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# INTEGRATION OF MUSLIM CEMETERY AND RECREATIONAL AREAS: ANALYSIS OF PLANNING GUIDELINES AND SOCIAL ASPECTS

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## Abstract

Recent studies suggested cemetery to be a dual function to accommodate the needs of open spaces that are gradually diminishing. In Malaysia, the Planning Guidelines for Muslim and Non-Muslim Cemetery need to be referred in developing a burial site because a cemetery is an important social infrastructure in the same way to a recreational park. The focus of this research is to analyze the identification of cemetery as an alternative space for social activities that are compatible with the sanctity of Muslim cemetery. This study attempts to reveal how Muslim cemeteries that are often considered as a dead space can be integrated as part of the city's recreational park without marginalizing the spiritual values of the space. The methodology employed comprises of (i) comparative analysis on the contents of the cemetery and recreational planning guidelines, and (ii) site observation of the selected case studies as a mean of data collection. The finding exhibits summative points extracted from both the planning guidelines and the physical elements observed that could transform and revolutionized Muslim cemeteries beyond its norm. This article concludes by providing some recommendations that will help to align the planning and design practice of Muslim cemeteries for future development.

## Research Highlights

Urban areas are experiencing serious land shortages for other types of land uses that also equally important besides residential and commercial uses such as burial grounds and open spaces for recreational activities. Due to shortage of open spaces experienced by many cities around world, the study believes that cemeteries can provide an alternative as a recreational area for urban dwellers. Based on detail content analysis conducted, the study extracted contents related to space planning, facilities, landscape elements and activities that is essential and important to initiate the concept of hybrid cemeteries with a dual function (a burial ground and a recreational area).

At the moment, the link between Muslim communities with their burial spaces is barely realized in Malaysia. The social aspect associated with Muslim cemeteries could be expanded to non-related burial activities to benefits the *kariah* members. In a manner similar to urban





parks, cemeteries should be more open, even contributing to the sense of belonging shared by members of a given community.

## Research Objectives

The study investigated the possibility of integrating cemetery and recreational areas into one functional space that can benefit urban dwellers since land scarcity is experienced in many cities around the world. Thus, the study is looking at factors and conditions that could help to reinforce the social function and recreational values of Muslim cemeteries. The aim of this paper is to analyze existing planning guidelines on the integration of Muslim cemetery and recreational areas. In order to achieve the aim three objectives were outlined:

1. to examine both the existing guidelines for cemetery and recreation in Malaysia
2. to identify recreational activities that are compatible with the sanctity of Muslim cemetery
3. to identify the physical design elements that link to the social aspects within Muslim cemetery

## Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is based on qualitative methods which comprise of comparative analysis. It can be divided into (2) two parts as followed:

1. Examine the planning guidelines of present guidelines related to recreation and cemetery planning in Malaysia.
2. Site observation on the connection between social aspects and recreational use at Muslim cemeteries.

## Content Analysis

The study has identified four (4) existing guidelines related to cemetery and recreational planning in Malaysia namely; Planning Guidelines for Muslim and Non-Muslim Cemetery (1997), National Landscape Guidelines (2008), Muslim Cemetery Management Guidelines from the Federal Territory Islamic Affairs Department (JAWI) and Planning Standards and Guidelines for Open Space and Recreation (2000). The analysis conducted was focusing on the





aspects of space planning, facilities, landscape elements and activities that can be conducted at the cemetery and recreational areas in Malaysia.

### Case Studies Analysis

Three (3) existing case studies have been selected namely Section 9 Muslim Cemetery (S9MC), Kuala Lumpur-Karak Cemetery (KLKMC) and Taman Selatan Muslim Cemetery (TSMC). Site observation was conducted in early 2019 based on the checklist consisting of two main components of social aspect at Muslim cemeteries which are spatial planning and facilities. Each component can be divided into two categories of indoor and outdoor spaces.

### Results

The definition of 'open space' in the *Town and Country Planning Act 1976* (Act 172) highlighted; open spaces must be accessible for all people to conduct various recreational activities. Thus, in order to revolutionize Muslim cemeteries to be multi-function and adapting with a contested urban condition, the area must be open to all. Currently, most of new and well-planned Muslim cemeteries are enclosed and guarded. The same phenomenon has been observed in all the case studies conducted. This will be contradicted with the definition of open space in Act 172. Thus, this improvement should be made in present guidelines if the concept of dual function is to be realized for Muslim cemeteries soon. Based on the content analysis of conducted on present guidelines related to recreational and cemetery planning, the study found that there are possibilities to integrate the usage of Muslim cemetery as recreational areas. The finding shows spatial planning and design elements provided can accommodate Muslim cemeteries beyond its cultural norm.

### Findings

Circumstances and times have changed and some of the existing guidelines set out are no longer applicable to be implemented. These policies only touch on the external aspect of a burial ground and does not emphasize the concept of cemetery as part of social identity such as the provision of funeral services to attract visitors and pay homage to the deceased. In order to realize such activities, this study believes that it is essential to provide specific need spaces such as placement of death-related departments such as *khairat* or funeral expenses and





insurance at the cemetery. This indirectly enhances the function of burial grounds to a greater extent not only to a place to bury the dead but also to reminds the living of the dead. Although open spaces may be different in sizes and usage, most importantly, open spaces must be accessible for all people to conduct various recreational activities. Due to the shortage of open spaces available for recreational purposes especially in urban areas, the study found that there are possibilities to integrate recreational and cemetery planning. Size and function of open space can influence potential types of recreational activities conducted. Contemplating, sitting and reading are among the passive activities that use less space. On top of that, the study believes that passive recreational activities like walking or strolling is compatible with the sanctity of Muslim cemetery and can be conducted at cemetery areas because the activities encourage users to find solace and admire God's gift and creation.

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