Critical Review on the Role of Street Art of George Town, Pulau Pinang

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ABSTRACT

Cityscapes have been seen as a form in enhancing the urban spaces and creating a social interaction between human and environment. Nowadays, street art is widely used for many reasons and has become an iconic theme for certain cities. Georgetown is well known as heritage city in creating new and unusual art in attracting locals and tourists. George Town’s state government started to introduce the street art during Georgetown Festival 2012 which aimed to strengthen the identity of the place. Many studies on street art focused on the history of street art, however, less attention has been focused on the role of street art. This paper presents the concept of street art, with focus on the history, function and categories of street art based on literature synthesis. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of street art in George Town as a creative innovation that introduce the rich history of the streets, and induce lively concept in the inner city of George Town. This literature synthesis will help for future research on the street art in George Town.

INTRODUCTION

Street art can be explained as forms of visual art created in public areas, usually forbidden art work performed outside of the background of traditional art venues. Street art earned popularity in the early 1980s and continues to expand in various techniques and categories in conveying the messages. Consequently, a difference in cultural practice has appeared in many cities since the late 1990s; street art also includes the placement of unassigned artwork in public places. Different people perceived it differently, some people see it as a form of graffiti while some perceived as a new art movement; although, it is professional engagement in unlawful activities. On the other hand, some scholars indicates that the illogical response to display the street art simulates formal understandings of crime, law, culture, and art [1]. Furthermore, street art possesses a very old history; going all the way to the ancient inscriptions. It has become a popular issue, since most people do not know whether it is crime or art. Street artists have been blamed for vandalism, malevolence, damage, intention to ruin, of property, illegal intrude, and against the social’s principles[2]. In modern times, the use and application of street art have changed. Street art is a promotional tool used to challenge the meanings of the landscape elements that dominate current cities, foster social inclusion in the city, advertising industry, as well as creates the tourism industry for the city [3], [4]. Likewise, it has changed to the furniture of our cities. Several of these works need a high-level of skills, techniques and a great concentration to the detailing. Moreover, some of the arts reflect simple images and phrases, which convey a deeper meaning, and sometimes their creation is spurred by the urge to create and just have fun [5]–[8]. In this paper, the history of street art will be explained firstly and then continue with deliberation on the function, concept, and types of street art, and finally the usage of street arts that was explored in the George Town of Malaysia as a case study.

History:
The history of the street art and the starting point of invention of street art is remain unknown and not documented. Limited studies have been done on the history of street art. For this reason this article is based on the literature review that gather from books, journals, magazines and the internet. Street art existed since the beginning of mankind [6]. People have constantly felt the need to share and express themselves in a public areas, sometimes by posing a question or telling a story, and also presenting a political ideology [9]. But early

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man also anticipated blowing coloured powder, the stencil and spray technique through hollow bones around his hands to make silhouettes[6]. Street inscriptions and decorations have greatly dominated Western towns throughout history. Following this, the shift from prehistoric cave graffiti to the Roman cities which are rich in adornments, signs, and writings are such as those displayed at the archaeological sites [10]. During World War II, seeing the name and sign of various political parties had become very common. In some situations, those writing on the walls took different styles. Some of them had a social and political message that was relayed by the paint on the wall [11]. After World War II, making illegal paintings on the walls had been continued [6]. Nowadays the application of street art is changed and it is far from its base. The history of street art movements is an attractive tale of evolution stimulated by aesthetic and political ideologies in firm cross-cultural hybridization. Urban designers consider the street art as urban furniture, they tried to changed atmosphere of cities with the street art. Many municipals used the street arts to adorn the city and transfer the culture of the city to the visitor [12], [13].

Functions, Concept and Types:

Street art is a symbolic allotment as live displays put on the walls and walls in the city [14] and the phrase normally relates to unsanctioned art[15]. It has identified negatively by simply pure or purist graffiti authors [16] and begun very privately because of it’s outlawed to coloring public along with possessions without concur[15]. It has the particular close relationship with the common life on the city, and the particular ephemeral value in the city, as well as an anonymity of the artists[17]. Street art is a brand-new wave regarding anti-establishment community space art which includes a variety of genres and also techniques[18]. Some of the street artists intended to create insolent vandalism for enhancing the consciousness of social about political problems while for some artists perceived urban areas as unutilized pattern for individual artwork. The motivation of artists to create their artwork in public places is due to more audience compared to traditional way in their galleries[5]–[7]. There are two distinct viewpoints about the function to be achieved by the street paintings. The first point is the emergence regarding street art within the urban structure and since an attempt to destroy the actual set up obtain in public areas. In this function, street art is highlighted and is the most important urban structure in the public area. The second point in taunness is the interpretation manufactured by artists about how to explain the city by its investigation, delimiting these social places where artistic productions are generally displayed, applying their role to the town, and looking intended for recognition. In this point, street art is parallel to other urban structure and plays a role to illustrate the city[17]. In some manner, the relationship between artists and the city, his invention within the city as well as urban style and design, shown like a mark of alteration in the aesthetic function that the city requires. This higher level of language enables to create a platform for dialogue within the area through the art work [19]. Also, they are known as “urban places” or even “sites/urban spaces” [10]. On the other side the street art can categorize to the illegal and legal art. Many of the street arts are arranged with the municipal or other urban organization, these street arts are legal. In opposite point illegal street art is created by the unknown artist and often they contain the protesting concept. These arts have short life time and erase very soon [20].

Street art consists of different method of performance and mass media, including; murals, mosaic tiling, LED art, wheat pastes, stencil art, emulsion, poster, spray paint, flour pasting, wood blocking [5]–[8], regular graffiti artwork, sand sculpture, ice sculpture, stencil graffiti, stickler art, megalithic art, art intervention, guerrilla art, and street poster art[15]. A number of these types of operators possess high-levels regarding abilities as well as focus on detailing. A number of them reflect simple pictures and phrases that convey deep meaning, also it is sometimes just for entertaining [5]–[8]. New type of street art is 3D anamorphic format art of pavement that illusory two-dimensional pictures[21].

Case Study: Street Art as Tourist Attraction in George Town:

Nowadays, the capital of the Penang island, George Town, is not only well known for its heritage, foods, interesting ancient life, multicultural, and structure. However, rapid multiplication of street art has made new and unusual art in George Town; this art draws the attention of many tourists. Moreover, this city marked as famous city for its progressive access to street art[22]. The State governments of Penang who funded the street art festival in 2012 within the inner city of George Town. They try to represent the reality of the heritage of Penang with the concept of ‘voice from the people’ that also attracts people without any damage to this heritage site [23]. Steel Rod Caricatures are spread throughout all the small alleys and streets; they try to illustrate the detail of every street to visitors. Most of the street arts are very attractive by utilizing funny and strange images and words that try to attract passersby [24]. Street art in Georgetown began with the idea to promote the history of the site or street. The initial objective is to increase the awareness of people to their surroundings and introduce the richness stories and history of these streets. Furthermore, it will motivate in conserving and revitalising the heritage area. In fact, the 52-rod steel caricatures intended to welcome the visitors to heritage site in entertaining way of welcoming and also mesmerising the local culture and stories in the past [25]. In George Town has been tried to make a relationship between culture and art. One of the idea is making the Steel Rods
designs in every streets within the inner city in order to explain the history of the past. However, the visitors sometimes do not understand the meaning of the street art. They only appreciate the aesthetic values rather than the stories behind it (especially tourists from China and Korea who are enthusiastic about the street art but do not understand English at all). Hence, most of the tourists only come to see the art. Even children, who do not know anything about heritage, but enjoy finding these funny and interesting steel rod street arts in George Town. It can be one of the best ways for introducing all the streets of George Town. The choice to use the steel rods was a very wise selection. The selection of steel material for street art in the tropical weather of George Town is a good selection for increasing the lifetime of the artwork; instead of murals, which wear and decrease their value every day.

The other type of street art that has been seen in Georgetown is mural. Mural’s projects were made in various places of this old city that are called ‘Mirrors George Town’. Some of them are not related to the local culture and lifestyle, but they have high artistic value and painted by famous artists such as Ernest Zacharevic. Murals were planned to make place hinges with human element that is called embodied placemaking [27], [28]. Furthermore, these murals show figures and scenes that are full of energy. These murals want to transform a sense of witty, unusual, and lively behavior to this old heritage area [29]. Murals are sometimes located in the narrow streets and alleys; and also are sometimes found on the high walls of this city. Although a few of them are not obvious and hardly seen due to the discoloration of the painting. The reason for lack of improvement and preservation of the murals is due to some perceived street art is irrelevant in planning or tourism industry [30]. Animals painting also had gained popularity in Georgetown. Cat images are most used captured in George Town[31]. Making street art with the purpose of introducing the history and local culture has changed into attracting tourists into appreciating the artistic values and mesmerising the inner city of the town. However in some ways, it helped the tourism industry in generating the income to the businesses around the city centre as the visitors walked around. The attention of people had change from viewing historical parts of the city to finding street art and look for them only[32]. In addition, some of this street art are irrelevant with the local culture, but only represent aesthetic value.

Summary:
Street art was raised up from the ashes of World War II for political issue. But after the decades, the application of street art has changed, that has been used for adorning the urban as furniture of the city. George Town is a good example of using the street art. George Town has tried to present its culture and history to the visitors around. Like other elements of the city, use of street art needs more research and attention to be effective.

REFERENCES