The Strategies and Concept for a Safer City in Malaysia: a Review on its Weaknesses in Providing a Safer Living Environment

Arinah Rozhan, Nor Kalsom Mohd Isa, Noor Fazamimah Mohd Ariffin

Dept of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Design and Architecture, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400, Serdang, MALAYSIA

ABSTRACT

Article history:
Received 10 November 2015
Accepted 22 December 2015
Available online 30 December 2015

It is highly noted that the number of crime and social problems are increasing in cities. The authorities and planners has certainly done their job by producing guidelines and strategies in town planning to prevent criminal activities. However, people are still living in a fear of crime where criminal activities and social problems are still prevalent. It is highly questionable whether the current concepts are still weak therefore this paper will review and discuss the current safe city strategies and concept. At the end of the study, it is concluded that further improvement needs to done in order to provide a safer city for all and the current strategies are still weak to stop the occurrence of crime.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is a country which is well known with its richness of culture and attractive tourism spots. However, the number of crime in Malaysia especially in urban areas are increasing rapidly [1]. The occurrence of active crime in our country contributes to a negative impact for the tourism industry [2]. This safety issues not only give a bad impact to the tourism industry, but also to the economic and increasing the fear of crime among the people.

The occurrence of crime contributes to a large amount of money to be spent by the government [3]. Australia was reported in spending a large amount of money each year in order to tackle the issue of property loss, fraud, emotional cost and others that are related to safety and crime [3]. A previous study revealed that crimes create a financial impact not only in terms of its aftermath, but also in the necessary precautions that is required to be taken [4]. The percentage of carbon footprint emitting from car vehicles, people visiting hospitals, repair of damage properties and more had also increased in the process of crime [4].

Crime in housing areas are currently a norm in Malaysia. Street crimes, crimes against person and properties are increasing thus prompting a fear of crime among the communities [5]. A critical attention is needed in order to overcome this safety issues especially when a person does not feel safe even in their own houses. Malaysia has launched the “Safe City Programme” in 2005 by the Federal Department of Town and Country Planning [5].

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) guideline has been prepared by Secretary-General of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. It aims to ensure that design and development incorporates the CPTED proposal as a crime prevention [6]. Other safe city concept has also been proposed to overcome this issues. However, the number of crime in Malaysia is still worrying. Therefore this paper intends to review the current concept and approach of a Safe City for a better improvement [6].

2.0 Identifying the Safe City Concept:

Putrajaya has implemented a Safe City Programme in 2004 [2]. Among the strategies applied in the programme are the environmental design initiatives, target hardening, and social activities and awareness [2]. A research on the level of satisfactory towards the Safe City Programme was done and the result revealed that most of the respondents are satisfied with the installation of CCTV in Putrajaya. However, the number of satisfaction towards crime reminder sign boards, education on safety measures, security guide service and preparation of community crime booklet is very low [2]. The research concludes that the Safe City Programme has weaknesses that need to be improved.

Corresponding Author: Arinah Rozhan, Dept of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Design and Architecture, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400, Serdang, MALAYSIA
E-mail: mohdyazid@upm.edu.my
CPTED was planned to assist architects, town planners, landscape architects, designer and others in their design and development process. It is a guideline mainly to save the environment [6]. The guide explains that a crime can take place due to 3 basic elements which are the criminal, the victim and the environment which support opportunity of crime [6]. The CPTED concept has been applied in several developed cities such New York, Glasgow, Melbourne, Seoul and Singapore and have proven in its effectiveness of reducing the crime rate [6]. CPTED consists of its principles and strategies as well as development components. 

The Principles and development components from the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Implementation Guide are summarized in the following Table 1 and Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPTED Principles</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural Surveillance</td>
<td>• To increase the awareness of the public by implementing the ‘eyes on the street’ approach. • Capability of the environment to create a clear and wide opportunity for surveillance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural Access Control</td>
<td>• Through the use of doors with security cards, fencing, landscaping and other physical means.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Reinforcement</td>
<td>• Distinction between public and private territory. • Fencing, doorways, landscaping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance &amp; Management</td>
<td>• Clean environment and active environment prevents drug and social activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CPTED General Guide</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Layout Design</td>
<td>• Mixed development design layout that create active environment for natural surveillance. • Design and layout of neighborhood with clear sight line. • Diversify housing type. • Park and public places within walking distance. • Potential crime areas should be visible from adjacent building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Design</td>
<td>• Ensure doors, windows, house foyer of the residential property faces the road, open space and car parking area. • Ensure doors, windows, house foyer of the building faces the road. • Avoid blind wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access and pedestrian walkway</td>
<td>• Ensure that new and existing roads have connectivity so that there is no separation between old and new areas. • Pedestrian walkway is not encouraged to be connected to the dead end road. • Provide lighting in dark areas along the street and pedestrian walkway at the appropriate distance and height. • Provide connected pedestrian walkways in residential areas, neighbourhood centres, business area and areas of public concentration for the comfort of the pedestrians. • Provide pedestrian walkways that can be visible directly from nearby premises and is not obstructed by any structure. • Avoid design of telecommunication service system that encourages criminals to commit crime. For example, telecommunication poles with steps.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the guideline, the principles of CPTED can be implemented through 3 strategies which are; (i) natural surveillance by space design, windows and doors that is facing the public, (ii) mechanical surveillance by the use of lighting, CCTV, security alarms and etc, (iii) organized surveillance which involves police patrol and security guide.

Gated and guarded community is one of the housing concepts that play an important role in creating a safer living environment [7]. In most of gated neighborhood areas, guards are usually stationed at the entrance of the neighborhood and equipped with high-definition security cameras, CCTV monitoring devices and alarm systems. Guards monitored neighbourhood through CCTV and sometimes are responsible to patrol the area [7]. From a research done in gated community in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, 5.7% of the respondents stated that a house breaking did happen and the other remaining mentioned that they have not heard of any house breaking cases [7]. They mentioned that they felt safer in the gated community and are familiar with neighborhood living on the front and back street [7].

A study was done to determine the level of crime potential in Taman Melati terrace housing. The study compares the location of terrace houses along the main road and around the open space. It is found that the houses around the open space are more vulnerable toward potential of crime than houses along the main road [5]. This result is also influenced by the provision of lighting and access of vision towards the street, social interactions between neighbors as well as maintenance and management measures [5]. Other than that, there is a significant relationship on crime potential with the housing appearance where houses with a better appearance is more prone to crime [5]. However, a study done in rural areas show that the appearance of a house does not affect the potential of crime [8].
Many studies of crime prevention in neighborhood areas focuses on the urban communities. Less studies was done for houses in rural areas which are mostly occupied by the elderly but many homicide cases towards elderly people was reported [8]. The case of abuse towards elderly people are complicated because not many of them are willing to report their cases and many elderly victims are not given attentions by the authorities [8]. The treatment by the authorities hinder them from making a report as they were said for not being a credible witness [8]. Based on the research that was done in rural areas with elderly people, it is likely that anyone can be a victim of crime. The elderly does not keep their money inside the house but criminals will still take whatever there is inside the house and due to this minimal of lost, the victims refused to report this cases to the authorities [8]. At the end of the study, the elderly even suggested a technology with speech- control that can help them when being a victim especially being tied up. Their interest in having such technology shows that they are actually living in a fear of crime but they don’t have the ability to prevent it.

Another study describe the perception of women travelling in Kuala Lumpur [9]. The result conveyed that the respondents felt safer to travel in Kuala Lumpur during the day time than during the night time. They have a fear of crime towards potential of rape, pick pockets and theft assault. Their perception of safety is highly based on the road traffic and the respondents highlighted that they felt more secure at areas with CCTV [9]. However, does CCTV really helps in preventing criminal activities? It can be seen that many criminals are caught on tape showing that CCTV can only be a mechanic to detect criminals but might not preventing them from doing such crimes.

For public transport users, a research revealed that travelling time, travelling distance and age does trigger the safety issues among the women [10]. Instead of focusing on factors of incidents that increase the fear of crime among public transport users, this study concentrates on the effect of poor public transportation service that leads to criminal activities. The service and maintenance for public transportation must be looked into to ensure that the public transport arrived on time with no delay and no technical issues that can prolong travelling time [10].

Several safety concepts are outlined based on the Islamic perspectives. These concepts are; (i) crime might be prevented through correct and effective environmental design, (ii) the corporation between the people, government, private sectors and non- governmental organisations iii) education for the younger generations and community on safety and crime prevention methods [11]. It is also indicated that in order to create a safe city, Muslim’s faith plays an important role. It is believed that when a person truly submits to the Creator by really understanding the principles and beauty of the religion, a safe city can be achieved. In doing so, mosque is emphasized to be the form of development of one’s faith.

A theory by Siegel was highlighted on the importance of avoiding being a victim of crime [12]. There are four theories that can increase the potential of being victimized; (1) victim perception theory due to confrontation or provocation, (2) lifestyle theory which includes high-risk lifestyle such as taking drugs and alcohol, (3) deviant place theory where the victims live in high potential crime area and (4) activity theory which involve suitable target such as unlocked homes, poor surveillance and unemployment [12].

3.0 Methodology:
This study is to review the current mitigation strategy on crime prevention as well as the safe city concept. Based on previous studies and guideline, the concepts are summarized to be further analysed and discussed on whether the current strategies and concepts are reliable. The current strategy and concepts are summarized as follows:
1. CPTED principles of surveillance, natural access control, territorial reinforcement, maintenance and management
2. CPTED guidelines of layout design, building design, access and pedestrian walkway
3. Social activities and awareness
4. Target hardening
5. Environmental design initiatives
6. Gated community
7. Mosque as a centre for social development

Analysis And Discussion:
Based on the current strategies and concept towards a safer city, it is not to be said that the strategies is a total failure. These ideas undoubtedly will reduce fear of crime and feeling of safety among the people. However, there are some questions that needs to be reviewed. These ideas of safety does not stop some of the criminals from their intentions to commit crime. It is just an obstacle for them. Some of the criminals are aggressive and tend to commit homicide just to get what they want. By having surveillance such as CCTV, the place is still not necessarily safe. Many criminal are caught on tape. CCTV functions as surveillance to address people concern on safety, but it does not prevent crime from happening [13]. It is more essential to have both CCTV and human surveillance. Also, guard especially in housing areas must be well trained to face
unpredictable destructive events. Based on the CPTED principles, police patrol is one of the strategies in
surveillance. It is agreeable that we need police force to patrol our cities at night rather than having guards
which are mostly old people or foreign workers as they are well trained. Unfortunately, it can be said that it is
not a norm to see police patrolling areas in the city. Patrolling usually will only starts when a complaint was
made or after a case was reported.

The CPTED guidelines that involve layout and building design as well as access control and pedestrian
walkway is a relevant guide to be followed by the planners and designer. The study of a gated community in
Kuala Lumpur revealed that the respondents felt safer to live in that type of development. The community
express that they recognize their neighbor and gated community is not an issue but most of them are not aware
of the house break in which was reported by the other 5.7% of the respondents in the community. The idea of
gated community is only applicable in new development and mostly for high cost housing areas. Yet a study
revealed that crime does not take place only in high end development but also in rural areas. Most of the old
housing development also does not have guard or CCTV that makes them feel safer. It is important to take into
concern on other neighborhood community rather than just providing guideline for only new development.

Besides neighborhood area, safety measure should also applied for public transportations system. It is
common to encounter crime such as thefts and assaults when using public transport especially women. The
authority must take into account to have human surveillance as well as making sure that the public transport is
in a good condition and are on time. The delay of public transport will only increase the fear of crime. Based on
the point of view of Islam, social development is important to prevent crime from happening. Mosque being
said to be the centre for social development and it is a success during the Prophet Muhammad time. In today’s
housing community, each one of it will have surau in the area. But why does crime is still aggressively
happening in housing community? This might be due to lack of awareness on the importance of surau, or the
role of the surau in the community is still weak.

Based on the analysis and review, it can be said that the current safe city strategy still needs many
improvement as the number of crime is still increasing. It is not to be said that the strategy is a total failure but
more attention need to be given in order to create a safer city concept.

Conclusion:

Due to the worrying increment in the number of crime and the fear of crime, several strategies and concept
have been implemented. However, the percentage of criminal activities is still rising. It is important to enhance
our living environment by providing a safe city for all. Therefore the purpose of this paper is to review the
current strategies and safety concept that has been implemented to see whether it is reliable or not. Based on the
analysis from the previous study, it can be said that there are so many aspects that need to be consider and
emphasized in order to promote a safer living environment. Among the considerations are proper surveillance
that can reduce the fear of crime and most importantly stop the occurrence of crime. CPTED guidelines must
not only for new development, but it must also applicable for old housing areas. Another important aspect is
social development awareness to educate the community on the importance of living in a harmonious way.
Mosque can be the center of social development for the Muslims just like during the time of Prophet. Therefore
it is also necessary to find ways to attract people to go to the mosque.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express deepest appreciation to all from University Putra Malaysia and Faculty
of Design and Architecture as the funding bodies of this research, under Geran Putra, Inisiatif Putra
Berkumpulan.

REFERENCES


