



EFFECTIVENESS OF ECO PUBLIC ART FOR URBAN
BACK LANES REVITALIZATION

BY

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ABSTRACT

Back lane is part of cities that is often associated with unutilized issues, leading to several environmental issues, safety problems and the low level of environmental awareness and concerns on its care. Some cities have undertaken revitalization projects through public art as part of the transformation. Therefore, the aim of this research is to examine the revitalization process of an urban back lane through eco public art to identify the steps involved in transforming the back lane, and how eco public art acts as a medium to increase people's environmental awareness. The case study selected is Laman Seni 7, Shah Alam, which is an urban back lane that has been transformed through eco public art. The research methods consist of a site inventory, semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires. Four key points summarize the revitalization strategy. First, the revitalization process of Laman Seni 7 involved four main phases, which are planning, designing, executing and programming. Second, public preferences of the eco public art were found to be based on specific attributes from the aspects of physical, social, material and message. Third, the findings reveal that eco public art contributes to the increase of environmental education and environmental awareness among the public. Finally, the research concludes that eco public art is indeed an effective medium for urban back lane revitalization. In conclusion, this research contributes to the field of landscape architecture and urban design by recommending a guideline on implementing eco public art for public space that can be adapted by the local authority, designers and the community for back lane revitalization projects in the future.

خلاصة البحث

يتناول هذا البحث عملية تنشيط الممرات الخلفية في المناطق العمرانية من خلال بيئة فنية عامة بوصفه لزيادة الوعي البيئي لدى الجمهور العام. تعد الممرات الخلفية جزءًا من المدن، وتكون غالبًا مرتبطة بالقضايا غير المستغلة وتؤدي إلى العديد من المشاكل البيئية قضايا السلامة وانخفاض في مستوى الوعي والاهتمام لرعاية هذه الممرات الخلفية. وقد قامت بعض المدن بمشاريع تنموية من خلال الفن العام جزءًا من التحويل. ومع ذلك، فإن معظم هذه الجهود المبذولة تركز على أن هذه الممرات فضاءات عامة. لقد وجدت الدراسات السابقة بأن التربية البيئية والوعي البيئي بين الجمهور من العناصر المهمة في المساهمة في تقدير الناس تجاه الأماكن العامة. لذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة لفحص عملية تنشيط الممرات الخلفية في المناطق العمرانية من خلال البيئة الفنية العامة للتعرف على الخطوات المتبعة في عملية تحويل هذه الممرات الخلفية، وكيف أن البيئة الفنية العامة وسيلة لزيادة الوعي البيئي لدى الناس. أما الأهداف فهي:

(1) للتحقيق في عملية معالجة الممرات الخلفية في المناطق العمرانية والأشخاص المعنيين الذين شاركوا في ذلك.

(2) لقياس مدى فعالية البيئة الفنية العامة وسيلة لتعزيز الوعي العام بين الجمهور الذين يزورون ويستخدمون الممرات الخلفية.

(3) لتقديم التوصيات والسمات البيئية الفنية والتي من شأنها إعادة إحياء الممرات الخلفية للمشاريع المستقبلية. تم اختيار دراسة الحالة في منطقة امان سيني7، شاه علم، وهو ذلك الممر الخلفي الذي تم إعادة إحيائه وتهيئته من خلال بيئة الفن العام. تتكون طرق البحث من عميلة جرد للموقع واستخدام المقابلات شبه المنظمة والاستبيان المسحية. ولقد تم جرد الموقع لتوثيق ظروفه وسمات الأعمال الفنية المعروضة. وأجريت المقابلات شبه المنظمة على السلطة المحلية، والجهة المنظمة واثنين من الفنانين لمعرفة المزيد عن عملية الإحياء. ولقد تم توزيع ما مجموعه 200 استبيان على جمهور المستخدمين لقياس تفضيلات الجمهور وتصوراتهم نحو سمات فن البيئة العامة وسيلة لإحياء الممر الخلفي. وكذلك فإن المسح الاستبائي يقوم بتقييم فرق الوعي البيئي قبل زيارة الممر الخلفي بعده. تم تحليل البيانات من المقابلات شبه المنظمة باستخدام التشفيرات الموضوعية، في حين تم تحليل الاستبانات باستخدام برنامج SPSS الإحصائي. إن الخطوط العريضة لنتائج هذا البحث تتلخص بأربع نقاط رئيسية تلخص استراتيجية إعادة إحياء الممرات الخلفية. أولاً، إن عملية إعادة الإحياء لأمان سيني7 ينطوي على أربع مراحل رئيسية وهي، التخطيط والتصميم والتنفيذ والبرمجة. ثانياً، تم العثور على تفضيلات عامة لبيئة الفن العام تقوم على أسس سمات محددة من الجوانب المادية والاجتماعية والمادية ورسالة العمل. ثالثاً، التفضيلات العامة لبيئة الفن العام حيث أظهرت النتائج بأن بيئة الفن العام تساهم في زيادة التوعية البيئية والوعي البيئي لدى الجمهور. وأخيراً، استنتج الباحث أن الفن البيئي العام هو في الواقع وسيلة فعالة لتنشيط الممرات الخلفية في المناطق العمرانية. في الختام، يساهم هذا البحث في مجال هندسة المناظر الطبيعية والتصميم العمراني من خلال دليل التوصيات لتنفيذ بيئة فنية عامة، في المساحات العامة، والتي يمكن أن تتبناها من قبل السلطة المحلية والمصممون والمجتمع في المشاريع المستقبلية من أجل إعادة إحياء الممرات الخلفية.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Science (Built Environment).

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DECLARATION

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

PAC	Public Art Committee
PACB	Public Art Commissions Board
PAS	Public Art Staffs
PAAT	Public Art Action Team
SACC	Shah Alam City Council
LS7	Laman Seni 7
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In most developed cities in countries such as America, Australia, China, Japan, Singapore and Malaysia, the lanes in between the rows of buildings have been an essential part of the urban built environment. However, most of the back lanes in cities and towns are often associated with underutilization, and they evoke a number of negative images such as bad hygiene, disgusting, narrow and dark conditions (Kakimoto, 2013; M. Tawil et al., 2013; Martin, 2001). In overcoming these issues, some cities have formulated revitalization strategies through public art for back lanes to transform into a quality public space by enhancing the function, environment and people's experience through social interaction and activities (Burgos & Sarkisian, 2013; Fialko & Hampton, 2013; R. Adams, 2008; Ferreter, Lewis, & Pickford, 2008; Samadi & Hasbullah, 2008).

This study focuses on the revitalization strategies of urban back lanes through eco public art approaches in the Malaysian context. Back lane revitalization projects aim to improve and create an effective public space for people. There has been numerous revitalization strategies or approaches for back lanes that reconnects them to the community (Ardis, 2014; Burgos & Sarkisian, 2013; Fialko & Hampton, 2013; R. Adams, 2008). This revitalization approach has a close relation with the concept of placemaking. Placemaking is not just the act of building or fixing up a space. It fosters the creation of a public place where people feel a strong stake of communities and commitment to make things better. It is not only about transforming urban back lanes

into a public space, but at the same time, creating a public place to uplift people's experience and help them to connect with each other (PPS, 2005). According to Stenning & Somers, (2012) public art has potentials to be incorporated into the revitalization strategies. Public art can beautify the back lanes and it can also become an attraction. There are cities that have introduced the implementation of public art as their revitalization strategies to offer a positive experience for people in the urban public space (Fialko & Hampton, 2013).

1.2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

In the built environment, back lanes are a part of the cities that generally function as service routes. However, they are often associated with poor condition and lacking of appropriate management (City of Birmingham, 2012; Yiwei, 2011). For more than 2000 years, the leftover narrow spaces in between rows of houses have functioned as a space where neighbours communicate and interact, children play, infrastructure service access, and other informal activities (Martin, 2001). However, in cities, back lanes are often neglected by most of the public and the building owners. As a result of this, left over space becomes underutilized. Issues that arise pertaining to back lanes cause the space to be perceived as wasteful, unattractive, prone to crime, no maintenance, garbage dumping area, and eventually leads to the low level of environmental awareness on back lanes (Kakimoto, 2013; Martin, 2001; Beasley, 1997). Back lanes become a forgotten space where no one seems to care, which is what attracts the problems.

In Malaysia, back lanes are required to fulfil the minimum distance between buildings as set by the local authorities or government. According to the Back Lane Planning Guidelines 2012 set by the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning Peninsular Malaysia, under the Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local

Government (JPBD, 2012), the back lanes function as emergency routes for fire escape and to allow fire engine to access. Not only that, the functions of back lanes are generally used for utilities and infrastructure route, for instance, for drainage and garbage collection, sewerage maintenance and sometimes act as the secondary network for vehicular circulation. The effects of limited use of back lanes have resulted to the environmental and social issues relating to human and their attitude towards urban back lanes.

Within the last four years, issues of back lanes in the urban context, have been regularly appearing in the local newspaper headlines. Among which are, “Sniffing out a fatal habit” (Edwards, 2011), “Back lanes in Taipan Business Centre filled with garbage” (Mustapha, 2013), “Petaling Street’s dirty condition turning many away” (Teng, 2014) and “Dirty back alley in TTDI attracts rats” (Edward, 2014). The negative image and perception of back lanes as a potential crime area, dirty, dark, smelly, and full of disgusting elements are very concerning. Apparently, most of the building frontage of the shops or offices may look nice and clean but the back lanes reveal a different condition. This reflects the people’s behaviour and their low level of awareness towards the environment and their responsibilities (Abdul-Wahab, 2008; Wong & Wan, 2004; Yuniato, 2012).

Back lane issues will affect not only the negative visual impact of the place and the community’s health, but also the identity and the image of the city and its economic development (Fialko & Hampton, 2013). Hence, the bad perception of back lanes among the public should be changed. Advocates of the recent planning trend known as ‘new urbanism’ began an attempt to rehabilitate the back-alley as a streetscape-enhancing strategy. Back lanes are seen to potentially contribute to the green lungs of

the city and can function as flexible spaces (Lorinc, 2014; M. Tawil et al., 2013; Fialko & Hampton, 2013; Martin, 2001).

Despite the negative views concerning the back lanes, this overlooked space indeed has a lot of potentials in the built environment. Back lanes can contribute to 50% additional space to a city, creating a new network for pedestrians (Lorinc, 2014; Burgos & Sarkisian, 2013; Fialko & Hampton, 2013). According to Kakimoto (2013), the urban revitalization of back lanes in the United States is becoming widely recognized. Successful revitalization of back lanes may bring many positive outcomes to the city, which can contribute to the maximum and effective utilization of public space. Cities such as Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Austin in Australia have also taken the actions in transforming their lanes into a public space to catalyse growth and development (Burgos & Sarkisian, 2013; Carmichael, 2011). In the Asian countries, back lane revitalization is still at its infancy stage. Cities in Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia have started to take initiatives towards revitalizing back lanes.

Back lane revitalization initiatives have also been done locally in Malaysia. Local authority such as the Shah Alam City Council (SACC) has also taken some efforts in transforming the back lanes in Shah Alam into vibrant space called “Laman Seni Shah Alam”, located in Section 2 and Section 7 commercial area. The former Mayor of Shah Alam said that, the purpose of the project was to change the visual landscape of the area, together aimed at changing the public’s perception. Similarly, the State Government of Penang also improved some parts of the city by introducing street art for the public to experience. The street art aimed to create a visual sense of belonging to the city. In other example, Chinatown in Kuala Terengganu, had also implemented a cultural approach in revitalizing the lanes in between the shop houses. This project was also an initiative of Terengganu State Government. As a result, the left over space in

between the buildings were no longer a space without proper function nor is it for garbage anymore. The lanes conditions are now clean, well-maintained and attractive. These examples show that the revitalization of back lanes have increased the efficient use of urban space and changed the functions of back lanes into a public space.

The integration of public art in back lanes transformation projects are widely implemented to create a social space for human activities. Recent studies and revitalization projects concerning on the implementation of public art mostly emphasize on creating a sociable and functional place (Adams, 2008). Public art also acts as a medium of beautification to attract people. However, most of the artwork installations are still lacking in considering the environmental approaches or values that can also contribute to the urban quality of life (Colotti, 2008; Haley, 2005; Damon & Smithson, 1998). Therefore, there is a potential of “Eco public art” or ecological public art to be a part of back lane revitalization. Eco public art integrates the concept of art and ecological-friendly approaches as a means of developing awareness in improving human relationship with nature, through visual arts and experience (Curtis, Reid, & Ballard, 2012; Bower, 2011; Mantere & Naess, 1992; Robinson, 2008). The concept is similar to other public art approaches but with different methods focusing towards environmental awareness.

Although numerous back lane placemaking projects have been done locally and internationally, however, there is not many studies that examine people’s experience of the revitalized back lanes. Have the projects successfully changed the function of the back lanes? How effective is it in contributing to change the public’s perception and awareness on the back lanes? It is important to evaluate the extent to which this revitalization approach is effective or not, so that planners and designers can further improve on how we can revitalize back lanes into more functional places.