carry out some social activities. Hence, it is critical to develop a suitable community-oriented use of public place for community empowerment and social interaction.

In the context of the urban fabric, “art and culture” is one of the significant elements that help in developing public spaces. Therefore, this study aims to resolve the above mentioned issues by constructing a framework of culture-driven urban regeneration and integrating the intervention of public participatory art which can help to improve the social culture and economy of the area.

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to identify the role & methods of participatory arts that could be employed in the urban regeneration to improve the social sustainability of Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat.

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follow:

- i. To determine the role of participatory art in alleviating social issues for urban regeneration in Bandar Penggaram
- ii. To investigate the methods of integration of participatory art with existing urban context in efforts to regenerate Bandar Penggaram
- iii. To identify a suitable building typology and programme that can utilize public participatory art to initiate the urban regeneration in Bandar Penggaram

1.5 Research Questions

The main aim for this research is to investigate how participatory arts could be employed in urban regeneration to improve the social sustainability of Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat. In respect to the research objectives mentioned above, the research questions are as follow:

- i. What are the current social issues encountered by the urban fabric of Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat?
- ii. What are the roles of participatory art in the urban regeneration of Bandar Penggaram and how it does alleviate the social issues?
- iii. How does participatory art act as a medium to regenerate Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat?
- iv. What is the suitable building typology and programme that can utilize public participatory art to initiate the urban regeneration in Bandar Penggaram?

1.6 Scope of Research

The research scope ranged from determining the role of urban regeneration in solving social issues to explore participatory art as a driving tool to revitalize the town. It restricts the scope of the research in the following aspect.

The scope of this research is bounded to the context of the town centre of Bandar Penggaram, Batu Pahat in order to obtain the accurate data of the local community needs. This research included all the community from various ethnics, culture, age group and background. The sample size is limited due to the limitation of time and observation was done in duration of one week.

1.7 Significance of Research

A number of published articles and research studies have been carried out on regenerating cultural quarters in the urban fabric. However, there is limited concise study on culture-driven regeneration that is integrated with participatory public art. This study is significant as it aims to propagate the vital roles of participatory public art in raising awareness of art and culture among the local community as well as rejuvenating the urban fabric. The outcome of this research would serve as a reference to the Design Thesis, specifically in addressing the urban fabric of Batu Pahat (see Appendix B for details). The Design Thesis, as shown in Appendix B, is to challenge the conventional way on the use of public space through participatory art and proposing a design scheme to spark the cultural activities in Batu Pahat towards a lively town.

1.8 Research Methodology

In overall, the basic research framework will be divided into four stages, which are research problem identification, data collection, analysis and findings and lastly, conclusion. The details about the chosen methodology will be further elaborated in Chapter 3. Primary data is collected through field survey, interview and questionnaires. Meanwhile, data collected through literature reviews, journal articles, reports and internet-based articles will be utilised as secondary data to support the collected primary data besides providing a direction for the data collection. This research adopts mixed methodology in order to obtain a more precise data. The data is then analysed accordingly and concluded to achieve the research objectives. The research methodology framework is thus summarised in Figure 1.2.

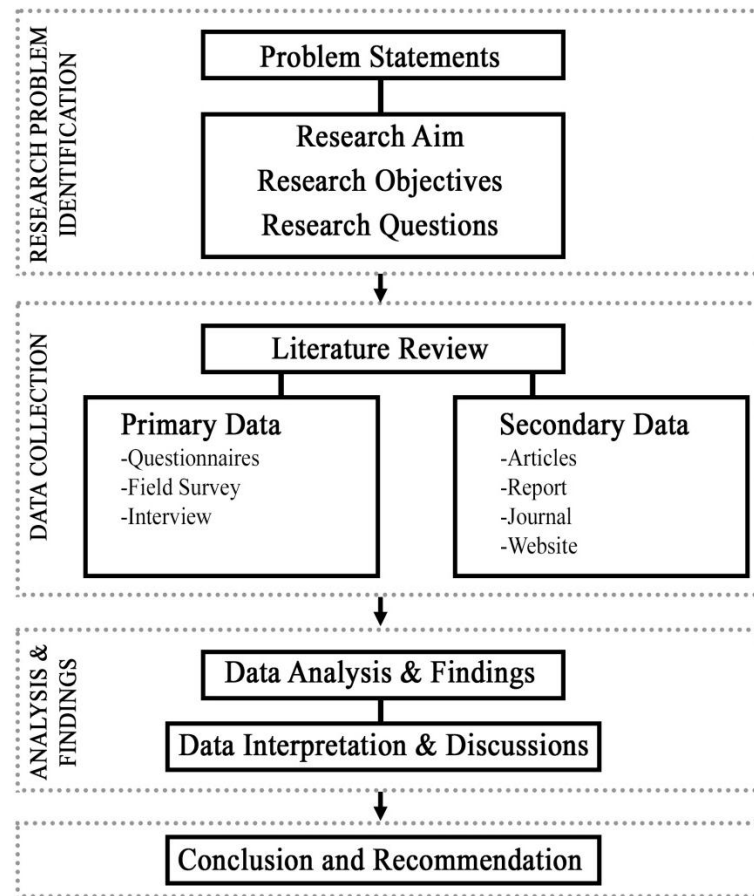


Figure 1.2: Research methodology framework

1.9 Expected Findings

Eventually after the research is being done, there will be a recommendations list that allows the collaboration between the local authority and community to come out with unified goal on regenerating a town through participatory art. The research provides comprehensive findings, discussions, and recommendations on the opportunities of open spaces around the town, the appropriate typology of urban art and cultural facilities and design framework on integration of participatory art into public building.

1.10 Structure of Dissertation

Generally, this research is subdivided into five main chapters. Chapter 1 illustrates an outline and brief introduction of the research, which consists of background study, problem statement, research aim, research objectives and research questions. The scope of research, significance of research, research methodology and expected findings are outlined in Chapter 1 as well.

Chapter 2 comprises of literature review on relevant research on participatory art and urban regeneration referring to the research objectives. The sources of literature review are secondary sources, such as journal, books, thesis, research paper and other reading materials that are able to provide fundamental information.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology used in this research and contains explanation of the choice of data collection instruments and procedures. Implementation of data collection methods is also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4 demonstrates the analysis of the primary data collected through questionnaires, interviews, observation and field survey. Presentation of primary data findings have been simplified through tables, bar charts and pie charts, together with brief discussions and explanations. The main results of the primary data are compared with references to previous research through literature review and in-depth discussions have been provided with respect to the research objectives.

Chapter 5 concludes the research and summarizes the level of achievement of research aim and objectives. Limitations of the research and recommendations for future research in the same research area are addressed in this chapter as well.

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