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Human Interaction in Open Spaces

Dasimah binti Omar^{a*}, Filzani Illia binti Ibrahim^b, Nik Hanita binti Nik Mohamad^c

^a*Centre of Studies for Town and Regional Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM)*

^b*Centre of Postgraduate Studies, Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM)*

^c*Centre of Studies for Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Planning & Surveying, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM)*

Abstract

There are various studies on how open spaces provide a positive reaction to human. Apparently, in relation to open spaces, Malaysia has received very little attention from researchers. The objective of this paper is to provide valuable insights into how human interact with outdoor urban environments. The analysis in this study will address human-human interaction and human-nature interaction in the open spaces at Taman Tasik Shah Alam in Selangor, Malaysia. The findings of this study will show the main domains of interaction towards open spaces together with the perceived benefits to the open spaces users.

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Keywords: Open spaces; physical health; outdoor urban environment; human interaction

1. Introduction

Open spaces can be seen as among vital social infrastructure that is required in any housing development. It plays an important role in improving environmental ecosystem (Marzukhi, Karim, & Latfi, 2012). The major function of open space is to satisfy people's recreational need (Chiesura, 2004). Arifin (2005) claimed that open spaces with its plant represents as a green open space that act as production for the oxygen, controlling the surrounding ecosystem and controlling the soil water. Moreover, open spaces also take the role as a buffer towards sounds, wind, dust and the sun. But the truth is the designer will plan the open spaces based on real or perceived notions of recreation needs. The three important devices according to Philips (1996) in measuring the successfulness of open spaces are good design, proper management and supportive people. In the other way, the purpose of an open space is to

* Corresponding author. Tel No : +60355444294; Fax No: N/A

Email address : dasimah629@salam.uitm.edu.my.

allocate space for the city dwellers for a natural setting enjoyment ranging from low-activity leisure to a more high-activity recreation. Apart from that, open spaces are positive elements of our urban environment and landscape. Properly designed open spaces are an asset to the entire city (Philips, 1996).

According to Federal Department of Town and Country Planning of Peninsular Malaysia (2004) open space means any land whether enclosed or not which is laid out or reserved for laying out wholly or partly as a public garden, park, sports and recreation ground, pleasure ground, walk or as a public place. Chiesura (2004), define open space normally as a space that is exposed to the environment or external factors by means of a nature orientated outdoor recreation and trail-related activities. It normally can be divided into two which are public open space and private open space. Public open space is for the public enjoyment whereby the private open space is to fulfil certain group of society.

Thus, open space can be defined as an area where it has certain function and intention that is usually for the purpose of recreational activities. Open space normally is bounded by the element of nature either in fully or semi-bounded way whereby recreation is an activity done by people without any force of anyone (voluntarily) which then aim for self-satisfaction and done during their own free time (Shuib, 2008:4). Examples of recreational activities are cycling, jogging and playing badminton. Furthermore in the Islamic context, recreation is very much emphasised as it contributes a great deal to life satisfaction, quality of life, health and wellness.

2. Literature review

People's relationship with the open spaces is different based on some factors such as socio-economic, gender, type of activities and park facilities. According to Mutiara & Isami, (2012) people's involvement and interaction in the open spaces can enhance the sense of belonging to people and at the same time increase the degree of neighbourhood attachment. Hence, according to Matsuoka & Kaplan, (2008), they provide a valuable insights into how human interact with outdoor urban environments, which included open spaces itself. Thus, they come out with major themes that are directly linked to the open spaces that are the human-nature interaction and human-human interaction. Under the nature needs, there are three variables that can be measured which are, contact with nature, aesthetic preference, and recreation or play. As for the human needs, the variables to be measured are social interaction, citizen participation, and a sense of community as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Theoretical framework of human interaction in open spaces (Matsuoka & Kaplan, 2008).

Author	Nature needs			Human needs			Primary Data
	Contact with nature	Aesthetic Preference	Recreation/ play	Social interaction/ privacy	Citizen Participation	Sense of Community	
Austin (2004)	•			•		•	Qualitative
Chiesura (2004)	•		•	•	•		Quantitative
Gobster (2001)	•	•	•		•	•	Both
Oguz (2000)	•	•	•	•			Qualitative
Ozguner and Kendle (2006)	•	•		•			Quantitative
Abu-Ghazze (1996)	•				•	•	Qualitative
Crow et.al (2006)	•	•	•	•			Quantitative
Dokmeci and Berkoz (2000)	•	•		•			Quantitative
Hull et.al (1994)	•					•	Qualitative
Lucy and Phillips (1997)	•					•	Qualitative
Vogt and Marans (2004)	•	•	•	•			Qualitative
Herrington & Studtman (1998)	•			•			Qualitative
Coles and Bussey (2000)	•			•	•		Both
Simson (2000)	•	•				•	Qualitative
Yuen and Hien (2005)	•	•	•	•			Qualitative

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