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Community Perception on Public Open Space and Quality of Life in Medan, Indonesia

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Abstract

Among many urban environment problems in a developing country which affects the decreasing of public open space quality and quantity, the research means to identify the relationship between public open space (POS) and quality of life (QOL) in Medan, Indonesia. By using 1-5 Likert scale, the perception of community was collected through the level of satisfaction with the factors of POS and QOL. This research found that the most significant factor that affects people's perception of POS was the 'function' factor. The 'health' factor was the most significant factor that affects people's physical QOL. The study shows that there is a significant relationship between POS and the physical QOL.

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Keywords: Urban environment; public open space; quality of life; Medan; developing country

1. Introduction

Public open space is a free place for people to be accessed. Everybody is free to do many various activities at the place. The physical elements and activities at public open space offer many benefits to quality of life: health, social interaction and economic value. With such significant benefits to quality of life, now public open space in urban space over the world has to face some problems, such as the increasing of urban environments changing and the decreasing of public open space's function. Typical

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with others, one of the cities characters in Indonesia is the fast growing shopping malls and gated communities. As an illustration, there were 20 malls built in 2002 in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. Although some of them were social-friendly, but only a little contributed to public space (Douglas, 2006). As a contrast, during this 30 years, public open space, primarily green space, in Indonesian cities - such as Jakarta, Bandung, Medan, Surabaya and Semarang - tends to decline, from 35% in 1970's to only less than 10 % in 2006 (Departemen Pekerjaan Umum, 2006).

Generally, there is no special concern in Indonesian cities to enhance public open space quality among many other development programs priority. By this situation, it is interesting to study whether the 'poor' public open space relate to community quality of life. Is there any similarity or difference between 'quality standard' of public open space from the users perception compare to those are in the developed country? How intensive do people use the public open space? What is the dominant factor of public open space that people perceived? Does public open space still relate to their quality of life?

Medan, the 3rd biggest city in Indonesia, is a city of more than 2.5 million citizens but has just 5% public open space compared to the whole city area. In the other side, the malls, cafes and theme parks grow fast as well as the gated communities (Nasution and Zahrah, 2010). According to Siu (2008), there are some changes of how people in developing countries view their needs. In many Asian cities people more prefer the privatized public space – malls, theme parks, many other consumptive amusement centres – as a more comfortable public space. By the trend, the aim of the study is to investigate whether people still need public open space to maintain their quality of life. The result of the study can contribute to formulate a suitable policy in urban planning, especially in public open space concern, as a part of development in achieving quality of life of urban people.

2. Literature Review

2.1. High quality public open space

The high quality public open space can make people stay longer with a wider range of activities (Gehl, 1996). The quality relates to the usability with some criteria depends on people needs and perception (Kallus, 2001). If not, public open space becomes useless and unsuccessful (Carr *et al*, 1992). The quality of public open space can be viewed from two aspects: the function and the physical features. The function relates to people's background and their activities in public open space. The open space must be accessible for all class of people, democratic and reflect the local culture and tradition (Carr *et al*, 1992). Some of the physical criteria of high quality open space are the availability of clear pedestrian linkage and integration with public transportation (Project for Public Space, 2000; Gehl 2002; CABE and DETR, 2001). Some researches about the relationship between usability and the quality of public open space were conducted in a developed country, where the public open spaces are well designed. There is a lack of similar studies in a developing country, which has to face the degradation of the urban environment and the decreasing of public open spaces quantity and quality.

2.2. Public open space and quality of life

The urban quality of life is the outcome of the interaction of man and urban environment (Das, 2008). The satisfaction level with the urban environment is one of the indicators of quality of life (Sirgy dan Cornwell, 2002). One of the urban environment's elements is public open space. Thus, the satisfaction level with public open space can be an indicator of satisfaction with the urban environment and next can affect people's quality of life. Public open space, both as a physical structure and a place for many kinds

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