

## Successful Attractions of Public Space through Users Perception

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### Abstract

The success of the revitalization program of urban public space is viewed through attractions that have been identified. This study aims to investigate the perception of users in public space through the on-site survey. In summary, the motivations, behavioural patterns, impressions on the public space as an attraction and the perceived importance of urban public spaces in the development of the city are important attraction for successful public space. The findings of this study will show main attraction in successful revitalization of urban public space based on users perception and can be used in a meaningful way to the users.

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**Keywords:** Public space; successful attraction; users perception; revitalization

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### 1. Introduction

Public space is one part of the development of a city. Public spaces play an important role in the public life and enhance the quality of life. In the context of Malaysia, Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, (2005), stated that "in the global environment, open spaces play a pivotal role at the time of declining natural resources, increasing pollution, destruction of ozone layers, and fear of greenhouse effect. Without open spaces, the long-term sustainability of our cities is in some serious doubt". If the public space plays an important role in a few matters involving the public and urban areas, public space becomes inevitable components in urban areas.

Public spaces are a physical space that unique and attractive space in urban area. Public space also allows all people from different background regardless of their personal, social and cultural differences to use public space. In addition, public space fulfills various societal needs with different functions and features in order to create connection between peoples and rest of the

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world. According to Carr et.al, (1992), suggest that aside from bridging this connection “public spaces are important because they provide avenues for movement, a means of communication, and a common ground for enjoyment and relaxation”.

According to Kurniawati, (2012), public spaces have at least three basic things those are responsive-accommodate a variety of activities, interests and desires of the users, democratic-usable and accessible to a variety of human physical condition without any discrimination, and meaningful- have a linkage between human, space and the world at large. Hence, undoubtedly that public space is an indispensable component of an urban area. The significance of public space can be seen from the perspective of individual, community and city.

This paper sets out with the aim of exploring and establishing the attraction of successful public space through users perception. Thus, the main attraction will be useful for the revitalization program of urban public space can be used in a meaningful way to the users.

## 2. Literature review

Public space revitalization program has been designed to bring intercultural communities together (Bagwell et.al, 2012). Therefore, urban public spaces should become the symbols of the contemporary city and tools in the revitalization of cities, thereby recreating the lost identity of a given city. These public spaces reflect the social life and interaction of a people (Okolo et.al, 2010). Meanwhile, Ramezani et.al, (2009), stated that the importance of public space in revitalizing the city in that it generates a sense of place, as well as a sense of community, by encouraging local activities and special events that are integral part of urban heritage.

Successful public spaces are characterized by the presence of people, in an often self-reinforcing process (Carmona et.al, 2003). In other words, public spaces accessible to all member of society from children to aged, whereby they can see and enjoy the various activities provided in the public spaces. In physical dimension, the criteria of high-quality public space are the clear and easy access and movement system (Nasution et.al, 2012). According to Project for Public Space (2000), physical dimension could be attained by creating linkage as clear paths which connect each other and by integration of transportation mode and land use, the present of landmark as orientation. Without such, the objects, people and information cannot make a movement or exchange from one area to another. In addition, there are also facilities such as traffic signs, street light, parking areas and information signage to facilitate user intercommunication. Hence, according to Project for Pubic Space (2000), they provide a valuable key attributes of successful places; comfort and image; access and linkage; usage and activity; and sociability (see Figure 1). These attributes as a parameter were identified by the issues stated after many previous case studies and surveys. Therefore in this study, revitalization of urban public spaces is examined by applying the parameters.



Fig. 1. Key attributes of successful places. Source: Project for Pubic Space (2000)

### 2.1. Comfort and image

Public space is placed where the people spend time to carry out recreational activities using the existing facilities. According to Project for Pubic Space (2000), comfort and image are emphasized in the public space in which it determines whether the facilities in public spaces such as benches, gazebo, walkways, lighting, water fountain and shading is attraction to encourage

more visitors to come to the public space. Moreover, safety and comfort are considered as significant components in the public space, and they have an influence on public space's usage and satisfaction (Namin et.al, 2013).

## 2.2. Access and linkages

In a generalized view, public space is space within the city area which is accessible to all people and is a ground for their activities (Jalaladdini et.al, 2013). An ideal public space should be as "open" as possible, including convenient geographical location, availability of transport links, high visibility to the public, clear entrance and the provision of barrier-free access, in order to ensure everyone in society can enjoy the public space without difficulty (Hong Kong Public Space Initiative, 2012). Therefore, access is very important to connect people with public spaces. According to Project for Pubic Space (2000), a successful public space is visible, easy to get to and around as well as have a high turnover in parking and, ideally, convenient public transit.

## 2.3. Uses and activity

Public Space is not only provided to meet the need of the public but should be complemented with uses and activity. The use of public spaces should be fully utilized by the public, but not just for certain groups of people only. Public space should have a multi-layer activity so that it can attract not only local public but also the tourists alike. Activities that occur in a place-friendly social interactions, free public concerts, community art shows, and more are its basic building blocks: these are the reasons why people come in the first place and why they return Project for Pubic Space (2000). The activity that occurs in a public space will also make a place lively, unique and has its identity as well as become more famous.

## 2.4. Sociability

Sociability is an attribute that is difficult to measure but unmistakable quality to be achieved. Usually, the purpose of providing public space is to encourage people to carry on recreational activities, creating affection and build social interaction in which it will create a positive interaction between societies. A successful public space should facilitate social interactions among people through accommodating voices of people from all walks of life, eliminating obstructions that discourage interactions, providing venues for performances, exhibitions and recreational activities which all encourage sociability, etc. (Hong Kong Public Space Initiative, 2012). When people see friends, meet and greet their neighbors, and feel comfortable interacting with strangers, they tend to feel a stronger sense of place or attachment to their community and to the place that fosters these types of social activities (Project for Pubic Space (2000). Moreover, Rad et.al, (2013), argues that "when people interact with others, they feel a stronger bond with their society and space. This factor can be measured and evaluated by the amount of different social groups' presence, social nets, and life in a day".

## 3. Research Methodology

To achieve the aims, this paper adopts perception from local residents and users through an on-site survey. This research explores attraction of public spaces based on the users perception. The sampling technique conducted in this study is probability sampling and the simple random method was applied. Determination of the sample size by using the simple random sampling calculation with a confidence level (95%) and standard error (5%).

In order to study the success of revitalization of urban public space, it is recommended to measure the motivations, behavioral patterns, impressions on the public space as an attraction and the perceived importance of urban public spaces in the development of the city through questionnaire survey.

### 3.1. Methods

In this study, there are respondents from various age group and randomly chosen in Padang Kota Lama, Georgetown, Pulau Pinang. In the process of conducting survey, there were 400 respondents answering the survey forms. Self-administered questionnaire survey was designed for the respondents. Self-administered questionnaire is the survey where the respondents were asked to complete the document themselves. The purpose of this questionnaire was to investigate the respondents' profile,

behavior patterns of users and perceptions of users as well as detailed information on the attraction of users in urban public space. Apart from that, the respondents were asked about their purpose of visit to public space.

There are three parts in questionnaire survey form. The first part is to simplify the description of the demographic and socio-economic attractions. At the second part, the behavioral pattern of respondents will be analyzed such as frequency of visit and length of stay at the public space, visiting time and preferences to bring family members to public space. The third part is to analyze the perceptions about the role of urban public space to the respondent's life, the importance of urban public space to the development of Georgetown and satisfaction about facilities and services in public space. The perceptions and satisfaction of public space is measured in a 1-5 point Likert Scale with scale 1 being not important or strongly disagree to 5 very important or strongly agree. A Likert scale is commonly used to measure attitudes, knowledge, perceptions, values, and behavioral changes (Vogt et.al, 1999).

#### 4. Results and Findings

The result from the survey has shed some light on the attraction of public space towards successful revitalization program. The data obtained from the respondents were analyzed by using descriptive statistic in SPSS software to get the test results for descriptive analysis, cross tabulation and chi-square test. Descriptive analysis was used to determine the minimum, maximum and mean value of the data. Using mean value bigger than 3 is considered as a stronger statement and important to the users. Similarly with the value less than three means that the statement is not so important to them. Chi-square was also conducted to investigate whether there is significantly different between different age groups and between males and females. If the significant level ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ), then there is relationship between age group and gender, but if significant level ( $\alpha \geq 0.05$ ), then there is no significant different between the variable.

Table 1 below shows the data gathered regarding the descriptive findings of demographic and socio-economic attraction of the respondents during the process of conducting the survey. This shows that the gender, education level from secondary school, relatively in the middle age and moderate income are influencing the successful of public space in attracting people from users perception. This study is parallel with Sangar (2007), stated that public spaces are places that are provided by public authorities for the shared by all people regardless of their personal, social and cultural differences.

Table 1. Descriptive findings of demographic, socioeconomic and behavioral pattern of the respondents

Categories	Variable Measured		N=400	%
Demographic	Gender	Male	190	47.5
		Female	210	52.5
	Age group	16-25 years old	124	31.0
		26-44 years old	184	46.0
		45-59 years old	62	15.5
		60 years and above	30	7.5
	Race	Malay	258	64.5
		Chinese	72	18.0
		Indian	68	17.0
		Others	2	0.5
	Length of Residence in Georgetown	0 to 5 years	44	11.0
		5 to 10 years	48	12.0
		10 to 15 years	61	15.3
		15 to 20 years	63	15.8
		More than 20 years	184	46.0
Socioeconomic	Occupation Status	Self-employed	42	10.5
		Employed	237	59.3

Behavioral Pattern	Education Level	Unemployed	16	4.0
		Retired	18	4.5
		Student	61	15.3
		Housewife	25	6.3
		Other	1	0.3
	Monthly Income (RM)	Institution of higher education or above	149	37.3
		Secondary schools	200	50.0
		Primary schools	44	11.0
		Illiterate	7	1.8
		Below 1000	53	13.3
	Range to nearest public space	1000 - 1999	103	25.8
		2000 - 2999	70	17.5
		3000 - 4999	49	12.3
		5000 - 9999	1	0.3
		Not sure or refuse	3	0.8
	Transportation	0-1 km	50	12.5
		1-5 km	304	76.0
		6-10 km	22	5.5
		more than 10 km	24	6.0
	Frequency of Visit	Car	211	52.8
		Bus	15	3.8
		Motorcycle	140	35.0
		Bicycle	7	1.8
	Length of Stay	Walking	27	6.8
		Everyday	40	10.0
		2 - 3 times per week	84	21.0
		Once in a week	79	19.8
		Once in a month	87	21.8
	Time of visits	Not sure	110	27.5
		Less than 1 hours	14	3.5
		1 - 2 hours	274	68.5
		2 - 3 hours	44	11.0
		3 - 4 hours	34	8.5
	Companionship	more than 4 hours	34	8.5
		Before 8 o'clock	8	2.0
		8 - 12 am	24	6.0
		12 - 2 pm	23	5.8
		2 - 5 pm	88	22.0
		5 - 8 pm	219	54.8
		8 - 11 pm	35	8.8
		After 11 pm	3	0.8

No

166

41.5

According to Table 2 below, there was no significant different between behavioral patterns and age group, but female (mean is 3.381) has a slight effect on the frequency of visit to public space.

Table 2. Chi-square test of behavioral pattern ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )

Behavioral pattern	Gender	Age
Frequency of visit	0.000	0.057
Length of stay	0.600	0.011

#### 4.1. Purpose of visit

During the survey, the respondents were asked about their purpose of visit to public space. Table 3 below shows the result of descriptive findings and chi-square test of motivation. The most important motivation of visit to study area by respondents is to relax (4.2500), walk (4.1400), for fresh air (4.2800) and to have fun (4.1225). This shows that the purposes of visit to relax, walk, for fresh air and to have fun are influencing the uses and activity in creating successful spaces from the users perception. This study is coincide with Efroymson et.al, (2009), "a wide range of activities occurring in many public spaces indicate that a city still has much to offer in terms of spontaneity, energy, creativity and liveability". Meanwhile, the motivation of make friend, doing nothing, getting information and escape from home are less important purpose to the respondents.

Table 3. Descriptive findings and chi-square test of motivation

	Descriptive findings			Chi-square test	
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Sig. ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )	
				Gender	Age
Relax	2	5	4.2500	0.330	0.039
Walk	1	5	4.1400	0.001	0.002
Outdoor Activities	1	5	3.9575	0.846	0.000
Exercise	1	5	3.4725	0.575	0.008
Talking with Friends	1	5	3.7800	0.002	0.000
For Fresh Air	1	5	4.2800	0.228	0.042
Have Fun	1	5	4.1225	0.154	0.001
Making Friends	1	5	2.4975	0.062	0.000
Doing Nothing	1	5	2.2100	0.477	0.000
Getting Information	1	5	2.5950	0.236	0.000
Escape from Home	1	5	1.1275	0.846	0.040
Date	1	5	3.0450	0.308	0.029
View City Scene	1	5	3.8950	0.086	0.367
Play with Child	1	5	3.1650	0.000	0.000

Chi-square test was used to investigate the relationship between the purposes of visit and gender and between age group. Female respondents are much more effect on the purpose of to walk (4.300) and play with child (3.5571), while talking with friends (3.9474) are reasons male respondents. There are slight different purposes of visit for outdoor activities(4.3145) and talking to friends (4.2339) for respondents with age group between 16-25 years old, while for those of age group 45-59 years old are much more on walking (4.4677 ) and playing with children (3.6452).

#### 4.2. Perceived importance of public space in daily life

It is undeniable that the public space is important in daily life for some people. Therefore, data from of perceived importance of public space in daily life were analyzed. The results for perceived importance of public space in daily life are shown in Table 4 below. The respondents perceived that the public space is a place to relax (4.3600), opportunity to communicate (4.3075), space for outdoor activities (4.2850) and public space create happiness (4.2300) in their daily life. It indicates that there are important aspects of public space in their daily life that encouraged users to have active and passive activities, and create physical and social life in order to drive the successful attraction of public space through users perception.

Table 4. Satisfaction level and chi-square test of perceived importance of public space in daily life

	Descriptive finding			Chi-square test	
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Sig. ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )	
				Gender	Age
Opportunity to communicate	1	5	4.3075	0.224	0.187
Space for outdoor activities	1	5	4.2850	0.780	0.546
Indispensable in daily life	1	5	3.2150	0.273	0.039
Tourists give negative impact	1	5	2.6225	0.451	0.201
Opportunity to get information	1	5	3.5500	0.380	0.002
Place to relax	2	5	4.3600	0.174	0.041
Public space disturb daily life	1	5	2.1975	0.530	0.001
Public space create happiness	1	5	4.2300	0.431	0.021

Table 4 above shows the result that there is no significant different between the perceived importance of public space in daily life and age group except for the opportunity to get information. According to chi-square test, the importance of public space in daily life is slightly imperative for age group between 16-25 years old (3.7742), 26-44 years old (3.5924) and 45-59 years old (3.2903) for the statement of opportunity to get information, while there is no significant different gender between the perceived importance of public space in daily life.

#### 4.3. Perceived importance of public space in urban development

There are aspects in public space that are important in urban development. Therefore in this part, the respondents were asked about the satisfaction level of perceived importance of public space in the urban development. According to Table 5 below, most of the statements were agreed by the respondents and mean value were above than 3, except the perception about the waste of land resource and waste of money. It is clearly shows that public space plays an important role in urban development of Georgetown city particularly in the aspects of improving tourism development and lively of the city. This study is parallel with Carr et.al, (1992), regard public space as a fundamental feature of cities and represent sites of sociability and face-to-face interaction, and at the same time their quality is commonly perceived to be a measure of the quality of urban life

Table 5. Satisfaction level and chi-square test of perceived importance of public space in urban development

	Descriptive finding			Chi-square test	
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Sig. ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ )	
				Gender	Age
Improve urban environment in Georgetown	2	5	4.1875	0.528	0.943
Improve vitality	2	5	4.2475	0.199	0.431
Formed public space culture in Georgetown	1	5	4.2675	0.838	0.554
Enhance city image	1	5	4.3275	0.694	0.637

Connection with development of the city	1	5	3.9875	0.559	0.104
Build more public space	1	5	4.2100	0.711	0.019
Improved economic development	2	5	4.0850	0.386	0.629
Improved tourism development	2	5	4.4650	0.081	0.461
Improved lively	1	5	4.4275	0.034	0.827
Waste of land resource	1	5	1.6750	0.219	0.573
Waste of money	1	5	1.5950	0.510	0.643

Chi-square test was adopted to investigate the perception on the aspects that are importance in urban development. The result in Table 5 above shows that there is no significant different for all the aspects either between genders or between age group.

#### 4.4. Satisfaction level of perceived towards existing facilities and services in public space

Public facilities are important elements that need to be provided at the public space. The result of descriptive analysis on the perception of facilities services in public space is shown in Table 6 below. Most of the respondents were very satisfied with the facilities and services in public space, except on the perception on the availability of parking space and safe and comfortable gazebo. This study confirms what Nasution et.al, (2012), state that such facilities are preferred physical elements of public open space which increasing comfort that encourage attraction to public space through users perception.

Table 6. Satisfaction level of perceived towards existing facilities and services in public space

	Descriptive finding		
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Pedestrian networks fully connected	2	5	4.1150
Functionally public toilet	1	5	3.5150
Sufficient parking space	1	5	2.8500
Comfort and safety gazebo	1	5	1.9000
Comfortable benches	1	5	3.8050
Appropriate dustbin	1	5	3.7575
Sufficient lighting	1	5	3.6850
Informative signage	1	5	3.7075
Attractive playground	1	5	3.5750

## 5. Conclusion

As for the conclusion, this study has proved that the public spaces are an interesting and indispensable component of an urban area and must adhere to the specific attraction. Also, public spaces provide important opportunities for Georgetown residents as a medium in creating a community in the urban area in spontaneous way. Majority of respondents perceived that public spaces as a place to relax and create interaction through communication in their daily life. The public space and people also contribute to the urban development in the perspective of tourism development and lively of the city.

The public spaces perceived as an important element in enhancing the city image and improve the vitality of the city. It seems that public space has provided good facilities and services to the users to enjoy their life. However the lack of some facilities and limitation in physical quality and management aspects as contributing factor to the decline in the number of visitors at public space and make it difficult to attract visitors. It shows that specific attractions need to be in order to achieve successful revitalization of urban public spaces in Padang Kota Lama, Pulau Pinang. Hence, public spaces should accommodate change



and people from all sorts of background should be accessible to public spaces with the right to variety (Kurniawati, 2011). To create more successful urban public space, it is important to revitalize the public space as safe, welcoming and accommodating for all users.

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