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Bringing the New to the Old : Urban regeneration through public arts

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Abstract

Old cities usually suffer from abandonment. Concerning this issue, public arts are seen as a good alternative for regeneration. Therefore, this paper focuses on the effects of public arts to the user on the urban environment focusing more towards mural since it has gained the attention of several parties to induce urban regeneration. This research uses literature based methodology. Data is collected from various literature and site observations. The analysis is done to measure the impact of public arts on physical, social and economic aspects of Ipoh Old Town. However, the limitation of this study is that each physical, social and economic aspects of urban regeneration is studied based on several detailed criteria only. In future research, more criteria will be included to measure each impact. The results show that there is a significant impact to Ipoh Old Town regeneration.

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1. Public Arts in Malaysia

Arts are traditionally exhibited in galleries and buildings shows exclusivity. In contrast, arts nowadays are scattered around outdoor public spaces for ordinary people to enjoy. This type of art is called public art. It is the art for the public. Sometimes the production of the art also involves the public. Therefore, it could also become art from

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the public to the public. Public art is the physical expression of ideas, feelings and message to public viewer in a public space. Public art encompasses both functional objects in the landscape and expressive, decorative forms either permanent or temporary, that belong to any established classic or contemporary artistic disciplines such as but not limited to sculpture, mural, relief; installed with the intent to enhance, physically define, promote or establish identity in a space or a place (Landi, P.J, 2012). According Mustafa, M. 2009, public art is sometimes seen as a manifestation based on political and cultural aspirations that intersect with the city's beautification. Public arts in old cities can help to bring new life to the decaying cities. By carefully placing site specific public arts at little corners of streets, backlanes and walls, the unappealing dying spaces of old cities will be transformed into energetic and vibrant little pockets of lively spaces. Public art gives impact to the physical/aesthetic of the city, the social environment and the economic well-being.

1.1. Physical/ Aesthetic

Public arts in urban area will help to improve the visual quality of an area. A dull wall will be given a new life with an addition of murals or 3D public arts. Public art is expected to contribute visually and experientially to the quality of life of those who experience it as an element in their daily environment (Shin Dongshuk, 1999). A previously neglected alley filled with trash and molds can be transformed into a cleaner space after intervention of public arts. The presence of public arts requires the space to be properly taken care of before the construction of the public art and even greater care and maintenance after it successfully constructed. Therefore, the physical appearance of old heritage buildings in the city especially in an old city like Ipoh which experiences aging process through time by weather can be enhanced to look more appealing instead of looking scary and uninviting. This is important to produce comfortable feelings for the city's residents and visitors to experience the city. The addition of public arts around the heritage buildings also catalyses adaptive re-use of the buildings. As old cities normally suffer from high numbers of abandoned buildings, public arts are introduced near the buildings to attract visitors that will trigger more buildings to be transformed into other uses such as cafes, restaurants, galleries, boutiques and hotels. When the outdoor spaces becomes more lively with public arts sightseeing activity, higher volume of people will come and will create more opportunity for new use of the buildings around it. At first, the activity around the public arts will support the adaptive re-use of the buildings, then, the adapted re-used buildings will support the activity around the public arts. This cycle continues to create a symbiotic relationship between public arts, the outdoor spaces and the old heritage buildings.

As the heritage buildings are re-used to perform new functions, there will a need for preservation of the heritage buildings which will requires facade uplifting and structural conservation of the buildings with the help of guidelines from local authority to ensure an acceptable aesthetic quality. In addition, this reaction triggered by the public arts reduces the need for new unexplored land for development (greenfield development) but focuses more on re-using the existing buildings or opting for infill development that makes it more sustainable. The public arts foster more development for the local residents and tourists. Image of the city of strengthen where the public arts create new nodes and the spaces around the public arts produce new vibrant districts in the old city. Other than that, the city will have higher sense of identity where it can be well-known from the public arts available around the city. People would be able to recognize the presence of the city through its public arts and overall physical and aesthetic appearance. Lastly, as new development increases, new facilities will be provided for the convenience of people.



Fig. 1. (a) Hummingbird mural by Ernest Zacharevic; (b) Old Uncle with Coffee Cup mural by Ernest Zacharevic
(Source: Lipstiq blog)

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