

IMPLEMENTATION OF HENTIAN KOMUNITI TOWARDS HERITAGE TOWN SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The sustainability of heritage town has been a huge controversial issue. Many local authorities struggle to sustain heritage buildings due to lack of community participation although they have adequate funding. As a result, many guidelines or even restrictions to sustain those building meets a dead end. Most heritage building owners also face issues in maintaining their buildings due to the building age and change of use. Other challenges are cost, value and also interest. Community participation in the process of sustaining heritage towns is equally important with the vital needs of the local authority to maintained them. Both work together as a complete system that compliments each other. The Hentian Komuniti is a unique community participation concept which is a translation of a concept called Machinoeki from Japan that reflects hospitality and volunteerism. The core principal of Hentian Komuniti concept is to encourage the community to share the space at their building premises where visitors can rest, get information about the town, and also use the toilet service for free. This is an interesting concept as the community works voluntarily to help the local government to revitalize the town, nurture the idea of hospitality, which means cultivate and educate good services. This paper explains the implementation of this concept in the town of Taiping and the chain benefit outcome from the surveys undertaken towards heritage building owners and local community in the effort to sustain the heritage town.

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INTRODUCTION

Heritage buildings are generally difficult to sustain due to the old age and the change of building use. Heritage buildings sustainability also relies on the ability of the owner to maintain it which means it involves cost that affects the market value. On top of it all, the main factor contributing to heritage buildings sustainability is the knowledge and willingness of the building owner to sustain the building. There were many initiatives taken by the government to sustain heritage buildings as a part of a national move to take care of the national heritage. But, often the effort came short due to the lack of participation from the community. In most cases, efforts put by the local authority only last until the funding ends. Other than that, heritage buildings sustainability needs constant funding to ensure the condition of the building is maintained and functional. Community participation to sustain heritage building is crucial. Thus, any effort to promote community participation to sustain heritage buildings is vital. Machinoeki or also well known as Hentian Komuniti in Malaysia is a Japanese concept initially in the spirit to revive Japanese cities and to solve the issue of urban sprawl in Japan. The word Machinoeki derived from the word “Machi” which means town or settlement while “Eki” means a station that provides a pit stop for a person when walking similar to the idea of “Rest” and “Relax” along the highway for the highway users. In many cities around the globe, community participation in the town volunteering program received mix responses. In a study conducted by Jepson, A., Clarke, A., & Ragsdell, G. (2012) found that participation of respondents among the local community can be enhanced through opportunity to give suggestions and the level of contributions that the community is able to make in a program. Therefore, in other words it is anticipated that cities will be able to have a stronger character and deeper sense of place with more participation from the local community including the building owners who also play an important role in the development of a town. In another study conducted by Wang, H., Yang, Z., Chen, L., Yang, J. & Li, R. (2010) found that the level of awareness among the community can influence the effectiveness and outcome of a program. This shows that more education and motivation about community participation will raise the level of awareness towards community participation itself. The introduction of this concept in Malaysia, is not just because of town revival effort but also to help the local government to conserve heritage buildings, to motivate more people to walk and appreciate those buildings, use Hentian Komuniti

as a pit stop for rest and to increase the level of community participation in the town program. This paper explains about the three months' pilot study conducted in Taiping, Perak Darul Ridzuan in 2017 and the objective is to understand the implementation of this concept in terms of heritage town sustainability.

DEFINING THE CONCEPT

The introduction of this concept in Malaysia is unique as there are elements of cultural differences from Japan. The objective of this study is to introduce this concept to the community of Taiping and to understand the effects towards heritage building sustainability. The town of Taiping was selected as the case study due to its history of having the most number of “first” buildings in Malaysia developed during the British administration where modern colonial buildings were constructed as early as 1885. Inspired by the wonderful concept of hospitality and the positive outcome from the Machinoeki movement in Japan, it is hoped that this project is able to encourage a town like Taiping to revitalize the idea of volunteerism and hospitality in an attempt to instill a sense of place and rebuilding the town at the same time. One of the main challenges faced by the researcher is the lack of previous studies related to the Machinoeki concept itself as this is the first time such concept was implemented other than Japan. However, such concept related to community participation, hospitality and volunteerism holds an important part in the conservation and tourism development. The motivation, opportunity and ability model or also known as MOA model was used to examine three levels of community participation. According to the recent research related to community participation using the MOA model conducted by Rasoolimanesh S.M., Jaafar, M., Ahmad, A.G & Barghi, R. (2017) and Rasoolimanesh, S.M., Jaafar, M., Kock, N., & Ramayah, T. (2015) found that motivation has a positive effect on low level of community participation where the respondents in their study were only interested in minimally participating in defined tourism related activities. In addition, a research supports Wang et.al., (2010) study that when given the opportunity to participate and having a voice in the process, more residents will be more interested in the decision making process. The idea of Machinoeki clearly is not a medium for local government to wash their hands but to assist in the process of creating a better outcome from any program created by

them. This is important because when the community realize that the town sustainability is also part of their responsibility, more great achievements can be achieved in creating a better future.

Taiping is a town located at the north part of Perak state in Malaysia with a heritage and historical background that need to be sustained for future generations. Historically, Taiping is the earliest modern town planned in Tanah Melayu with many colonial building houses and offices, shop houses and the famous Lake Garden which reflect the mix culture and settlements that occurred in Taiping since the beginning. Taiping retains the gridiron street pattern type of the town layout but originally it was not considered planned for motorize vehicles as the main users for the road. Hence people either walk or cycle around the town. Most people drive their own private vehicle from their house which is located outside the town. As a result of urban sprawl and poor public transportation services, most people do not walk in the town. This pilot study started in September, 2017 with an inventory study on numerous elements that describe the concept. This research project focuses on buildings listed in the Taiping Heritage Trail. After a careful inventory study of the heritage trail buildings, five buildings were selected based on its current condition and its ability to provide services as Hentian Komuniti. Those buildings are Museum Perak, Public Library Taiping, Gallery Taiping and two private owned buildings that are Devalaya Temple and Hokkien Association building. In order to implement Hentian Komuniti in the heritage building it must include certain elements such as an information check point for visitors, building owner need to provide free toilet services and to provide good service. From 40 heritage buildings, five buildings were selected based on their willingness to participate and the suitability to be part of this pilot project. Subsequently after the inventory study, a focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted to allow the owner of the building to know more about the function as a Hentian Komuniti owner and to learn about the effects of this concept. The objective of the FGD is to get feedback from the building owners on the implementation of Hentian Komuniti at their building. Some of the questions asked to the building owners are the current function of the building, the type of customers, ability of the building owners to attend to visitors' queries and using the free toilet services and keenness of the building owners to join this program. To strengthen the implementation of this concept, the Mayor of Taiping Municipal Council (MPT) also plays a significant role to support the

project. One of his main roles is to acknowledge these buildings as Hentian Komuniti of Taiping and to include them in the heritage map. The basic concept of Hentian Komuniti is that these five buildings in Taiping need to provide free toilet services while helping to maintain the toilet voluntarily, to provide a rest place like a sitting area and to provide information about Taiping which also include the town history. This concept will not only benefit the tourists but also the local people.

As reported in the Taiping Special Area Plan 2020, Taiping is largely dominated by two to three level shop houses with various styles of architecture which are unique and distinct in their own way. These features enabled the buildings to be easily distinguished from the new shop houses even though they were standing right next to each other. The sheltered passageway, commonly known as the five-foot-way also gives the shop houses their unique character and therefore assisting in creating a clear sense of place. Collectively, they form a strong and cohesive streetscape. Furthermore, one can also witness remnants of the town's wonderful era such as the Magistrate Court, Post and Telegraph office, Railway Station, Taiping New Club, Perak Museum, and Larut Matang District Office which were built more than 100 years ago along the heritage trail. The majority of these buildings have remained relatively intact and re-used with most of them still retaining the major structure of the colonial architecture. This is crucial as a place is deemed to be of historical importance to local communities if it maintains the continual pattern of human use (New South Wales Heritage Office, 2011). Another Hentian Komuniti project expectations is to increase the motivation level of the local community to walk in the town. However, safety concern becomes the main topic of concern when it comes to motivation to walk. In Malaysia, road accident is a major concern where a total of 66,296 fatalities since 2005 to 2014 has been recorded (PDRM, 2014). An accident involving pedestrians may easily result in fatal injury due to their vulnerability. Safety while walking is one of the important factors that any pedestrian will consider. An increasing number of pedestrians being involved in road accidents is cause for concern regarding the risk of walking, especially for parents. Consequently, this situation could impede the struggle towards promoting the walking culture in Malaysia. In the past, many studies have investigated on the behavior of pedestrians in Malaysia particularly in urban area. Different types of people will have different types of walking behavior. There are many possible factors in measuring walking behavior.

According to Daamen and Hoogendoorn (2003), walking behavior can be measured by walking speed, walking direction, walking experiences, group formation and density. Every pedestrian group has different expectation towards the pedestrian facilities. Poor maintenance of pedestrian facilities is related to the inappropriate condition of walkways and street furniture. Physical quality of linkages is important to allow people to walk or transfer comfortably within the city center.

FINDINGS

The findings written in this paper discussed specifically on the outcome of two different respondent groups. The data collection are conducted separately. The two groups are the building owners who is the main player in making Hentian Komuniti successful in Taiping while the Taiping town local community is the second respondent group in this study. Moreover, the reason to carry the survey among local community in the respondents group is to study the walkability in Taiping town and also the potential of such concept being implemented in the town. The responses from the five building owners and 16 respondents among the local community were carefully recorded and explained in this paper. The five building owners were selected based on the initial inventory study in September, 2017 and the 16 local community respondents were selected based on the different background, gender, age and education level in order to get different responses regarding walking experience, perceptions, awareness of heritage buildings in the project. The local community responses are recorded from a walking program called “Walk with me” conducted in March, 2018, three months after the program started in Taiping while the focus group discussion was conducted in December, 2017. All respondents comments were carefully recorderd and were clarified in the discussion. However, this study also finds limitation in getting more local community respondents as it is dangerous to walk in a large group during the walking program. Besides, the heritage building owners participation in the FGD are also on a voluntary basis. Therefore, the number of building owners involved in the FGD is also limited during this study. The researcher has found some interesting findings about the outcome of this pilot project and to learn about the effects of this concept implementation.

OUTCOME FROM LOCAL COMMUNITY WALKING PROGRAM

Table 1 indicates background of the local community respondents who were involved in the “Walk with me” program as one of the methods to introduce Hentian Komuniti and also to get their response about the concept. The program was conducted in March, 2018. Immediately after the walking program, the respondents were asked about their experiences about Hentian Komuniti.

Table 1: Background of Respondents among the Local Community

Item	Percentage (%)	Item	Percentage (%)
Gender		Locality	
Male	18.8	Resident of Taiping	93.8
Female	81.3	Non-Resident of Taiping	6.3
Categories of occupation		Health Condition	
Public Sector	12.5	Good	100
Private Sector	6.3	Transportation Mode	
Self Employed	18.8	Motorcycle/ Bicycle	18.8
Student	43.8	Car	81.3
Housewife	6.3	Factors of Refusal to walk	
Retired	12.5	Weather Condition	25
Education Level		Lacking facilities	12.5
Primary School	12.5	Cost and time management	43.8
Secondary School	37.5	Criminal issues	12.5
University	37.5	Condition of pedestrian walkway	6.3
Others	12.5		

The method of data collection from local community was conducted using two different surveys, that is before and after they learn and visit the Hentian Komuniti. Firstly, we try to understand their knowledge about Hentian Komuniti and their experience about walking. Respondents answer a questionnaire survey form before they start walking. From the initial

survey, we found that nearly half of the respondents felt discouraged to walk in the town (either as daily transport mode or leisure) due to the factor of cost inefficiency and time constraint. Consequently, 81% of respondents were using car as a mode of transportation in Taiping on a daily basis. Almost one third of respondents have encountered difficulties while walking around the town center due to the exceeding provision of junctions within Taiping (refer to Table 2). Yet, most respondents were willing to walk for more than 500 meters and indicated that sports interest encourage walking activity. However, more than half of the respondents informed that it is very difficult to find a toilet in Taiping town and most of them use their own toilet at home. In addition, they also criticise the poor quality of available toilet services. Therefore, respondents are reluctant to use public toilets available in the town. As all respondents understand very well about Taiping, the elements of information centre is not a positive experience for them which is explained in Table 2.

Table 2: Respondents Experiences before Hentian Komuniti

Item	Yes	No
Difficulties encountered during walking	31.3	68.8
Difficulties finding toilet	68.8	31.3
Difficulties finding Information Center	31.3	68.8

Table 3 demonstrated respondents perception about Hentian Komuniti concept after they experienced the “Walk with Me” program. The respondents were guided by the researcher and walked from one Hentian Komuniti to the other Hentian Komuniti. This is to get their feedback on walking ability and distance, experience, comments about safety and infrastructure. This is also a way to introduce to the local community about Hentian Komuniti. The respondents were asked about their walking experience and their feedback regarding facilities provided in Hentian Komuniti. After the walking program, it is found that almost half of the respondents actually enjoyed walking and agreed that walking is not a tiring activity. Nevertheless, they agreed that walking can enrich their knowledge about the heritage building in Taiping town after they joined the “Walk with Me” program. The respondents highlighted their interests to learn and explore the historical parts of Taiping town although they passed by the same building everyday using car. This is an interesting outcome from the findings. However, two third of the respondents revealed the displeasure felt when walking as they

felt threatened by crime and accidents while walking. Consequently, the respondents suggest that a pedestrian walkway be provided to reduce the danger to the pedestrians.

Table 3: Perception towards Walking and Facilities after Knowing about Hentian Komuniti and its Facilities

	Extremely Agreed	Highly Agreed	Agreed	Disagreed	Highly Disagreed
	Walking Experience				
Walking as a tiring activity	6.3	6.3	18.8	25	43.8
Enrich knowledge	62.5	18.8	18.8	0	0
Enhance interests in exploring historical area	68.8	12.5	12.5	6.3	0
Safe from criminal threats	0	0	25	56.3	18.8
Safe from accident	0	37.5	25	37.5	0
	Facilities Provided				
Sufficiency of facilities provided	0	12.5	50	37.5	0
Facilities attract residents to walk	62.5	12.5	25	0	0
Foster appreciation on historical part	68.8	25	6.3	0	0
Hentian Komuniti Enhances Tourist Attraction	87.5	12.5	0	0	0

The perception of respondents on the facilities provided in Taiping were evaluated. A majority agreed that toilet is the most important facility as it is the most frequently used by visitors especially when using public transportation. However, two third of the respondents claimed that the toilet provided was insufficient and inaccessible. At the moment, 5 Hentian Komuniti provide free toilet services. The last section of the survey evaluating the respondents’ awareness and perceptions towards Hentian Komuniti as explained in Table 4.

Table 4: Awareness and Perception towards Hentian Komuniti

	Percentage (%)		Percentage (%)
Familiarity about Hentian Komuniti		Transportation Mode to Hentian Komuniti	
Yes	62.5	Not Related	31.3
No	37.5	Walking	31.3
Source of Information		Cycling	6.3
Not familiar	31.3	Car	31.3
Newspaper/article	6.3	Facilities Used in Hentian Komuniti	
Advertisement	12.5	Toilet	50
Family/Friends	50	Information Centre	18.8
		Tourist Information Counter	12.5

Based on the findings, a majority of the respondents knew about Hentian Komuniti through media and word of mouth. However, approximately 38% of respondents was not familiar with Hentian Komuniti before joining the walking program. Majority agreed that the Hentian Komuniti promotes walking activity thus fostering the appreciation towards the historical buildings in Taiping. Most of the respondents highly agreed that the Hentian Komuniti enhances the tourist attraction in Taiping for future heritage sustainability. The respondents also suggest to provide more Hentian Komuniti in Taiping thus cultivating a healthy lifestyle through walking. In the findings, this paper strongly believed that there are chain benefits from the idea of Hentian Komuniti implemented in Taiping. Although, the idea is basically new, the ability of the respondents to learn more about the heritage building while walking is a good sign that members of the community are willing to walk more in Taiping town. With safer walking facilities like pedestrian pathway, proper crossing lane and Hentian Komuniti services like free toilet available can assist more people to walk and appreciate the town heritage in the future.

OUTCOME FROM BUILDING OWNERS FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) among building owners were arranged in December, 2017. The idea to setup the FGD session was to inform and educate the building owners about the concept. Among the concerns shared

by the building owners were about the water and electricity bill that they have to bear during the program as the result of giving free toilet service. Another concern was to know who should entertain the guest when they approach their premises. Thirdly was a question related to the profit that they get from the program. However, there are mix responses from the government owned buildings like the Public Library, the Perak Museum and also the Taiping Gallery as they are less concerned about the financial status. The motivation of all five building owners who participated in the program are sensible and with more training and education, building owners will be able to see the positive outcome from the program. There are mix response among the private building owners who were very skeptical about the program outcome. One of the prompt action to support and motivate them was to acknowledge their participation in this program by the local authority (as shown in Figure 1).



Figure 1: Building Owners were Acknowledged by the Local Government during an Appreciation Ceremony

While, Figure 2 shows the official logo of Hentian Komuniti which is displayed at all 5 pilot Hentian Komuniti in Taiping. Also shown in the figure is the map of Hentian Komuniti in the “40 First” Taiping.



Figure 2: Hentian Komuniti Official Trademark Logo is Displayed at all Hentian Komuniti. The Figure Above also shows the Location of the 5 Hentian Komuniti which is also in the list of “40 First” in Taiping and other Heritage Destinations in Taiping Town

CHAIN EFFECTS OF HENTIAN KOMUNITI IMPLEMENTATION IN THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE HERITAGE TOWN

The responses of Hentian Komuniti concept from building owners and local community varies. However, both groups contribute to a chain effect as shown in Figure 3. The first task for the researcher was to introduce the concept to all heritage building owners. As this concept is on a voluntary basis, only a few building owners see the potential outcome of this concept. The researcher also needs an input from local community regarding walkability in Taiping town to ensure the concept is successful. The lack of walking gives a direct impact to the rate of success in the project. Without people walking, nobody will use Hentian Komuniti services therefore the researcher couldn’t access the level of success of the project. Government owned buildings like the library and the museum received a consistent number of visitors everyday due to the nature of its service. Therefore, more members of the local community know about Hentian Komuniti existence in Taiping or at least are aware of it. However, the low number of people walking in Taiping town contribute to the slow progress of the project. As a result, local community did not use Hentian Komuniti functions for a pit stop to rest or use the free toilet services. Clearly from the figure, we can

understand that both building owners and local community play an important role in the implementation of Hentian Komuniti. Without each other, the concept will not be successful even if the local authority supports the action. This create a chain benefits among the three stakeholders. Another chain benefit can also be found in the outcome of the project. As more people walk in the town, more people will realize the value of heritage buildings and appreciate them. This will increase the level of awareness among the local community towards heritage buildings and try to preserve them. Tourists can also benefit from walking in the town which is supported by Hentian Komuniti functions. Finally, both outcome will contribute to the success of sustaining the heritage town.

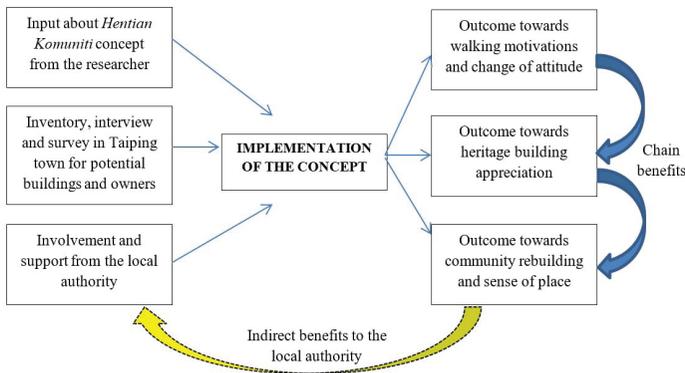


Figure 3: Chain Benefit Effects of the Hentian Komuniti

It is recommended that community involvement can improve the level of awareness on the importance of heritage sustainability. Therefore, with enough training and constant motivation about community involvement in town development program it will lead to future improvements. Proper infrastructure and facilities to accommodate people to walk are needed to encourage more people to walk and to give more confidence during walking. In addition to the added facilities, the existing building design can also act as pedestrian pathway. The five footway which is also part of the heritage building design can act as perfect natural pedestrian pathway. In cultivating walking as part of Malaysian culture, more education should be provided on the benefits of walking other than to reduce traffic congestion. Cultivating walking as a culture is a worldwide problem but it is not impossible to conduct as many other countries has evidence on the benefits of walking to

the town. Other than health benefits, walking also increase the awareness of the town condition, appreciation towards the building history and its heritage values especially for a town like Taiping. In addition to that, the community will become more attached and will improve social communication with each other. This will create a better sense of place and improve the sense of belonging among the local community.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are a few strategies that can be implemented in the future to rebuild the historical town. Firstly, is to educate the community to care about the town since young. The community needs to learn to do something without any expectation from the local authority and to do things voluntarily as part of their duties as a citizen. The changes in their action and mentality will improve other challenges such as walking motivation. Furthermore, the community will realize that more walking will improve and lead to better social communication, health and of course to reduce traffic congestion in the town. The promotion of walking culture is also a way to improve the health of the community wellbeing. The education and continuous awareness about the town history among the local community should be initiated by the family first, then to their neighborhood and the whole community. The concept of rebuilding the town will be realized if everyone work hand in hand to care for the town.

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