UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

PUBLIC EVALUATION OF STREETSCAPE IN KUALA LUMPUR CITY CENTER, MALAYSIA

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PUBLIC EVALUATION OF STREETSCAPE IN KUALA LUMPUR CITY CENTER, MALAYSIA

By

SOHA SOLTANI

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

May 2017

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DEDICATION

In the name of Allah, I dedicate this thesis to everyone who deserves to live in a better city and society that we love. Truly specially, I dedicate this thesis to my parents and my lovely husband who always love and support me.

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May 2017

Chairman : **Norsidah Binti Ujang, PhD**
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Physical elements, mainly landscape features shape streetscapes of cities. The review of literature demonstrates that pride, symbolism, attachment, memorability, recognizability, and fulfilment are the attributes of images of a street associated with people's experience and perception. The problem pursued in this study is that inconsistency among physical elements weakens images of streets in the city center of Kuala Lumpur. Hence, the study aims at enhancing the images of streets in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur. The objectives of the study are: (1) to identify the existing physical elements of Tuanku Abdul Rahman (JTAR) and Bukit Bintang Streets (JBB) for improving the imageability of the city center of Kuala Lumpur, and (2) to determine the role of physical elements in forming the images of Tuanku Abdul Rahman (JTAR) and Bukit Bintang (JBB) Streets in making the city center of Kuala Lumpur more imageable.

In light of the objectives aforementioned, the researcher employed a sequential mixed method to gather the data. First, a systematic observation study documented the real condition of physical elements of the two streets. Followed by that, a self-administered questionnaire survey investigated public evaluation of physical elements of streetscapes in the study areas. To strengthen the findings, the data gathered from both methods were converged through triangulation method. The researcher chose 330 participants via the time interval sampling method from passers-by, shoppers, workers, office workers, shopkeepers, shop-owners, and local residents who were familiar with study areas. The results demonstrated that transparency and seating spaces contributed to memorable images of streets in the city center of Kuala Lumpur the most and the least respectively. This study falls under a practical urban study that offers insights into development of future streetscapes. The findings present pragmatic suggestions that assist urban designers in bringing psychological comfort into urban contexts.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi Keperluan untuk Ijazah Master Sains

PENILAIAN ORANG AWAM TERHADAP SKAP JALAN DI PUSAT BANDAR KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

Oleh

SOHA SOLTANI

Mei 2017

Pengerusi : **Norsidah Ujang, PhD**
Fakulti : **Rekabentuk dan Senibina**

Elemen fizikal terutamanya elemen landskap membentuk landskap jalan *(streetscape)* bandar. Kajian literatur menunjukkan bahawa kebanggaan, simbolisme, ikatan, *memorability*, *recognizability* dan kepuasan adalah sifat imej jalan yang berkaitan dengan pengalaman dan persepsi pengguna. Permasalahan yang dikemukakan dalam kajian ini adalah ketidakseragaman fizikal elemen melemahkan imej jalan di pusat bandar Kuala Lumpur. Matlamat kajian ini ialah untuk meningkatkan imej tempat iaitu jalan utama di pusat bandar Kuala Lumpur. Objektif kajian ini adalah: (1) untuk mengenal pasti elemen fizikal yang sedia ada di Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (JTAR) dan Jalan Bukit Bintang (JBB) untuk meningkatkan imageability pusat bandar Kuala Lumpur; dan (2) untuk menentukan peranan elemen fizikal dalam membentuk imej Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman (JTAR) dan Jalan Bukit Bintang (JBB) untuk menjadikan pusat bandar Kuala Lumpur lebih *imageable*. Berdasarkan objektif di atas, penyelidik menggunakan kaedah campuran berturutan untuk pengumpulan data. Kaedah pertama ialah kajian pemerhatian sistematik yang merekod keadaan sebenar elemen fizikal di dua jalan tersebut. Kemudian, soal selidik bagi mengkaji penilaian orang awam terhadap elemen fizikal landskap jalan *(streetscape)* di kawasan kajian. Untuk mengukuhkan dapatan kajian, data yang diperolehi daripada kedua-dua kaedah telah dikumpulkan melalui kaedah triangulasi. Penyelidik telah memilih 330 responden menggunakan kaedah persampelan sela masa yang terdiri daripada pengguna jalan, pembeli, pekerja, pekerja pejabat, penjaga kedai, pemilik kedai dan penduduk tempatan yang biasa dengan kawasan kajian. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan transparensi paling menyumbang kepada memori imej jalan di pusat bandar Kuala Lumpur manakala ruang tempat duduk adalah penyumbang terendah. Kajian ini adalah termasuk di dalam kajian bandar praktikal yang memberikan cadangan kepada pembangunan landskap jalan *(streetscape)* pada masa hadapan. Hasil dapatan kajian menunjukkan cadangan prakmatik yang boleh membantu pereka bentuk bandar dalam memberi keselesaan psikologikal ke dalam konteks bandar.

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Special thanks to my dear parents and my sibling, for their encouragement and support throughout my research period.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 18 May 2017 to conduct the final examination of Soha Soltani on her thesis entitled "Public Evaluation of Streetscape in Kuala Lumpur City Center, Malaysia" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Science.

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Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:
- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

JTAR	Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman
JBB	Jalan Bukit Bintang
DBKL	Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Streets, as important elements in a city, constitute a significant part of the public open spaces in urban areas and are the most important symbols of the public realm. Streets are the places where people can regularly visit and commune with friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even strangers (Mehta, 2007). A street is generally a type of public open space that has been the center of attention in numerous studies related to the environment design (Lynch, 1960; Krier, 1991; Moughtin, 2003). Prior to giving a suitable definition to a street, it is essential to analyze and understand its physical elements (Jacobs, 1961). This introduces a street as a public road in cities or towns where houses or buildings flank it on both sides (Shuhana et al., 2004). Therefore, it is a dynamic space that instills the sense of movement (Carmona et al., 2003).

In the urban design, streets are the main constituents of the faces of cities (Carmona et al., 2003). Streets with their physical elements that give a strong sense of enclosure play an important role in making city images (Carmona et al., 2003). The design of a city that materializes different components of a city including its streets is an attempt that forms the image of a street. The correspondence between users and their cities with the aid of the new identity that the cities have obtained, has stressed the necessity of having a suitable living environment as well as achieving a high quality of life (Bulduk, 2012). Qualities, elements, and materials underpin the urban identity (Cheshmehzangi, 2013). As Relph (1976) asserted, the urban identity relates to 'physical features or appearance, observable activities and function, and meanings or symbols'. The physical elements and features are a 'navigation mechanism' as well as a '*visual tool*' with which the image of a place is appreciated (Cheshmehzangi, 2013). The urban image of a place bases a mental map that is formed through physical elements or activities of which (Tazilan et al., 2008). The place image is an important variable of place identity. Understanding places originates from the elements that make their images. Image of a place is delineated by the physicality of its constituting elements such as buildings, softscape, hardscape, street furniture, etc. Places might be imageable on their own, but more importantly, what makes them associated with others is the awareness of signage and symbolism (Ngesan et al., 2013). Hence, identity is linked to the meanings and perception held by people in relation to their environment (Ujang, 2012b). A significant factor linked to the experience of urban environments, here streets, is the way people perceive, interpret, and analyze the visual elements that shape images of such spaces (Oktay, 2002). The physical elements of streets, as the main places in urban contexts, help people create images of streets in their minds that form the place identity. The direction in which people tend to move their eyes when inspecting images can reveal the different influences on eye guidance in scene perception (Foulsham & Kingstone, 2010).

The past memories associated with the places that etch socio-cultural meanings on people's minds play a significant role in making urban places, such as streets, memorable (Shuhana, 2011). The reason is found in that the past memories that relate to particular

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visual elements of the places establish a signage and symbolism system in mind (Ngesan et al., 2013). This signifies that physical forms, elements, and features reflect place image. Creating distinctive images of the study streets complies with City Hall Kuala Lumpur's vision in strengthening the weak visual identity in most areas of the City Center of Kuala Lumpur. City Hall Kuala Lumpur (2008) stressed the lack of streetscape consistency along main streets as well as the lack of broad visual linkages in the City Center. Review of the relevant literature in Malaysia demonstrates that achieving the main objective of the current study, which addresses identifying the role of the physical elements of streets in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur in making their images, is significant and worth studying. As such, streets are visually comfortable for the users in the City Center and impart aesthetic values to the cityscape. This significantly contributes to the development and establishment of urban identity for Malaysian cities.

1.2   Problem Statement

Although Southeast Asian streets are complex in nature, studies that regard them as public places are scant. Most of the current related studies rely on the Western contexts that may not have any significant role in improving the image of streets in the Southeast Asian urban contexts, especially Kuala Lumpur (Oranratmanee & Sachakul, 2014). The emergence of new buildings has created a monotonous urban image in most main streets in Malaysia (Hashimah & Shuhana, 2005). Subsequently, most of the new building facades are not consistent with their context. This chaos has brought about an urban threat for the image of traditional streets in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur (Ja'afar et al., 2012). In addition, due to the newly urban modification, the five-foot walkways of traditional shophouses, as important constituents of main traditional streets in Malaysia, are wider and their heights are no longer responsive to human scale. In most urban developments in Malaysia, the scenario has been worse when there is no provision of the five-foot way in the new buildings constructions (Ahmad Bashri & Shuhana, 2002; Ja'afar, 2006; Ja'afar et al., 2012). The five-foot walkways are the arched walkways with large columns in front of buildings with continuous arcaded walkways and pedestrians walking along the street in the absence of sidewalks. They provide shade to the travelers as well as the opportunity to have a closer look at the merchandise displayed by the shopkeepers. Hence, lack of five-foot walkways in the new projects is an urban threat for the images of streets by decreasing the values and meanings associated with the past memories of such spaces.

As a concomitant of rapid urbanization and modernization, change of most of the physical elements of public open space, especially streets has negatively affected the soft and hard landscape of the streets in old cities in Malaysia (Haslina et al., 2012). In Kuala Lumpur, cutting trees along Masjid India Street has changed a place for relaxation created by shaded trees to a roofed pedestrian bazaar (Ja'afar, 2006). Users stressed the role of trees of Tuanku Abdul Rahman Street in memorability and imageability of the place (Abdul Rahman, 2012). Bachok et al. (2004) in their study on Tuanku Abdul Rahman Street found out that street furniture, as an important visual element, has created an obstruction to pedestrian flow, which tarnishes people's evaluation of its image. A review of the research conducted on historical zones in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur reveals that inconsistency among the physical elements of building facades negatively influences the image of a place such as a region, district, and more specifically a street

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(Askari & Dola, 2009). More specifically, the piecemeal building development in Kuala Lumpur has extensively affected the quality of streetscapes that is the overall character and continuity of streets as represented by building frontages, soft landscape, and hardscape. Lack of streetscape visual consistency and landscape amenity along major streets in the Kuala Lumpur reduce people attachment along the streets and thus they do not stay long, which leads to unmemorable streets (City Hall Kuala Lumpur, 2008)**.** In conjunction with the issues aforementioned, the problem pursued in this research is that inconsistency among physical elements weakens images of streets in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, this requires a rigorous study to identify the physical elements that play a significant role in configuring memorable images of streets. This is to preserve the local identity of Malaysian urban centers, in particular the city of Kuala Lumpur.

1.3   Research Aim

Referring to the important role of physical elements in forming image of a place, the aim of this study is to help to enhance streetscape in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur.

1.4   Research Questions

The research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the existing condition of physical elements of Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Bukit Bintang Streets in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur?

Research Question 2: What are the physical elements that play an important role in forming the images of Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Bukit Bintang Streets in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur?

1.5   Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

RO 1: To identify the existing physical elements of Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Bukit Bintang Streets for improving the imageability of City Center of Kuala Lumpur

RO 2: To determine the role of physical elements in forming the images of Tuanku Abdul Rahman and Bukit Bintang Streets in making City Center of Kuala Lumpur more imageable

1.6   Research Significance

Taking measures to improve the visual definition, continuity, and streetscape characters of the major road network that provides a greater coherence within the urban areas is one of the goals stated in Kuala Lumpur Structure Plan 2020. This visual consideration

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focuses on improving the identity of the city as well as enhancing the streetscape features in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur (City Hall Kuala Lumpur, 2008). Therefore, this goal pursued by the City Hall Kuala Lumpur clearly underlies the importance of the current study in identifying the physical elements that improve images of the streets in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur. This creates visually strong bonds between people and their built-environment, which enhances the public life in the City Centers.

1.7   Research Methodology

Complying with the research objectives to identify the physical elements of street images, the study adopts a sequential mixed method. In the first stage of data collection, the researcher documents the real condition of physical elements of the study streets through an observational study. Followed by that, review of the theories supported by the results derived from the field observation forms the structure of the questionnaire survey that evaluates people's perception. In fact, the questionnaire survey targets at identifying the role of physical elements in forming images of the streets. In addition, the data gathered from both methods were converged through triangulation method.

1.8   Operational Definitions

The following definitions give a clearer insight into the study aim and objectives.

1) Street: it is a place that houses physical elements forming a 3-dimensional image in the observers' minds.
2) Distinctiveness: it refers to the mental image that is formed in the observers' minds due to the particularity of the physical elements of a place.
3) Place image: it is the mental image of a place as the combination of both physical elements and the memories associated with the place.
4) Transparency: it refers to the visual access to function of the buildings.

1.9   The Scope of Research

This study focuses only on the effect of the physical elements, such as seating spaces, soft landscape, building facades, and transparency, on the image of streets. Therefore, the scope of research falls under practical and exploratory in the field of environmental psychology that covers people's evaluations of a memorable streetscape in the field of urban design

1.10   The Limitation of Research

This study aims to identify people's evaluation of image of streets in response to their physical elements. Due to time limitation in data collection, the study only focuses on Tuanku Abdul Rahman Street and Bukit Bintang Street. The study areas respectively

represent traditional and modern streets in the City Center of Kuala Lumpur. As Bentley (1985) stated, historical parts of cities in most cases portray urban images stronger than newer parts of city. Bukit Bintang Street is a main shopping street with modern and international images characterized by a wide pedestrian walk. It is the place with hotels standing alongside modern shopping malls, retails, and entertainment spots. Shuhana (2011) stated that tourists' evaluation of images of streets differs from that of locals due to their low level of familiarity. Therefore, the researcher chose the locals with high level of familiarity who have a stronger evaluation of the environment compared to the tourists.

1.11   The Structure of Thesis

The structure of this study covers five chapters, which include introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and discussions, and summary of findings. Chapter 1 presents the background of study. This chapter also outlines the framework of the research including the problem pursued, the research aim and objectives, the research significance, scope, and limitation. Chapter 2 reviews the literature on the definition of streets, place image, and the role of physical elements in outlining the images of streets. Overall, this chapter pursues an analytical review of previous studies that develops a better understanding of guides and arguments for the study. Chapter 3 outlines the research methods employed. It discusses the development of the research strategies and the procedures of carrying out the research. The field observation as the first technique of data collection is explained. The next section discusses the process of quantitative approach as well as its main data collection instrument, a self-administered questionnaire survey. Separate sections elaborate on the way this type of data collection is prepared, structured, and carried out. In addition, the study areas are introduced and discussed in relation to the aims and objectives of research. Lastly, this chapter presents a comprehensive understanding of the analysis methods employed to ensure the most reliable findings. Chapter 4 presents the way the data collected from the field observation and the questionnaire surveys are analyzed to achieve the objectives of research. The findings are discussed in response to the achievement of objectives as well as contribution to the relevant urban theories. Chapter 5 summarizes and concludes all the discussions from the previous chapters. It reiterates the main findings of research and their implications for the future implementations. This chapter also provides some insights into better conducting the future studies. It also sums up some practical suggestions in relation to the role of physical elements in improving the urban images of the study areas.

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