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## PLACE MAKING IN UNUSED URBAN SPACE

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Place making as a focus of urban design has started to take shape in this part of the world. The boundaries of social space are, however, more intricately woven into the customs as opposed to the physical space. Human experience as the crux of phenomenology in urban space is seen as a significant factor to enliven the urban place. The creativity of the people attempts to make use of its spatial presence for community benefits often prevalent. One of the most popular informal sector in the city that is encouraged by the government and legalized by the city council is the Night Market activities. Although the involvement of the community in informal sectors is not favoured by the municipality, however, the government policy on eradicating poverty persuades the people to participate in small scale businesses in urban areas. The activities are not only to sustain the economic well being of the people but to enliven up the urban environment. The safety and security of the urban areas are the result of the presence of the people, the linkages as well connecting the variety of activities that help to gear up the mobilization of daily "street ballet" in the urban areas. This paper attempts to explore the elements of place making in the unused urban space where sometimes this spatial significance of people's involvement are ignored. The research was conducted in various urban areas of Malaysia while one example is discussed in this paper. This paper also delve into the issue of place making that has been developed by the urbanites to sustain their livelihood and slowly these activities developed the unused urban space into a PLACE.*

**Keywords:** *place making, informal sector, urban design, urban spatial order, urban linkages.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Place and space are two components of architectural attributes commonly discussed whenever physical development arose. Space is defined according to the territorial boundary which is termed as enclosure of planes or the elements that surround it, while place is not a visual elements that can be addressed except only define according to experienced. The boundaries of social space are, however, more intricately weaved into the customs as opposed to the physical space. The customs manifest themselves into a variety of physical space - true - but its basis in social rules as opposed to a rigid physical demarcation had allowed the culture to adapt given the changing environment that the people have had to live with. Thus similar spatial structure can be found in the urban that has been developed by the urbanites. The significance of that particular place derives from the importance of its function and how well it can contribute to the surrounding (Hillier and Hanson 1984). Most commonly its functions depended on the elements of enclosure which determine the space and from here the

usage is identified but place is usually associated to the emotional bond to the environment that is attached to a person based on certain ties.

Several schools of thoughts in the discipline of urban design discussed the issue of urban space from various perspectives. Relph (1983) with a concept of Place and Placelessness, Lynch (1960) *The Image of the City*, Jacobs (1961) 'eye on the street', Shirvani (1985) 'Principles of Urban Design', Seamon (2003) 'Space and phenomenology', Trancik (1987) 'the Lost Space' to name a few who understood the complexity and the function of towns and cities in relation to the growth of the settlement together with economic development. Human experience as the crux of phenomenology in urban space is seen as one of the significant factors to make urban place alive. However, the elements of phenomenology cannot be outlined objectively to explain the case of phenomena itself. We try to understand the urban phenomena through its fabrics and the user of the urban space who dwell these areas daily. Although there are some studies carried out in this field however, these studies focused mainly on the fragmentation of the elements in urban areas, not on the integration of activities. It is understood that the diverse characteristics of the ambience, the security and the life of the urban areas are part of an integrated whole that need to be understood..

Seamons (2003) identified the characteristics of the place based on the three main bearings i.e. place as physical, social and psychological nature. It should be noted that there is no two places that are the same. The spaces in dwellings are mainly arranged according to the requirements of the occupants and the place in the surroundings consists of a collected built form within the surrounding. The image of a place is not represented by a significant landmark but by the established processes of the community in the area.

Generally, unoccupied urban space creates void and these urban voids become the path for activities, pedestrians and vehicles. However, not all the spaces can fulfill the human needs in the urban areas. The relationship between the internal space (micro) and external space (macro) need to show a continuous integration else some of these spaces will become a lost space (Trancik, 1987). Some of these lost spaces will be utilized by the urbanites according to their needs and others will be left idle. Some of these spaces exhibit a certain characteristics and are used accordingly. These spaces include plaza, streets, mews, mall, parks and unused lots. These spaces become places of interest if the quality can be improved with hardscape and softscape to integrate the internal and external spaces. Not all development can guarantee the life of the urban space without giving a serious attention to the activities so that the linkage can be understood.

## **THE ELEMENTS OF PLACE MAKING**

### **Phenomenology**

Phenomenology is an understanding of an individual at the stage of a clear rational thinking and the result or exploration of the experience that can not be explained literally. It includes the experiences of someone and the perception of individuals. It also depends on the number of observations and assumptions of his or her intelligence. These approaches were compounded by Relph (1983) and Salingeros (1999) in their studies of the urban place. There are few things that can't be explained objectively in urban design discipline, amongst which are the activity in the place itself. The existence of an activity that helps to generate the economy is not caused by the physical element instead it is reflected by the integration and experiences of individuals. Two main activities i.e. primary and secondary activities as claimed by (Jacobs 1961) are the main ingredients of linkage in urban activities. It is the interchange of continuous primary activities that form the agglomeration of people in urban areas while secondary activities help to support the continuous usage of the space with various additional activities. These secondary activities attract people to group with the advantage of the primary use.

Urban place sometimes can not be explained literally and our understanding is often based on the dynamic activities of the people. Writers such as Jacobs (1961), Trancik (1987), Relph (1983), Whyte (2005) and Seamons (2003) focused on the phenomenology of the place based on interactions of the people in the urban areas. For example Jacobs (1961) considered the

road and streets as the lung of the people's networks. The dynamism of roads and streets exemplifies the active use of the city and networks of activities that intertwine between the primary and secondary usage. The actual usage criss-crosses of people's movements along the streets and it is argued that used streets are safe streets. Active streets are well defined and have clear demarcations between public and private spaces. These streets often show continuous activities, gaining consistent attention of the public in each area as observed by Seamons (2003).

## **CASE STUDY - THE NIGHT MARKET (PASAR MALAM)**

Eateries in Malaysia sprung up since the recession period of 1997 when a substantial numbers of worker were laid off due to the economic crisis. The island of Penang has also seen an increase in the number of food stalls on every corner of the main street offering delicacies from roasted bread to Thai Seafood.

One of the main location for these stalls is the night market, a popular form of informal sector in the city, encouraged by the government and legalized by the city council. The location of the night markets changes every night and is rotated weekly as allowed by the city council. Most of the unused urban space near the residential areas that are connected by secondary or service roads often become the venue for these Night Markets (Photo 1.0). The Night Markets offer a wide range of uncooked and cooked food, as well as everyday household items.

### **Characteristics of the Night Market**

A study was carried out at Sg. Dua near the main campus of University Sains Malaysia. This is part of the location of the Night Market in the South East Region of the island. Most of the patrons are students and road users along Sg. Dua Road and the residents of the area. The secondary road that stretches 70 meters is where the stalls are placed and lighted with coloured



Figure 1. Scene at the Night Market

lights (Figure 1).

The sellers are those who worked in the public or private sectors during the day and become food vendors in the evening selling cooked food or household items to the visitors.

The ambience and pattern of the night market reflect the local culture and it is an initiative introduced by the government to improve the economic situation of low income urbanites. The night market starts as early as 5 pm and continues until 10 pm. The street is closed to motorized traffics, allowing only pedestrians. These streets are usually under utilized or agreed upon by the community in the neighbourhood for use as the Night Market. The management and cleanliness are taken care of by a committee among the stall operators. The ambience of the Night is a cacophony of music played on high amplified music machines, street musicians, beggars and the noise of cooking utensils and the sound of stall operators shouting out their wares. To the residents in the neighborhoods, it is the most awaited event of the week and considered as a 'Mini fiesta'.

The operation of the Night Market is a good example of urban activities and the safety of streets; however, one cannot passively apply urban design theory to this phenomenon.

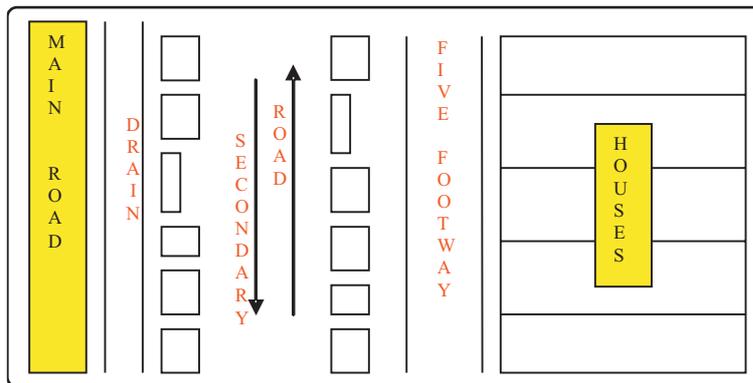


Figure 2. Location of Food stalls at the Night Market

The Night Market is a weekly event in Malaysia intended to encourage the urban Malays to participate in the business. The setting is a typical part of Malaysian life and an effort to curb urban poverty.

For a small family or those who just starting a family, the Night Market is a place to get fresh vegetables and fish because during the day both parents are working and the Night Market starts at 5 pm is a good time for them to get household supplies; with supermarkets being a hassle to go especially after a long day at work.

The advantages of the Night Market can be witness as follows:

1. The informal activities of the Night Market generate economic activities for the urbanites. It helps the efforts for poverty eradication.
2. The activities also encourage tourism and form a mini fiesta for the locals.
3. It helps develop social harmony
4. Ensures local monetary flows
5. Increases linkages in urban activities

The disadvantages of the Night Market also available as follows:

1. The noise level in the neighbourhood increased tremendously.
2. The over crowdedness encourages such as pick pockets
3. There is no proper parking space and the illegal parking spots create congestions within the neighbourhood
4. The cleanliness of the venue after the operation stops
5. The questionable hygienic condition of foodstalls due to lack of running water.
6. Lack of warranty on product sold.
7. It becomes the venue for imitation products and dumping ground for low quality and expired foodstuffs.

Architect and planners play an important role in creating the place. The place that starts from space practically recognised through activities, as propounded by Heidegger (1958 in Relph 1986:19).

*"Place, places man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time the depth of his freedom and reality".*

The night market is a place organized with the consent of the community, understanding the importance of such activities. The activities of the Night Market show that place making is not necessarily formed by physical elements only.

## CONCLUSION

Good linkage is developed by creating events in the city, especially in areas where there are less spaces for residents to integrate. The Night Market activities enliven the urban areas and revive community participation in the urban planning. The activities of the Night Market helps to avoid a permanent physical structure in the city where these structure might become eyesores. Activities of the Night Market also develop the continuity of urban activities.

This urban space concept however need to be understood since many would simply duplicate the demarcated space without understanding the underpinning customs that dictate the form. Although it is the intention of the architect to design the place that meets the human purpose, there is always a negative and positive effect on the utilization of the land use. The idea of form following function is as expressive here as it is in modernist design. The difference here being that function as defined by cultural norms and needs are different from the crude assumptions of physical design for aesthetic and commercial purposes.

From a phenomenological perspective these activities became the platform for encouraging the urbanites to participate in businesses and increase their socio-economic status. Indirectly these activities help to integrate the linkage of urban areas with other events for the locals. The activities also become pocket activities and at the same time help to stabilize the economy and city development. In Malaysia culture forms the basis for the development of urban activities which portrayed by the multi-ethnicity, forming a unique streetscape that cannot be found elsewhere. In the West the locals organised themselves to take care of the streets as well as the cleanliness of their neighbourhood. They became more vigilant towards their areas and in a way help to keep peace and harmony in their areas. From here we learn how land use is distributed and generated for optimum usage.

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