

**STUDY ON LOWCOST HIGH RISE URBAN HOUSING IN KUALA
LUMPUR – IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL SPACES**

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ABSTRACT

Current needs of low cost urban housing in Malaysia have spurred massive construction and development of residential areas. With the urgency to execute government promises in the electoral campaign, the development of low cost urban housing is being seen to provide communities needs for shelter and social well being. Low cost housing is a dwelling where the total housing costs are affordable to those low income groups with earning below 200 US dollar a month comprises of a family with two or three children respectively. It is also a housing development carry heavy subsidization from the government or from the private sectors. The objectives of this paper are to investigate the design and use of spaces for the low cost high rise urban housing particularly in Kuala Lumpur. The paper shall also focus on space planning issues and approaches that would enable to look at the sustainability of communal spaces in urban housing areas. The research study will provide sampling of low cost high rise urban housings constructed for the past 10 years. Comparison analysis together with interview and site observation shall be conducted Therefore, the study is expect to provide a detail insight to the use of social spaces and how the communities approach the use of public spaces in high rise housing.

Key words: Low Cost High Rise Housing, Sustainable Design, Sustainable Community, Social Space.

Introduction

Low cost housing is dwelling where the total housing costs are affordable to those of low income group in that housing unit. Almost in all the major cities in Asian countries, residential buildings are characterized with high-rise and high density. Therefore, the sustainable strategies in communal space used for low cost high rise housing development play an important concern and is the main focus of this paper. The research will cover the 'soft part' of the sustainable architecture which is socio-environment of the communities. On the macro view, sustainable communities are communities planned, built, or modified to promote sustainable living. In the *Strategies for Sustainable Architecture*, Sassi. P. mentioned that sustainable architecture has two parts which hardware and software. The hard part will be the material, construction or ecology foot print. The soft part will be the appropriate contribution to the social environment human inhabit by addressing people's practical needs while enhancing their surrounding environment and their psychological and physical. Therefore, the sustainable community can consider as soft part.

Most of the time concern were on areas pertaining to heat lost and gain but in retrospectively to focus on the other environmental issues of sustainability (including intra personnel development and well being) and economic of sustaining moderate living. As stated by Sassi P. "*Sustainable urban and communities design connects these natural elements so that the community works together as an organism, creating interdependent patterns that sustain each other.*" The idea of sustainable architecture will be to deal with local climate and context at micro perspective. That sort of architecture can call as 'green architecture'. Nonetheless, green architecture is reducing the non-renewable energies indirectly. It also concerns more on the space planning and comfort in overall design. However, sustainable design is much wider.

On the other hand, Barton H.(2000) explained ;"*Desirable sustainable community with a place that engenders a feeling of belonging, an attractive and healthy place within a convivial community, a safe place that is pollution free, uncongested, planted, less frenetic and offers more locally based life with balance of privacy and community interaction.*" In the micro scale, sustainable communities offer people the opportunity to enjoy better standard of living, while housing minimal negative impact on the environment and the economic and social structure. Communities and local government in the United Kingdom has a standard that how the sustainable should offers to public.

- A sense of community identity and belonging
- Tolerance, respect and engagement with people from different cultures, background and beliefs
- Friendly, co-operative and helpful behaviour in neighbourhoods

- Opportunities for cultural, leisure, community, sport and other activities, including for children and young people
- Low levels of crime, drugs and antisocial behaviour with visible, effective and community-friendly policing
- Social inclusion and good life chances for all.

The Communal Spaces

“In any organisation, extreme compartmentalisation and dissociation of internal elements is the first sign of destruction. In a society, disassociation is anarchy. In a person, disassociation is the mark of schizophrenia and impending suicide.”- Christopher Alexander (1965), *A City Is Not Tree*. The concepts of communal space, community space, social space, defensible space, or transitory space carry out the same function in the realm of public housing. They act as platform for meetings and interactions between the residents living there. The importance of these spaces is inherently acknowledged in any traditional community. In the principles socio petal of Edward Krupat who as Psychologist (1985, pg.158) that the five ways that then built environment relates to people;

- Physical As end product being actual physical structure that encompasses and compartmentalise space
- Functional Space that accomplishes certain purpose
- Cognitive Provide cues for behaviour
- Affective Arousing emotion, perceived and evaluated against cultural norm as being beautiful or provides safety and security
- Social A loose setting to allow people to interact and meet others

In terms of functional satisfaction for users, the Krupat felt that the designers should beyond that which provides more cues to fulfil the human needs for social interaction privacy and identity. He likewise mentioned on how the centralize space can work better to provide a highly interaction space for human. The space function would influence the space usage as well for him.

Beside that, Tay Kheng Soon’s discourse on ‘The Tropical City’ (1986) believed transitional zones to mitigate the suffering experienced by people living and working in cities of rapidly developing countries. Tay remarked that when people are in a hurry, they tend to cast aside the simple courtesies of demeanour and speech. However, since hospitality and informality are the hallmarks of our tropical life, therefore Tay reminded us that our city should be build and plan for them. Through the theory of the communal space, the parameter for the communal space can be formed by size, visual accessibility, physical accessibility, safety and comfort as well. Based on this criterion, the success or sustainability achievement of the spaces can be identified easily. That it will be a encourage factor for users to come to interact and

have communication as well. Therefore, the sustainable community can be formed easily.

Low Cost High Rise Housing in Kuala Lumpur

“The quantity of housing that is required to provide accommodation of an agreed minimum standard and above for a population given its size, household composition, age distribution, etc without taking into account the individual household’s ability to pay for the housing assigned to it.” – Housing Economics & Public Policy, London, Robinson, (1979, p55).

“In Malaysia, conventional low cost housing is provided by the public and private sectors. Low cost housing is generally defined as the appropriate housing units of which the construction is in accordance with identified minimum standard complying with a code of practice specially created for low cost house.” – Morshidi Sirat, (1999).

On the above, the statement gives the general explanation for the low cost housing. Basically, low cost housing is providing for certain range of incomer particular low income that they can afford a house in our country. Low cost housing is established based on certain minimum standard of construction and planning to ensure the comfort of the residents.



Figure 1 Pantai Dalam Development, Kuala Lumpur



Figure 2 Jelatek Development, Kuala Lumpur

In Malaysia, government has established a programme called Hard-Core Poor Development Programme (Program Perumahan rakyat Termiskin - PPRT) to deal with the low cost housing. One of the purposes of the low cost housing is to reduce the squatters in the urban area that created a lot of problem to environment. On the relocation of squatters, the government has considered the community spirit within the squatters. Thus, they usually replace into a same low cost housing development to extend the community spirit into new environment.

Living in multi-racial hospitality and informality is part of our culture and heritage. Communal space and communal activities are a norm in our traditional society. Yet in our quest for providing high density living, we often look outward and elsewhere for clues and methods of providing safe, secure and harmonious living conditions. Both knowledge and practice founded by the academics and our culture should be synthesised and implemented in planning for high-density living.

Scope of Study and Methodology

The objectives of this paper are to investigate the design and use of spaces for the low cost high rise urban housing particularly in Kuala Lumpur. The paper shall also focus on space planning issues and approaches that would enable to look at the sustainability of communal spaces in urban housing areas. The scope of study covers the sustainable social aspect for communal space planning in the selected low cost high rise housings. For the fundamental social space in the housing can define into general community area such as recreation area, community hall, and sub communal space such as corridor, and lift lobby.

From that, we can justify that the recreation space is where the leisure activities can be used by the youth and elders. Therefore, the space consist the facilities of leisure

activities such as ball court, playground, and jogging track that can be considered as recreation area. The community hall is a building used for community activities, it is a building used for a range of community activities in housing scheme can be justified as community hall.

'A corridor is a path or guided way (usually referring to an interior passageway in modern buildings). A corridor is fundamentally a relatively large space enclosed by a roof and walls. In the Iron Age, a mead hall was such a simple building and was the residence of a lord and his retainers. Later, rooms were partitioned from it, so that today the corridor of a house is the space inside the front door from which the rooms are reached.' - Newman, D. "Building Identity: Socialization"

This is the definition of the corridor that the selected case studies will be based on same criteria. In this paper the study will focus on Kuala Lumpur which is an urban state and consist a lot of high rise residential buildings which were built to accommodate government policies to house the low income group.

The research methodologies are divided into several parts as shown below:

- Case Studies
Pantai Dalam had highest number of squatters in Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. The area has the highest number of PPRT flats with 5000 units in 5 housing schemes. Basically, Pantai Dalam is divided into 5 areas that are Kg. Limau, Kg. Selamat, Kg. Pasir, Kg. Pantai Dalam, and Pantai Hill Park. The 2 sampling will be selected within Pantai Dalam low cost high rise housing. The housing development at Jelatek shall also be included in the research. The observation and survey will be conducted and will be analysis accordingly.
- Collection of data (questionnaires)
The field study is carried out through series of questionnaires which than be analysis statistically in providing some findings. (By using Likert Scale with 1 as least appropriate/suitable and 5 being most appropriate/suitable).

Discussion

Low cost high rise housing in Jelatek which approximately 3 kilometers from the city center was chosen completed in the mid 1990's. The other low cost high rise in Pantai Dalam was just completed almost 2 years located approximately 10 kilometers and shall provide a contrasting research study. The questionnaires had been divided into five sections as seen below.

General Information

Through the questionnaires, occupants in Jelatek had average residency period of 11.1 years with the average age group of 50.15 years and with the average 5.65 numbers of children. Meanwhile occupants in Pantai Dalam had the average residency period of 0.97 years (which indicate the building only being occupied fully almost a year ago). The average age was 45.55 years with almost the equal number of 5.15 children.

Findings on the Design and Use of Spaces

Occupants at the newly completed housing scheme of Pantai Dalam fall short for using the recreation spaces as compared to those of Jelatek. This being that the overall planning of used at Pantai Dalam utilized the linear planning and stretching its accessibility to the limit whereas other were not. Safety and ease of use fare equally to both low cost housing schemes with Jelatek had the fare better in term of appropriateness and suitability of use for interaction and usage by the public. Thus indicate a better design and usage of recreation spaces in the older scheme of low cost housing.

What equally important to the open spaces or recreational spaces on the ground level are spaces that become the basic to the need of the high rise housing communities. These spaces only read in plan as corridors and lift lobbies but they are spaces prime and important to the socio arteries of any vertical housing scheme. The basic for sustainable community is to create a peace and enjoyable space for public to interact among each others. At the same time, create a sense of belonging and shared memories among people who use it. Eventually, generate a lively community among city people. The low cost high rise housing scheme for both had provided fairly satisfactory planning for the occupants to be utilized as a place for communication and interaction. However the users for the housing scheme of the newly completed building at Pantai Dalam feels that the circulation area and lift lobbies were inadequate in providing safety or the comfort of feeling secured. Although the spaces were fully lit during the evening but the layouts were angled to the corridor area almost obscured to other public spaces. Since there have been a case of child kidnapping not far away from the case study area, users are more conscious to semi enclosed public spaces such as the lift lobby area..

The planning of a multi purpose community building has been part and parcel for any low cost housing development in the city. Both low cost housing developments were provided with a community building for activities such as sports, wedding and communal festive celebration. The newly completed housing development of Pantai Dalam had been provided with the best facilities to be housed in the multi purposed community building. However the users felt that the location and distance is not

suitable no appropriate to encourage the full use of the community building, on the other hand users at the Jelatek low-cost high rise housing development experience otherwise. Since Pantai Dalam had a higher development density compared to Jelatek, problem of overcrowding and availability become an issue and if it is not address immediately will encourage infringement and defacement of other spaces to be utilized as communal cum play area.

Space Planning Approaches

Findings pertaining to the design and use of spaces had been explained for both developments. Although the economic factors and the immediate policies to house low income group in order to provide some answers to problems of squatters, approaches and space planning does not differ very much for the last decade. Spaces were planned almost the same with minor adjustment to suit site condition and planning requirements. As a matter of fact some adjustment to increase density and maximizing cost had provided insecurities to users, in the case of corridor and lift lobbies for the newly built Pantai Dalam development. Public or semi public spaces in any high rise housing development are facilities of equal importance and should be plan meticulously to ensure communal and environmental sustainability's. The importance of such spaces go beyond of providing enjoyable spaces, it can also help avoid anti-social behaviours. Therefore, the success of the space planning can play a part to a sustainable community and at the same time provide housing needs to the city.

Recommendation and Conclusion

The research has cover area of public spaces commonly used in any high rise public housing within Kuala Lumpur city center. Communities look at the spaces daily as mean of recreation or practical used such as horizontal and vertical circulation. Retrospectively the spaces bare more important role than merely of its daily used. Architects and planners are provided with opportunities and challenges to ensure that the spaces utilization were used beyond its practical means but as spaces integral to the suitability of the housing communities, whether from the environmental point of view or the socio-economic.

In the past decade the low cost high rise housing scheme constructed were not much different in term of its basic layout and strategies. Changes and adaptation only occur in minimal context .Without immediate consideration to the sustainability of the communities and its immediate environment, the city might end up facing a vertical squatters or high rise squatters. The only differences between the new development and the old squatters is supposedly a well planned development and that to include whatever parameters that need to be addressed or considered.

Recommendation to be considered;

- Limit the density and building height of low cost high rise housing from current to 10 storey height.
- Discourage turnkey contracting and issuance of low cost high rise housing development contract to contractors.
- Encourage competition for alternative development by professionals such as architects and planners.
- Encourage users and occupants to engage in the overall planning.
- Provide R&D funding and university participation for research to sustainable housing scheme.

It is ironic that goes to the proverb of 'if you fail to plan than you plan to fail'.

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