

Nurturing Nature for Man

Mazlina Mansor
Ismawi Hj Zen
Jamilah Othman
Nor Zalina Harun

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CHAPTER 6

PUBLIC SPACES IN HISTORIC CITIES OF MALAYSIA

Nor Zalina Harun

Department of Landscape Architecture, Kulliyyah of Architecture and Environmental Design
International Islamic University Malaysia

ABSTRACT

This research examines the roles and evolution of public space of the historic cities in Malaysia. Examination was conducted based on three development stages: traditional, transitional and contemporary. First, a review was carried out to identify the early establishment and development of public space and their influence in the built environment of the city. The finding indicated that roles of public spaces were underpinned by the process of different era of development and administration. Likewise, a number of underlying dimensions of early roles played by the public spaces emerged as administration, economic and social. The study revealed that numbers of public spaces have been modified by certain levels of disruption, resulted in the disappearance of unique townscape qualities. The study concludes that while contemporary changes are beneficial in many ways, it is not altogether wise to abandon the indigenous features and activities which make public space a distinctive and highly regarded place. This study also implies that the public space and it surrounding areas convey various architectural categories of meanings which lead to the image formation of historic cities.

Keywords: public space, historical city, place meaning, urban component

INTRODUCTION

Dynamic public spaces are essential component for the urbanites to have their recreational activities and social interactions. Streets, squares and parks of a city are open public spaces that form a city fabric and its character. Such spaces are often considered as green nucleus, void or breathing space of the city beside gives form to the ebb and flow of human exchange. Greater appreciation on public place has been expanded whereby the physical and social functions are elements that afforded pleasure, safety and care urban users (Lynch, 1960; Carmona et.al, 2003). In other perspective, public space is the stage upon which the drama of communal life unfolds with a symbiotic relationship between the complexities of the urban structures (Carr et.al, 1992). What is more public space is not only a place of joyful social celebration but at the same time it can be a ground for heartbroken communion, civic discussion and a place to exercise the right of assembly and free speech which is essential to participatory democracy and the good life (Child, 2004).

Series of public spaces may bring various architectural meanings which are the essential structure for city image. They are basic components of a town. Lynch (1960)