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REVIVING LOST SPACES BENEATH ELEVATED RAIL LINES IN URBAN AREAS

**Farah Adiba Karim¹, Yusfida Ayu Abdullah², Hamizah Yakob³,
Raja Norashekin Raja Othman⁴, Nurul Shakila Khalid⁵**

*^{1,2,3,4,5}School of Town Planning & Landscape Architecture,
Faculty of Built Environment,*

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA (UiTM) SHAH ALAM

Abstract

Elevated highways and rail lines create a vertical split, obstacles, and divisions at ground level, whereby the space above is used exclusively for transit. Conversely, the space below often becomes a void or is identified as lost space. Law enforcement has largely overlooked the area below the elevated highways and rail lines, which has become a hot spot for criminal activities and consequently, a location many people ignore due to its perceived safety. The residual spaces, also known as the leftover spaces under the elevated highways and rail lines, are often perceived as the negative aspects of urban spaces. Many relevant parties, such as urban planners, landscape architects, and urban designers, have been attempting to transform the spaces for various purposes which are community-friendly. This paper aims to examine the lost spaces beneath elevated rail lines in an urban area. The main intention is to evaluate the potential of converting these lost spaces into useful areas for the public. The results of this paper identified the potential design strategies for promoting public activities. The study applied a qualitative method, using a case study as the subject matter. The approach also included a detailed site investigation and purposive sampling of interviews at the site. Results concluded that the lost spaces can be repurposed following the suggestions of the participants. The outcome of the analysis highlighted the potential activities for the public, which can serve as a useful reference to local authorities and urbanists.

Keywords: lost spaces, elevated rail lines, design strategy, placemaking

¹ Corresponding author. Email: yusfida@uitm.edu.my

INTRODUCTION

This paper offers a unique approach to solving lost spaces beneath elevated roads and rail lines. Since placemaking is our new approach to enhancing urban image and wellbeing, this study is thought to be crucial in providing recommendations for placemaking at unutilised spaces beneath elevated infrastructure. Elevated roads have been a cornerstone of urban design and planning for nearly a century. They thread their way through the suburbs, cities, and the countryside. By enabling access to the growing population of people travelling to and from the expanding suburbs, they were meant to boost the economies of the cities. Furthermore, the urban landscape has been divided into largely functioning zones above and largely ignored regions due to these elevated roadways and rail lines. While they have driven business and employment out of the city, they have isolated certain regions and divided or separated communities. Landscape architects, city planners, and architects are progressively remodelling the areas below urban highways and rail lines to develop workable pedestrian-focused activity zones to bring the divided population back together. Elevated highways and rail lines create a vertical split, obstacles, and divisions at ground level; the space above is used exclusively for transit, while the space below is frequently a void. The area below the elevated highways and rail lines, which has gone largely unnoticed by law enforcement, has become a hot spot for criminal activities and, as a result, a location that many people would avoid due to safety reasons.

The residual spaces or leftover spaces under elevated highways and rail lines are often seen as the negative aspect of urban spaces. Many urban planners and designers have been attempting to convert urban spaces for a variety of purposes that could benefit society (Hamzah, Sinniah and Rusli, 2024). However, authorities are most likely to classify these spaces as a grey area for maintenance. Hence, numerous action plans or initiatives have been forwarded to the respective parties to transform the unofficial and unregulated dead spaces under those elevated highways and rail lines to create a viable community place. Areas beneath the freeway are also commonly regarded as unstructured areas (i.e., free zones) with impromptu user groups and unscheduled functions. Lost spaces or dead spaces frequently have unclear boundaries and limitations, comprising parts of zoning, programming, and regulations, and these factors are often not clearly understood.

Highways and rail lines are essential features for any city responding to population growth. As a result, it is critical for urban expansion, economic support, and connecting city cores. Elevated roadways, rail lines, and bridges are necessary for improving the automobile flow within cities in congested locations and for promoting transit between urban and rural areas. Designing or changing the usage of the spaces can be rather complex due to the factors and limitations that need to be considered, as some parts of the spaces might work within different rules and regulations. For example, Area A has been utilised with certain

rules or living styles, while Area B has been utilised with a different set of regulations or living styles; these areas may have also been used illegally by some. Hence, this could create some limitations and difficulties when converting or changing the said spaces into a place that can function in an orderly manner for the community. The limitations and difficulties involve the sensitivity and the culture of the current space (i.e., the current occupant behaviour), whereby the solutions will have to meet the needs of the communities. Thus, decisions in which programming and design are included will affect the current occupant or the involved populations, as well as the overall development of the areas. Unlike other public spaces, the functions, physical characteristics, circulation, and activities are very definite in their usage. Hence, these contradictions or complexities can create heightened and controversial difficulties between the functions and user groups. As lost space is a borderline area, certain zoning and land use can be tolerated based on the circumstances.

The objective of this paper is to examine lost spaces beneath elevated rail lines in an urban area. The main intention is to evaluate and establish the potential of design strategies to convert these lost spaces into functional spaces for the public.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lost space is described as a leftover of an unconstructed or undesirable urban area that requires redesigning of the space (Trancik, 1986). Unattended areas between districts, buildings, or streets emerge undetected until they are physically constructed on the ground (Mseddi, 2020). These sites could be empty or have remains of built infrastructure in them (Khalid et al., 2018). Simon et al. (2020) defined urban void as the absence of a physical entity, such as a built structure, a natural element, or both. It could also refer to an absence of an assigned function for various reasons, regardless of physical presence, as well as the absence of users or an activity space, irrespective of whether a function is present or not. The issue of lost space encompasses not only the physical aspects but also the social and economic dimensions (Yalcin and Kurkcuoglu, 2023).

The various terms used, such as “lost,” “void,” or “vacant” while connected to space, area, land, or a plot, often carry a negative connotation that creates a social and mental image of dereliction, decay, loss, and danger (Mseddi, 2020). This image often reflects the reality of these perceived spaces. Ultav et al. (2016) reported that the modern movement in architectural design, high-rise building design, and infrastructure are critical factors. This movement has proven to be insufficient for the need to create physical connections and meaningful places. Meanwhile, Trancik (2007) argued that the purpose of this movement is to remove itself from the street, distancing it from the activities of street life and as a result, street space is increasingly overlooked. He believed that architects rarely design the space between buildings and create an “anti-space.”

Investigating the underlying causes of lost spaces is an essential component of the puzzle to eliminate, identify, and improve them (Topçu and Ünal, 2022). In the book titled “Finding Lost Space: Theories of Urban Design,” Trancik’s theories of urban space design apply three (3) approaches to urban design theories: (1) Figure-Ground Theory; (2) Connection Theory; and (3) Place Theory. The third approach, which is the Place Theory, will be adopted in this study. The Place Theory distinguishes itself from the other two theories by incorporating human needs and cultural, historical, and ecological background to attain economic gain and offer greater social benefits to the urban fabric of the city centre (Trancik, 1986).

A space will only become a place through the abstract context when the said space is given a contextual meaning from a cultural or regional context (Trancik, 1986, p.112). Every space can be categorised and classified based on its physical characteristics and typologies, as each location is distinct and adapts to its surroundings (Khalid et al., 2018). Characters also have intangible cultural connotations, such as shape, texture, and colour, and people need a solid structure to develop themselves in their social lives and cultures. The making of places, also known as architecture, entails visualising the genius loci, or spirit of place, and the architect’s responsibility of creating a meaningful space in which man can live (Norberg-Schulz, 2019). As a result, it is the responsibility of every designer to create a place through analysis or synthesis of its social and cultural components rather than simply developing new things and manipulating objects to create space (Topçu and Ünal, 2022; Yalcin and Kurkcuoglu, 2023). The results and consumption of the outcome should be tailored to the demands and preferences of the users, such as the history, feelings, and traditions of the community, as well as the political and economic realities (Topçu and Ünal, 2022).

Therefore, for designers, how they respond to time and place when overdesigning and overplanning is almost as detrimental as letting the market construct ad hoc cities. In this study, the authors have discussed the consequences of ‘under-designing’ and the outcomes of allowing individual developers to shape today’s city. Concurrently, this work investigated the issue of overdesigning too much zoning and planning, which obstructs future change and denies historical continuity. The cities must be fluid and dynamic, both historically and physically, and designers must not lose this flexibility by pushing their ideas. Even beyond engaging with the urban environment, the central issue here is how designers, architects, and landscape architects should perceive their work. Perhaps, the most destructive aspect of the Modern Movement and later planning tendencies is the self-aggrandisement of design. New and old, lower and higher, stone and glass, black and white, all of these come together to form a favourable public entity.

Since the study on Lost Space involves physical spaces and social dimensions connected to these spaces, it is ideal to gather quantifiable data to

evaluate the changes so the results can prove whether “it has improved” or “it has worsened.” Various global research and initiatives have shown that unused spaces can be put to use in a variety of ways, leading many design professionals and scholars to study aspects of their planning design potential (Németh & Langhorst, 2014; Kim et al., 2018). These spaces may be used for anything, such as a neighbourhood garden on a single plot, public plantings, or small-scale urban agricultural projects. Additionally, when frameworks for comparable projects, including commercial operations, exist, they have been subjected to adaptive reuse. Furthermore, abandoned spaces have been transformed into community gathering places or recreational areas for neighbourhood activities and public infrastructure. Moreover, research showed that long-forgotten locations have been successfully converted into centres for ecological services. For instance, paving fractures can make it easier for rainwater to enter, and plants can help climate change efforts by purifying the air and reducing soil pollution (Anderson and Minor, 2017).

The notion of temporary use suggests that something is used temporarily, but what does it mean for a use to be temporary, as all uses can be considered temporary (Németh and Langhorst, 2014)? Németh and Langhorst (2014) define temporary use as a use that is explicitly and intentionally time-limited. De Girolama (2013) defines temporary use as explicitly and intentionally time-limited. This use can be transient, occurring only once for a limited time, or recurrent, occurring multiple times. The remaining areas, or those with several purposes, are appropriate for short-term use. It could be illegal, political, informal, impromptu, or official. Additionally, one may plan temporary use to highlight specific features of vacant or underutilised areas (De Girolama, 2013). According to Kim et al. (2018), it offers a changing environment for users while providing new and exciting experiences that activate underutilised areas. Temporary use is a tool that can transform an empty plot or vacant land into more than just a testing ground. It allows urbanists to explore longer-term development strategies while offering short-term, exciting, attractive, and sustainable urban design with limited financial risks. For instance, installing landscapes or benches in the underutilised pocket park could serve as a valuable public space within the urban environment. Another example is the space alongside the railway, which is the most extensive form of informal gardening. In Porto, Portugal, the metro that heads in the direction of the city’s outskirts has many garden plots alongside it. This example has attracted more visitors or users and provided a testing ground for temporary urbanism (De Girolama, 2013).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study applied a qualitative approach using a case study as the subject matter. It was determined to select only one (1) case study since the area is valued as a popular site with a variety of surrounding activities, making it a common area for

many pedestrians to pass by. Furthermore, the researchers had no intention to undergo a comparative study, as it would result in different designs to accommodate the urban setting and physical state of the areas. Having just one (1) specific site as the case study will enable a rather focused analysis for recommendations. The space beneath the Light Rail Transit rail lines at Pasar Seni, Kuala Lumpur, was selected as the case study. The study involved detailed site investigations and interviews of the public in the space beneath the rail lines. The first part of the study involved a detailed literature review to understand the historical background of the Kuala Lumpur urban areas, and the definitions of key terms related to urban space, social space, sense of place, identity, and authenticity. The analysis of theoretical frameworks for the important themes was done in the following phase, which involved conducting critical evaluations of specific literature. Journals, books, conference papers, government records, archival records of maps and aerial topography, newspapers, online resources, and more were used in this procedure. The gathered information was subsequently examined in further detail following several issues related to the standard of public space.

The second part was the fieldwork at the site, examining the physical and sociological contexts of the space. The space below the Light Rail Transit (LRT) rail lines at Pasar Seni was selected as the focus of the study because the local environment offered the ideal backdrop for the study's fundamental ideas, which centred around significant commercial areas that had successfully fostered social spaces, a feeling of community, and authentic identities (Figure 1). The method of gathering and analysing relevant data involved making on-the-spot observations. The chosen site was studied on the area's form, context, and characteristics, and all these elements were identified during fieldwork through analytical observations and inspections. Pictures were also taken to document and analyse the site's physical environment and activities, among others. Furthermore, the study investigated how the study location had changed and how the surrounding area had been developed and run. The primary idea behind this was to map the elements and characteristics throughout the site, identifying the source and the activities, and the link to the intangible feeling of identity, sense of belonging, and authenticity that are only present at the site.

Following the abovementioned procedure, the third exercise was to gather the opinions and perceptions of the public users beneath the rail lines. Since the space beneath the LRT line did not offer specific social activities, therefore, the area lacked a number of users and became accessible to passersby. For that matter, the study chose to apply the purposive sampling method, targeting 30 individuals at the site. The purposive sampling was conducted for the study as it requires personal opinions from the users of the lost space (the pedestrians). A set of interview questions was outlined, which included the main themes, defining leftover spaces and recognising them, outlining approaches to

change these spaces, and identifying areas in the city that will cease to serve their current purpose. Due to the study's position amid Pasar Seni, enquiries included the participants' opinions based on the context's components, including its geography, culture, history, and demographics. However, the key question was to seek the participants' suggestions for the lost space. To ensure the greatest possible age and gender variety, a simple random sampling method was used in the selection of the 30 participants for in-depth interviews. In doing so, the researchers had set a rule that only targeted pedestrians who agreed to be interviewed would be interviewed. On top of that, the ethical procedures were exercised whereby the survey (interview) would only be conducted if consent was given by the respondents, and all respondents were maintained as 'anonymous'.

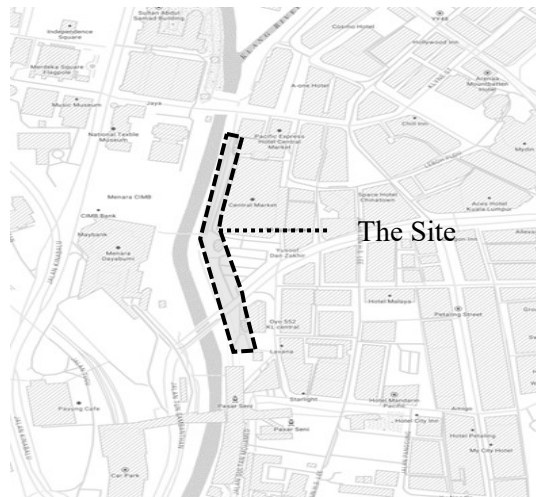


Figure 4: Site Location

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Kuala Lumpur Central Market, also known as Pasar Seni, is located in the city centre. Originally a wet market, it now serves as a gathering place for locals and visitors for entertainment and relaxation. Nevertheless, the arts and crafts offered in this area have been preserving a significant amount of Malaysian culture despite its partial commercialisation by nearby rapid urbanisation. It occupies a unique space amid other contemporary metropolitan skyscrapers, reflecting the usual active streets of urban life. Because it is close to the railway station, Kuala Lumpur's bus service centre, and the Klang bus stand, the site of the wet market is deemed highly convenient for early city residents. Moreover, the position of this Central Market currently offers accessibility for tourists to key destinations, hotels, and Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).

Due to the presence of the Pasar Seni LRT Station, Pasar Seni has become one of the major transportation hubs in the modern era and has generated a significant amount of interest among working people to use the spaces on weekdays. On the other side, weekends draw large numbers from a tourism standpoint, including young people and visitors who visit Pasar Seni for its historical and cultural attractions at the neighbouring Central Market and Petaling Street buildings, among others. The space beneath the LRT lines at Pasar Seni is, therefore, seen as having potential, since the site is associated directly across from Central Market, which is on the other side of Dayabumi that is divided by the Sungai Klang. The site proposed is also located near one of the main LRT and bus hubs, which is the Pasar Seni Hub station. This facility will create and provide a good attraction and crowds to the location and spaces. However, one of its disadvantages is that the location lacks a greenscape. Although the site location is near the River of Life, the spaces there have failed to provide such privilege to the area, and this could be seen as a waste of space (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Visuals of the Site

The density of the spaces was determined via site investigations throughout the week, including the weekends. The places suggested were used mostly on that determined during weekends when crowds were significantly greater than on weekdays. According to Figure 3, the right figure depicts the density during the weekdays; the majority of the red regions are mostly found

near commercial locations, some of which include trade places and offices. Meanwhile, places like Central Market, Dataran Merdeka, and Petaling Street are peaceful and hardly populated. On the other hand, on weekends, unusual patterns of density can be noted. The commercial district has the densest population on weekends, whereas the business area is more passive and less active. It appears that the information presented is consistent in revitalising and reactivating the vacant places (Figure 3). The accessibility for pedestrian pathways and their behavioural movement can be accessed throughout the site. The site has good pedestrian access; however, some of the places are not well-maintained and are unsafe for pedestrian use. Some places can be accessed by taking shortcuts, while others would force pedestrians to make a big round to head towards their direction (Figure 4).

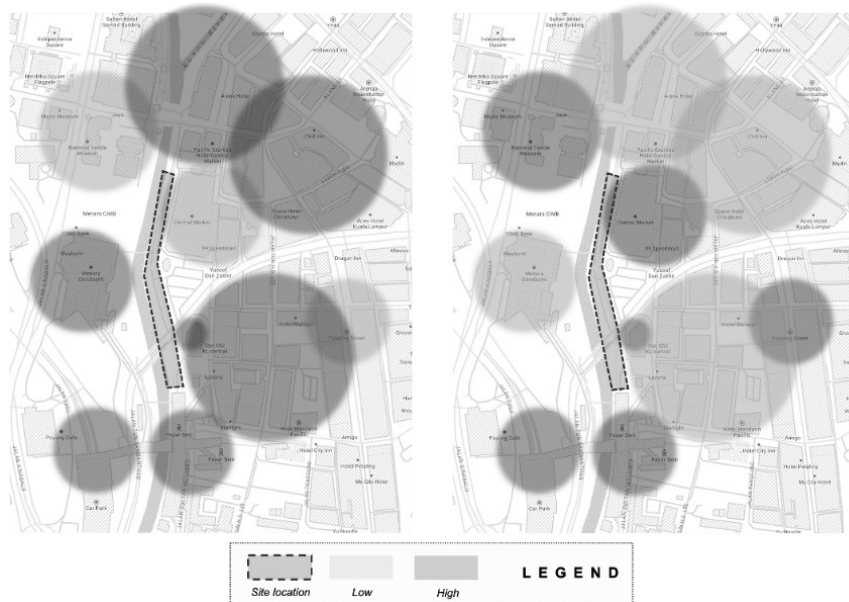


Figure 3: Density During Weekdays (Left) and Weekends (Right)

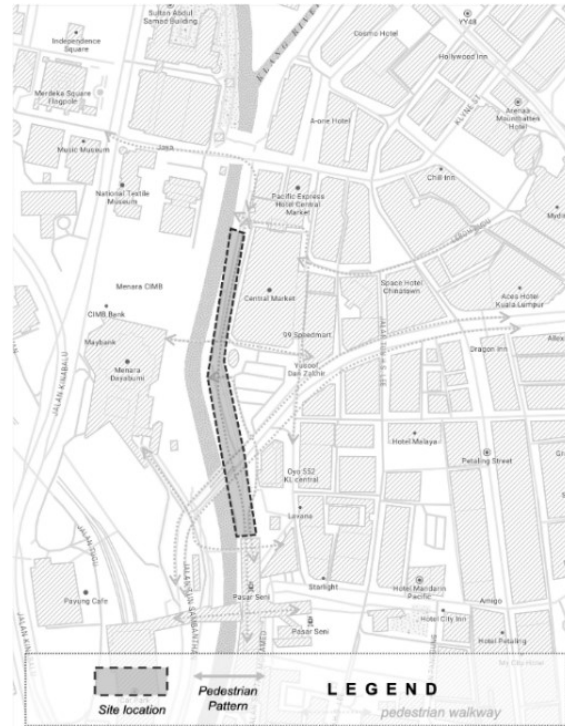


Figure 4: Pedestrian Movement and Behavioural Pattern

Perceptions of Participants

This study area includes information on the relevant everyday activities or major pursuits and how people perceive the place. Activities, time spent, perceptions, and other pertinent aspects are crucial for the study since its primary goal is to comprehend how people view empty spaces and find the best solutions to the problem. Since the majority of the participants have visited the site more than ten times, therefore, their responses to the investigation are legitimately considered as a good validation for better comprehending the issue of lost spaces. Most of them accepted the site's presence, and they recognised the problem and expressed concerns about improving the spaces. The findings showed that security and safety, physical coherence, visibility, liveliness, richness, a sense of belonging, and comfort are design characteristics that consumers choose when designing lost spaces. The lack of safety and security was the main concern, particularly at night when there is insufficient lighting and hidden corners that result in people's fear of being harassed on the street and the physical risk posed by moving vehicles. The following issue is the disdain for aesthetics, particularly when a large amount of concrete is used to build elevated rail lines without any thought given to aesthetics or accessibility for pedestrians. The main issue was how the abandoned

spaces have turned into illegal parking spaces and garbage dumping areas. Consequently, the spaces tend to create unnecessary and unsafe attraction for the homeless and drug addicts, thus creating a negative space towards the city. As such, the participants have emphasised the need for good lighting and public art.

Based on the features of the local setting and users' thoughts, this study investigates the concepts of leftover spaces. The findings offer design recommendations for enhancing the quality of areas beneath elevated rail lines based on the preferences of the participants. Such public opinion-based policies offer prospects for improved utilisation of underutilised spaces in various contexts. According to claims, the most crucial elements boosting how consumers view their surroundings in the leftover places are safety and security. Participants thought that increased public monitoring and surveillance could help people feel less afraid. Restricting pedestrian movement, utilising natural elements, creating a network of pedestrian access points, utilising traffic-calming techniques, enforcing social monitoring (eyes on the street), incorporating nighttime activities, using the appropriate lighting, and eliminating hidden areas are design strategies that can promote safety and security.

Lighting has the biggest impact on people's feelings of security because most locations beneath elevated rail lines lack enough lighting. At any location beneath elevated structures or rail lines, paying attention to its physical conditions can be crucial. A comprehensive place-shaping strategy that is in harmony with the surroundings is what is meant by physical coherence. It is easier to comprehend the qualities of space in people's minds when such locations are integrated with their surroundings (both physically and visually). Similar studies cite the physical coherence of urban street areas as a crucial element in assessing street imagery's aesthetic quality. To create a uniform urban environment, lost spaces beneath elevated structures or rail lines must be integrated with the surrounding landscape. The physical components' harmony and unity, the space's design's unity, the materials' colour harmony, and the utilisation of iconic and symbolic structures make it possible to create in the minds of users a holistic perception of the environment.

The inclination of potential users for sensory richness in lost space design is another. Graffiti and murals are examples of eye-catching public art that can improve the aesthetic appeal of these locations. Apart from that, the hearing senses can be stimulated by water, and variations in the pavement's construction materials can also enhance the tactile experience. Additionally, the presence of vegetation might cause favourable odours associated with the location to be released, making the setting more appealing to passersby. The temporary uses of fragrance and sound (music, perfume, alcoholic beverages, etc.) to draw people in have the biggest influence towards the spaces. People might develop a sense of belonging in a better setting. For instance, public art and other visual elements may help people feel more at home in a certain place. This can have a good effect

by piquing people's interest in the design procedure and inspiring their concern for the future of a particular location. Furthermore, one of the most crucial elements for enhancing the feeling of community that these locations may foster among residents is giving the neighbourhoods located beneath elevated highways and bridges a distinct identity.

Design Strategy

The design strategy divides the area into three (3) zones (Figure 5). Different programmes and activities are offered in each of these three zones, with a focus on the creative exercise area for Zone A. The large area provided and its proximity to the River of Life make this place ideal for promoting healthy living and exposure to the outdoors. Additionally, improvements to the streets are made in the neighbourhood. Space for children and adults to practise their creativity that faces the river of life is suggested. People may enjoy their leisure time, especially families with children or young people, thanks to the amenities that have been offered. A few people can jog or run in this region as well. In combination with the ongoing River of Life project at the next location, this offers the public or communities beautiful views to enjoy their evening. Additionally, this area is home to four different Sustainable Development Goals, namely, Goals 3, 4, 9, and 13.

In Zone B, the emphasis is mainly on safety concerns, and installing lighting is a key component of enhancing the areas to increase their visibility to onlookers at night. For safety and aesthetic reasons, the ceiling of the pillar and railway structures will be covered with an art piece. Zone B also supports the five SDG categories of 5, 8, 9, 11, and 17, respectively. This area may also be used as part of a project to paint a mural or put art on the crossing road in partnership with local artists. This may also provide the artists with a chance to work together seasonally.

The last zone, Zone C, will attract and accommodate more people and activities than the other zones due to its larger capacity. This area will serve as the primary draw for the general public because it houses placemaking amenities, including a market, entertainment venues, and food vendors. The area will be used seasonally for a variety of events and occasions. Given that this area is located in front of the Pasar Seni LRT and bus hub, it is deemed to have good accessibility. To protect the people and other users of the area from harm, the exposed services on the railway structure ceiling were also covered with artwork. Additionally, serving as a shelter on hot and wet days, this installation. It is observed that three SDG goals were implemented: Goals 2, 8, and 17.

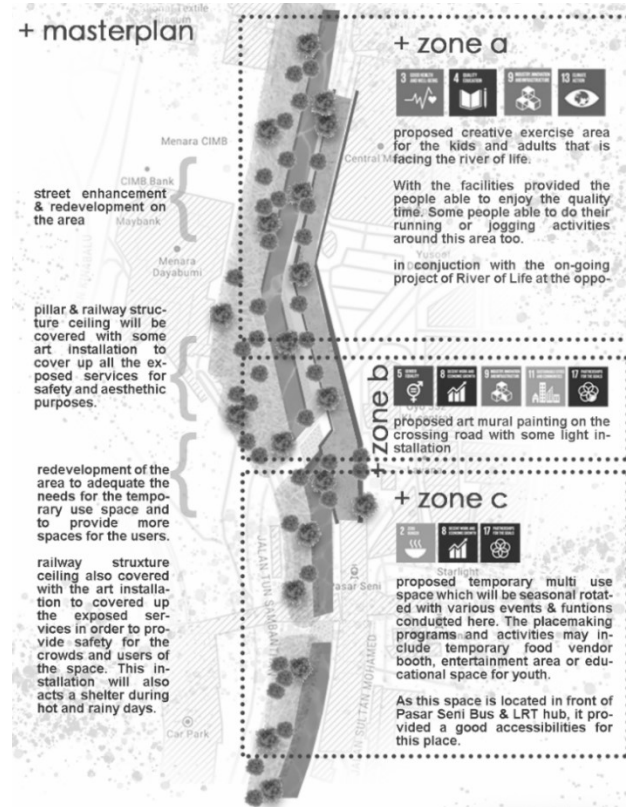


Figure 5: Design Strategy for the Lost Space

Due to the spaces which are surrounded by historical and cultural aspects, the view element must be present in all three zones. For instance, Zone A, which included the creative exercise area, provided views of the Central Market, the River of Life, as well as Dayabumi and Masjid Jamek, to the public. On the other hand, Zone B serves customers who can catch sight of the KTM Kuala Lumpur station, which is situated on the other side of the river. This historical landscape will add value to the location by serving as one of the area's landmarks for users and tourists (Harun, Jaafar and Mansor, 2021). This is important for circulation because it ensures that people will use the spaces effectively and with the appropriate activities. Regarding the crossing road in Zone B, efficient traffic flow will also provide good safety for those using the road, notably children or young people travelling from point A to point B. This temporary multi-use space component must also be used in Zone C, as this area will change the themes or functions according to the seasons.

Circulation among the users of the place who are actively moving about, the vendors, and the entertainers. The market element is observed to be more concentrated in Zone C, a transient multi-use space. The locations for this market or placemaking will be determined by the events that occur simultaneously. On the other hand, a rest plaza is offered, likewise centred on Zone C; this enables tourists to take a break or unwind while occupying the area. The same is true for performance components. Because Zone C is a high-magnet environment with plenty of activity, these items will be able to better excite the space. Last but not least, all zones have flora, which will improve the rooms and give the public a sense of healthy living by adding more natural components. Since the River of Life was also implementing the same element to improve the environment, these greenery components will work well together to create a better natural environment that not only supports healthy living but also raises public awareness, as evident from the Sustainable Development Goals strategy.

CONCLUSION

This study was initiated based on the issues of lost spaces in urban areas. Elevated highways and rail lines create a vertical split, obstacles and divisions at ground level. The residual space or leftover spaces under elevated highways and rail lines are often seen as the negative aspect of urban spaces. The space above is used exclusively for transit, while the space below is frequently a void. The area below the elevated highways and rail lines, which has gone largely unnoticed by law enforcement, has become a hot spot for criminal activities and as a result, a location that many people want to avoid due to safety reasons. The space beneath the LRT lines at Pasar Seni was investigated to prove that the public prefers such areas to be safe and attractive places, whether for activities or the image. The study discovered that the lost space beneath the rail line can be revitalised with a repurposing design strategy. Findings suggested that spaces below elevated rail lines can be useful for activities or programmes. The outcome of this study can be used as a reference to urban planners and designers, whereby the findings have most importantly considered the safety of users of such spaces.

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