A Study on Social Influences during Annual Flood Occurrence in Kota Bharu, Kelantan: the Positive Sides of Disaster

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Kota Bharu, the state capital of Kelantan receives an annual flood occurrence due to its location in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Flood in Kota Bharu is mainly caused by heavy rainfall brought by the Northeast monsoon starting from November to March every year. It is categorized as annual flood as it occurs every year during the Monsoon season. After a few decades, flood occurrence in Kota Bharu has become a social event and celebrated among the local community. In fact, one of the most awaited year-end holiday for the Kelantan’s community whom migrated to live in an urban areas. This paper intends to investigate the positive social values among the community and its potential to attract tourism industry to the East Coast of Malaysia.

Results of this research informs that there are numbers of positive values embedded among the Kelantans’ community that enabled them to celebrate this annual flood occurrence, despite of common natural hazards and damages.

INTRODUCTION

Kota Bharu, the state capital of Kelantan receives an annual flood occurrence due to its location in the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Flood in Kota Bharu is mainly caused by heavy rainfall brought by the Northeast monsoon starting from November to March every year. It is categorized as annual flood as it occurs every year during the Monsoon season.

Natural disaster namely an earthquake, fire and flood are always associated with the greatness sign of the Creator, and results of the fault of man for being disrespectful to the earth and its environment. Like it or not, these disasters are always devastated to a community. This paper however, bringing another insights of natural disaster; which is on looking on the positive sides of these occurrences. In another words; not to be helpless, but to be more faithful, positive and a stronger community during and after disaster. The author believes that disaster is always a shocking reminder, a sign that human being is always vulnerable and could have never been able to separate themselves with a community. This paper therefore, elaborates on the positive social factors naturally happening during flood occurrence in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

Monsoon season that normally take part in November to January each year in the East Coast of Malaysia brings meaningful and thoughtful experience to the Kelantanese. Known as the “wet months”, the community is well prepared with living indoors rather than spending outdoor activities. The fisherman, farmers and workers get themselves ready with food, appropriate clothing and arts and crafts to be enjoyed together. Figure 1 shows a typical heavy rains that continuously overflow and within a few days; Kota Bharu is reported as a floating city by the local social media.

Figure 2 shows the flood which took place in Kota Bharu, Kelantan in year 2014.

2.0 Flood Occurrence And A Sense Of Place Attachment Among The Kelantanese:

Interest in complex relationships between tangible and intangible elements in the living environment has become significant in various disciplines, for example the design-based fields such as architecture, planning and urban design [1 such interest has been rooted in the phenomenology arena since 1964 and provides insights into this research area [2]. Place identity studies provide a basis from which to explore issues of people and physical
settings and undertake research on place meanings. This study investigates the meaning of relationship between community and their living place [3]. The Kelantanese, with their great knowledge on an annual flood occurrence seems to uphold their territory and showing great attachment to their living spaces. Some of them were relocated and evacuated to safer places during flood, but still insisted to go back to their existing living places after the flood disaster. Why is it happening?

Fig. 1: Rainfalls caused by the East Monsoon Ocean.

Fig. 2: Flood in Kota Bharu, Kelantan (2014).

The notion of ‘identity’ is one of the leading contemporary issues, debated especially by philosophers, social scientists and psychologists [4] the field of landscape architecture particularly, this idea has become a recurring topic discussed in international scientific conferences and workshops. The current landscape changes that “are characterized by the loss of diversity, coherence and identity” are perceived negatively [5]. Identity can be defines as the similarity and coherence which enables each item to be distinguished on its own [6]. The Kelantanese are very unique and strongly identified by their cultural identity. This study focuses on the ‘identity of place’, one of the physical environmental expressions of where humans dwell. Identity of place can be defined as “that which provides its individuality or distinction from other places and serves as the basis for its recognition as a separable entity [6]. The importance of place identity represents a sense of belonging, reflecting whether you are an “insider” or “outsider” in a space [7]. Lending support to this notion, other researchers have
provided arguments and evidence that communities are attached to their existing living spaces that is full of personal identity and sense of place [8]. These living attachment is achieved with a variety of reasons, including culture, religion and economic status [9]. This idea is consistent with Hinds and Sparks’ [10] assertion that “people often identify with what they care about”. Despite the importance of having genius loci, little research has been conducted in regard to cultural ethnicities and their identities in landscape [11]. She believes that landscape architects and other related professionals should consider cultural significance in the design of, and decision-making around, the built environment. The cultural landscape is able to promote place attachment and strengthen the meanings of place. He suggests that “experiential landscape” means more than just “objects, landforms, houses and plants”. It is a “particular set of personal and cultural attitudes and intentions that give meaning to that setting [12]. Symbols of place features, such as objects of the past, are more important than how people function in a setting [13].

Cultural landscape and traditional landscape are strongly associated with intrinsic understanding between humans and environment [14]. Humans are continuously changing the surrounding natural landscape to shape the environment that suits their living demands (Ismail, 2003; Said, 2001a). These processes, that are established through a period of time, result in an intimate bonding between humans and environment; creating place attachment and identity that reveals the significance of natural, cultural and aesthetical values [15].

The cultural landscape in Kota Bharu is an example of the above phenomenon. Through my own work I discovered that “the evolution of the Malay villages in Kota Bharu are the result of the interrelationship between Man and his surroundings, Man and his inherent cultural attributes and the need to survive” [16, 17, 18, 19]. Indeed, these processes include feelings that create attachment to the place.

**Methodology:**

The aim of my study is to investigate the positive social values among the community and its potential to attract tourism industry to the East Coast of Malaysia. Results of this research inform that there are numbers of positive values embedded among the Kelantan’s community that enabled them to celebrate this annual flood occurrence, despite of common natural hazards and damages. This study adopted a qualitative research approach because this process enabled the author to interact with respondents and investigate human events and activities in their natural settings.

Qualitative research is characterised by sets of research questions, issues and a search for patterns, in contrast to the hypothetical-deductive approach requiring the specification of main variables and a research hypothesis. Qualitative research in this study comprises structured interviews, case studies and analysis of archival material. These techniques enabled the researcher to discuss with residents the reasons for, and processes of place attachment and the unchanged identity. At the same time, this process enabled the researcher to understand the meanings of tangible elements embedded in the residents’ living area and to read the intangible experiences involving feelings and emotions belonging to the house owners. At the same time, employing a qualitative research approach allowed the researcher to examine particular issues, cases and data in depth and detail by talking to the community and coming to understand their opinions from their own frames of reference [12].

**The Positive Sides Of An Annual Flood Occurrence:**

In general, natural disaster is always associated with sorrow, uncertainty and uneasy. In fact, not many of us could relate this vicissitudes (a feeling of bad luck) with serendipity (a feeling of fortunate). Since flood in Kota Bharu, Kelantan is an annual event, the community has no choice but to stay strong and positive in any circumstances. Figure 3 shows flood occurrence in Central Business District of Kota Bharu.

**Fig. 3:** Flood occurrence in Central Business District of Kota Bharu.
The community should always seek for emotional, spiritual and physical balance that enabled them to move forward [18]. Safety is around them which they should re-create within themselves. They should always believe that they could not be able to control everything that happened; but to accept something that is quite unusual to be common things in their life. For example, to enjoy water season more than enjoying dry season; or at least, equally enjoying both of them. Other example is also shown in Figure 4 shows a family enjoying family eating outdoor in the water.

Fig. 4: An outdoor eating with family is one of the uncommon activities that happened only during flood season.

Being positive will always being helpful to create safe tangible spaces and intangible emotional feeling for people around us to find healing, positive perspective and paths to meaningful actions an in the end, to create better, appropriate and empowering places for everyone. Figure 5 expresses community enjoyment with water.

Fig. 5: Children taking advantage to upgrade their swimming skills during flood season with their parental guardians.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, community have the power to make a difference through daily actions. By working together as a community; actions can create change. An inspirational example is shown by Viktor Frankl; a psychotherapist who was imprisoned in concentration camps in World War II. In that hopeless terrifying setting, he came to the conclusion that, while he could not control most outside events, he could choose how he would respond to those events. He created a form of psychotherapy called Logotherapy, which helps people heal by making meaning of their lives. Most often, we can take charge of our safety. In this case, an annual flood occurrence in Kota Bharu is indeed, a water festival to the local community and able to attract visitors and tourist to share the same water excitement with the locals. Being positive is not only socially healthy but, economically promising for tourist to come and share the same water experiences with the locals. The homestay industry, hotels and other facilities will have great potential of receiving an outrageous numbers of visitors.
REFERENCES