ORANG SELETAR ADAPTATION TO URBANISATION THROUGH HOUSING IN RELATION TO SENSE OF PLACE

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Architecture

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To God and my beloved mother.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank God for His guidance and strength throughout my whole architecture education journey. It is through architecture that I have found Him. He always open new doors and pick me up whenever I fall.

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ABSTRACT

The resettlement of the Seletar People from coastal living to houses built on land through development policies of Iskandar Region Development Authority has shifted the landscape of the Orang Seletar community settlement which forced them to adapt within the bustle of the urbanized dwellings. As the development comes closer to their villages, the community must be prepared for changes in their lifestyle. Besides that, the current housing scheme allocated to them does not reflect the identity of their community. The current approach of their living dwellings creates an atmosphere that is not conducive for living, which deters vitality of the area. A housing unit should go beyond the unit level and contribute to the macro scale development and the environment. The scope of studies for this research will focus on the concept of adaptable and flexible space, principle and characteristic on the physical environment and relationship to the development of the Orang Seletar community at Kampung Bakar Batu, Perling, Johor Bahru. The research objectives are to identify the definition of home beyond the physical boundary of the community, to verify their community attachment in relation to increasing trend of urbanisation and to outline design strategies that can be implemented which aims to improve sense of place in an urbanised Orang Seletar housing and community. Findings suggested that the community requires an informal setting of living space. There is also a need to have a transitional space between private and public spaces to create a sense of intimacy, a quality which cannot be seen or felt in their existing houses. Furthermore, there is also a need to allow the unit designs to achieve a high degree in porosity which will blur the physical boundary between indoor and outdoor and at the same time should respond to the tropical climate.
ABSTRAK

Penempatan semula daripada kehidupan maritim Orang Seletar kepada perumahan melalui dasar pembangunan ekonomi Iskandar Regional Development Authority mendorongkan penerimaan scenario urbanisasi dalam masyarakat kini. Pembangunan yang semakin pesat selain daripada skim perumahan yang tidak melambangkan identiti masyarakat orang Seletar juga mengundang komuniti Seletar untuk bersedia membuat perubahan dalam kehidupan mereka. Pendekatan terhadap isu perumahan komuniti Seletar kini yang tidak menyeluruh menyebabkan persekitaran yang tidak menggalakkan. Sebuah unit perumahan seharusnya melebihi batasan peringkat unit malah menyumbang dalam pembangunan makro dan alam sekitar. Skop penyelidikan ini akan memberi tumpuan kepada konsep penyesuaian diri dan ruang fleksibel, prinsip dan ciri-ciri persekitaran secara fizikal malahan hubungan terhadap pembangunan komuniti Orang Seletar di Kampung Bakar Batu, Perling, Johor Bahru. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti definisi ‘rumah’ orang Seletar yang melebihi maksud fizikal, mengesahkan penempatan semula komuniti Seletar seiring dengan trend urbanisasi dan juga mencatatkan strategi reka bentuk yang boleh dilaksanakan dengan tujuan peningkatan perasaan tempatan dalam urbanisasi perumahan komuniti Orang Seletar. Kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa komuniti Seletar memerlukan ruang yang tidak formal dalam perumahan mereka. Keperluan memiliki ruang penampan antara ruang awam dengan ruang peribadi untuk mewujudkan rasa keintiman yang tidak dapat dilihat atau dirasa di rumah yang sedia ada. Tambahan pula, situasi yang memerlukan reka bentuk unit yang tidak tegar secara fizikal antara dalaman dan luaran sekali gus bertindak balas dengan iklim tropika.
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Wind flow simulation with Autodesk Flow Design showing the efficient natural ventilation towards interior spaces. Diagrams show that the interior spaces are penetrated by wind effectively due to the porosity of the proposed unit designs.

Wind flow simulation with Autodesk Flow Design showing adjacent blocks receive significant exposure to distributed wind due to its permeability at the façade.

Adjacent blocks receive significant exposure to distributed wind due to its permeability at the façade.

Preliminary sketches of multidimensional communication of different housing units to create an atmosphere of living indoor and outdoor simultaneously through blurring the boundaries of horizontality and verticality.

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LIST OF GLOSSARIES

Sense of Place A combination of characteristics that makes a place special and unique. Sense of place involves the human experience in a landscape, the local knowledge and folklore. Sense of place also grows from identifying oneself in relation to a particular place. It can be categorized into six types of relationship: biographical, spiritual, ideological, narrative, commodified, and dependent (Cross, 2001).

Community Attachment Community attachment may be thought of as the extent to which residents of a place possess cognitive or affective ties to each other and to that place. It involves a higher degree of participation towards the sense of place (Cross, 2001) compared to at the individual and family level.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Looking at a housing scheme is not only about providing or relocating a family, individual or in a bigger scale; a community to living units confined within a shoe-box layout. It is beyond the walls and shelter. Somehow it should address beyond the micro-scale level. Nowadays housing schemes are addressed in a literal manner where it is only to address the rising urban needs of development without providing choices for the people to live in the type of home they would like. Designs must respect the culture of target group in addressing all the socio-environmental issues in responding to context. The quality of housing often fails to meet the ever-changing demands of users since too few suitable homes are available. The Orang Seletar are the only indigenous community in Peninsular Malaysia who lives by the sea (Ahmad et al., 2012). They used to live on boats and conduct their daily chores in the boats; unconfined by a location, thus leading a nomadic life in the mangrove swamps in the river banks (Ali, 2002). However nowadays they are resettled to the land provided by the government near to the sea or river, now threatened by rapid development to pave ways for a bigger economic model scheme. Hence the current housing scheme does not reflect the identity of their community. This research attempts to seek a comprehensive resolution to address the housing issues experienced by the Seletar community to help them adapt in the face of current urban development yet portraying characteristics of village living.
1.2 Problem Statement

Asian cities are developing rapidly, which includes Johor Bahru. As the economic corridor by IRDA is currently being implemented at the southern corridor of Johor Bahru the adjacent land use becomes financially attractive to foreign investors. Profits aside, the implementation of these policies should not overlook and marginalise the disadvantaged community. In this case the mentioned community are the Seletar People, known as Orang Laut. The resettlement of the Seletar People from coastal living to houses built on land through development policies of IRDA has shifted the landscape of the community settlement to be forced to adapt within the bustle of the urbanized dwellings. Consequently, the current housing scheme allocated to them does not reflect the identity of their community. Hence, three issues are identified and categorized into the following aspects; social, architecture and environment.

The existing neighbourhood is not taken into account as important criteria towards the social identity, which is a tangible gap that should be improved on. The existing outdoor environment does not create a vibrant atmosphere nor promotes social interaction. It does not provide them with an economic niche where their existing livelihoods are being compromised. The current approach of their living dwellings creates an atmosphere that is not conducive for living, which deters vitality of the area. A housing unit should go beyond the unit level and contribute to the macro scale development as well as the environment. Hence, a comfortable living experience can be achieved through the place-making.

Thus it is essential to investigate and study these according to layers of social levels based on the level of involvement; unit, block, cluster and neighbourhood. From these levels, a comprehensive level of understanding can be achieved in order to propose effective design strategies to weave with the social, architecture and environmental aspects.

These three criteria will influence the design decision making at later stages. Therefore research on the socio-culture and physical environment qualities of the
village are conducted. It is essential to have background understanding on the community before designing housing to relocate them especially in this case, redesigning a disoriented neighbourhood scattered with general housing units allocated by the Johor State Government to a responsive and adaptive village meant for the Seletar People, as a permanent resolution. The study looks into the three mentioned criteria, in order to achieve a sustainable community through housing and public spaces which helps adapt them in the bustle or urban development with a strong village living identity.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

The main research aim is to study on the coexistence of community (macro) and individual interaction (micro) where the Seletar People can adapt and achieve a sense of belonging through a community living which embodies their culture and identity. The research will revolve around the identification of suitable design approach on various levels of involvement from micro to macro in order to promote the sense of community living to be incorporated in the current Design Thesis project. Based on the literature review research and studies, the research questions generated and produced are:-

i) What is the definition of home for the Orang Seletar community in the face of urbanisation?

ii) What are the factors that triggered the lack of community attachment of Orang Seletar in relation to increasing trend of urbanisation? How can these factors facilitate the study on housing layouts design for better understanding of home from the perspectives of Orang Seletar?

iii) What are the aspects of social spaces in housing which can be compared between low-rise and high-rise housing community? What are the strategies that can be identified to be implemented specifically in Orang Seletar housing design?
1.4 Research Objectives

Basically, there are 3 main objectives that will be outlined and achieved:

i) To establish the definition of home beyond the physical boundary in relation to the Orang Seletar community.

ii) To verify the lack of community attachment of Orang Seletar community in relation to increasing trend of urbanisation.

iii) To establish design principles that can be implemented which aims to improve sense of place in an urbanised Orang Seletar housing and community.

1.5 Significance of Research

The Orang Seletar community has long lived by the sea because their settlement to the coastal regions from living in boat houses was partly due to the geopolitical situation. Hence there will be a much significant difference when designing for the aborigines who are geographically close to the water bodies compared to other ethnics residing in jungles. Studies have also shown those who used to live on land have managed to respond positively to relocation schemes and adapting themselves to urban dwellings. However for the Seletar community the issue of relocation and settlement is much more sensitive and there is not much effective solutions to address them effectively because it is only addressed at a preliminary stage without an in-depth understanding of what their needs are. Hence, this research is needed to gain a new perspective of understanding from another angle.

Their current housing needs should create a positive social impact in the way that they will be empowered through a place making which truly reflects their attitude and character towards the nature, and consequently their identity reflected to us through response by nature. Natural environment in housing plays a significant role in their community in this urbanization. This chapter will outline the
understanding for research paradigm in order to generate research objective for further research purposes. The research studies will be useful for students and academic instructor adopting the same strategies in understanding the Seletar people through design. Furthermore the research can be used as a guideline in the aspect of design strategies whichever relates to potential projects to be implemented.

Besides that this study will serve as a reference on designing for a unique marginalised community in the urban dwellings. The research will also trigger a more in-depth approach towards design decision making where each components of a design strategy will correlate each other. Simply put, they may overlap each other but still acceptable in the sense that these strategies help support the whole scheme in the macro level. Hence through a comprehensive understanding of the patterns based on social, architecture, and environment the design process is emphasised to be multi-directional and multi-levelled. The adaptability and livelihood of the community coexists with the issues identified. Hence, for this case the housing needs are looked into differently as compared to a general understanding of housing as merely living cells and shelters. The definition of housing as depicted by Chokor (1993) and Podger (1982) have clarified that a housing is more than a protective shell for a family, it is a starting point in the micro level for social and economic activities which linked to other similar activities in other places of the macro scale. This shows the relation of various components to create a sustainable community. In fact, studies have shown and identified that there are three major aspects to look into when considering about the adaptability and flexibility of a housing; namely social, economy and environment (Nakib, 2010). Thus, the potential of how deep this research can go into as feasible and promising as it shows.

### 1.6 Research Scope

The scope of studies for this research will focus on the concept of adaptable and flexible space, principle and characteristic on the physical environment and relationship to the development of the Seletar community at Kampung Bakar Batu, Perling, Johor Bahru. The study will seek for various design principles which will be established from various issues which will then be translated into an effective
medium to be implemented on the macro scale; the neighbourhood level where the main scenario of the community village living shall take place. Data collections are done through case studies, interviews and literature review, where it shall contribute in identifying problems and the design principles.

1.7 Structure of Dissertation

There are five main chapters continued in this dissertation as a whole. Chapter 1 elaborates on the overview of this research. It outlines the research framework which includes the problem statement, research aim and questions, research objectives, significant of research and research scope. Chapter 2 provides one of the main support to this dissertation. It contains an overview of topics of discussions which covers topics such as housing, the Orang Seletar, sense of place, community attachment, housing trend in urban area and social spaces in housing from the perspectives of Orang Seletar against the urbanised high rise community. Chapter 3 elaborates on the methodology opted for this research with primary and secondary data. Chapter 4 presents the data that are collected as well as further discussions on the findings. Lastly, the dissertation concludes with Chapter 5 with a summary of the research findings in relation to the research objectives. Various limitations and suggestions regarding this research will be outlined as well.

1.8 Summary

The research is the author's attempt to understand on the issues of housing of the Orang Seletar in a comprehensive manner as possible. The concern and limitation of the author will not limit nor suggest that the findings or research outcome is the only specific approach to address the issues of the Orang Seletar community in Kampung Bakar Batu, Perling, Johor Bahru. However, this dissertation will reveal another social perspective and contribute architecturally through fulfilment of the research objectives.
5.7 Recommendations

A further research should be conducted to validate the proposed design strategies. A prototype should be constructed to allow the facilitation of the design strategies to be implemented at the community level. The direct physical participation into the design implementation phase will further enhance and validate the design strategies based on the proposed unit layout design. Besides that, allowing the target group end users to experience the spaces will further bridge the understanding of the necessity to broaden the scope of the understanding of 'home' and verification of the presence of community attachment. The design strategies implemented on the prototypes can then be evaluated through questionnaire surveys, observations by taking videos and photographs and interviews of the users. Finally, more input of primary data can be collected to bridge the gap which may be present due to the limited expertise of the author.


