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**THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING *MACHINOEKI*
CONCEPT IN TAIPING TOWN**

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Abstract - *Machinoeki* is a unique community involvement concept, empower with hospitality and volunteerism that benefits the town revival. The core principal in *Machinoeki* concept is to inspire community through the idea of space sharing at their building premises where visitor can rest, get some information about the town, and also used the toilet service for free. The use of existing resources within the building indicates that the concept does carry the spirit of community participation as a non-direct social service from the local community to the town development. This is an interesting concept as 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 concept is not a medium to get local government to wash their hands but to get the community work bottom up and work hand in hand with the local government to rebuild and revive the town. Nonetheless, the implementation of this concept faced a lot of challenges from the building owners involved and received mix responses among the local community. Are Malaysians ready to embrace such concept and how do they react to this concept? This paper explain about the challenges faced by the researcher to introduce this concept to the building owners and local community in Taiping town for the past year.

Keywords - Walkability, Rebuilding Community, Historical Town, Taiping, *Machinoeki*

1 INTRODUCTION

Machinoeki or also well known as Hentian Komuniti in Malaysia is a Japanese concept invented in 2002 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. Although the original idea in Japan was mainly because of revitalization needs and urban sprawl issue (Koike, 2016), the concept has proven that it is able to cultivate a non-direct impact of community involvement in the development of town in Japan. In many cities around the globe, community participation in the town volunteering programme received mix level of responses. In a study conducted by Jepson et.al (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 able to make in a programme. 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 plays an important role in a town development. In another study conducted by Wang et.al (2010) found that the level of awareness among the community can influence the effectiveness and outcome of a programme. This shows that more education and motivation about community participation will increase in the awareness towards community participation itself. The introduction of *Machinoeki* concept in Malaysia, is not just because of town revival effort but also to help the local government effort to conserve heritage building, to motivate more people to walk and appreciate those buildings, the use of

Hentian Komuniti as a pit stop for rest and to alleviate the level of community participation in the town programme.

2 DEFINING THE CONCEPT

The introduction of this concept in Malaysia however is considered challenging in many ways and it is very closely related to cultural differences from Japan. The objective of this study is to implement this concept and to understand its challenges to implement such a positive concept in Malaysia. For the first time outside of Japan, the *Machinoeki* concept was applied in a heritage town known as Taiping, Perak in Malaysia. The significant of Taiping town to be selected as the case study is in line for its town history with the most number of “first” building in Malaysia that were 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 *Machinoeki* movement in Japan, with a hope that this project able to encourage town like Taiping to revitalize through the idea of volunteerism and hospitality. This is an attempt to instill sense of place and rebuilding the town at the same time. This paper looked at the challenges face by building owners and the responses of the local community towards the concept. The understanding of these challenges and the responses from the local community themselves towards *Machinoeki* concept will provide further information about the suitability of this concept outside of Japan as well as to understand the best method to implement this concept in future.

One of the main challenges faced by the researcher is the lack of previous study related to *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 et. al (2017) and (2015) found that motivation has a positive effect on low level of community participation where the respondents in their study were only interested in being minimally participate in defined tourism related activities. In addition, a research supports Wang et.al (2010) study that given 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 programme created by them. This is important because when the local community finally realize that town development is also part of their responsibility, more great achievements can be achieved in creating a sustainable future.

Taiping is a town located at the north part of Perak state in Malaysia with a heritage and historical background which needs 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 shows the mix culture and settlements occurred in Taiping since the beginning. Taiping retains gridiron street pattern type of the town layout. But originally it was not considered for motorized vehicles as the main users of the road. Hence local people either walk or cycle around the town. However, modern lifestyle nowadays changes their dependency on mode of transportations and as a result; it is rare to see people walking now in the town. The study started in 2017 with an inventory study on numerous elements that describe *Machinoeki* concept. This research project focuses on buildings and places listed in the Taiping Heritage Trail. After a careful inventory study of the trail from 40 heritage buildings in the Taiping Heritage Trail, 5 buildings were selected which are government owned building like Museum Perak, Public Library Taiping, Gallery Taiping and private owned building like Devalaya Temple and Hokkien Association. The buildings must be able to turn as information check points, to provide toilets free of service, to provide hospitality with greetings and good service. Therefore, the current building components need to have those criteria to be considered and chosen as *Machinoeki* or Hentian Komuniti and also need to be in the path of heritage walk as part of the needs to revive the heritage preservation in Taiping. From 40 heritage buildings, 5 buildings were selected based on their willingness to participate and basic criteria as

explained to be part of this pilot project. Subsequently after the inventory study in September 2017, a focus group discussion and interviews was conducted to allow the owner of the building to know more about the function as a *Machinoeki* owner and the impact of the concept to their premises in future. In strengthening the implementation of this concept; the Mayor of Taiping Municipal Council (MPT) also plays a main role to support the project. One of his main roles is to acknowledge these buildings as Hentian Komuniti of Taiping and to include the heritage buildings as the main stop within the public buses route. The basic concept of Hentian Komuniti is that these 5 buildings in Taiping need to provide free toilet services and the ability to maintain the toilet voluntarily, a rest place like a sitting area and an information counter not limited to a board but also a person in the building that is able to answer questions and the whereabouts in Taiping the includes the town history similar to the concept of *Machinoeki* in Japan. These concepts will not only benefit tourists but also for local people. In addition, it is expected to be able to enhance more non-motorize (walking or cycling) journey within the town, hence able to revive appreciation towards historic buildings, social and economic activities, direct or indirectly – as proved by *Machinoeki* concept in Japan. The experimental implementation of this project started officially in December 2017 and another survey was conducted in March 2018 to understand the immediate outcome and learn about the challenges to implement this concept in Taiping town among the building owners and local community.

The fact that the town, was once an important commercial hub in the district of Larut Matang, offers a wide variety of businesses since the late 19th century. This has certainly influenced the character of the town. As reported in the Taping Special Area Plan 2020, Taiping is largely dominated by two to three level shophouses 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 shophouses even though they were standing right next to each other. The sheltered passageway, commonly known as the five-foot-way also gives the shophouses 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. Majority of these buildings have remained relatively intact and re-used with most of them still retain 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). The presence of people throughout the day and night, particularly by those who come to work or visit during the daytime and at night, create and maintain a safe and distinctive environment in the town. Hence, it offers great potential to implement *Machinoeki* concept in Taiping town.

Another Hentian Komuniti project expectations is to increase in the local community motivation 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 pedestrian 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 causing concerns 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 with the inappropriate condition of walkways and street furniture. Additionally, physical quality of linkages is important to allow people to walk or transfer comfortably within the city center.

3 FINDINGS

The findings written in this paper discussed specifically on the outcome of the focus group discussion among the building owners and findings from a programme called “Walk With Me” that has introduced Hentian Komuniti in Taiping town with the local community. The responses from the 5 building owners and 16 respondents among the local community were carefully recorded and explained in this paper as challenges in implementing the *Machinoeki* concept. The 5 building owners were selected based on the initial inventory study in September, 2017 and the 16 respondents were selected based on the different background, gender, age and education level in order to get different responses about the walking experience, perceptions, awareness to heritage buildings in the project. The walking programme was conducted in March, 2018, 3 months after the programme started in Taiping. All the respondents’ comments were recorded and were clarified in the discussion. The researcher has found interesting findings to study about the challenges from the programme. The discussion is based on the data collection both from the building owners and also the local community.

3.1 Local Community

Table 1 indicates background of the local community respondents who were involved in the “Walk with me” programme as one of the methods to introduce about Hentian Komuniti and also to get their responses about the concept. The programme was conducted in March, 2018. Immediately after the walking programme, the respondents were asked about their experiences in findings the three basic elements of *Machinoeki* in Taiping town before *Machinoeki* were first pilot project implemented in December, 2017. The three basic elements that are walking motivations, toilets service and information center. It is found that nearly half of the respondents refused to walk due to the factor of cost inefficient and time constraint. Consequently, a portion amounting to 81% of respondents used car as a mode of transportation in Taiping. The respondent’s experiences and perceptions on walking around the Taiping town center were identified. Almost one third of respondents have encountered difficulties while walking around the town center due to the exceedingly 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 do encourage walking activity. While, 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. Therefore, public transportation or even walking is not suitable and efficient for them. As all respondents understand very well about Taiping, the elements of information centre is not relevant experiences for them. Therefore, this explains the percentage trend in Table 2.

Table 1 Background of respondents among the local community

	Percentage (%)		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		

Table 2 Respondents' experiences before Hentian Komuniti

	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
respondents'
Hentian Komuniti

demonstrated perception towards concept introduce in Taiping town after they went through the "Walk with Me" programme. In the programme, all 16 respondents were briefed about the special three elements that related to the walking motivation, heritage building appreciation and community participation. The participants were also briefed about the walking path from one Hentian Komuniti as well as its function including the free toilet services. The respondents were asked about their walking experiences and their feedback regarding facilities provided in Hentian Komuniti. It is found that almost half of the respondents enjoyed walking and agreed that walking is an unfatigued activity. Nevertheless, they agreed that walking can enrich their knowledge about the heritage building in Taiping town after they joined the "Walk with Me" programme. The respondents reported that they are interested to learn and explore on 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 feelings towards walking as they felt threatened by crime and accidents while walking. Consequently, the respondent suggests to provide pedestrian walkway to eliminate the safety issue among 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 fatigued 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 threaten	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
<i>Hentian Komuniti</i> Enhances Tourist Attraction	87.5	12.5	0	0	0

The perception of respondents on the facilities provided in Taiping also were evaluated. Majority agreed that toilet is the most important facilities because 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, only 5 *Hentian Komuniti* are provided with free toilet services and this does not include paid toilet services in several spots in Taiping town at a very minimal cost.

Table 4 Awareness and Perception towards *Hentian Komuniti*

	Percentage (%)		Percentage (%)
Familiarity about <i>Hentian Komuniti</i>		Transportation Mode to <i>Hentian Komuniti</i>	
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 <i>Hentian Komuniti</i>	
Advertisement	12.5	Toilet	50
Family/Friends	50	Information Centre	18.8
		Tourist Information Counter	12.5

The last section of the survey was evaluating the respondents' awareness and perceptions towards *Hentian Komuniti*. Based on the findings, majority of respondents acknowledged about *Hentian Komuniti* through media and from word of mouth. However, approximately 38% of respondents were still not familiar with *Hentian Komuniti*. Majority agreed that the *Hentian Komuniti* promotes walking activity, thus, fostering the appreciation towards the historical buildings in Taiping. Most of the respondents agreed that the *Hentian Komuniti* enhances the tourist attraction in Taiping for future sustainability. The respondents also suggest to provide more *Hentian Komuniti* in Taiping so that it can cultivate healthy lifestyle by walking. In the findings, this paper highlights that there are chain benefits from the idea of *Machinoeki* or *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 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 made available will be able to assist more people to walk and appreciate the town heritage in future.

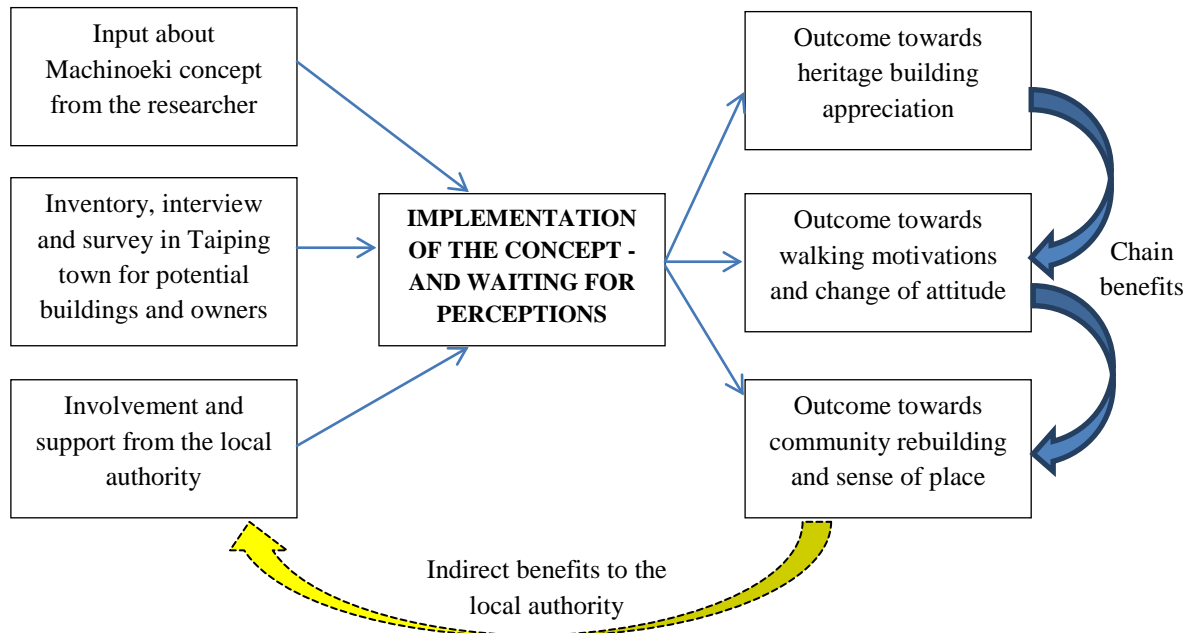


Figure 1 Chain benefit effects of the Hentian Komuniti

3.2 Building Owners

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were set up before the programme was initiated in December, 2017. The idea to setup the FGD session was to inform and educate the building owners on the *Machinoeki* concept. One of the main concerns of the building owners was the outcome of the programme. The building owners were very anxious about the water and electricity bill that they have to bare during the programme as the result of giving free toilet service. Another concern was to know who should entertain the guest when they approached at their premises. Thirdly was a question related to the profit that they get from the programme. Most of the responses recorded were related to financial status. However, there are mix responses received from the government owned building like the Public Library, the Perak Museum and also the Taiping Gallery as they are less concern about the financial status. After 3 months, an individual interview was conducted towards each building owners regarding the short outcome of the programme. The motivation of all 5 building owners who participated in the programme are moderate and it is hoped with more training and education, building owners will be able to see the positive outcome from the programme. Some building owners were very skeptical about the programme outcome and were very silent. It is still very challenging to define the level of acceptance among the building owners in this programme as it is still new but the researcher able to anticipate that with enough education and awareness, they will accept this idea better in future. This is important as the maturity of the community including the building owners in implementing a new concept especially voluntarily for a free cost are still low if compared to other developed countries like Japan. The researcher could not put any high expectations towards the building owners as the concept is still new in Taiping and the outcome of the programme depends much on the feedback from the community first. Figure 2 shows a picture of all building owners participated in the programme during an appreciation ceremony by the local government. While figure 3 shows one of the programme participated by the researcher to educate the local community and building owners about *Machinoeki* concept that promotes hospitality and volunteerism.



Figure 2 Building owners were acknowledged by the local government during an appreciation ceremony



Figure 3 Promotion and public survey about the concept during the Heritage Festival 2017 in Taiping

4 CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENT MACHINOEKI CONCEPT

The challenges to implement Machinoeki concept can be derived into four immediate outcomes of the project from the responses of the building owners and local community:

- a. Motivation to do something for free without expectations among the building owners
- b. Lack of safety, infrastructure and facilities for pedestrian were the main concern of the community.
- c. Walking is not a culture among the local community
- d. Awareness about the town history and heritage appreciation alleviates during walking.

The level of challenges in the implementation of *Machinoeki* concept among two different group participants are varied. The challenges faced by in the implementation among local community was mainly to attract more people to walk. The lack of walking gives direct impact to the rate of success in the project. Without people walking, nobody will use Hentian Komuniti services therefore the researcher was unable to access the level of success of the project. Different responses between building owners were received as each of the building owners provided different kind of services. Government owned building like the library and the museum received consistent number of visitors everyday due to the nature of its service. Therefore, more local community knows about Hentian Komuniti existence in Taiping or at least aware about it. Both building owners also able to give responses towards the use of toilet and information services as the number of visitors are acceptable. Instead, building owners of private building are still skeptical about the programme not only because there was no frequent visitors at their premises but the facilities to facilitate walking to the building is

very poor. As a result, people either drive to their building or did not use Hentian Komuniti functions such as pit stop either to rest or use the toilet services. According to the initial literature review, community involvement can be improved through awareness and more education about it. Therefore, with enough training and constant motivation about community involvement in town development the programme will be able to improve future situation. In addition to that, more participation also allows more people to voice out their opinion to improve town programme. For example, the lack of safety while walking was raised by the participants of the programme. Since, the number of vehicles on the road are high, many participants felt unsafe to cross the road and walk along the road. Proper infrastructure and facilities to accommodate pedestrian are needed to encourage more people to walk and to give more confidence. 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 building act as perfect natural pedestrian pathway. However, the local authority needs to educate and inform the building's owners not to extend their building or allow motorcycles to park at the footway. In cultivating walking as part of Malaysian culture, the people should be exposed through education on the benefits of walking rather than seeing this as a process 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 made 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 town like Taiping. In addition to that, community will become more attach and will improve social communication among each other. This will create a better sense of place and improve the sense of belonging among the local community.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, there are a few strategies that can be implemented in future to rebuild the historical town. Firstly, is to educate the community to care about the town starting as early askindergarten age up until adulthood. The community needs to learn to do something without any expectations 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. Community will realize that more walking will improve better social communication, health and of course to reduce traffic congestion in the town. The promotion of walking culture is also part to improve the health of the community wellbeing. The education and continuous awareness about the town history from the local community must be initiated by family first and 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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