Economically Sustainable Mosque: Lodging Facilities As An Alternative Income Generator

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**ABSTRACT**

Mosque is very synonym with Muslim community all over the world. It symbolizes the existence of Muslim community in that particular place. Besides playing a role as a place for worship, mosque also becomes a center of activities for Muslim such as religious education, and also marriage. In complimenting all aspect of Muslims life, mosque needs to be economically sustainable especially when providing services for the community. This paper will explores the feasibility of introducing lodging facilities to be commercially operated and opened to the public. It is hoped that this paper will give abeter understanding of how the management of the mosque facility may lead to an economically sustainable mosque.

**INTRODUCTION**

Mosque is commonly referred to as a building or a place used by Muslims for worship. It is also act as a symbol of the existence of Muslim community in the surrounding area. According to Malaysian Standard, mosque or a more preferable term is Masjid, a place to prostrate or place to worship. Mosque is a building used for Friday prayer which is compulsory and other prayers and activities, suggested and allowed by Islam without any exception at any mosque. In Malaysia, generally there are several categories of masjid including national masjid, state masjid, district masjid, village or town masjid, Mussollah (surau) and prayer room [1].

In relation to hospitality, mosque is also one of the best examples of the hospitality industry as it provides services and also space or place for the Muslim to worship and being Muamalah or socialized with the surrounding community in a pleasant ambiance. In early years of Islam, mosqueswas playing a pivotal role in helping Muslim community in every aspect of human being from providing space and place for individual development including education, ibadah and also up to providing welfare facility such as a shelter for traveler and hospital.

Nowadays, the roles of mosque are being enhanced with the involvement of the government in upgrading the mosque management including the services and facilities of the mosque. This situation will enable the reorganization of the mosque setup to become better in term of mosque as an institution. According to the Malaysia Federal Constitution, everything related to Islamic religion, Islamic laws are under the State authority. Every state has their own State Islamic Council that has been authorizedto manage all mosques in the state territory [2].

In managing the mosque, there are two separate entities which are known as Mosque Community Member and Mosque Officers. The roles and responsibility of Mosque Community Member is to plan and manage all the mosque activities while the Mosque Officers are focus on the day to day operation of the mosque [3].

2. **Mosque Income Resources:**

In providing the best services for the community especially the Muslim, Mosque needs to be well equipped with all the facilities needed. To provide an excellent facility and service, it has to come from a well manage organization which is the responsibility of the Mosque Community Member. They need to have a broader idea

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on how to manage the mosque activities including the financial management aspect of the mosque. According to Ashraf et al., the mosque management needs to know well the framework of the mosque economy and financial management (Figure 1) especially when dealing with the mosque income and the expenses. This will enable mosque as an institution to maximize all the resources available within the mosque sensibly [4].

As an example, in reference to the EnakmenPentadbiranPerundanganNegeri Selangor 1989 Seksyen 58(1), the State Islamic Council will guarantee enough financial support to operate and to manage the mosque [5]. However, realistically there are still mosques that have to depend on the fund from the donations. According to Sumaiyah and Suhaili, at least 80% of the mosques in Selangor have to depend on the fund collected during the daily and Jumaatprayers or the contribution from corporate sectors [6]. This situation may arise due to the high operational cost of maintaining the mosques which seemed to increase gradually each year.

Therefore, even though there is a guaranteed funding from the government such as from the Selangor State, but still it is still insufficient to operate and run the mosque effectively. Hence, this situation may be changed by proposing a supplementing income to sustain the mosque, especially in funding their daily activities. This paper will explores the feasibility of introducing lodging facilities within the mosque to be commercially operated and opened to the public and subsequently will generated income for the mosque which possibly will lead to an economically sustainable mosque. Figure 1 shows the Mosque Economy and Financial Management Framework.

![Fig. 1: Mosque Economy and Financial Management Framework.](image)

3. Methodology:

3.1 Instrument:

This study is a qualitative exploratory research which uses an in-depth semi structure interview method. When compared to questionnaire as a tool, interview is more powerful in eliciting native data which will allow for investigating people in greater depth [7]. Apart from that, interview also offers great value in term of enabling interviewees to “speak their own voice and express their own thought and feelings” [8].

3.2 Sample Size:

Since this study used a qualitative method therefore it is very common to use smaller sample size because the aim of this method is not to generalise the finding. This research involved only four (4) case studies from the selected mosques that directly involved with the lodging facilities, and the selected informers interviewed were from the mosque management team.

3.3 Sampling Technique:

It is very common for a qualitative study to use purposive sampling due to its effectiveness in information rich cases but with limited resources [9]. Purposive sampling involves the process of identifying and selecting individuals that has the knowledge or experience with the phenomenon of interest [10]. In this study, the most appropriate informers are the mosque management team. The mosque committee members were particularly the most appropriate informers for this study because of their involvement in the day to day operations of the mosque. Therefore, they should have sufficient knowledge related to the lodging facilities offered by the mosque and also having basic understanding of the hospitality industry.

4. Findings:

**Lodging As Income Generator For Mosque:**

The previous study found that, there are existing mosques that provide lodging services for their worshipper and also the surrounding community of the mosque. Study done by Noor Fiteri on the lodging services provided by Masjid Al Ghurfan (Figure 2), provides an evidence that mosque can possibly generate passive an income from the lodging services or known as “RumahMusafir”[11]. The fund generated from the lodging services are used to supplement the operation of the mosque activities including giving support for the primary school run by the Masjid Al Ghurfan management.
The selection of lodging as an alternative income generator for the mosque is indeed a pragmatic strategy because of the minimum cost needed to operate the lodging services but the return is high for the mosque. Similarly, according to Vallen & Vallen, rooms are the hotel industry largest revenue earner compared to other department in the hotels [12]. With a lot of untapped land owned by the mosques or the state Islamic councils and availability of unutilized space within the vicinity of the mosque, the proposed lodging services can help to supplement and increase the income of the mosque.

In providing evidence for the lodging services as an alternative income provider for the mosque, there are four mosques to be highlighted in this paper. These mosques are Masjid Jamek Baru Gopeng, Gopeng, Masjid Sultan Yusuf Rapat Setia, Ipoh, Masjid Ridzuaniah, Kuala Kangsar, all located in Perak while Masjid Kuarters KLIA, Nilai is in Negeri Sembilan. All of these mosques are fully utilizing the available space inside and outside of the mosque to create business opportunity for mosque and indirectly generate alternative revenue for the mosque.

Masjid Jamek Baru Gopeng:

Masjid Jamek Baru Gopeng (Figure 3) is located in the center of Gopeng town, just besides Gopeng Fire Station. Currently, this mosque has two houses that are being rented out daily. Each of the house has 3 rooms, 1 toilet and 1 bathroom with a small kitchen (Figure 4). The houses or formerly known as “Homestay” is built on a Wakaf land, which was being Wakaf (donated) by the resident of Gopeng Muslim Community. The “homestay” is built with the purpose of helping the community and also the traveler to get alternatively a cheaper place to stay and indirectly it will help mosque to generated extra income. Each house at the Homestay is available to any lodger at RM 160 per night.

Meanwhile, Masjid Sultan Yusuf Rapat Setia (Figure 5) is located to the south of Ipoh city near to a famous theme park called The Lost World of Tambun. The mosque has two types of lodging facilities, which is a house for daily rent with 3 rooms located besides the mosque and 3 units of single-room available for renting located on the first floor of the mosque (Figure 6). The house was originally owned by a resident, and eventually being bought by the mosque management for the purpose of generating income. Presently, the unused land around the house is being used by the mosque for building a telecommunication tower and also to bury carcass of the Qurban animal during Aidiladha. The house was rented out for RM 250 per night. Meanwhile, the rooms on the first level of the mosque is being rented out for RM150 monthly and occupied by the workers from a nearby factory.
Masjid Ridzuaniah (Figure 7) on the other hand is located beside the most popular college among the elite group, Malay College Kuala Kangsar (MCKK). The mosque has 7 Single-Room, 2 Family-Room and a Deluxe-Room. All the rooms are located at the south of the mosque, on the first floor. The room rate is RM 40 for a Single-Room, RM 90 for a Family-Room and RM150 for a Deluxe-Room (Figure 8).

Masjid Ridzuaniah, Kuala Kangsar:
Masjid Kuarters KLIA:

Masjid Kuarters KLIA (Figure 9) is located near to the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA). The mosque has 2 types of rooms known as An Najah and Al Falah. The differences between the rooms are the rate and also the type of bed available. For An Najah, there is a Queen bed as well as a double decker bed. The rate for the room is RM 80 per night. Meanwhile, the Al Falah, is being equipped with a Queen bed and a single bed respectively. The room rate for this room is RM 50 per night (Figure 10).

Discussion:

Based on the review of all the mosques that offer lodging facilities, there are several points that may be highlighted to get an overview of the potential and challenges of proposing lodging services within the mosque vicinity.

Based on the official figure from JAKIM shown in Figure 11, there are a total of 6284 mosques in Malaysia [13]. With a common trademark, the dome at the top of the mosque and also being strategically located close to the main road besides being built in every town, it makes easier to locate these mosques especially by the travelers. This is one of the reasons of why mosque becomes one of the preferred places for the travelers to drop by and get a good rest.
Fig. 10: Facilities Provided by Masjid Kuarters KLIA.

Fig. 11: Numbers of Mosque in Malaysia.

From the informant feedbacks, the lodging facilities are full with travelers especially on the weekend and public holidays. The purpose of travelling stated by many of the travelers are mostly attending wedding ceremony and also for holiday with family members. They choose lodging facilities provided by the mosque mainly because of the price, which is much cheaper and the service is friendlier than many hotels in term of registration, payment and the services provided.

Table 1: Mosque Potential Income from Lodging Services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mosque</th>
<th>Potential Income per month</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masjid Jamek Baru Gopeng</td>
<td>RM 3000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masjid Sultan Yusaf</td>
<td>RM 3000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masjid Ridzuannah</td>
<td>RM 2000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masjid Kuarters KLIA</td>
<td>RM 1000*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on general observation

Table 1 shows the potential income that could be generated from the available lodging services provided by the mosques. This amount is realistic with the assumption that every weekend the rooms were fully booked. Most of the mosques can generate income up to RM 3000 a month, or a total of RM36 000 a year. This amount could help the mosque in supplementing the operational cost of a mosque.

According to the financial report of Masjid Kuarters KLIA for the year 2014, the total operational cost of the mosque was RM 73,000 a year including electricity, water and maintenance. The total cost was excluding the others expenses such as mosque activities for the whole year. With the assumption of RM12,000 a year collected by the lodging services, it contributed up to 16% of the total revenue. The revenue can be further increased provided that there is a proper management of the mosque lodgings in term of marketing the venue and the other services provided by the mosque such as food and beverage services to the lodgers.

Currently, the observation carried out on all the mosques in the case study found that the mosques are using their very own staff in managing the lodging services including carrying out the maintenance. This situation maybe be appropriate in a short term, however in a long term and in order for the operation to be sustainable in term of economic sustainability, the mosque need to have a proper operator to operate and manage the lodging facilities.
Table 2: Mosque Lodging Provider.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mosque</th>
<th>Lodging provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masjid Jamek Baru Gopeng</td>
<td>Mosque management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masjid Sultan Yusuf</td>
<td>Mosque management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masjid Ridzuanah</td>
<td>Mosque management</td>
</tr>
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<td>Masjid Kuarters KLIA</td>
<td>Mosque management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on general observation

Table 2 displayed the current model of managing the lodging in which the operators consisting of mainly the existing mosques officials. Perhaps a new business model for the mosque lodging must be proposed to better manage these mosques. Ideally, the lodging facilities should be run by professionals for better profitability. However, in relation to efficiency another question may crop up, whether a smaller scale of the current operation really appropriate for outsourcing the management of the facilities. Outsourcing the management of the mosques would be more proper and possible if the scale of the operation is much bigger.

6. Suggestion And Conclusion:

Lodging facilities offered by the mosque is another avenue to nurture the local tourism sector and remains to be a good alternative for mosque to generate alternative income. Even though the houses and the rooms were very popular among the visitors and mostly fully booked during the weekend and public holidays, still a lot of rooms for improvement in term of marketing and day to day operations of the facility especially by management of the mosque. This is due to the concept of having a lodging facility within the mosque vicinity provides a lot of opportunity to maximize the land available and also to fully utilize the facilities for the benefit of the community and also the worshippers in general.

The mosque management can also implement the concept of accommodation as suggested by Department Of Standards Malaysia, referring to the Architecture and Asset Management of Masjid (MS 2577:2014). In this guideline, there is a lot of information on designing a proper building for the mosque including the accommodation for the traveler and visitor of the mosque. According to Noor Fiteri, most of the mosque provided lodging facilities does not plan to have the accommodation places for their visitors at the early stage of the mosque development planning [14]. The rooms that are being used for the lodging facilities generally were the unused space, which were being converted into lodging facilities after a decision by the mosque management. However, this constraint has led to an improper setup of room as well as the limitation to the facilities offered by the accommodation.

In term of occupancy, even though the occupancy was high during weekends, the occupancy rate is still low during weekdays. This particular issue needs to be carefully addressed with more promotional activities and proper management. However, the biggest challenge is still base on the perception of mosque being a place for worship and not to be in business. This perception needs to be gradually overcome for the betterment of the community and also for the future sustainability of the mosque which currently very much dependent on grants from government and public donations.

REFERENCES


