LOST SPACE IN URBAN CORE AREAS OF KUALA LUMPUR IN RELATIONS TO PHYSICAL URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

The process of urban development today treats buildings as isolated objects, not as part of the larger fabric of streets, squares, parks and viable open space, and without an understanding of human behaviour. What emerges in most environmental settings is unshaped antispace. The essence of this research seeks to establish a better understanding towards the local perception of lost space in the urban core areas of Kuala Lumpur and identify the appropriate tools to improve the usability of the space. The research has been designed with the aim of seeking effective ways of designing a space in the urban core to minimize the undermanaged space. For this reason, the research focuses on the definitions and characteristics of lost space before the process of designing the space. A qualitative analysis is made on selected parameters in the theory of lost space by Trancik (1986); activities, accessibility, connectivity, maintenance and design aspect. Through a qualitative approach, the result indicates that there were various new perceptions of descriptive lost space includes economic and social activity, connectivity, and accessibility as these are an important strategy for maintaining the vitality and robustness of urban space. It is proposed in this paper that more attention should be given to urban areas to continue to give cities' life and vitality, and the most significant result is to achieve holistic sustainable planning and management of urban space.

Keywords: lost space, environmental settings, local perceptions, vitality

INTRODUCTION

In most of the cities today, designers are faced with the challenge of creating holistic environments in an urban core particularly as collective, unifying frameworks for new development (Krier, Ibelings, Meuser, & Bodenschatz 2006). Too often the design's contribution becomes an after the fact cosmetic treatment of spaces that are ill-planned for public use in the first place. The process of urban development treats buildings as isolated objects, not as part of the larger fabric of streets, squares, parks and viable open space, without considering the relationship between buildings and spaces, and understanding of human behaviour (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1996; Carmona, 2010). Hence, what emerges in most environmental settings today is unshaped antispace. It is centred on the concept of urbanism as an essential attitude in urban design, favouring the spatially connected public environment over the master planning. This approach knows for making figurative space out of the lost landscape. Architects, urban planners, urban environment, and landscape architects have a major responsibility to meet the challenge and to reintegrate the lost spaces in the urban core into the effective urban fabric.

According to Trancik (1986), lost space is a leftover unconstructed landscape. They are the undermanaged areas between districts, buildings, or roads emerge without anyone realizing it until its being done physically on the ground. It is the undesirable urban space that is accidentally formed during the planning stage (Sommer, 1974). In other words, lost space can be seen as an inadequate use of space in urban area, isolated from the walking flow (Montgomery, 1998 and Tibbalds, 2001). It is abandoned and left area that has lost their functions (Franck & Stevens, 2006). Trancik (1986) notices that space such as a park can be considered as lost space if space does not serve its intended purpose. Lost space becomes a place when it is given a contextual meaning derived from cultural or regional content (Azhar & Gjerde, 2016). Therefore, in the effort to recapturing the lost space and imbue it with a sense of place, designers need to focus on the needs and wants of the users.

Mobility and communication have increasingly dominated Kuala Lumpur, which has consequently lost much of its cultural meaning and human purpose especially today, the spaces between buildings are rarely designed. The results of this can be seen all around us. The disjointed lacking visual and physical coherence in Kuala Lumpur has resulted to the more utilitarian in their organization, the notion of function was gradually displaces from the external space to the organization of internal space. A building tended to become more of an object, separate from its context.

Under the logic of lost space and how the theoretical understanding contributes to user perception, this research attempts to seek a better understanding towards the local perception of lost space in the urban core areas of Kuala Lumpur and seek the appropriate tools to improve the usability of the

space. The aim of the study thus was to implement a methodology: (i) to define lost space in the context of urban space in Kuala Lumpur, (ii) to identify the factors contributing to lost space, and (iii) to recommend several effective approaches to improve the usability and redesigning lost spaces that have emerged over the last two decades.

For that reasons, 10 respondents were interviewed, as the samples in qualitative research as are often small. Their responses and understandings as the end users help the contribution to design the efficient urban space that incorporates respondents' value meaning.

A THEORY OF LOST SPACE

Since 1986, many scholars began to study a particular kind of lost spaces and provided many definitions and suggested several interpretations such as loose space, cracks, vacant, in-between, transitional, liminal, neglected spaces, deteriorated and indeterminate space (Figure 2.1). Trancik (1986) first used the term of lost space to describe spaces that are in need of re-design, antispaces, making no positive contribution to the surrounds or users. According to Trancik (1986), lost space is a leftover unconstructed landscape or under managed space. It is the undesirable urban space that is accidentally formed during the planning stage (Sommer, 1974).

Table 1: Definitions of lost space

Year	Scholars	Terms	Definitions
1974	Sommer	Tight space, hard space	Offerings possibilities for different activities, unrelated to the original designed purpose for a particular space.
1986	Roger Trancik	Lost space	Space that makes no positive contributions to the surrounding and people.
1996	Loukaitou-Sideris	Cracks in the city	Spaces that are abandoned and left deteriorate, which eventually be filled with trash and human waste.
2001	Hajer & Reijndorp	In-between spaces	As an ephemeral object, a site – yet not only space, but also a possible future, and disparate activities.
2007	Franck & Steven	Loose space	Spaces that only allows certain regulated activities, unrelated to the original designed purpose for a particular space.

Lost space can be car parking, the edge of highways which are being planned without maintenance and management, the base of high-rise tower, abandoned waterfronts, unused sunken plaza, vacated military sites and deteriorated parks (Trancik, 1986). Trancik (1986) argues that the blame for

creating lost spaces lies squarely with the car, urban renewal, the privatization of public space, the functional separation of uses and the modern movement.

In placing more emphasis, lost spaces or leftover spaces are mostly found in between two buildings, in front, at the sides or at the rear of buildings, and rooftops. These spaces loss their values and meanings, functions and a sense of belonging. Leftover spaces, usually publicly owned but without any assigned function, are often located right next to spaces with fixed and restricted functions (Franck & Steven, 2007). Examples include the spaces under bridges and next to highways. These exist beyond the boundaries of organized social space, having no intended use and often lacking conventionally appealing features, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The underutilized spaces in urban areas that accommodate unexpected and unintended activities.
Source: Azhar & Gjerde (2016)

Tibbalds (2001) argued that public space is too often littered, piled with rotting rubbish, covered in graffiti, polluted, unsafe, congested by traffic, full of mediocre and ugly poorly maintained buildings, and populated at night by homeless people living in cardboard boxes. What a failure to deal with minor signs of decay within an urban area could bring a rapid spiral of decline. Tibbalds (2001) advocated the use of good design as a means to reverse the issues of a threatening and uncared for public realms, and also identified the vital role of public space management – caring about litter, fly-posting, where cars are parked,

street cleansing, maintaining paved surfaces, street furniture, building facades, and caring for tress.

Loukaitou-Sideris (1996) writes about 'Cracks in the City' and define cracks as the 'in-between spaces, residual, under-utilised and often deteriorating'. She thus argues that poor management is also to blame for the state of many plazas, car parks, parks and public housing estates, where abandonment and deterioration have filled vacant space with human waste and trash.

Figure 2: Neglected space filled with trash
Source: Carmona (2010)

What are the best characteristic to describe the factors contributing to lost space? According to Trancik (1986), there are four (4) major factors contributing to lost space, which are (i) increasing dependency on the automobile, (ii) modern movement in design, (iii) land use zoning policies, and (iv) unwillingness of institution to assume responsibility for the public realm.

The increasing automobile dependency has caused the city form to change from time to time. Streets are no longer essential urban open spaces for pedestrian use. Open spaces are slowly replaced by highways, thoroughfares, and parking bays which are consider as predominant types of open spaces in the modern urban planning perspectives. These highways, parking bays and similar to it cuts through cities and created huge areas of lost spaces.

The modern movement has created buildings more practical and functional in their organization, spaces between buildings are rarely taken into consideration as architects and planners tends to make building as a formal object separated from its context. Architects and urban planners in the twentieth century failed to understand the needs and desire of pedestrian towards a space (Tibbalds, 1992). This has resulted what once used to be external space of an organization gradually turns into private internal space of the organization (Peterson, 1980)

As mentioned by Trancik (1986), the zoning policy was initiated by the planners with the purposed to promote health, safety and social welfare through the segregation of land uses. However, the zoning policies adopted hardly take consideration towards the spatial structure and community existence. The value imposed by zoning has rejected the elements of old town that were built around a network of street-level public spaces in response to traditional planning. This has resulted towards an increasingly unliveable environment, vehicular and pedestrian system became confusing, the relationships of building and public spaces were ignored, and undeveloped spaces were turned into parking lots. Zonings has subdivided cities into homogeneous districts, and created a major lost space in the urban fabric.

The privatizations of public spaces are closely related to the modern architectural movement which does not pay much attention to the public realm. The framework of common public realm concern has lost along the way of modern architectural movement, the minimal investment in maintaining public spaces and lack of interest in controlling the physical form and appearance of the city has created monumental problems for not only the public spaces in the city but also the image of the city.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS
Analysis sections were divided into three (3) stage; (i) stage 1 Analysis of relationship between the characteristics of lost space and the physical setting, (ii) stage 2 Analysis of Characteristics between prescriptive and descriptive lost space, and (iii) stage 3 Analysis of prescriptive vs descriptive lost space. Prescriptive lost space refers to the definitions as explain in the theory of lost space, and using codes and themes to group the definitions, while descriptive refers to local perceptions that may contrast with the definitions by theory. Both descriptive and prescriptive reflects the question how theoretical approach of lost space may differs how local perceive and understand the lost space.

The Relationship between the Characteristics of Descriptive Lost Space and the Physical Urban Environment
In this analysis, the physical urban environment, such as streets, public spaces, parks, government reserve, buildings and parking, has unique characteristics needed in enhancing its quality. Physical settings in the urban area become a part of city attractiveness elements because of its ability to attract newly-emerging businesses and social interactions. In particular, not only the city but the people have recognised that attractive physical settings of the city can enhance city uniqueness and improve urban environment.

The results found that there are three (3) most characteristics mentioned by the respondents; social activity, economic activity and design (Table 2). Cafes, buskers, picnic, exhibitions, music festivals, and other events are types of social

activities identified by the respondents. If space was poorly managed and declined either physically, or in the activities (social, cultural and economic) it offers, the vicious cycle of decline may all too easily set in. Carmona, Heath, Oc and Tiesdell (2010) describe "if people use space less, then there is less incentive to provide new spaces and maintain existing ones. With decline in their maintenance and quality, public spaces are less likely to be used, thereby exacerbating the vicious spiral of decline".

The second characteristic of descriptive lost space as perceived by the selected members of the creative class is economic activities. Retail locations, restaurants, cafés, street food stalls, are some of the economic activities that were identified by the respondents. The third characteristic of descriptive lost space as perceived by end users' is the connectivity. According to the respondents, connectivity refers to the relative location and types of elements in the physical setting. Connectivity also refers to the availability of public transportation in the area. Accessibility, according to the respondents, refers to safety, convenience, and permeability. Some respondents have been denied access to it, prominent among which are the rich, elderly and youth. Exclusion of fear and inability to consume, the most written about being sporting and skateboarding, which is regarded by some as anti-social because of the conflict it creates with other groups. In such places, youth experience problems of safety and security and feelings of exclusion, while what they desire in a public space is social integration, safety and freedom of movement. All these describe failures to manage shared public spaces in a manner that allows their equitable use by all groups without diminishing the welfare of others.

Analysis of characteristics of descriptive lost space is very important as to compare with the characteristics of prescriptive lost space explained in the theory. As an example, the variety of public spaces in Kuala Lumpur such as KL Bird Park, Orchid Garden, Merdeka Square, and Perdana Botanical Garden, includes those that are planned for certain assigned functions; both legally and physically, accommodate other activities as well. It also includes other kinds of spaces currently without assigned functions that accommodate unintended and spontaneous activities. Many of these spaces possess particular features that invite people to appropriate them for their own uses.

Table 2: Characteristics of descriptive lost space based on the physical urban environment

Physical Urban Environment	Comments by Respondent	Characteristics of Descriptive Lost Space
	No activities	
	No proper path	
	Unfriendly	
	Not accessible for public use	**Social Activity**
	Climatic	
	No activities	
	Unattractive	
	Poor maintenance	
	Dangerous	**Economic Activity**
Streets	No linkages	
	Poor management	
	Unusable space	
Public Spaces	Single use space	
	No other activities	**Connectivity**
	Unsafe	
	Poor connectivity	
Urban Parks	No signage	
	Lack of various activities	**Accessibility**
	Lack of safety elements	
Government Reserve	Expensive	
	Nothing interesting	
	No special attraction	
Commercial Buildings	Not easily accessible	**Climate**
	Boring	
	Parks too large	
	Blind spots	
Parking Lots	No feeder bus provided for locals	**Design**
	Does not lead to anywhere	
	Nothing much activities to do	
	Poor infrastructure	
	No interesting gesture	
	No events/programs	**Maintenance**
	Dumping ground	
	Trapped space (dead end)	
	Building not maintained properly	
	No retails	**Scale**
	Lack of public facilities	
	Serves no purpose	
	No function	
	Not habitable	
	Non-functional design	

To identify what respondents perceive lost space

Important factors to improve sense of place

Three respondents have mentioned urban core areas of Kuala Lumpur is lacking social and economic activities, connectivity, accessibility and design. The respondents have highlighted that there are no significant attractions or interesting activities that attract people to come. The following quotation shows how the importance of having a synthetic gesture in an urban area:

> *"…it is important to have a synthetic gesture to attract density towards an area. However, in the case of Perdana Botanical Garden and its surrounding, there is no strong attractors that may attract people to visit*

> *the area often. Having activities alone does not make the area lively. The support of public transportation and better connectivity helps to capture the density in the area…"*

The poor physical state of Perdana Botanical Garden seems to rest with the fact that it is rarely clear who should be managing it after it is built, or after it has declined. As a result, it is being neglected, with Hajer and Reijndorp (2001) explaining that more attention needs to be given to such transitional space.

In addition, the study area consists of a large recreational park surrounded by various cultural and eco-tourism areas. However, local people did not find any attractions to visit. This brings us to the second characteristic, which is poor in connectivity and accessibility that contributes to lost space as mentioned by the respondent.

> *"I have been living in Kuala Lumpur for 30 years. I can count how many times I have been to Perdana Botanical Garden. Hardly reachable, unfriendly pathways and bicycle lane, and no public transportation access to the area except the Hop on Hop off Bus, which only caters for the tourists only".*

The design of the area also influences people to utilise the space. Two respondents perceived that Perdana Botanical Garden is unsafe due to many reasons such as robbery and vandalism. The massive development around the park contributed to the feeling of unsafe due to the lack of natural surveillance.

Characteristics of Prescriptive and Descriptive Lost Space
Most of the respondents expressed the negative perceptions towards the term lost space as defined by Trancik (1986), Loukaitou-Sideris (1996), and Franck and Steven (2006). People are aware of the negative side of the space and the need of redesigning towards the area. This shows that most of the respondents' definitions of lost space are somehow similar to Trancik's (1986).

For descriptive definition of lost space, this study synthesizes the key themes discussed by selected end users' when asked to define their individual perceptions of lost space. In general, respondents perceived descriptive lost space as underutilized, abandoned, wasted, unused or hidden spaces. Descriptive lost space, however, has the potential to become a positive space if it benefits the aesthetics of the surroundings. The characteristics of prescriptive lost space are activity, connectivity, accessibility, design, maintenance, orientation, and scale. From a prescriptive perspective, activity refers to unused sunken plazas, abandoned waterfronts, and edges of freeways. Connectivity in prescriptive perspective refers to parking lots when they cut the city's urban fabric. Meanwhile, accessibility mostly refers to wide roads if they limit access to surrounding districts. From a prescriptive perspective, design refers to

unstructured landscape at the base of high rise towers and marginal public housing, and maintenance includes the edge of freeways and deteriorated parks. Finally, orientation in a prescriptive perspective refers to large parcel development, large blank walls, large government structures, and mega structures. When spaces in the physical setting lack characteristic such as the activity or design, they are considered as lost space in prescriptive perspective.

The descriptive lost space results can be concluded by combining the descriptive definition and characteristics of lost space, meaning that for a place to be defined as descriptive lost space, it must lack of at least one of the four (4) common characteristics of descriptive lost space; activities, connectivity, accessibility and maintenance.

Prescriptive vs Descriptive Lost Space
In discussing the lost space in Kuala Lumpur, the respondents mentioned Taman Tasik Perdana, streets, roundabout, waterfront, Kompleks Daya Bumi, viaduct of Jalan Kuching - Jalan Tun Perak, and parking space. Examples of each area mentioned by respondent will be discussed in the following section. For the purpose of determining whether an exact location conforms to the characteristics of prescriptive and or descriptive lost space, these specific areas of Kuala Lumpur mentioned by the respondents were fit into the typologies of prescriptive lost space.

Table 4 summarizes the understanding of respondents of lost space in Kuala Lumpur. The results show there is the conflict between the characteristics of prescriptive and descriptive of lost space. Respondents reported that the parking lots are not a lost space because it is a park facility since everybody drives a car to go to the park.

People create loose space through their own actions (Krier et al., 2006). These urban spaces possess physical and social possibilities for looseness, being open to appropriation, but it is people, through their own eyes and understanding, who fulfil these possibilities. From the results, the emergence of a lost space depends upon; people's perspective of the potential within the space, and second, varying degrees of creativity and determination to make use of what is present, with possibility of modifying existing elements or bringing in additional ones.

Table 3: Comparison between characteristics of prescriptive and descriptive lost space

Typology of Prescriptive Lost Space		Characteristics of Prescriptive Lost Space	Characteristics of Descriptive Lost Space
Trancik	Unstructured landscape in high rise buildings	Activity	Activity
	Unused sunken plaza		
	Edge of freeway	Connectivity	Connectivity
	Abandoned waterfronts		
	Abandoned blight clearance sites	Accessibility	Accessibility
	Deteriorated parks		
	Marginal public housing	Design	Design
	Surface parking lots		
Loukaitou-Sideris	Large parcel developments	Maintenance	Maintenance
	Edge of large transportation projects (wide roads)		
Franc and Steven	Large blank walls	Orientation	Prescriptive
	Large governmental structures		
		Scale	Scale
	Mega structures		

Figure 3: Lost spaces identified by the respondents. (i) Roundabout in Jalan Kuching, Kuala Lumpur; (ii) Viaduct of Jalan Kuching - Jalan Tun Perak; (iii) Panggung Anniversari

Table 4: Comparison between areas of prescriptive and descriptive lost space according to the definitions

	Typology of Prescriptive Lost Space	Areas	Prescriptive Lost Space	Prescriptive Characteristics	Descriptive Lost Space	Prescriptive Characteristics
Trancik	Unstructured landscape	Kompleks Daya Bumi	●	Activity, connectivity, accessibility	○	1
	Edge of freeway	Jalan Kinabalu	●	Activity, connectivity, accessibility	●	Activity, connectivity
	Abandoned waterfronts	Along Klang River and Gombak River	●	Activity, connectivity, accessibility	●	Activity, connectivity, accessibility
	Deteriorated parks	Taman Tasik Perdana	●	Activity, connectivity, maintenance	●	Activity, connectivity, accessibility, maintenance, scale
Loukaiton-Sideris	Off-street parking	Parking space	●	Connectivity	○	2
	Large parcel developments	Taman Tasik Perdana	●	Connectivity, accessibility	●	Activity, connectivity, accessibility, scale
	Edge of large transportation projects (wide roads)	Jalan Kinabalu	●	Activity, accessibility	●	Activity, accessibility
Frank and Steven	Large blank walls				○	
	Large governmental structures				○	
	Mega structures				○	

Notes:
1. Only one respondent highlight the issue of lack of activity in area of Kompleks Daya Bumi
2. None of the respondent report that the parking areas in KL Historical Zone was lack of connectivity. Most of the respondent indicate that parking are necessary to facilitate their daily life, therefore they assume it as not a lost space. However, one respondent report that due to the single use of the space, it has been caused to be as a wastage of space instead of lost

● Yes

○ No

○ Not mentioned

Figure 4: Respondents highlighted the Perdana Botanical Garden is well-maintained. However, due to the lack of interesting activities, poor connectivity and accessibility, thus contribute to lost space

Figure 5: Jalan Lembah, Kuala Lumpur, a street that found lack of activities and pedestrian infrastructures. A greater variety of streets and land uses stimulate the emergence of loose space

Figure 6 The vacant lots and abandoned spaces turn into parking lots which has no necessary relation to ownership, size, type of use or even landscape characters.

CONCLUSION

Having the understanding on the differences between prescriptive lost space and descriptive lost space, it is apparent that the respondents in this research perceive Kuala Lumpur to be lacking activity, connectivity and accessibility, and therefore, has descriptive lost space potential. The respondents also perceive that more social economic activity would help prevent descriptive lost space, especially if those activities had better connectivity and accessibility with the surrounding.

It is crucial to trigger the relevant bodies' interest by highlighting certain basic principles in planning for a better space design and planning in urban core areas. As conclusion, both political commitment and public investment are required. It is not the planning system per se which is at fault. We need a strong planning system. It is possibly the way that it is operated that needs review. There needs to be greater sensitivity in the application of planning laws to better control over the location of high buildings, infrastructures, public spaces, greater regard for historic areas, better understanding of the organic growth of urban core and a striving for higher quality in building and space design.

Additionally, there has always been a strong relation between commerce and urban public space, and strong exclusionary tendencies among those with management and ownership responsibilities. It is surprising that corporate interests are determined to take responsibility for public spaces when the public sector has often done such a poor job in managing the spaces for which they are responsible, spaces that still make up the large majority of the public realm.

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