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PROVING INTO URBAN LINKAGE THEORY: THE CASE OF INDIA STREET, KUCHING, SARAWAK

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Abstract: *The life of the people on the street is governed by the users who are strangers in general. The activities are the central medium that makes the street alive. This simple paper advancing the urban design theory that has been tested and criticized elsewhere. The main figures like Jacobs, Whyte, Seamon and Gehl have used the western plaza and streets to evaluate the success and failure of cities gauging the same theory. With a similar approach, the far-flung India Street of Kuching is examined via its linkage and place theory supported by the existence of primary and secondary use interweaved by cultural events exemplified by the actions in urban space. The direct and participant observation technique is employed, supplemented by maps and photographs to record the inquiry persuasively. It is learned that the accessibility of the user from all directions (connected by short cut path), the diverse activities at every corner of the blocks of shophouses, the continuous flow of the primary and secondary use intertwine in between the main street and lanes support the connectivity of urban linkage in the area. Finally, the urban phenomenon is distinguished from the intertwines of the street user, activities, and physical aspects as well as surrounding buildings with different functions that rendered the happening through the urban scene.*

	Keywords: India street, primary and secondary use, urban phenomenon, Kuching.
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1. Introduction

The social life of small urban space is the beginning of urban study dynamics of urban activities in parks, the plaza between the buildings, streets and even at the market place (Whyte, 1980; Fitzpatrick, 2016). To apply the same procedure of research complemented with other leading urbanist technique and theorists such as Lynch (1964), Relph (1976), Trancik (1986), Jacobs (1992), Gehl (2013) and Seamon (2019), to name a few, this research attempts to examine the far-flung streets of the developing world of Kuching Sarawak, Malaysia. The case study is used to examine the pragmatic parallelism of the linkage, activities-utterly the stretch of the primary and secondary use and the presence of activity support in the urban areas that became the attributes of place-making.

As the gateway to Sarawak, Kuching is blessed with natural beauty, and the physical features from the remnants of colonial buildings and Malay village across the navigable Sarawak River enchanted the visitor's experience to this humble city. Moreover, Sarawak's diverse ethnic consists of the Iban, Bidayuh, Malays, Melanau and Orang Ulu, to name part of the majority sector of the population added a multifarious cultural integration with the progress of the modern city.

The urban activities of any city are defined by its streets, buildings, and spaces within the urban areas. The visibility and imageability as propagated by Lynch (1964) and reviewed by Hospers (2010) can be evaluated through the five elements of urban features. The path of the street in the city defined the route of the participant to their destination. Although landmarks became the distinguished image in the urban space, however, Lynch (1964) and Hospers (2010) assert that it can be any object of significant interest to the locals in identifying the place. In Kuching, the landmarks are always associated with the culinary delicacies of its speciality. This observation was supported by Wahid and Harman Shah (1992), Karsono and Wahid (2015), Karsono et al (2016), Karsono et al (2018), where the local people are attached to their favourite food stalls or shops where it is served. This meeting place is nourished by its popular food that attracts visitors. It shows that the meaning of place is converging on the aspect of human existence, regardless of condition or locations. Inevitably, a place integrates multi-dimensional human activity, be it personal or overcast, on environment dominated by certain culture overarching through human experience. Relph (1976) explained that places as a "... fusions of the human and natural order are significant centres of our immediate experiences of the world." This is the quality of the place of accumulation and centralization of thought where the power of synthesis is considerable. Seamon (1987, 1997 & 2000), added that such phenomenon is due to the human experience. Any object, event, situation, or experience that a person may hear, see, touch, smell, taste, feel, sense, know, understand, or live is the legitimate topic for a phenomenological investigation. The elements of architecture attributes derived from these phenomenologies such as light, colour, and landscape portray the urban fabrics of 'place', which encapsulates the power of seeing travel, learning, of relationship sociably. All of this happens because humans can encounter, experience or live through it in many ways.

India Street is an ordinary street consists of two storeys-shop houses with moderate architecture style, pedestrian mall, and local cultural elements presented in the area. It is located at the heart of the town centre that creates a district by itself due to the activities and perimeter of the building blocks and boundary. It became one of the most successful streets where pedestrians can shop, relax, see people passing by, safe and secure circulation networks due to its perimeter and demarcated space. It is a must-visit street in Kuching for the local and visitors alike. The colourful and diverse choices of items attract the visitors, and the linkage through small lanes and connected streets also ease the pedestrians to reach this area easily. This street is also reachable by pedestrian from the colonial era's, historic buildings, the new waterfront, and some iconic structures recently added to the townscape.

2. Literature

The creation of a place for a specific use sometimes only appears during the planning process where the architects or planners only create space expecting the people to use it. The significance of the street may have started since 1765 with the Industrial Revolution (Allen, 2012) when Watt successfully built the steam engine (Spear, 2008 & Cameron, 1982). The railway track divided the urban space and creates boundary and edges. After the late industrial revolution, the cities and urban spaces were taken over by automobiles. The idea of “drive-in or drive-through” became the new habits among the street users. This is the beginning of the disappearance of urban space that led to the emergence of urban design as a new discipline combining the planning, architecture, engineering and urban governance to look back at the street's life and activities (Gehl 2010). Jacob (1992) and Laurence (2006) stressed the idea of reviving American streets through her classical literature *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, and the writing became a “wake-up” call for most architects and planner alike to review back the land use and integration of urban plaza and street location as well as the idea of zoning as imposed by the city council. In the developing world, the success and failure of the urban space can be learned from the western examples.

Place-making coined by urban designers to recreate the urban space is a new phenomenology in physical development in creating a place in the urban environment. Jacobs (1992) and Laurence (2006) point out that the urban environment's quality is based on the community's activities and how they keep alive of their streets. Seamon (2019) propounded that the place is not entirely dependent on the physical aspects of what is there or the existence of the iconic building, nonetheless, the way the integration of the primary, secondary and activity support is vital for the urban community to create a “place”. Relph (1976), Seamon and Sowers (2008) referred to the human experience as an important factor in giving life to the urban space by understanding and integrating the diverse daily chores and activities that is not planned. These collective urban phenomena are what Jacobs (1992) and Laurence (2006) drawn as street ballet. Time and again Relph (1976), Seamon and Sowers (2008) with the concept of 'place and placelessness', Lynch (1964), Hospers (2010) - 'urban image', Jacobs (2016), Laurence (2006) - 'eye on the street', Shirvani (1985), Seamon (2019) - 'space and phenomenology', Trancik (1986) - 'lost space' and Gehl (2013) - making city works, to name a few examined the impending of human experience and linkage that evolve parallel to the local conditions as utilized by the user. The evidence of crisscross of the path, activities presented by the “primary and secondary use” enable the continuity of happenings in the urban areas. The structure of 'place' will explain the terms "landscape", "settlement" and will be analyzed in terms of "space" and "character." The space that is described as a three-dimensional organization creates a 'place'. While

"character" is something considered as "atmosphere" and it is more comprehensive in defining the 'place'. Lynch (1964 & 1984, 1995), on the other hand, it could only be explained by human experience in determining its concept as "nodes", "landmarks", "path", "edge" and "district" which is a strong foundation for human orientation of their 'place' (Schulz, 1976).

Generally, the city's main features are roads and streets, buildings and unused spaces due to gutted buildings waiting to be reconstructed or some idle urban spaces for the plaza and urban parks. The available spaces left by the building and the physical structure are the pathways for vehicles and humans. Inner space (micro) relationship with external space (macro) provides continuous integration. However, not all these spaces can meet the needs of people or users within the city. Some of these spaces were left idle due to no integration, which Trancik (1986) termed as 'lost space'. These spaces include plazas, alleys, roads, terrain, parks and undeveloped areas. Most of these unspecified spaces became an unused area. Instead, suppose this space needed to be designed to the local culture and integrated with the urban environment features tastefully. In that case, it will benefit the user and accentuating the quality of the urban environment. This area will also be a crowd attraction if enhanced by the soft and vibrant landscape so that integration with the environment can create a particular image for the city area. However, not all physical enhancements can give a 'life' to a city area. This assessment will explore through phenomenological methods. According to Bolt (2003), the integration of physical and cultural elements exists when it involves the perception of all individuals and the human need to fulfil their function and purpose of life. Thus, the identity of a 'place' depends on physical, social and cultural factors. According to Rapoport (1977) and Altman (1975), images of a 'place' along the cultural influences and experiences existed in the people. It creates meaning and connection to a 'place' that given an identity for a 'place'. It will also determine the social and cultural values of a 'place', especially for the people who live there. This identity will support the cultural importance and sustainability of a 'place' for it to survive. 'Place' is also associated with many aspects of psychology that help us undergo many changes, especially in the context of urban design that is strongly influenced by the forms of building and globalization of culture (Altman, & Low 1992) and Brehm Eisenhauer & Stedman (2013). These changes will affect physical and human activities. It may have the same meaning, but it has a more profound sense of culture and function from an urban design perspective.

3. Methodology

This is a brief study of street life in Kuching Sarawak, which claimed to be the most successful street visited by locals and people abroad. As the gateway to Sarawak, Kuching is a moderate city with 612,000 people (Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, 2021). Since the street is marked as one of the "must-visit" place on the tourist map, it is worth opening "Pandora's box" and examining the importance of India Street to the readers and the main activity area for the authority to consider.

The study of urban space to explore its phenomenon through the “lifeworld” of everyday routine is rather interesting by examining the local street that the people use. The research applied mixed-method techniques that are well suited to urban design discipline which is multi-dimensional in nature (Cresswell, 2017). The method of direct observation and participant observation as mentioned by Whyte (1980) in his study the “Social Life of Small Urban Space” tend to materialize in considering the unknown phenomenon of the urban place. Additionally, informal interview while having coffee in the area also giving additional information in the research. With the help of the mapping technique supplemented by both pictorial images similar to Likert scale improve the result of the analysis. The street layout is viewed to familiarize with its accessibility, familiarity, vitality, diversity, uniqueness, safety and security. The five elements of studying the image of a city propagated by Lynch (1964) and Hospers (2010) gave the opportunity to systematically map the area. Applying each element to trace the significance of the features within the perimeter of the study area is fruitful and works very well.

4. Case Study

India Street has a long history, and a base for early Indian Muslim settlers in Kuching beholds its character in the urban landscape. In the 1960s and 1970s this is the only area that served the people of Kuching with shopping items and other household goods. India Street is located between Barrack Road and Market Street (Figure 1.0). The two lanes, Kai Joo and Ban Hock, that connects the pedestrian mall of India Street to Khoo Hun Yeang Street, provides a legal path to access Electra House, Police Station and even the new Merdeka Plaza. Khoo Hun Yeang Street linked Market Street and Barrack Road, which is diverted Merdeka Plaza’s construction. The linkage of Market Street, Barrack Road, Khoo Hun Yeang Street and India Street creates an enclave of diverse activities for the people in Kuching and tourist. Based on observation of the street, there are 87 shops altogether located on the left and right sides of the street. The shophouses along the India Streets are mostly two storeys, and the upper floor is used for skilled crafts business, saloon, offices and living quarters (Figure 5.0). The lower floor is entirely shops selling handphones, gadgets, household items, clothes, books and knickknacks, simple family restaurant, camera and watch shops, selling preserved fruits and souvenirs (Figure 4.0). The shops open as early as 7.00 am, and some shops close at 6.00 pm as the number of pedestrians along the mall reduced. The canopy sheltered the pedestrian from rain and shine. Indirectly it ties the two blocks of shophouses under one roof (Figure 2.0).



Figure 1.0: Map showing the linkage (source: googlemap 2020)



Figure 2.0: Items sold along the mall



Figure 3.0: Entrance to the pedestrian mall



Figure 4.0: Pedestrian mall canopy



Figure 5.0: Street users

(source: google street view 2020)

India Street's peak time is at 10.00 am till 1.00 pm and 3.30 pm till 5.00 pm. The condition of the weather plays a vital role in daily activities. The patrons from the main entrance at Khoo Hun Yeang Street (Figure 3.0) are those from the village alighting from the boat at *Pengkalan Simpo* and *Pengkalan Panjang* (landing platform), the narrow street from Market Road also accessible through Old Indian Muslim Mosque. There are twelve (12) Malay villagers stretching from Kampung Bintawa until Kampung Tupong Ulu, and eight villages are located close to the stretch facing the Kuching town centre. The patrons from *Pengkalan Simpo* may take the five-foot way at shophouses along the Java Lane and proceed to India Street via Khoo Hun Yeang Street. Here, few Indian Muslim (Figure 5.0) shops selling spices, dried fruits and assorted local condiments make the passer-by sense the unforgettable aroma of this place. Those from Jalan Datuk Ajibah Abol, Rubber Road and Nanas Road will take a shortcut through Ban Hock Lane and Kai Joo Lane. The District Mosque is located on top of the hill overlooking the panorama of old Kuching town. The Java Lane that connects the *Pengkalan Simpo* to the Mosque in the West and Market Street to the East is the primary use for passengers from the boat landing platform from the Sarawak River villages. There are shops selling garments, fruits, machinery, frozen food and small family restaurant facing the Java Lane and Market Street back to back. The services are continuously spread to Khoo Hun Yeang Street until India Street. The new iconic symbols of Kuching are the Darul Hana Bridge and Floating Mosque, which contribute to the must-visit place for the tourists. The location of the two new landmarks is well connected to the path of the enclave. The close proximity of each attraction iconic places within a reachable area helps attract people to these areas.

5. Analysis

Urban design principles are essential to evaluate the integration of elements in the city. The street plays an essential role in the city to link the areas within a specific enclave. The building massing of different sizes and length gives a positive space while the streets and roads gave the negative space (Trancik, 1986) as transferred through the 2D images of the plan. From these images, all the important elements can be analyzed with respect to its importance and the people is flowing through the path (Lynch, 1964; Hospers, 2006). The pedestrian from the village walks to the town, and the shady path easily ease the route without much problems with vehicular traffic. Although there are cars and taxi in the area, the pedestrian right of way is well observed. Eventually, the five elements as deliberate by Lynch (1964) and Hospers (2006) (Table 1.0) shows the continuity of the evidence of imageability of the streets.

The shops are about six meters in width and eighteen meters long, and some have continuous access from the front till the rear. These features had been commented by Trancik (1986) that the double frontage allowed the flow of customers and giving life to the rear streets too. Standard practices in some areas where the rear streets or back lane are used for garbage and other services. Primarily, the combination of tangible urban elements, subtle space and social activities in a given area will develop character (Relph 1986). The continuation of this space creates an active atmosphere for a place. Human activities can be exuberant and create a mood of festivities in urban areas (Tibbalds 2003).

Table 1.0: Visual Interpretation

Elements	Features	Evidence	Objects
Path	linkage	Streets and lanes	Legal and short cut route
Landmark (s)	Visibility/recognition	Objects, food delicacies	Landing platform, spice shops, noodle stalls, specific shops, Darul Hana Bridge, Floating Mosque
Nodes	People gathering area	Specific shops to get goods	Pedestrian mall
Edge	Building walls, river edge	end of path	Landing platform/wharf
District	enclave around the neighbourhood	Demarcate the reachable area	From Mosque to Barrack Road

(source: developed from Lynch, 1964 and Hospers, 2006)

India Street is designed for specific human activities that have gone through a number of years according to the changes of technology and trends around the world. However, life on the streets did not change drastically with all those transformations. Since the completion of the waterfront project facing the Sarawak River, the number of tourists from West Malaysia, the Western world and within Borneo islanders increased drastically. It gives India Streets an advantage, especially after the beautification program of the street with an additional canopy that embraced the two rows of shophouses and allowing the locals to participate in the informal sector in between the shops. These activities create activity support and increase the diversity of usage under the high-roof of India Street. Not far from the shop blocks connecting to India Street, three boat landing jetties are located at the waterfront along the Java Lane, Ban Hock Road, Gambier Street and Main Bazaar (Table 1.0). Every morning the commuters from the village use these jetties to alight from the sampan to their desired workplaces, and housewives frequenting the market and getting their household items and supplies. The pedestrians are well connected from the boat landing platform to the narrow lane connecting the edge of the waterfront berth to the pathway shops, five-foot pathway to the nearest block without interruption. The presence of primary use from commuters landing at the jetties and the workers from the offices supplemented by secondary use from the pedestrians frequenting the shops and marketplace creates a street ballet (Jacobs, 1992; Laurence, 2006).

The people are also attracted by the street medicine man with their hilarious jokes and metaphors selling their ointments. These activities supplemented the activity support of the street. The people on the upper floor overlooking the street is the “eye” on the street, which Jacobs (1992) and Laurence (2006) asserts as giving security and safety to the users. Wahid (2008), postulates that the integration in the multi-dimensional activity and the place helps to provide an image to the 'place'. Nonetheless, an image of a 'place' is not necessary to be indicated by a landmark, instead, it creates a living community sustaining through an activity pursued by the locals. This is a strong phenomenological element in urban design. This phenomenon is creating by those living in the urban area, unconsciously patronizing the same street daily and developed their understanding of the human-environment relationship. Thus, it is not the Police's task to maintain the safety on the streets, it is the people and strangers.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

It can be concluded that placemaking is not choreographed according to how the designer intended it to happen. The street is full of strangers while the users maintained the safety and security of the street. The presence of human activities is the main ingredients that give life to the street. Each user has their intentions and destinations in their daily chores. The cross path of these users enriches the continuous pattern of movement in urban areas. It is the diversity of goods and crisscross of primary and secondary use that enables urban areas to sustain life in the street. India Street is a proving example of what has been propagated by some urban design scholars about linkage and street activities.

India Street is reachable on foot and more convenient to walk to this place than driving to get some household items. Furthermore, to the locals, there are plenty of shortcut paths from India Street to other destinations to reach the other end of functional areas such as post office, few other streets beyond it that offer different trades and skills for the urbanites to accomplish their wants. India Street is an example of how the primary use, secondary use, activity support proves the social life of small urban space that is intertwined by the linkage developed by the user from the village, the office workers, and the sellers/owners of the shophouses the street itself. The people on the streets are responsible for their safety and safeguard the interest of the user. The presence of shops with diverse goods and items also encourages the crisscross of the path that the pedestrians can access in all directions within the enclave. The shops with the dual entrance are advantageous to the front and rear streets and help to create a continuity of urban space both in function and visibility. Whereas the linkage is essential to determine the smooth flow for the pedestrians within this urban centre.

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