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The Effectiveness of the Provision of Community Facilities in Neighbourhood Areas to Encourage Social Interaction

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Abstract: The importance of physical elements as a space for social interactions has been emphasised over the years even from the national perspective. The Second National Physical Plan, for example, has indicated that public facilities must be provided in neighbourhood areas mainly for the society to better interact, promoting sustainable and quality community living. According to the Department of Town and Country Planning Peninsular Malaysia (2012), public facilities consist of five types of facilities which are education facilities, health facilities, safety facilities, community facilities and religious facilities. This research aims to examine the effectiveness of community facilities (focusing on community hall) as a medium for social interactions in neighbourhood areas. It will analyse to what extent the community facilities has been effective or otherwise to be the platform for social interactions. This is because, according to Ahlbrant and Cunningham (1979), community facilities should act as a physical space for people to hold meetings, gather socially and conduct civic education congregational activities, recreation and sports activities as well as be the temporary sheltering space for people in need during any emergency situations.

Keywords: community facilities, effectiveness, neighbourhood, social interactions.

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INTRODUCTION

Based on the roles of community facilities suggested by Ahlbrant and Cunningham (1979), which is to be the space that provides a platform and physical area for people to do social activities without any force. In fact, the establishment of successful and functional community facilities is not solely the responsibility of the architects, urban designers or even town planners as it depends on those who are adopting, using and managing the space in line with the idea that people make places more than places make people. In order to focus on analysing the effectiveness of community facilities, this research has identified an area that has potentials to be the study area. It has been decided to choose a selection of community facilities in a populated neighbourhood area because as recommended by Farah Habib et. al. (2013). Perry neighbourhood concept by Clarence Perry proposed the public elements such as school, hall and any public facilities to be located in the middle of the neighbourhood area as a focal attraction. He believes the social connectivity among the neighbourhood residents would be enhanced by making the public spaces at the centre. According to Okunola and Amole (2012), the frequency of usage of the community facilities such as the community hall reflects the level of social interaction in a neighbourhood area.

In general, the usage of a community hall in a neighbourhood is focusing much on a few activities such as sports and wedding ceremony only. Whereas in a bigger perspective, it can be used for society meetings, civic and educational congregations and events, recreation and sports activities as well as sheltering people during the emergency events. The previous study shows that most of the community facilities are of underuse and in unfavourable conditions. For example, the quality of community facilities in Muar is at the poor level whereby 71.1% of 54 unit’s community facilities were not being used by community properly and not in working order (Utusan Online, 2010). While in Labis, there was one case where the futsal court was not well-functioned and later covered with bushes which somehow give a negative image of that neighbourhood area (Sinar Harian Online, 2015).
CASE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

The selected study area is at Taman Rinting neighbourhood which is located in Rinting planning block (according to the Local Plan), district of Johor Baharu, Johor covering an area of 272.7 hectares. In order to carry out this study and facilitate the data collection process, Taman Rinting Neighbourhood Area is divided into seven zones according to six types and categories of houses as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Zone Division of the Study Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Types of Housing</th>
<th>Housing Unit</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Area (Hectare)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Detached house (Gated Community)</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Medium cost terrace house</td>
<td>1,081</td>
<td>4,432</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>High-cost terrace house</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>1,976</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Flat</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1,230</td>
<td>17.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Unplanned house</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Low-cost terrace house</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>3,567</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,599</td>
<td>11,763</td>
<td>144.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The method of carrying out the data collection involves three stages which were observation survey, interview sessions with selected stakeholders and questionnaire survey. The observation survey was aimed to observe the existing conditions and functionality of the community hall which can be further connected to the effectiveness of community facilities as a medium for social interactions. While from the interview sessions with the selected respondents, the feedback from the management team was gathered and recorded. In this study, two interviews were conducted with the officers from the Welfare Department who have the authority towards the management and operation of the community hall. Finally, the questionnaire survey was distributed to the 100 residents which were randomly selected in Taman Rinting Neighbourhood.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis on background and functionality of the community hall has been carried out and the findings show that the usage of community hall and futsal court was minimum and only limited to selected activities. Residents use these facilities as their point for interaction when there are events or activities held at the hall because a space without activities will make people have no reason to come. Besides, the physical conditions of the hall were not well maintained and a few supporting facilities were not provided such as toilets and prayer rooms. This will not encourage local residents to go to the community hall and interact with others.

In the context of location, the community hall is located at the strategic place where it is surrounded by commercial area and main road. This makes a reasonable walking distance from each zone in the neighbourhood area. It only takes about 3 to 8 minutes’ drive to go to the community hall. The hall is still effective as a medium for social interactions because 81% of the respondents are still going to the hall and most of them are going to the hall for the purpose of a sports activity (futsal) and attending a wedding ceremony.

The activities conducted at the community hall plays a big role in attracting the community to go to the hall. This is explained by 80% of the respondents go to the hall only once a month whenever an event was held. It shows that the hall only effective to be used during the weekend and public holidays and there is no activities conducted on a daily basis. Besides, based on the analysis it shows that majority of the respondents are not going to the hall because of the busy schedule especially those who are working. This means that the hall is not effective as a medium for social interaction for working people because they prefer to spend more time at home during the weekend. Overall findings of the study are summarised as shown in Table 2.
Table 2: The Summary of Findings of this study

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Aspects</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Existing Condition of Taman Rinting Multipurpose Hall</strong></td>
<td>The Analysis on public facilities in the context of local plan</td>
<td>The current provision of public facilities in Planning Block 14 is not enough because there are lack of 87 facilities which are 1 health clinic, 28 rural clinics, 3 primary school, 4 mosque, 24 surau, 4 Chinese temple, 5 Indian temple, 5 church, 2 multipurpose hall, 2 community hall, 6 village hall and 4 mini library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background of Hall</td>
<td>The provision of hall and futsal court is not enough to encourage people to interact at the hall because a space without activities will make people have no reason to come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Location of Hall</td>
<td>The component condition of the hall is not well maintained and few components are not provided at the hall. This will not encourage local to go to the hall and interact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel Distance and Time</td>
<td>The activities held at the hall is not variety and not attract local people to frequently come.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Management of Hall</td>
<td>The Hall is located at the strategic place where it is surrounded by commercial area and main road that connecting each zone to the hall. The strategic location of the hall makes the hall suitable as a place for local people to interact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Effectiveness of Hall as a Medium for Social Interaction</strong></td>
<td>Respondents’ Presence at the Hall</td>
<td>The hall is still effective as a medium for social interaction because the majority of the respondents are still going to the hall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Purpose of Respondent going to the Hall</td>
<td>Wedding ceremony and sports activity makes the hall effective as a medium for social interaction in Taman Rinting Neighbourhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Respondents’ Frequency going to the Hall</td>
<td>The hall is not effective to be used in daily because the process of using the hall is not easy like other facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Reason of Respondent not going to the Hall</td>
<td>Majority of the respondents are not going to the hall because of busy especially those who are working which means that the hall is not effective as a medium for social interaction for working people because they prefer to spend more time at home during the weekend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of Social Interaction at the Hall</td>
<td>The level of social interaction at the hall is very good because the majority of the respondents are interested to interact in the future social activities while the minority of the respondents are not interested to interact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opinion on the Effectiveness of Hall as a Medium for Social Interaction</strong></td>
<td>Respondents’ Opinion</td>
<td>The effectiveness of hall will be more satisfied if the provision of activity is covering all group age and a program that can build a good relationship among the local people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Management’s Opinion</td>
<td>Department of Community Development agrees that the hall act as a medium for social interaction but they still have no plan on providing any program at the hall due to the no demand from local people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

As an overall conclusion, this study has achieved its aim and objectives stated earlier. It has accomplished its main purpose which is to examine to what extent the community facilities are effective in providing physical space for social interactions. It also examined the factors that limit the effectiveness of community facilities as a medium for social interaction in neighbourhood areas. The community hall will be more effective if the activities held covers all age groups and a program that can build a good relationship among the local people. Taman Rinting Multipurpose Hall provides spaces for few activities such as futsal, badminton, takraw, wedding ceremony, seminar, meeting and others. From the analysis carried out previously, it shows that local people would like to have some activities that can build good relationship among the residents. Currently, the activity provided at the hall cannot attract local people to use the hall frequently. The findings of this research concurred to the previous research conducted in Victoria (2009) which concludes that shared facilities is an inspiration and providing a multi-purpose activity at the hall can encourage people to go to the hall and therefore, interact with each other.

REFERENCES

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