

Understanding Urban Ornamentation Policy and Practice: Case study of Alor Gajah Melaka Roadside Sculptures

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Abstract

This study investigates the significance of Roadside Sculptures in the context of urban ornamentation policy and practice, utilizing a triangulation method of observation, formal analysis, and expert rating. Based on the findings the 14 Roadside Sculptures along the Alor Gajah-Melaka-Jasin highway feature four similar designs that promote environmental sustainability but lack cultural identity. Expert ratings, however, draw attention to problems in terms of functionality, idealization, shape, accessibility, sensibility, and exactitude. To improve the town's image, the study recommends that the Alor Gajah Municipal Council strengthen its urban ornamentation policy and practice by collaborating with the creative society and local community.

Keywords: Roadside Sculptures; Alor Gajah Municipal Councils; Urban Ornamentation Policy and Practice

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1.0 Introduction

Located in Melaka's northern region, Alor Gajah's town is rapidly expanding. To enhance the town's image, the Alor Gajah Municipal Council (AGMC) has implemented an urban ornamentation policy that includes landscape design, refurbishing old buildings, upgrading public amenities, and organizing events for the local community to improve the town's image and urban environment (N. A. Ismail, personal communication, February 17, 2020). Furthermore, AGMC has initiated creative endeavors such as installing Roadside Sculptures along the Alor Gajah-Melaka-Jasin (AMJ) highway. Despite this effort, it is unclear whether such sculptures are functionally effective for urban ornamentation, especially regarding their ability to convey meaning and be understood by viewers. According to Harun et al. (2021), the majority of the roadside sculptures that have already been erected by municipal councils give the impression that they are being used as "cosmetic" rather than as community symbols. Therefore this study aims to investigate the significance of Roadside sculptures in this context and to address the following research questions: (1) What design theme was employed in the depiction of the Roadside Sculptures along the Alor Gajah-Melaka-Jasin Highway? and (2) How well do the Roadside Sculptures fulfill the expectations placed upon them?

2.0 Literature Review

The installation of sculpture in urban spaces as a means of cultural expression and community engagement has surged in popularity. This type of artwork can be characterized as objects created by artists for public locations that are accessible and used by the community (Hutchinson, 2002, as cited in Cheng et al., 2020). In contrast to other public amenities, public sculpture is frequently employed by

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government or private organizations to beautify the urban landscape and serve as a symbol of the community (Mustaffa, 2009). Its growth is intertwined with cultural spaces and necessitates community involvement (Carter, 2010).

In Malaysia, the placement of public sculptures is a significant practice that carries historical and cultural value. The Tugu Negara sculpture, for example, serves as a national monument recognizing the warriors who gave their lives throughout the nation's quest for independence, particularly during the Japanese occupation in World War II and the Malayan Emergency from 1948 to 1960 (Ismail et al., 2017).

Local sculptor and researcher, Zakaria (2019), argues that the placing of public sculptures in municipalities or urban spaces may have originated from Western culture, particularly during the British colonial era. Statues honoring two historical British figures, for example, Sir Francis Light in Fort Cornwallis on Penang Island and Sir Frank Swettenham in Kuala Lumpur's National Museum, not only create an identity for the urban space around them but also serve to remind Malaysians of the British's once-dominant and influential position in the country. Unlike during the colonial era, contemporary public sculptures in Malaysia are often used as communal icons or as tools to create a sense of place (Mustaffa, 2009).

The increase in public sculpture installations in Malaysia's municipal area can be attributed to various art awareness campaigns financed by a range of organizations, including higher education institutions, government agencies, the commercial sector, and prominent individuals. One significant advantage of public sculpture is its ability to animate a dull public space and contribute significantly to the nation's economy. According to Misni and Suran (2018), the presence of public art in public spaces has become an essential commercial and marketing strategy due to its ability to attract investors, customers, employees, and services.

3.0 Methodology

In order to investigate the Roadside Sculptures situated along the 19.2-kilometer stretch of the Alor Gajah-Melaka-Jasin (AMJ) highway, extending from the Simpang Ampat toll plaza to Cheng town, this qualitative research utilized a triangulation technique that amalgamates information through three distinct methods: 1) Direct Observation, 2) Formal Analysis, and 3) Expert Rating. As described by Noble and Heale (2019), the triangulation technique is a research strategy that utilizes multiple datasets to illuminate different aspects of a significant phenomenon while also discrediting theories contradicted by another dataset. Consequently, this study aspires to make more informed assessments and enhance our understanding of the value of Roadside Sculptures along the Alor Gajah-Melaka-Jasin (AMJ) Highway.

3.1 Observation

In this part, the researchers conducted an observational study by visiting the placement point of the RS units. The researcher also double-checked with the AGMC's Department of Town Planning for validity and ethical considerations. Subsequently, the images from the Roadside Sculptures were collected and documented for use in part 2 of the formal analysis. This dataset will contain labels, design themes, locations, and donors' names.

3.2 Formal Analysis

In this part, the researchers performed a formal analysis using Feldman's model of art criticism. This research model is based on the idea of presenting new perspectives on art and, on occasion, the social contexts in which art first manifests itself (Feldman, 1994). It consists primarily of four steps: describe, analyze, interpret, and judge. According to Alashari et al. (2021, p.879), art criticism "extends beyond mere artistic reviews or literary narratives in which art critics document the occurrences within the realm of artistic activities". It is, in fact, a rigorous process that underscores a thorough and realistic examination of artistic matters. The resulting table, which combines data from Phases 1 and 2, is presented.

3.3 Expert Rating

In this part, the researcher conducted an expert rating survey. Two landscape architects who are currently working with municipal governments and property development firms were chosen for their experience, expertise, and knowledge, especially in urban ornamentation policy. Before this, both experts were given instructions and training on the assignment, as well as how to read and reply to the survey questionnaire, which was constructed utilizing criteria for Functionality, Idealization, Form, Accessibility, Sensitivity, and Exactitude (Stevenson, 2005, Chapter 1).

Table 1. Expert Rating Survey

Criteria	Questionnaire
Functionality	Q1. Do the present Roadside Sculptures serve a practical purpose, such as providing seating or shade?
Idealization	Q2. Do the present Roadside Sculptures represent an idealized version of its subject, such as a heroic figure or an idyllic landscape?
Form	Q3. Are the Roadside Sculptures aesthetically pleasing, with a visually appealing composition and balance?

Accessibility	Q4. Are the present Roadside Sculptures easily visible and recognizable from various angles and distances?
Sensibility	Q5. Do the present Roadside Sculptures evoke an emotional response or convey a particular message or theme?
Exactitude	Q6. Are the present Roadside Sculptures accurate in their representation of their subject, such as in the anatomical details of a figure or the architectural features of a building?

4.0 Findings and Discussion

This study has generated multiple results that include a dataset on 14 Roadside Sculptures, formal analysis, and expert ratings based on 6 criteria suggested by Stevenson (2005, Chapter 1) Functionality, Idealization, Form, Accessibility, Sensibility, and Exactitude.

4.1 Observation

As illustrated in Table. 2, the study has identified the label, design themes, locations as well and the names of the donors. Each sculpture is situated approximately 10 feet away from the road line and does not hinder visibility, making vehicles safer. Furthermore, the researchers discovered four master design concepts that are installed at specific plots. These include SH 184 (Flower bouquet); SH 231 (Globe on a stand); SH 227 (Hand gesture balancing a globe); and SH 219 (Emerging Sprout). As indicated in Table 2, SH 184 can be found at five different locations, namely 1. Simpang Ampat Toll Plaza Roundabout; 2. Melekek U-Turn, 3. Pegoh U-Turn, 4. Alor Gajah-Sri Pengkalan T-Junction, and 5. Sg Petai U-Turn. Similarly, SH 231 is situated at three different locations, specifically 1. Simpang Ampat toll Plaza T-Junction, 2. Simpang Ampat T-Junction, and 3. Taman Bukit Emas T-Junction. SH 227 is installed at two locations, namely 1. Taman Perindustrian Hicom-Pegoh T-Junction and 2. Taman Perindustrian Zaman (Sunpower) T-Junction, while SH 219 is located at four different locations, namely 1. Taman Perindustrian Hicom-Pegoh T-Junction, 2. Alor Gajah T-Junction, 3. Alor Gajah-Tampin T-Junction, and 4. Rembia T-Junction.

Table 2. Roadside Sculptures along AMJ Highway

Label/ Design Theme	Locations	Donors
SH184/ Flower bouquet	Simpang Ampat Toll Plaza Roundabout	Shimizu Corporation
SH231/ Hand gesture balancing a globe	Simpang Ampat toll Plaza T-Junction	Teladan Setia Sdn bhd
SH231/ Hand gesture balancing a globe	Simpang Ampat T-Junction	Mydin Wholesale Cash And Carry Sdn Bhd
SH184/ Flower bouquet	Melekek U-Turn	Laman Exotika Sdn Bhd
SH227/ Globe on a stand	Taman Perindustrian Hicom-Pegoh T-Junction	Honda Malaysia Sdn Bhd
SH219/ Emerging Sprout	Taman Perindustrian Hicom-Pegoh T-Junction	Honda Malaysia Sdn Bhd
SH219/ Emerging Sprout	Alor Gajah T-Junction	Honda Malaysia Sdn Bhd
SH184/ Flower bouquet	Pegoh U-Turn	Gromutual Berhad
SH219/ Emerging Sprout	Alor Gajah- Tampin T-Junction	Grand Tonic Sdn Bhd
SH184/ Flower Bouquet	Alor Gajah- Sri Pengkalan T-Junction	Honda Malaysia Sdn Bhd
SH184/ Flower bouquet	Sg Petai U-Turn	Pong Codan Rubber (M)
SH231/ Hand gesture balancing a globe	Taman Bukit Emas T-Junction	Honda Malaysia Sdn Bhd
SH227 Globe on a stand	Taman Perindustrian Zaman T-Junction	Free Port A'Famosa Outlet
SH219/ Emerging Sprout	Rembia T-Junction	Kein Hing Industry Sdn Bhd

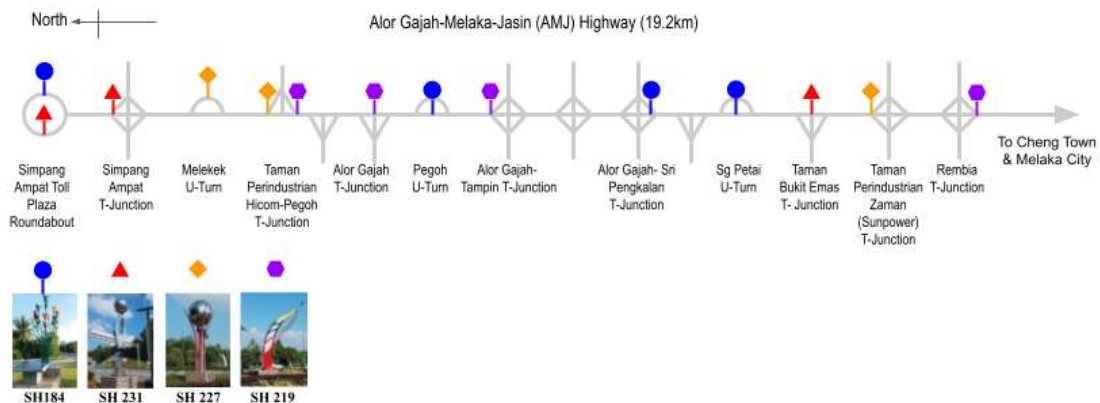


Fig. 1: Locations of 14 Roadside Sculptures along AMJ Highway (Source: Authors' collection)

4.2 Formal Analysis

SH184 (See Fig. 2.) displays the concept of a flower bouquet and is made of painted mild steel and molded plastic flowers. It measures 400 cm tall, 183 cm wide, and 183 cm long. This sculpture was donated by Laman Exotika Sdn Bhd and placed at two locations, the Simpang Ampat toll plaza roundabout, and Taman Bukit Emas T-Junction. SH184 is designed to look like a bouquet of colorful Tulip-

like flowers, and each blossom contains a light bulb powered by a solar panel. The sculpture's symbolic meaning is "Nature's wealth," which suggests the beauty and importance of nature in our lives.

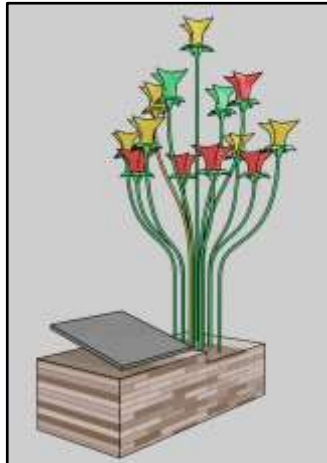


Fig. 2. SH184 Flower Bouquet
Source: Harun, et al. (2005)

SH231 (Fig. 3.) displays a concept of a hand gesture balancing a globe and is made of stainless steel and painted mild steel, and it measures 376 cm in height x 170 cm in width x 170 cm in length. This artwork is located in three places, the Simpang Ampat Toll Plaza T-Junction, Simpang Ampat T-Junction, and Taman Perindustrian Zarina Junction. In terms of design, SH231 is a monumentally standing structure with a sphere form on the top that can be generally associated with a globe/ball. The polished and reflective form of the globe is filled with cut-out voids of fern shapes randomly scattered all over the surface. The symbolic meaning of the sculpture is "Environmental responsibility", which highlights the importance of protecting and preserving the environment.



Fig. 3. SH231 Hand gesture balancing a globe
Source: Harun, et al. (2005)

SH227 (See Fig. 4.) displays a concept of a globe on a stand and is made of stainless steel and painted mild steel, and it measures 376 cm in height x 170 cm in width x 170 cm in length. The artwork is located in three locations, Taman Perindustrian Hicom-Pegoh junction, Melekek U-Turn, and Taman Perindustrian Zarina junction. The design of the sculpture is also a monumentally standing structure with a sphere form as the dominant feature which creates a strong focal point. The polished and reflective form of the globe is filled with cut-out voids of fern shapes randomly scattered all over the surface. The symbolic meaning of the sculpture can be associated with the notion of "Global awareness", which encourages people to acknowledge the interrelatedness of local, global, international, and intercultural issues, trends, and systems.

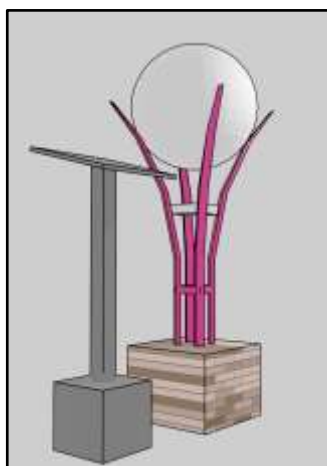


Fig. 4. SH227 Globe on a stand
Source: Harun, et al. (2005)

SH219 (See Fig. 5.) displays a concept of an emerging sprout and is made of colored mild steel and acrylic perspex, both with concrete tiles based on solar light. It measures 360 cm in height x 170 cm in width x 260 cm in length. This particular installation is located in three places, the Taman Perindustrian Hicom-Pegoh junction, the Alor Gajah -Tampin junction, and the Rembia junction. The design of the sculpture is a sprout represented by a linear shape with three colored structures. The inner form is covered with perspex finishes, and a row of simple grid squares gradually flows until the tip of the structure. The form of the hilt is filled with light that glows during nighttime. The sculpture's symbolic meaning is "Birth and hope of a new life," which suggests regeneration and growth.

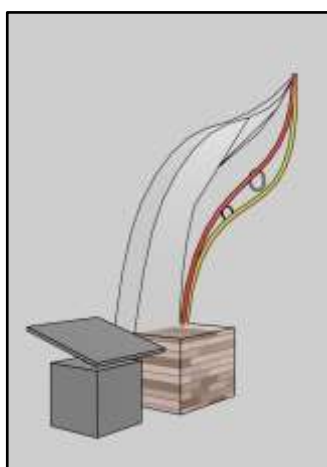


Fig. 5. SH219 Emerging sprout
Source: Harun, et al. (2005)

In summary, while each of the Roadside Sculptures under study is associated with sustainability and environmental awareness, its design themes and craftsmanship are perceived to be basic and lack uniqueness. Furthermore, they are located in isolated plots visible only to road users and not to pedestrians, hence limiting their influence even further. According to Hasna et al. (2012), public art in Malaysia appears to be created mostly to fill empty spaces rather than to act as important public sculptures. In fact, it has been noted that local councils in Malaysia seldom seek the input of artists or art historians when installing public art. This demonstrates a lack of collaboration between the municipal government and the creative culture when it comes to erecting public artwork (Hasna, 2023).

4.3 Expert Rating Results

The data presented in Table 3 offers an evaluation of the Inter-Rater Reliability (IRR) of four types of Roadside Sculptures labeled SH184, SH231, SH227, and SH219, across six criteria: Functionality, Idealization, Form, Accessibility, Sensibility, and Exactitude. The assessments were carried out by experts, and the dataset includes details on the percent agreement and Cohen's kappa values for each variable which indicate the consistency and accuracy of the rater's decision.

The results of this study indicate a lack of agreement between the experts in their evaluations of the Roadside Sculptures. The percent agreement values were relatively low across all variables, indicating a significant level of disagreement. For instance, SH184 received low ratings of 8.3% for both Form and Accessibility, while receiving a rating of 0% for Functionality, Idealization, Sensibility, and Exactitude. Similarly, SH231 received ratings of 8.3% for Idealization, Form, and Accessibility, while receiving a rating of 0% for Functionality, Sensibility, and Exactitude. SH227 received ratings of 16.6% for Idealization and Accessibility while receiving a rating of

0% for Functionality, Form, Sensibility, and Exactitude. Finally, SH219 received ratings of 16.6% for Idealization and Form while receiving a rating of 0% for Functionality, Accessibility, Sensibility, and Exactitude.

Regarding Inter-Rater Reliability (IRR), the Cohen Kappa values varied across the variables, with some variables demonstrating almost perfect agreement and others showing only moderate agreement. For example, a Kappa value of 1.00 for SH219 suggests that the raters had perfect agreement on their assessments of this variable, while a Kappa value of 0.400 for SH184 indicates only moderate agreement.

In summary, the results revealed a significant lack of agreement among the raters, with the percent agreement values being relatively low across all factors. The evidence indicates that the raters had a large level of disagreement in their judgments of the sculptures, as seen in Table 3, and the inter-rater reliability varied across the factors. Some sculptures received low ratings across the board, showing a high amount of disagreement. The Cohen Kappa values varied across factors, indicating that the raters disagreed significantly on their assessments of the sculptures. The expert rating result suggests the need for additional research to develop more precise ways of assessing the efficiency of Roadside Sculptures.

Table 3. Inter-Rater Reliability (IRR) Analysis

Variables	SH184	SH231	SH227	SH219
Functionality	0%	0%	0%	0%
Idealization	0%	8.3%	16.67%	16.67%
Form	8.3%	8.3%	0%	8.3%
Accessibility	8.3%	8.3%	8.3%	0%
Sensibility	0%	0%	0%	0%
Exactitude	0%	0%	0%	0%
Agreement (%)	16.7%	25.0%	25.0%	25.0%
Cohen Kappa (K)	0.400	0.806	0.471	1.00

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

As explicated in this article, public sculptures serve a multitude of functions, including commemoration, aesthetic improvement, economic resurgence through investment and tourism, promotion of artistic and cultural renewal, identification of a community, facilitation of public space management, and response to a more comprehensive quality of life policy. The present study aims to investigate the significance of Roadside Sculptures along the Alor Gajah-Melaka-Jasin (AMJ) Highway, concerning the urban ornamentation policy and practice. Using a triangulation approach of observation, formal research, and expert rating, this study establishes a comprehensive dataset, including labels, design themes, dimensions, locations, and donor names, and evaluates the public sculptures from an expert perspective. The adoption of multiple approaches enables the study to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the Roadside Sculptures with the present urban ornamentation policy implemented by the Alor Gajah Municipal Council (AGMC).

However, despite these endeavors, the study discovers that the Roadside Sculptures under consideration are not fulfilling their potential due to unimpressive design form, poor maintenance, low-quality materials, and poor craftsmanship. Furthermore, the study reveals that the implementation of the urban ornamentation policy of Roadside Sculptures by AGMC falls short in terms of the Functionality, Idealization, Form, Accessibility, Sensibility, and Exactitude criteria. Hence, it is recommended that the Alor Gajah Municipal Council (AGMC) reevaluate its urban ornamentation policy and practice, particularly regarding Roadside Sculpture installations, to enhance the urban space and reputation of the municipality of Alor Gajah. This can be accomplished by organizing a special gathering with the local community and creative society to enhance the design and maintenance of the Roadside Sculptures. It is envisaged that such an effort will allow the Roadside Sculpture installations to accomplish their original goals and contribute to the effort to beautify urban areas.

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Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study will contribute to the area of public art, landscape design, and urban planning.

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