The Management of Historic Asian Cities; Historic City of Georgetown and Historic City Melaka

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ABSTRACT

In 1976 UNESCO recommended that necessary steps should be taken to ensure the protection and restoration of historic towns and areas and to ensure their development and harmonious adaptation to contemporary life (UNESCO, 1976) This paper is going to discuss the common problems faced by historic cities in Malaysia, which are historical city of Melaka and Historical City of Georgetown. How conservation management of their unique could lead to a sustainable built environment of the future generation. This is done through literature review in the case Asian cities.

INTRODUCTION

These two cities studied share one common characteristic in that their existence as port, in which it act as a center of business networking with the world (west and east) in the past [1]. These cities played an important role in the Malaysian history not only during Malacca sultanate but also during the occupation by Portuguese, Dutch and British (Colonial). There are so much legacy left as evident to significance of the place that should be sustained [2].

These historic centres have strong sense of place and identity as they tend to display a unique architectural style [3]. This is evident in Melaka and Georgetown where some of the unique urban architecture in the form of row houses and shop houses. Georgetown for example boasts quite a significant number of the fine colonial buildings due to its former function as a seat of the British administration. The old Malacca had its own distinctive collection of buildings built by the Dutch and later on modified by the Street Chinese (Baba and Nyonya) thus providing its own unique of architecture for example there are still some Dutch architectural legacy such as Studhuys. The streets design and urban spaces are prominence in the urban layout. Street pattern in Melaka where Studhuys is located give the unique layout of the streets and act a major node for the town. In addition, for historic centers Georgetown and Malacca have ‘padang’ become dominant for Georgetown (Padang Kota) and Melaka (Padang Pahlawan). ‘Padang ‘also becomes a setting for important civic buildings.

2.0 Protection and Management of the Cultural Property:

2.1 Environmental Management:

No deniking conservation will have a significant impact both tangible and intangible a gained and respect of heritage [4]. New development without proper monitoring and management

2.1.1 The river condition:

The treatment of rivers in the historic centre is much to be desired. Very often the river is treated as a backyard and main sewer, with buildings located along the river discharging untreated waste direct to the river. This results in the conditions being polluted with rubbish and other wastes

In Malaysia, many of the historic centre started from the river or its confluence [5]. For the case of old Malacca, the historic core often includes river can be also considered as our urban heritage too, together with natural landscape element such as tress, hills etc, because they also contribute to the sense of place and the evolution of the centre. For years condition of the river is in a bad state due to pollution and neglect appeared to
be a prominence in the resident’s image of the place despite of observation of its polluted condition. However with upgrading river project recently, by improving the environmental quality of river, the Melaka River now can be enjoyed by public and hope to be lasting for enjoyment of future generations too.

2.1.2 Traffic congestion:
Traffic congestion and poor circulation in the historic centers due to the street design and layout that were not geared to deal with the modern day’s traffic. This creates a chaotic situation that reduces the quality of life as well as contributing to an undesirable environment (smoke and noise pollution) in the case of Melaka, the construction of the bypass across the river will eventually relieve the old Malacca which has been suffocated with traffic for so long. Many of the policies formulated and action taken tend to destroy the original building lines as well threatening the structural stability of the heritage buildings. The most damaging solution to deal with the traffic problems in the road widening policy.

2.1.3 New development:
Conservation projects or new development, if not conducted in proper manner can easily turn a blighted area of dilapidated buildings into a vibrant and charminig places into the city centre. The beauty of conservation as opposed to preservation is that it is looking for new ways to ensure that the historic environment becomes relevant in modern times. This involves designing a new environment that includes the historical fabric forming part of the ensemble so that they can contribute to the need of modern society. As in a case of Georgetown, at Campbell Street it give the street its sparkle through simple traffic management and street enhancement programme. Conservation can be easily be misinterpreted through the introduction of gimmicks and the theme park kind of environment [6].

2.1.4 Disruption of urban pattern lead to disappearing townscape characteristic:
The invasion of new development, especially office tower blocks and large blocks of shopping premises has slowly altering the urban pattern of fine grain and texture of historic centres. Many of these gigantic development in comparison with old buildings such as hotels and apartments could easily been easily been located elsewhere if there had been an appropriate development control policy [7].
The danger of allowing large scale development if not designed sensitively within the existing fabric of historic centre they might act as a cancer that could spread and in the end destroy the me whole setting of the centres.( its environments, beauty and significance). This is because such development may attract insensitive speculative development an inflating land value. This will make the historic centre and traditional buildings no longer economically viable [8].
New development if not control within the conservation zone in the historic centre may resulted disappearing the qualities of the traditional street pattern and their human scale that are unique to townscape qualities slowly disappearing [9]. The modern commercial developments in the form of shop houses are alien to the traditional shop houses in term of architectural qualities and scale. As we can see the modern shop houses are totally bland and monotonous with the proportions when compare with old shop house which are adorable with their ornamentation [10].
These new development sometimes are not compatible to the human scale of the historic centres. The increase of population contributes to increasing of traffic volume to the area, pressuring the traditional streets that were not meant for modern traffic. Subsequently, many original building line were destroyed through insensitive set-back policies within the intention of road widening. This contributes to altering the townscape of historic center [11].

2.1.5 Changing activity pattern:
Many of the activities in the historic centers happened on the street and it the five foot walkway, which reflects the culture of the people here [12]. The creative use of traditional streets supports human activities such petty trading, traditional medicine men and hawkering that creates a setting that heightens the sense of place to our historic centers.

2.1.6 Visual impact:
The other threat is the alteration and improvements done to buildings of architectural and historical significance that reduce their value through insensitive design [13]. This form of threat is capable of doing more damage to the value of the urban heritage because it reduces the authenticity of the building’s fabric. The most common damage is through facadism, of which only the façade of the buildings are retained whilst a totally new building structure are stuck at the back of the facade. Another problem is the rampant manner in which the façade of the buildings in the historic center are being screened by billboards and signage for the purpose of advertising.
2.1.7 Gentrification:
Modern development not only affects the physical outlook of the historic core but also have an influence in changing the social fabric of the place. In the process of revitalization, the functional character is often threatened by gentrification as is happening in many historic centres in Malaysia. This phenomenon usually occurs in areas that have deterioration and experienced obsolescence. This is because as and areas that is revitalized and its physical fabric is conserved [14].

The change in the functional dimension also has an effect in the physical dimension through the changes in activities within the building and on the street.

2.2 Tourism management:
2.2.1 Increase in tourist attraction and revenue:
The economic gain of conservation efforts can be seen through the increase in tourist attraction to the historic city as observed in old Malacca and Georgetown. It is a widely accepted knowledge that historic environment has tremendous attraction to tourist who are more interest in the local culture as compared to modern counterparts. Conserving the historic center’s fabric, revenue can be return back to the community to improve the quality of life. This can be achieved if the improvement of the historic fabric new life is able to maintain the authenticity of that environment whilst accommodating to the tourist’s need for services and facilities [15].

2.2.2 Providing life to old building stocks:
The commercial attraction of derelict buildings in the historic centres can be seen through the restoration of these buildings and adapting it to proper use that could benefit from the presence of the tourist. From the presence of the tourist. For example of the adaptive reused of these buildings are by converting them into cafes, boutiques, restaurants, studio apartments, galleries, etc. these can be seen in in the conversion of historic buildings in Old Malacca into budget hotels, antique shops, cafes and baba and nyonya Museum. Such projects not only provide new life for these buildings but also has added value of being of historical and architectural significance to the city of Melacca. This value is not found in new buildings, as meanings and associations are stronger in buildings that have been around for long time and thus become a familiar part of the environment for the residents [16].

3.0 Management tool and strategies:
The design and construction of buildings in historic centres were not adapted to fit in to modern by-law requirement used and rents in term of fire escape, services and sanitation [17]. These factors have often been used to justify demolition of these buildings when adaptive reuses and restoration could be better alternative to ensure the relevance of these building meet modern life needs.

Conclusion:
Historic centres provide an inheritance of the past and the product of change that society has required for its needs. The process of evolution should be continue so that society today leaves its mark on the environment for future generations. The important is to look at the long term and plan the balance of permissible change (rehabilitation, revitalization) as to ensure the historic center in a sustainable manner. (The concept of sustainable still under scrutiny, where analysis is required for formulation of heritage management methodology. Very little evidence of specific policies where sustainable practice adopted by some countries from these case studies)

Pickard has list four principles that determine the approaches to be adopted in European Cities:
i. conservation of the built heritage should be as an expression of sustainable development ( regardless of its monumental value, as a framework for urban projects and urban management)
ii. improvement of neighborhood amenities that contribute to the feeling of belonging (eg. Housing, public areas and its environmental amenities) it will include facades, streets, squares, markets etc.
iii. strengthening of the notion of centrality; upgrading the various central functions (shops, housings, neighborhood and etc) -where a balance mix of functions helps to maintain vitality and harmony.
iv. action to promote economic activity: employment, tourism, involvement by local population.

It is the duty of us where the future of our historic centers lies in the way we handle our historic environment. With globalization demands for new development and space, and networking may invite pressure from speculative development in the areas that could be subjected to threats of our heritage. The challenge that we face is to ensure that new development of these areas will not destroy the significance value that give the place its uniqueness and heritage value. This can be done by adopting a sustainable approach when dealing with development on historical sites/ centers.
The challenge is to promote development that could help local communities in the historic centers to continue living and regenerating the old buildings through innovative design and finding new uses that more appropriate to modern demands.

This also requires strong commitment by local authorities responsible in planning and architecture in respond to the surrounding context so that new development will compatible and keeping with character of the area. Policies and guidelines available should be realistic in guiding new development in historic sites.

"Managing change "in the historic centers with view to anticipating the repercussion of such changes in the future should be our concern and priority.

Pickard has rep- up where the need for sustainable methods of management of historic cities in Europe:

viii. Historic centres are meaningful only if the inhabited if they are the expression of the lives of the people who live and work there
ix. Free –market forces must be check and balance to prevent cities from losing their identities
x. To improve the conditions for inhabitants and reduce the effects of poverty especially in old city centres.

General principle highlighted by Pickard for sustainable management of historic centres;

- Respect community life
- Improve the quality of life
- Maintain identity, diversity and vitality
- Minimize the depletion of non-renewable heritage assets
- Change attitudes and perceptions – the process of managing change involves wider interests
- Empower community action and responsibility through involvement
- Provide a suitable policy framework for integrating conservation objectives
- Define the capacity by which the historic centre can permit change.

REFERENCES