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Physical Characteristics of Resting Places for the Homeless in Johor Bahru City Centre

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Abstract

The urban development and rising cost of living in Johor Bahru had reduced some people to live without any proper homes. The paper discusses the causes of the problem and the physical characteristics of their resting places. It was based on research that was conducted using three methods, namely literature review, unstructured interview and site observation. The findings suggest that the majority of the homeless were local people who tried to find jobs and were choosy in the choice of resting places. The finding of the research could be used as guiding tools in designing a one-stop centre for them.

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Keywords: Physical characteristics; space criteria; resting place; homeless

1. Introduction

Johor Bahru City Centre is an area of high commercial value that attracts both local and foreign entrepreneurs. It is also a border city that separates Singapore and West Malaysia. The urban development and rising cost of living in

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the city lead to some side effects. Among others, it reduced some people to live in the city centre, without any proper homes. These people are the homeless or bummers that in one way or the other could tarnish the image of the city. The other concern is regarding the safety of the city folks. The homeless were also mentioned to have caused some crimes in the city centre. Some studies on this group of people may highlight some of their problems and their needs. One way or the other, this effort may reduce problems associated with the homeless.

The paper discusses the causes of the problem in being homeless and the physical characteristics of their resting places. It was based on research that was conducted to identify the reasons for their being homeless and the physical criteria of the resting places chosen by them. Thus, there were two primary questions to be asked. The first question was why they were homeless in the first place. The second question was what were the physical characteristics associated with the places that they chose to spend their resting time in Johor Bahru city centre.

The primary intention was to understand their situation and their choice of spaces. The findings of the data could be used in designing a temporary shelter for the homeless. Even though there is a shelter provided for them in the city, it did not seem sufficient. The reason was that there were still a large number of homeless on the street daily. The intention of doing a shelter that relate well to their needs, hopefully, can somehow reduce the number of homeless people in the street. The research was intended to assist the effort to clean the streets of Johor Bahru city centre. Firstly, the reasons for the people to be homeless were seek for and secondly, the hope of eliminating or reducing the number of this group of people without proper homes. The knowledge of what causes them and their requirements can also help to improve the looks of the homeless. The image of the city among the locals and the visitors can be improved when there is a reduction in the number of people loitering around without any proper homes. The image can be better when there is an improvement in health and the outlook of the group.

2. Literature review

Azhan et.al. (2012) note that the provision of urban housing for the low-income group has become vitally important as urbanization expands. This situation was partly due to the increase in rural-urban migration and cost of living enlarges the proportion of urban poor as noted by Agus (In Azhan et. al.) In the past, the urban form of housing was provided by the old shop houses. However, as noted by Wan Hashimah (2013), many of the upper floors of the shop houses were already converted to storage area rather than accommodation spaces. Walk-up flats were then introduced and became common on the fringes of major cities in Malaysia due the increase in demand of urban dwellers. The popularity was due to the relatively high density and lower construction, land and maintenance cost. The rental of the walk-up flats, however, was still considerably expensive for the poorly earned urban dwellers. Subsequently, some of the urban dwellers became homeless. Thus, homeless can relate partly to the lack of affordable accommodation within the city centre.

According to scholars, both the physical qualities and the human aspects can affect the livelihood of an urban area. The physical quality of an urban area relates to its general appearance as well as the activities around it. Jacobs (1999) notes that the physical quality that is required to make a great street is known as 'liveability' and it affect the use of the streets. It was noted by Rahman (2013, in Rahmana et al, 2015) that there were not many examples of street environments that are friendly and can accommodate all users in Malaysia. Rahmana et al. (2015) notes that pleasant environment is one of the sub-factors that can attract activities onto the street. It is also one of the criteria that support livelihood. Apart from the physical qualities, the activities of the people can also affect the liveability on the street of an urban area (Appleyard, 1981; Wan Ismail, 2010). In other words, the human aspects also play a major role in providing a good urban space.

Wakhidah (2012) suggests that a good public space in urban areas need to accommodate for everyone, including the marginal, the forgotten and undesirable people. The group includes street vendors, street people, those with different ability and other marginalized community. It was considered as one of the problems concerning social issues that are clearly unresolved in the master plan of the city. The accommodating public space will be created when the physical aspects of space can accommodate the needs of the forgotten community. The society will be educated to learn and share, to respect the right of the other users in the city. Consequently, the physical quality of the visual city will be better since there are no annexation of space and overlapping activities.

It was noted by Rahmana et al. (2015) that an understanding of the people's need in urban space development in the city is required. Lack of understanding of the need may result in a reduction of public spaces and urban spaces

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