Life Art Exploratory Gallery at Petaling Jaya

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ABSTRACT

Conventional thinking of Malaysians makes art an abstract and complex subject to be understood. Although art is subjective and controversial to different person's perception however it can bring excitement and refresh ones' minds in everyday life. It is interesting for an urban center to gather all walk of life to interact with one another through art intervention. Unfortunately, PJ state is a strong administrative and business hub with no entertainment centre or interesting spaces for people to discover and interact. Art is used as a strategy to revitalize abandoned or underutilised spaces. Hence, art is able to give life to these spaces and heighten the identity of the PJ State. Art appreciation can be ignited by adding art to revitalize abandoned spaces and government administrative center. The overall project aims to focus on art intervention as an underlying excitement to the rigid working routine of people, revitalize the abandoned spaces (Urban regeneration), and enhance closeness between public and government relationship (Urban revitalisation). The study is conducted using comparative case studies and physical observation on site. Comparative case studies help to analyse and set parameter of designing the entire project. On the other hand, physical observation pursues site analysis from all angle of aspects and project's potential. Findings of the study suggest a comprehensive design of an art gallery and government administrative tower through aligning public and government opinions and plans and example of successful art galleries. The significant of the paper may appear as a solution to shift the paradigm of Malaysian mindset and improving current relationship of public and MBPJ in PJ state.

INTRODUCTION

To make art more approachable to people, art should be taught in the context of daily life. The aesthetics of everyday life lies at the center of this age where people should enjoy art in everyday life as there is no boundary between art and life. Art is a daily needs or expression, a form of community, a space for people, an education to everyday life, and a living experience.

The current Malaysian art is young and the art appreciation and enthusiasts are slowly booming in the art industry. Undoubtedly, art appreciation can be started with improved asian educational system and adding art into the daily used space. Besides, art galleries are not gaining popularity among Malaysian as most of them prefer to spend time on other leisure activities. Through breaking down and integrating art gallery into part of daily space may help heighten public participation in art meanwhile injecting excitement into a monotonous yet structured city.

The project objectives are derived from the issues and site background which will guide the design proposal till the end. The project seeks the best solution for people to explore art in the context of everyday life in PJ State. Besides, it aims to revitalize the underutilised sunken plaza of Menara MBPJ and the park in front of municipal council by inserting art space and activities hence maximise the activities and human flow on site. It is also looking into creating a bonding between public and government through art intervention in a harmonious way thus promoting PJ historical timeline and current activities.

Case studies are selected to examine the functions, contextual responses and programming while comparative case studies are made between foreign art galleries and local ones. The comparative analysis of all

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selected art galleries would set parameter and guidance to the development of the proposed new art gallery. Hence, a more active and casual art gallery that engages people's passive and active activities can be developed through architecturally designed spaces by accommodating people gathering in the plaza and various art activities within the space.

Fig. 1: Selected Case Studies  (Source: Archdaily.com)

**Backgrounds of Study:**

PJ State is the heart of Petaling Jaya located in between the capital Kuala Lumpur and Klang. It is acted as administrative centre focusing on commercial and industrial administration. The headquarters of MBPJ building as well as the newly constructed MBPJ Tower are located in PJ New Town amongst commercial buildings and shop lots. MBPJ Tower was inaugurated on 16 March 1987, consisting of 27 storeys and costs approximately RM50 million.

Fig. 2: Petaling Jaya view taken in year 2007 (Source: The Star)

As the heart of PJ, Petaling Jaya New Town had attracted major commercial banks to boost its economy. Banks such as Bank Islam, Bank Rakyat, Public Bank, Maybank, and Standard Chartered Bank display a confidence that finance institutions can benefit the people of this city. There are 17 higher learning institutes in Petaling Jaya. These universities provide a vast selection of courses for young scholars to learn and develop so that they can contribute to the nation’s future growth.

MBPJ has announced a lot of plans to make better of PJ State. These plans are PJ Local Plan, PJ Liveable City, Low Carbon City, PJ Neighbourhood Safety Programme, Public Complaint Bureau, Green Corridor, PJ
People's Square and PJ International Festival. All the plans indicated MBPJ intentions to change the state into a safe, lively and green township. The objectives of these plans have merged with the project programme.

A detailed analysis of site context, circulation and accessibility, building typologies and zoning, activities patterns and existing building architectural analysis are conducted. The site analysis on all aspects helped to reason and justify the site boundaries so the proposed project is viable to the current socio and economical condition.

Fig. 3: Site Boundaries highlighted in Blue (Source: The Star)

The analysis of the site shows Petaling Jaya New Town is a strong government administrative base. Along with plentiful shop lots that make up the commercial area as well as major banks in the nation, this site becomes a business trading centre for the citizens. To top it off, the placement of a park provides a green lung for the community amongst this busy town. The site is practising pedestrianization by having a walkway linked above shoplots and vehicular free roads. Figure below shows the building typologies and activities onsite.

Fig. 4: Building Typologies on Site (Source: Author)

The evolution of PJ Seksyen 52 is developed under jurisdiction of municipality. The current OSC buildings and Menara MBPJ has replaced the wet market and shrunk the recreational park. Unfortunately, the replaced building and spaces are underutilised and neglected as part of people's daily life. PJ State converts into a ghost town at night mainly because of majority people are working communities. People commute for work and leaving the site empty at night and in the weekends. Besides, the site is a strong administrative and business hub with no entertainment centre or interesting spaces for people to discover.

The site possesses opportunities of revitalizing the abandoned sunken plaza. The location of sunken area allows people to have a different angle of view to the above city. Standing at the sunken level are able to notice the existence of upper shophouses hence it is an opportunity to revive the economic activities of both sunken plaza and surrounding shophouses.
The pedestrian linkage should be redesigned to connect sunken plaza and the park. The current ground linkage is lacking of activities, only pedestrian crossover can be seen. MBPJ has initiated pedestrian linkage as part of green city but need a better connection flow to encourage pedestrianization concept on site.

Besides, the park should be redesigned to make more visible and attractive. The park should serve as a nice entrance court to the MBPJ. It has the potential to make PJ more vibrant and brings fun to the working community or residents.

The current internal layout of building should be redesigned to achieve public friendly building. Currently, the building is cramped with many departments and the lobby is not welcoming. Public have to guess their direction to access to the upper level. The entire proposed project buildings should be redesigned externally and internally to make a public friendly and a good working environment building.

**Design Process:**

The preliminary idea of design involves tackling diminishing glory of PJ New Town by adding art and life into it. According to GEHL Architect (2014), people, life and vitality are the biggest attractions in a community. GEHL Architects have developed working methods for dealing with planning and urban design where the activities of the people within the communities are considered first. The quality of the spaces is analysed based on criteria developed from a people perspective and design solutions and recommendations for spaces, landscaping and buildings are based on these.

![Fig. 5: GEHL Process of Planning & Reversible Process of Planning in this project (Source: GEHL.com)](image)

'Art in everyday life' is the initial concept to the project. In order to achieve this art activities are introduce as a journey and act as an underlying layer along the site. The strategies of the project are implemented in two different stages: Macro (Master Plan) and Micro (Main Buildings). Two stages are interdependent and interrelated. Master plan is done first then the detailed process of micro comes later in design consideration.

**a) Master Planning:**

In correlation with PJ low carbon city and green corridor plans, the master plan first focused on expanding greenery on site. Two ground car park will be converted into multi level sub basement car parking with greenery on the surface. Human activities are able to expand to the greenery which was previously a car parking area.

Urban revitalization is taken place at the sunken plaza of MBPJ Tower. The sunken plaza act as the heart to PJ State has a strategic location to gather people and direct human flow to the main building area. The
surrounding of site are equipped with many underutilised overhead bridge. The bridge as part of art gallery can encourage more public usage and pedestrian concept. The bridge allow people to enjoy artworks and city view at the same time.

Fig. 6:

The implementation of sub basement car parking (highlighted in grey) and expansion of greenery, the strategic location of sunken plaza as a heart of the city, and the overhead bridge direct human flow from nearest LRT Station. (Source: Author).

b) Micro Planning:

In term of micro planning, a continuous ramped walkway is created. The current human flow on site is mainly pedestrian as the car park is insufficient. Therefore, the pedestrianization concept of site can be enhancing through the programme of the project. Art spaces are created along the as casual and happening along the site with daily activities. The project created four different focal points as human convergence points and to cater different function and activities:

i. Central Park Focal Point
ii. Gallery Focal Point
iii. People's Square
iv. Civic and government Focal Point
v. 

Fig. 7: The walkway allows people to walk through art spaces and bypassing the busy road and arrive at the park. (Source: Author)

Casual recreational activities, art activities, MBPJ annual festival, tutorial and workshops can be held at all these focal points. The focal point can be functioned as amphitheatre, plaza, outdoor event hall, and performance stage. Hence, the continuous walkway attaching next to all these focal points allows pedestrians, passerby and vehicular passengers explore art actively or passively. The art gallery involving reconstruction and relocation of Jabatan Bangunan by retaining the current structure into People's Square. The project extends spaces out to the park to maintain the continuity of activities from continuous ramped walkway into the People's Square. The extended part is kept floating above the park where the below part can be a more casual and open spaces for more events. The floating part able to provide shades to the below part.
Before the relocation of Jabatan Bangunan, all spaces in the existing Jabatan Bangunan and MBPJ HQ are analysed and reshuffled to achieve a more efficient and effective flow of organisation structure. Therefore, after much consideration, all seminar rooms and meeting rooms are taken out from current HQ building and replaced with the existing Jabatan Bangunan's Departments.

The new government office tower is located between the Art Gallery, People's Square and current MBPJ HQ. The new 5 storeys government tower will contain seminar rooms and conference rooms shared by the MBPJ HQ and art gallery. The shared space become a communication for public to approach government through art. Art Gallery beside the government building tower breaks the linear municipal formality and appears as a soft images to public.

![Fig. 8: Art Gallery and Government Tower (Source: Author)](image)

**Design Solution:**

The project successfully linked both sides of PJ site by bypassing the busy road of Jalan Yong Shook Lin. Art are added into abandoned spaces amongst these tightly packed buildings that connects government buildings thus simultaneously added life to these abandoned spaces.

In accordance to the government's long term effort to improve ties with the local community, a small government department building is demolished to break government formality and to be rebuilt as a people friendly facility that promoted connectivity between a government and its people. Ultimate, the project is a merging between people plaza, art gallery and government tower to achieve all above.

![Fig. 9: Overall bird eye view of proposed design including redesign of park, amphithatre (people plaza), floating art gallery and new government tower. (Source: Author)](image)

By inserting art and architectural spaces, the sunken linkage would breakout the initial impression of being a government linkage and begin to turn into an attractive recreational space for people to explore, learn and interact. The design is simple and able to merge with park and support the function to MBPJ HQ.
Multi functional space is more economical and social interaction as it doesn't remain empty all the time. The project offers multi functional spaces to be converted into a park, plaza, performance stage, buskers venue, event spaces or workshops. The walkways and spaces are shaded as part of passive design strategy to ensure thermal comfort and carry out desired activities.

The special studies of the project focus not only on multipurpose spaces and walkways but also include an exciting element of two towers along the walkway towards the entrance court of the building. Tower 1 is expressed as extrovert art tower. The tower is abstractly named after it as the tower is mostly open to the surrounding view. The hoist is used to bring people up slower than normal speed of lift so the surrounding art work around the site and inside gallery can be enjoyed. Tower 2 is expressed as dark room tower (introvert art) as the tower is surrounded with thick walls and only small slit of openings allows people to peek inside. The tower functions as visual art exhibition or audio and visual room purpose. People can enjoy the light and holograms exhibitions as they travel upwards. Both towers only accessible from first floor but are able to be viewed from ground floor where it creates a sense of curiosity for visitors.

Conclusions and Discussions:

The significance of the project will make PJ State to have a strong representation of art activities cum pedestrian shopping of boutique retail, eating and drinking establishments, service-based businesses that offer a
mix of merchandise and government administrative centre. If the proposed pedestrian linkage is strengthen and liven with art activities and attraction, the business of food, boutique and cinema will greatly increase.

The project prepares plaza and stages for events not only for MBPJ but to be rented out for other organizations. MBPJ able to held annual event featuring aerobic dance, dancing competition, crafting events, sports events at people's square to solve the current problem of forced closure of road for the purpose of event and caused inconvenience for people to travel. The plaza and stages extend out to the park where leisure and recreational activities can be continued.

Previously, PJ State appears as strong trading centre to the public decreasing the public interest to visit the site during night time or weekends. With the intervention of art as the sparking element to soften the site image and bring back the people as a package of creative town. The project reintroduce PJ State as a healthy and creative town and offers visitor a different excitement of experiencing art through daily life activities such as dining, shopping, recreational and education.

REFERENCES