

RIVER AS A PUBLIC SPACE CORRIDOR IN A CITY

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ABSTRACT

River in a city plays an important natural asset to urban community. Some cities and towns have been turning back their rivers transforming from industrial corridor, large drainage system and derelict land into a new public park development. Furthermore, the increase of environmental awareness among locals and authorities have led to various environmental projects locally and internationally. Despite of the growing projects, there are concerned regarding public's perceptions towards river beautification projects. This paper explains a river as a public space corridor in a city based on the case study of people perception on river development in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This study investigates people perception about the importance of river in a city especially in the context of urban landscape planning. This research focuses on a qualitative approach to explore and understand the output of the questionnaire survey. Each question was designed to investigate on significant character of the river, physical elements and historical values that needed to be highlights in riverfront projects in a city. A total number of one hundred twenty survey questionnaires were distributed to the public in order to research public perception on river development in the City of Kuala Lumpur. The results of this study contributes to expand knowledge of the current river beautification projects in Malaysia. From the findings, it is found that publics are important subject needs to be addressed prior to development of the river as a public space corridor in a city. Research finding shows riverfront projects in Malaysia need to address functions of river corridor as a public space corridor in a city. Importance of site issues, contexts and public opinions need to be considered in the future river development.

1. INTRODUCTION

The way people perceived a space is influenced by the social norms they experience. They are also influenced by the rules they are compel too as well by

the presences of designated features prepared by the professionals namely authorities, landscape architects and urban planners. As a result, community interprets their environment according to how they managed the environment every day (Décamps, 2001; Berque et al., 1994). Presently, places and spaces where community interacts and utilize are a reflection on one self's identity and it represent the community desire and appreciation towards the spaces (Berque et al., 2011). With the different demands for a specific function, spaces are prepared in different sizes and types. One of the most well-known and used space are the riverside. Riverside differs from the other types of recreational spaces preferably due to the presence of water flowing from one point to another (Katrina and Hanne, 2012). In the case of Malaysia, civilisation started mostly on riverbank. Most cities emerged along rivers such as Kuala Lumpur, Kota Bahru, Kuantan and Kuching (Yassin et, al., 2010). One of the initial river project in Malaysia was develop in Kuching. The proposal started as early as 1999 but the development started in 1993 with all budget being founded by the Sarawak government (Yassin et al., 2010). Since its completion, Kuching riverfront has become the benchmark for waterfront development projects in Malaysia. Following the success, riverfront projects continue to take place in Malaysia such as in Malacca and Kuantan. The objectives of river beautification project varies among countries based on several aspects that is, i) level of river contamination, ii) target and aims of the authorities and iii) the dominance of local culture (Willian and Roggenbuck, 1989). In Malaysia, most urban river requires cleaning because it is greatly affect by waste problems from industrial and human activities. The public also need to be educated to appreciate water bodies of Malaysia before beautification took place to avoid destruction in the future. To gain insights on the significance of river among the public, this research is essential to help understand how the local views the current river in order to help bridging better solution that suits both users and the authorities.

2. PREPARATION AND COLLECTION OF DATA

In preparing the questionnaire sheets, questions were designed to highlight some issues and subjects that pertaining of Kuala Lumpur River from physical aspects such as visual scenery, urban landscape, built form and level of emotional that significant to local sense of attachment and users association to the river. Each of question is designed to investigate on how significant characters of the river, urban and landscape elements and historical values that needed to be highlighted in riverfront projects. Questions were prepared that representing the theme of each parameter of study such as investigating of users perception on river beautification projects, ecosystem and comfort as well as factors of surrounding context. Since the target users are public, the questionnaires are simplified to make it easier to understand and straight forward to avoid confusion among the respondents. A set of questions were prepared including one question to be draw and sketch based on respondent personal interpretation for a riverfront project. Each questions are rated using likert scale techniques with 1 least preferred to 5 most preferred (refer appendix A). A total of 120 survey questionnaires was prepared and distributed to the public in two days from January 21 to January 22, 2015. From the 120 distributed, 116 questionnaires were fully answered and only 4 sets were not answered and not return back. The survey was randomly distributed to public along riverside of Kuala Lumpur.

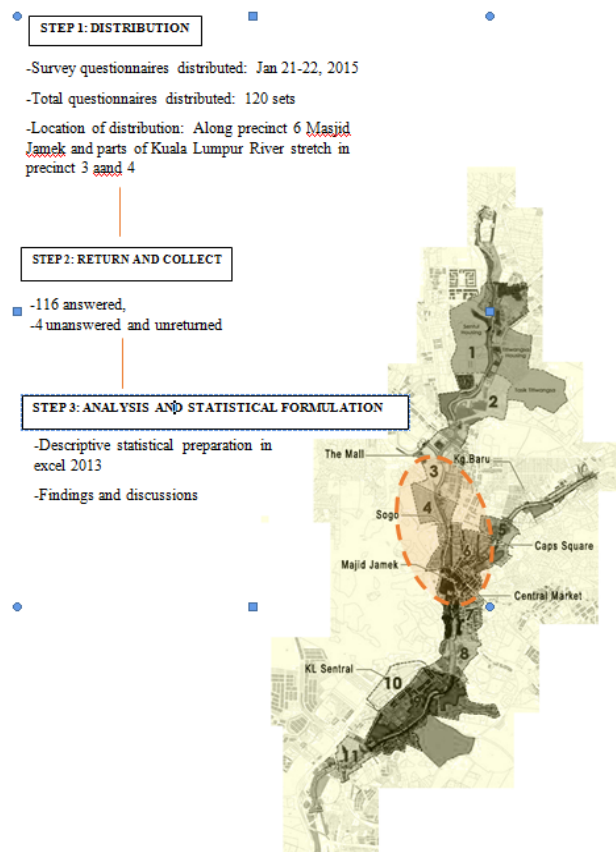


Figure 1.0 Process of data collection and site study.



Image 1: Masjid Jamek area for questionnaire distribution



Image 2: Jalan Ipoh riverside area



Image 3: Bandaraya station riverside area

Figure 2.0 Character of riversides study area in Kuala Lumpur.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Data were collected based on the survey of questionnaires and were calculated by Microsoft excel program. Later, the results are projected based on descriptive statistic that indicate percentage and score of each group of question that has been designed. Analytical data reveals a pattern among respondents that provide some important aspects that need to be considered in riverside planning and design development.

The collection of data are guided in categories such as 1) respondent background, 2) familiarity, understanding, and satisfaction, 3) participation and attachment and 4) Desire and recommendations. This is exploratory research in order to understand general ideas and understanding of local people pertaining into river upgrading and beautification project of City of Kuala Lumpur.

BEAUTIFICATION PROJECT BASED ON RECREATIONAL PURPOSE

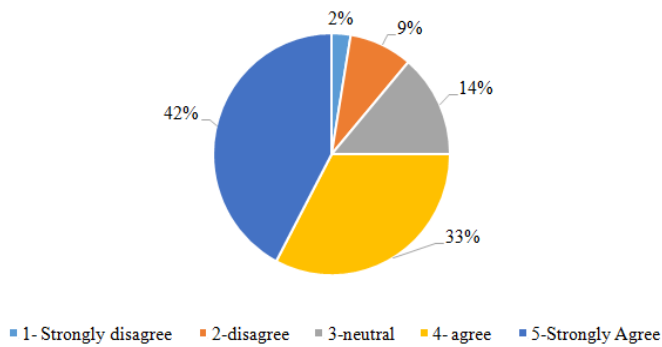


Figure 3.0 Perception on beautification project based on recreational purposes.

Figure 3.0 shows respondents were asked regarding river beautification projects. Respondents are preferred on river redevelopment that focuses more on recreational purposes. 42% of respondents answered strongly agree while 33% of respondents chose agree, 14 % of respondents chose neutral and 9% of respondents chose disagree. Only 2% of respondents marked strongly disagree.

BEAUTIFICATION PROJECT BASED ON ECOLOGICAL PURPOSE

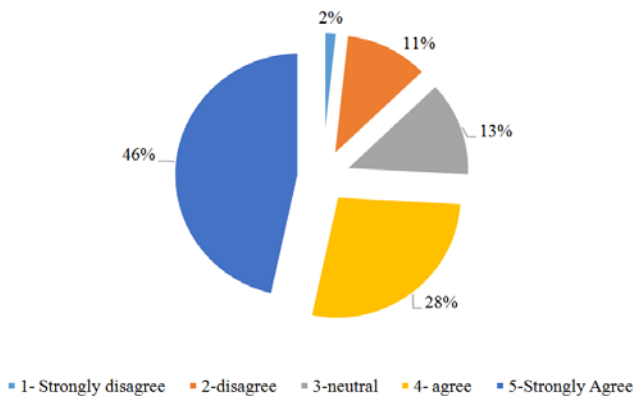


Figure 4.0 Beautification of project based on ecological purposes.

Respondents were asked to see whether they prefer and encourage river upgrading to serve ecological purposes (Figure 4.0). The result shows 46% of respondents chose strongly agree, while 28% of respondents answered agree. 13% of them answered neutral and 11% of respondents marked disagree. Only 2% of respondents chose strongly disagree. In accordance to the previous upgrading project, respondents were asked whether the river has turned out to become less attractive compared to earlier condition. However respondents answered with 45% chose neutral, 24% of respondents agree to the

result and 14% of respondents disagree. 9% of respondents strongly disagree while only 8% of respondents chose strongly agree.

To further elaborate and identify the understanding of the respondents, they were asked to provide personal insights they wish to be incorporated into future river projects. Two of main values are habitat for flora and fauna and the other to provide more recreational aspects. Results reveal that for habitat, 30% of respondents chose to be neutral while 27% of respondents selected agree. Following with 21% of respondents stated to be strongly agree. 14% of them disagree for such values to be added and only 8% of respondents answered strongly disagree. On the other hand, for recreational values, respondents answered that 37% of them agree with the ideas, while 26% of respondents answered strongly agree. Beside, 25% of respondents chose to be neutral. However only 7% of respondents chose disagree and 5% of respondents answered strongly disagree.

MAJOR CONSTITUENT GROUP OF USERS BASED ON RIVER SETTING

This study is essential in order to understand the user that occupies area of the river (Figure 5.0). This will not only help to ensure that any development planned for future understands the community and serves what is required by the people. From the data, the major constituent group answered the questionnaires are mostly women.

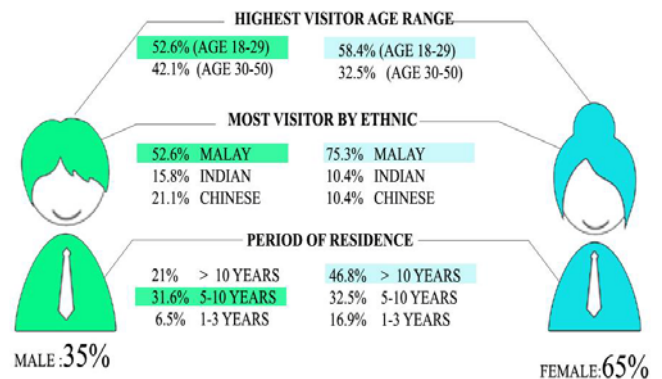


Figure 5.0 Major constituent group of users based on river setting.

The high presences of woman within the area can be related with the presence of shopping areas such as Jalan Tar, Central Market, and Sunway Putra Mall. Factors that contribute to high number of this gender group are influenced by the location and contexts of the place that at the central part of Kuala Lumpur, which are known as shopping street (Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman) for many Malay ladies. In terms of genders, women seems to be the largest population which uses the riverside area more than men.

Based on the study, the result indicates that spaces near the riverside attracts more Malay and Indian ethnicity

compared with Chinese due to the presence of nearby shopping areas and shop lots serve more good for two ethnics.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study contribute to expand knowledge on river as a social place in a city in relation to the current river development projects in Malaysia. From the findings, it is found that publics are important subject to be studied prior to development. Public plays a greater role in ensuring the completed project would be well maintained and well preserve. Although there are possibilities for damage and pollution, the advantage of consulting them and letting them know the objectives of the project will harvest better outcomes and avoiding conflicts after completion. Since this study are based on urban river development, planning and design strategies of river development needs to be reviewed. Important site issues, urban context and publics need to be understand in the early stage of the development especially to avoid conflicts. The results show that urban community are hoping to have a better river to improve their wellbeing as to embrace back the importance of water bodies to the community. Since river is a public property, it should be able to serve people from all range of age, professions and nationality. A river is to be celebrate hence it should be open to public and should be respected all the time. The physical condition of the river in relation to urban form and people activities need to study comprehensively in future in order to make river corridor as a valuable asset to the city.

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