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Experiencing Urban through On-Street Activity

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Abstract

The urban economic today enhances a high emphasize on urban outdoor experience. In line with tourism economic demand, this study focuses on pedestrian activity and intensity. This study analyzes data from the outdoor visual observation and digital photography. The objective of this study is to understand the urban context that attracts pedestrian density at the urban outdoor of the Lebu Harmoni, in George Town, Penang. Retrospectively, this street resembles the harmonious living of Malaysian ethnics: Malays, Chinese and Indian. The heritage shop houses façade is a reflection of urban heritage, commercial and social character of the port city.

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1. Introduction

There are magnetic attractions in terms of on-street activity and product that able to boost pedestrian within Lebu Harmoni. The local citizen is more familiar with the streets name as “Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling.” The number of pedestrian contributes to the vibrancy and intensity of the study area. This vibrancy enhances further the urban heritage culture of tourism despite the heritage streets status. This situation creates a positive aura within the outdoor an urban heritage street. The ambience encourages the street to revive commercially and to regenerate instead of deteriorating. Even though, there is a conflict of heritage commercialization as highlighted by Samadi, Z., Mohd Yunus, R & Omar, D. (2012), but the pressure has a positive impact to the street. With regards to urban planning strategy; Jakob, D. (2012)

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repeatedly expresses empathy on the exclusion of the local community from various major events and place promotion projects. The evaluation and analysis by Jacob, D. (2012) describes the festivalization is similar with the eventification and arts-led that altogether leads revitalization culture through promotion of the urban festival. Unfortunately, this scenario used to be ended up with exclusion of local people from participating. The target audience is tourists and wealthy locals. The festivals organizer creates an exclusive and elite. They sell expensive product and purposely make the event as unaffordable to the local. Those disadvantages of eventification especially when it comes to exclusion of local people make it worse and unacceptable.

On the other hand, enhancement of local identity and cultural heritage belongs is the local and therefore, they deserved a privileged in the form of high quality of public amenity. The Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang (MPPP), (GTWHI) and the Think City Sdn Bhd believes on “no make-up strategy” and “remain just the way it is” in holding the status-quo as the UNESCOs World Heritage Site since 2008. There was no major strategy except individual grants and guidelines for shop houses renovation works and they let the urban observers to experience the on-street activities of cultural heritage.

Understanding this urban social conflict and the existing aspect therefore; this research shares with readers on how local cultural heritage such as public congregation for religious ritual can generate economy and revive. Firstly, it is a local lifestyle, commodity for outdoor street shopping and tourism attraction. Secondly, it is purely an expression of local urban heritage. It means that; no costs for imported artists. Thirdly, in the cultural heritage practice; this is part of the continuum of the urban community heritage of Lebu Harmoni that means that no promotion cost since it is purely a local cultural heritages celebration. Fourthly, the richness of multi religious of heritage buildings provides the three major attractions for pedestrian congregation. The heritage buildings provide richness of varieties, closely-linked relationship between pedestrian movement and activity.

Why Digital Photography (DP) and Outdoor Observation (OO)? The combination of both of the outdoors observation through visual and digital photography strengthens the research methods. It works as complimentary in the mixed methods to answer the research question in understanding the real life phenomenon. Digital Photography has its limitation to a particular angle of viewpoint. Therefore; to record the urban outdoor observation which is on-street experience in terms of visual observation has a high potential to fill up the gap of the study areas coverage.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Urban heritage shop houses

The architectural style demonstrates the richness of historical shop houses of Lebu Harmoni. In terms of the façade treatment, the street shares almost similar physical qualities with Lebu Armenia, Lebu Chulia and Lebu Pantai of George Town, Penang. The outstanding value of tangible heritage is the physical attributes of the leftover built heritage of the early shop houses in George Town, Penang. The urban heritage shop houses are the living monument of the tangible cultural heritage. The close image and identity between Pulau Pinang and Melaka shop houses are due to their similarity in terms of colonial influences to the historic Port City. The feature spices-up with the architecture from the British Colonial, European, Asian and multi-ethnic influences. The high awareness and local appreciation towards the existing shop houses make the conservation of historical shop houses is acceptable. The built heritage is well taken care and remains in good condition. The continuous urban livability shall be part of the reviving effort to inherit the essence of the physical and cultural heritage to future generations.

2.2. *Multiculturalism*

Besides the shop houses façade, the outstanding universal value of Penang is the multiculturalism quality which rarely found to the world. Besides her tangible heritage, the heritage streets in George Town, Pulau Pinang are truly rich in intangible heritage. Her cultural heritage remains as local way of life through the continuation of the trading lifestyle from the previous port and fortress of Fort Cornwallis. The port activity inherits from the sub-cultures of Asian; such as India, China, Malay and Europe. The street is one of the most vibrant streets for cultural heritage besides Lebu Pantai and Lebu Chulia. The name of street: Lebu Harmoni means harmonious-balanced for all religions. The specialty about this street is that, public has accepted this street as a melting pot for cultural heritage activities.

The street has a mosque, Hindu and Buddhist temple. In front of the religious buildings, there are rows of shop houses with varieties to offer. The combination of religious and commercialization enhances heritage buildings to function well and merrier. The urban heritages outdoor quality is the added value to the streets unique identity and authenticity. The existing cultural heritage from the multiculturalism support towards the prosecution of festivalization as planning tool in city planning Markusen, A. and Schrock, G. (2006), Markusen, A. and Gadwa, A. (2010). They claim that there is somehow a benefit for local urban citizen from the festival of cultural heritage promotion within the physical setting of heritage shop houses for the urban activity.

2.3. *On-street intangible cultural heritage*

Intangible Cultural Heritage defines as oral traditions, performing arts and ritual by the UNESCO. The street has a richness of cultural heritage, lively and highly surveillance quality. Because of these opportunities, the street has high revitalization with peacefulness and attraction. No doubt, this street has its own excellent value of living testimony. The dual current functions as religious and shopping attraction validate her Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The significant value enhances the streets inscription by the UNESCO in 2008 as one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The daily operation at Masjid Kapitan Keling begins as early as five o'clock in the morning. The morning call initiates commercial projects to kick-start to other parts of the street. Both temples begin their morning rituals too. Almost all of the religious building and shop houses start with morning cleansing prior to operation. After the cleaning session, they have a quick breakfast prior to shop opening at 09.00am. The spirit of urban outdoor and activities on the street has begun for the day.

2.4. *Urban outdoor observation*

Outdoor defines as: the space outside the indoor of shop houses in which covers the “kaki lima” or the five foot verandah way and the open space in between heritage shop houses. The outdoor space includes landscape area, street, walkway, street furniture and the end-users of the street. Observation: Descriptive observations of verbal and non-verbal behavior. A method of conducting an outdoor observation is using not only visual but applying five senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. In this study, the observation includes pedestrian and traffic behavior, façade character, color, composition, on-street activities, density and vibrancy within the coverage area of the urban cultural phenomenon.

3. **Methodology**

There are three basic research paradigms in conducting research: positivism, (quantitative, scientific approach), interpretive and critical science. In this qualitative research, outdoor observation is in the


category of interpretive research. This study employed unobtrusive-data collection with on-street manual calculation for recording on-street intensity of pedestrian passing-by and utilizing the street. The observation is to identify a typology of pedestrian activity. This manual calculation on-street from selected observation points in the beginning, intermediate and the end of the street is to check from digital photography and manual data in validating the result. During data collection, the researcher has to stop and walk at the beginning, middle and the end of the street. The sequent of data collection begins at the entry of LebuH Harmoni, passing the junction of LebuH Chulia and proceed to LebuH Pantai. The streets visual radius of twenty feet (six meter) is the limit in controlling quality of viewing angle. The researcher records on the enlarged scale of the streets map for the purpose of recording on-site intensity and activity.

4. Findings

4.1. Activity along LebuH Harmoni

Based on the data collection for this study, there are six main activities in LebuH Harmoni. The following table presents these activities. The main activities are indoor staying and ritual, indoor shopping, street shopping, indoor staying and outdoor entertainment which are in the lineage along the heritage shop houses. The indoor activity has high influence towards the outdoor activities. The indoor activities are overwhelming and generate the outdoor activity. The weekly prayer on Friday at Masjid Kapitan Keling attracts extra capacity towards the street. The prayer unites local community, pedestrian and visitors from the nearby area. The indoor activity attracts crowds and hence creates another theme of vibrancy at the outdoor of the street. Apart from religious activity, street shopping and recreation are the other major activities. Trishaw, motorbike and bicycle-ride are enjoyable activities during morning and evening moment of time. In addition to that, night entertainment is lively since LebuH Harmoni offers motel, hotel and outdoor dining facilities. The following tables present the timeline and the related activities

Table 1. The Activity Pattern and the outdoor space of the Masjid Kapitan Keling

Early morning.	0400-0800.	Accommodation and Ritual.	
Morning.	0800-1200.	Indoor Shopping.	
Afternoon.	1200-1600.	Street Shopping.	
Evening	1600-2000.	Indoor Ritual and Indoor Shopping.	
Early Night.	2000-2400.	Street Shopping.	
Midnight.	2400-0400.	Accommodation and Outdoor Entertainment.	

The interaction between indoor and outdoor is proportionate to each other. Whenever the indoor activity is full; the pedestrian occupies the outdoor of shop houses or religious buildings. They move along the street from outside to inside and vice-versa and make the activity between indoor and outdoor becomes active and robust. Even though, some of the indoor product sales are duplicating during Friday prayer but then, that does not affect the crowd attention. The pedestrian from the neighborhood area and nearby offices or shop houses only grab their basic items from the street sales. The heritage streets shoppers enjoy the crowd and appreciate the positive aura of on-street market. On-street pedestrian is also accepting of seeing and being part of the crowd as their visual entertainment. Besides Friday crowds,

tourists in Penang enjoy on-street dinner and on-street sales. They feel a “sense of unity without worry” as part of the shared urban pleasures. The appreciation on outdoor freedom and outdoor streets views and vistas is observable from their gestures.

4.2. Intensity of pedestrian including visitors, shop owners and street vendors

With reference to the above tables; the low distributed model with a number of pedestrian with intensity between one to five persons within ten square meter area as detected early morning along the walkway of the study street. Pedestrian passes along the streets sides are workers and tourists. The least intensity is during the early morning. The low intensity is possibly because of the vehicular traffic is accessible for both directions that limit pedestrians movement. The highest intensity is during afternoon i.e. during lunch time. The following figure illustrates the street activity typology versus the timeline.

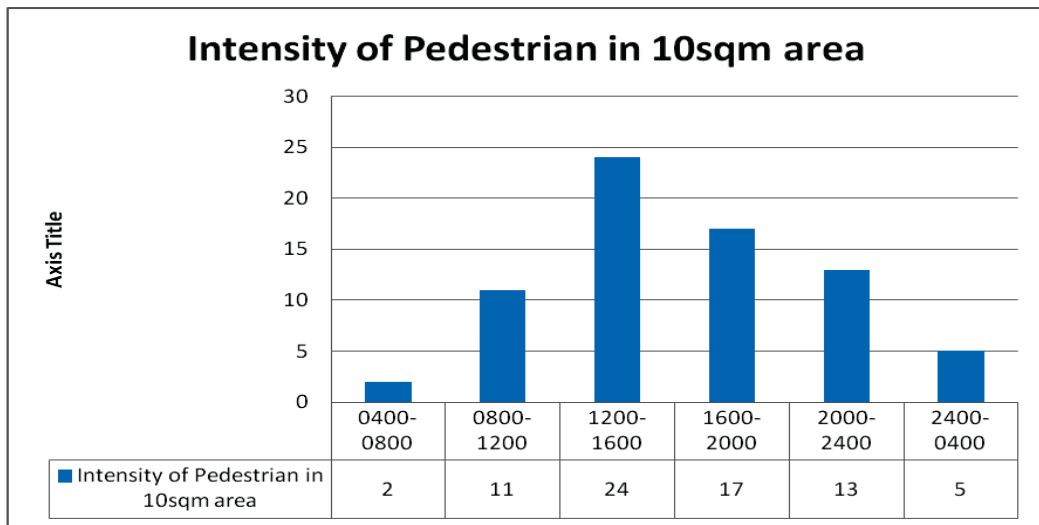


Fig.1. Distribution of intensity versus timeline

5. Discussion

The obvious change of model is from morning to evening. The change of pattern relates to the pedestrian movement which moves to and fro between one shopping lots to another. The most possible reason of the movement is because of the high interest on display products. There is more active movement with high intensity of pedestrian from one shop lot to another to continue their shopping activities on Fridays and lunch-time market period.

6. Conclusion

The active outdoor activities revive the legendary of the past cultural heritage activity of the port city. The heritage streets never lose her original functions as melting pot of cultural heritage events. Lebu Harmoni remains as a “harmonious-balanced street” to blend Muslim, Buddhism and Hinduism of Malaysian. The vibrancy of each religious activity contributes a great impact towards the revitalization of other nearby streets. The encouragement from the local authority through physical enhancement of the

heritage shop houses with initiatives for improvement enhances further the streets livability and vibrancy. The current trend on eventification of place; as highlighted by Jakob, D. (2012) on the aspects of promotion is not applicable for this subject street. The incline of interests towards urban heritage environment promotes the place identity as a new commodity for international tourism. It is pure attraction towards the local identity of the core zone of George Town, Pulau Pinang. In conclusion, Pulau Pinang is truly “the pearl of the orient” with activity of the outdoor living room relies so much on the local culture of pedestrian density and creative activities. By having this study, hopefully it will improve further the public amenity in terms of urban outdoor experience and quality at Lebuhraya Harmoni in George Town, Pulau Pinang.

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