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Young Visitors in the City: Their perceptions of heritage buildings

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Abstract

This paper examines the perception of the young visitors to the city on heritage buildings. The city chosen for the study was Johor Bahru. In the earlier urban study of the city, the majority of the youth were found around the modern shopping complexes rather than the heritage area. The methods of collecting data include field observation, questionnaire and literature review. The findings show that the youth interest in the area related to activities offered in the area rather than the setting. The resulting information from this study can be used as guidance in developing a heritage area.

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Keywords: Youth; perception; heritage building; attitude

1. Introduction

The retention of heritage buildings in the city center is one of the aspects often considered in the developments of towns. There are many reasons why the buildings need to be retained. The buildings may stay preserved if the authority figures that the heritage building can contribute regarding the economy of the place. Other reason could be due to the value of the heritage buildings either to the owner, to the place or the society. In some localities, the heritage buildings could be found in the old sections of the towns. These buildings are often segregated from the new developments. This segregation means that the new recent developments, such as shopping complexes are

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located away from the heritage area. This situation may ensure that the heritage buildings be left alone. However, it also means that the focus of the town may be shifted to the area with the new developments.

The situation as mentioned above relates to what happens to Johor Bahru City Center. The city grew from a little coastal village into a cosmopolitan city. The earlier buildings are situated around the area where the river meets the sea. The town developed further inland over the years. The heritage buildings that still survive over the years are municipal buildings, law court, temple, Indian mosque, railway station, shophouses and others. The old shophouses formed the most number of heritage buildings in the heritage zone. Sultan Ibrahim Building was the tallest structure in the past. Currently, it is overshadowed by high-rise buildings in the city centre.

New developments within the city had reduced some the old buildings into rubbles. These new structures include three new shopping complexes. Currently, the most number of visitors seem to flock the three complexes, especially the City Square. Contrary to this situation is the quietness of the heritage zone of the city center. This situation posed the question whether the general public particularly the youth aware of the existence of the heritage area and the buildings.

According to Department of Statistics Malaysia (2010), Johor Bahru City Center is populated by the age groups ranging from 1-year-olds to over 75 years old. But the highest numbers of the population are youths who are aged ranging from 19 to 25 years old (21% of the total population). With this much number of population in a city by age group, it is understandable that they would make a great impact on the development of the city.

The youth was also chosen as the main subject because there were not many of them around the heritage areas. On the contrary, many of them were found in the modern shopping complexes. Do they know the existence of the heritage buildings within the city? Do they know the difference between heritage and non-heritage buildings? Do they appreciate the heritage buildings? These questions were some of those asked to the youths in the research. The objectives were to find out youth perception and their attitude towards heritage buildings. The other objective was to see the related reasons for their opinion concerning heritage buildings. The knowledge of these aspects is important since the present youths will be the future inheritors or controllers of the heritage buildings in the city.

2. Literature review

2.1. Study area

The chosen area for this study is the heritage area along the Segget River in Johor Bahru City Centre. Though the river is covered with hardscape, the historical value of it is high. The area's early settlements started from the year 1855, known as Tanjung Puteri populated with Malays in a small fishing village and Chinese led by a master, Tan Hiok Nee on the Gambier and black pepper plantation. It was believed that the city is popular, and the dominant economical contributors were the Arab merchants. Tanjung Puteri later renamed as Johor Bahru (1866), was developed over the years with shop houses, palace, state mosques, railway station and residence being built by the next administrator Temenggong Abu Bakar (Kassim, 2011).

Currently, the heritage buildings can be found either within the older section of Johor Bahru City Center or sandwiched in between new buildings. These buildings have turned into essential pieces of Johor Bahru's urban fabric and are historical heritage points of the city. The primary building is Sultan Ibrahim Building. The building used to be the tallest in town and Malaya when it was completed in 1942. It suited to its function as the administrative building of the Johor state government. The strength of the building lies in its architectural value, with traces of classical, Johor Malay and Islamic architecture. The other dominant heritage buildings are the old railway station, the High Court and the royal museum. These buildings were built in colonial style. The heritage religious buildings in the city centre include the Indian mosque, Chinese temple, Indian temple, Sikh temple and a church. The old shop houses were the primary buildings in the older section of the city. This building type lines the streets in rows in a grid pattern. The buildings are connected at street level by the verandah-way.

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