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## Physical Qualities and Activities for a User-friendly Shopping Street in the Context of a Malaysian City

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### Abstract

The primary concern of this paper is to identify the relationship between attributes under physical qualities and activities that contribute to the user-friendly street. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is used in the early stages to gather information about the interrelationships among variables. The Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value was used to determine the level of reliability through the internal consistency for each factor. The result for a validity of all construct achieved Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value exceeding 0.70. This research found that there are positive correlation between safety with comfort and convenience, safety with accessibility, and accessibility with comfort and convenience

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*Keywords:* Urban shopping street; physical quality; street activities; user-friendly

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### 1. Introduction

The ‘user-friendliness’ of the street is an important factor to bring people onto the street. Therefore, the understanding of the needs of current users in a specific context is important. By understanding the specific

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contextual needs in space, a remedy leading to the improvement of the street can be made. Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020 states several main issues have been considered in respects of the needs of the people to create a world class city. These include physical qualities and activities of the urban environment.

The increasing population in the city centre every year has a major influence on demand on urban open spaces in urban areas (Bavani, 2008), and, consequently, community spaces have been lost in the urbanisation process (Lim, 2011). This issue constitutes one of the most important concerns of the Draft Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020 where a population increase from 1.6 million today to 2.2 million by 2020 has been estimated. According to JBPD (2006), the increase in population has contributed to the decrease in the quality of the urban environment and the quality of the life of the inhabitants. Apart from the growth in the population, the process of urbanization erodes the urban qualities and character of the urban areas (Shamsuddin, 2011). The rate of urbanization in Malaysia increased from 54.3% to 65.4% within 1991 to 2000, and, is expected to increase to 75% by 2020 with the majority of the population being urbanized (Jusoh et al., 2006). Urbanisation has resulted in the erosion of the street as a public space, which has also had an effect on public life and urban users (Sulaiman et al., 2001). Therefore, the streets will become a vital space for the public and need to be governed effectively and efficiently to promote an environment that is conducive, sustainable and friendly to all.

The effect of rapid urbanisation in Kuala Lumpur City Centre has compromised the priorities of the pedestrians in the City Centre to the dependence on both private and public vehicular transportation (Shamsuddin et al., 2010). As vehicular traffic has greater freedom of movement, and people depend too much on cars, designers have assumed that the movement of vehicular traffic is a primary concern of urban planning. As a result, urban spaces have been torn down to widen streets for cars and marketplaces have been converted to car parks (Mijan, 2000); the entire existing street network has been destroyed with the notion that fast traffic is the priority (Shamsuddin et al., 2010). Sulaiman (2000) found that one of the reasons for the poor quality of urban spaces in Malaysia is the limited appreciation of the context and the people. Mijan (2000) argued that Malaysian planners and urban designers have failed to provide a broader range of activities and a user-friendly environment that is appropriate for the climatic, physical social and economic circumstances of Malaysian cities. Many streets all over the world suffer from being inhuman and unfriendly to the users (Gehl, 2008).

## **2. Literature review**

The actual needs and preferences of the urban users are the most important quality and should be given more attention in order to re-evaluate the quality and design of the space over time and to create a successful urban space (Jansson et al., 2010, Abdul Rahman et al., 2012). Today, spaces are frequently designed to support the interest of corporate clients, and they do not contribute much to the vitality of public usage. With the fast pace of development, such as in Kuala Lumpur, there is a danger that the city will end up having privatized islands of public open spaces including streets that eventually do not provide support to the various user groups (Mijan, 2000). Through creating a good pedestrian environment, it will provide a well-functioning public domain; invite more people to walk, stay longer and offer a variety of attractive public activities. A good pedestrian environment will enhance people to socialize more in public spaces (Gehl, 2004).

The needs of the users in the street depend on their activities in the street. Tang et al. (2009) argued that ‘the lack of consideration on the human scale activity had led into the lack of characteristics of the city. As a result, humanity is being ignored subjectively and objectively in the planning and designing our living and work space. In such a car dominant city, people would have less and less choice to experience the daily life on foot. Street activities are more visible and prominent than activities that occur inside the building and concentration of the activities on the street and their visibility from the street are important in order for the place to be noticeable and more attractive (Abdul Rahman et al., 2014; Shamsuddin, 2011; Ujang, 2010). Frick (2007) posited that the interactive relationship between the activities and behaviour’ in the public space and the construction of public space, is imparted by its practical ‘functionality’ in space. Based on previous studies it has been proven that different cultures and groups of people tend to do different behaviours and activities in the street. Things that might be the supportive characters to activities and behaviour in Western and European countries might not be the supportive elements that affect the activities and behaviour in the Malaysian context. The usage and activity often use as measures of successful urban spaces. Carmona et al. (2003) stated, “the successful public places are characterized by the presence of people”.

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