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ANALYSIS OF THE RURAL SMALL TOWN MORPHOLOGICAL SETTLEMENT: ENHANCING THE CHARACTER

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Abstract

The rural small town settlements are diminishing by the hectic growth or urbanization. Even with the persistence of Sungai Perak as the heritage trail, most people forgotten to see rural small town as the place they would like to reside and appreciate. A key attraction is the ideological belief that the Malay cultural-tradition is still in place. Indeed, for many, it is the place where everyone has his or her say and where equal opportunity to succeed is still operative. As part of our Malay heritage, these rural small town beliefs are part of our enduring political cultural character and may be the transportation and economic value needed for redefining our nation's sense of belonging. Connectivity and network all of small town along Sungai Perak can be a key point to create a good example of heritage trail for tourist attraction. By doing so, it can open the eyes of resident and local authority and realize how important of small town roles as a catalyst along Sungai Perak. Linkages of small town along Sungai Perak that has been determine can change the perception of the citizen and local authority that small town has a good opportunity to develop in the future without disturbing its uniqueness. Thus, the importance of redefining the rural small town linkages would be significant to acknowledge the Sungai Perak morphology as one of the cultural heritage trail in Perak. This study will consider four important aspects, such as the physical characteristic of the small town settlements, the physical form of the cultural-tradition landscapes, the morphology of Sungai Perak that influence the characteristic of the physical elements linkages that influence this perception. The study will be conducted into Pekan Parit as a traditional rural small town along Sungai Perak.

Keywords: Small Town, Heritage Trail, Sense of Belonging

1. Rural Small Town

The most widely used criteria for classifying small towns is based on size of the population. However, the dependence on population size should not solely determine the definition of small town itself. Small town is generally related with population density, physical size, the number of workers engaged in agriculture, the diversity of dealer functions that lies between major town and small town. Our definition of small towns covers all settlements with a population of between 1,500 and 40,000 that are situated within open countryside, around bigger towns and cities, and in agricultural areas and hill country. Recent work to classify small towns by their social and economic characteristics suggests that they fall within a small number of fairly clear groups (Morris, 2012). Agnieszka Kwiatek-Soltys states that “a small town is a seat of the urban type with less than 20 thousand inhabitants; it forms a very heterogeneous set from a point of view of the size as well as from a point of view of demographic development and functions they hold in the settlement system”. Other precise characteristics of the small towns can be minimum population density (70 inhabitants/ha) or maximum 15 % of economically active inhabitants in agriculture.

Small town specifically has their own roles and functions. Roles and functions of small town generally depend on economic resources, services, geographical location, population and linkages that provided. Rondinelli (1970), determined small towns of developing countries have several roles that contribute to enhancing the characteristic of small town itself:

- Provide a suitable location for the centralization of public services by local authorities, the headquarters of the ministry or agency, providing easy access for the rural and urban population to the services provided.
- Provide space for population and economic activity and allow the centralization of activities in health, education, welfare, etc., and also acts as a province or territory to provide basic social services.

- Provide diversity of commercial and consumer products and personalized service of a small scale through the informal sector.
- To act as a marketing center that provides a variety of distribution, transfer, storage, credit and financial service sectors and existing institutions.
- To provide a more conducive environment for the growth of small and medium-scale manufacturing that can accommodate the needs of the local market and meet the needs of some large-scale activities.
- In the processing of agricultural products and supply hub for the country and providing services for the local community.
- Provide job opportunities based on farming and the activity a source of income for the local population as well as for those who have migrated to the area.
- To provide a center for transport and communications sector, this connects local areas with large cities, regions and countries.
- Able to absorb a large number of people migrating from the suburbs to the city center, transforming the area from rural areas to urban primates.

Lambe (2008) describe that small towns can be divided into four categories: 1) Small towns that are recreation or retirement destinations or adjacent to an abundance of natural assets, 2) Small towns with historic downtowns or prominent cultural or heritage assets, 3) Small towns with or adjacent to a college campus and 4) Small towns adjacent to a metropolitan area or an interstate highway

The small town was the product of a major city developed into the focal point in the transition of raw materials to the big city; small town will be to source goods from manufacturing centers in exchange. Economic orientation is called the 'periphery capitalism system'. Small town in a rural area serves as an agent to penetrate the rural market (Gerhard 1976). In Asia, rural small towns played an important part as market centre to agricultural goods for growth of economy. Small towns play the role in national development through the source of agriculture and service goods production, technology specializations, location and industry (Leeds 1977). Anita (1977), in studies in Bengal West had explained that small town with role as economic hub, political and cultural to the local population and vicinity provides market to market local products to external market and provides job opportunity prepared in rural areas. Rural small towns also known as a secondary city that acts as nodes for economic and social activities. Its also provide space for locals to carry out a day life activities. Apart from that, there is opinion which said that 'function of secondary city must be interact between one and another (secondary cities) as exchange place and also functions as route for raw materials distribution and service, medium social relationship and less influence on modernisation (Rondinelli 1970).

1.1 Small Town Morphology

The knowledge of the history of the town helps in understanding how the townscape is formed and gives meanings to the townscape. The art of relationship that forms the townscape is result of accumulation of buildings from different periods; from the early beginnings of the town until present time (Shuhana Shamsuddin, 2011). According to the Pan English Dictionary, morphology is the study of shape, form and structure of anything or subject matter. Shuhana and Ahmad Bashri (1992) define morphology as a study of the layout and structure of the town based on its origins, growth and function of the town. Morphology is a technique that examines the evolution of the city by studying the pattern and urban form. It is means of assessing the historical development of a city from physical point of view through analyzing the solid and voids as the city evolves through time. Farhana Ferdous (2007) opines that a study of morphological form of the city is important in order to understand the forces that shape the city as well as establishing its identity through its spatial pattern. A morphology study must identify aspects that relate to the structure of the town such as the physical qualities, layout, town function, main transportation route, lots and spaces (either open or built) including architecturally significant buildings having distinct quality. Morphology presents all existing forms as equally important in the explanation of the built environment.

According to Madanipour (1996) morphological study of urban form can be approached at three levels; elements, historical characteristics and contemporary characteristics although in urban design the study is seen to be confined to small and manageable areas such as blocks, streets or buildings. Its help to understand the genius loci of the city where a sensitive perception of the spirit of a place as revealed by the townscape provides a good starting point to charting the future development of the city. The historical aspects to be studied as a means of examining the main form-giving components of the city development which are reflected in its townscape include fundamental geographical reasons for settlement formation including previous topography, geology, soil and drainage, dominant

axes of development such as movement pattern of ancient origins such as ancient processional routes, historical focal points, changing seats of power and economic pattern, patterns of population intrusion and developing patterns of functional areas in relation to changing transportation modes.

Table 1: Historical and Morphological Study

References	Definition of Morphological Study	Element
Pan English Dictionary	a study of shape, form and structure of anything or subject matter	shape, form and structure
Shuhana and Ahmad Bashri (1992)	a study of the layout and structure of the town based on its origins, growth and function of the town.	Origins, growth and function of the town.
The Chamber of Science and Technology Dictionary	a technique that examines the evolution of the city by studying the pattern and urban form.	Pattern and urban form - Solid and voids as the city evolves through time
Madanipour (1996)	Urban morphology as the systematic study of form, shape, plan structure and functions of the urban fabric and the origin in which the fabric has evolved over time.	Form, shape, plan structure and functions of the urban fabric and the origin
Farhana Ferdous (2007)	a study of morphological form of the city is important in order to understand the forces that shape the city as well as establishing its identity through its spatial pattern	Spatial pattern
Conzen (1969)	a study of the form of human settlements and the process of their formation and transformation.	Land uses, building structures, plot pattern and street pattern.
Shuhana (2011)	Morphology as a built environment that results from previous choices and experiments in attempting to accommodate human intentions.	Physical qualities, layout, town function, main transportation route, lots and spaces (either open or built) including architecturally significant buildings having distinct quality
	a study of urban tissue, or fabric, as a means of discerning the underlying structure of the built landscape	structures and processes embedded in urbanisation

Source: Shamsudin. S. 2011

2. Pekan Parit:

Pekan Parit is a small town in Perak Tengah district. It is located about 30 kilometers from the city of Ipoh and the geographical location of the town is located near the banks of the Sungai Perak. Pekan. Prior to 1979, Pekan Parit is under administration of Kuala Kangsar district. Perak Tengah District covers an area of approximately 12,205 hectares (1282.05km) square which includes 11 'mukim'. The area is located in the central part of the state of Perak. Perak Tengah District Council Administration has moved from the Pekan Parit to Seri Iskandar on 14 September 1993. Pekan Parit development pattern is lined up for the position of development along the main street in town. Town development is extended towards Jalan Ipoh - Siputeh, and towards Bandar Seri Iskandar. Commercial area is concentrated in the town center along the main street of town. The main function of Pekan Parit is trade and services. Pekan Parit can be categorized as centralized town by hlocal center that provides goods and services to local residents. Services that already offered in the town directly is the one major potential to create non-farm employment opportunities for the surrounding population. Urbanization and modernization of basic needs in Pekan Parit itself is a catalyst to the development of the rural settlements.



Figure 1: Perak state map showing the district boundaries in 1877, with the tin mines, Sungai Perak and road systems that exist in those days. (sources: Journal of the Malayan Branch Royal Asiatic Society (JMBRAS) Vol. XXIV, Part 4 Sir Frank Swettenham's Perak Journals 1874-1876, Singapore, Malaya Publishing House Ltd, 1952)



Figure 2: Perak state map showing Pekan Parit as small town in centre of Perak state. (Source: <http://www.2malaysia.com/perak/map.htm>)

2.1 Problem Statement

In small towns, there are no developed traffic pivot, a forest of high buildings and dense population, but there have distinctive geography environment, natural scene, dwelling houses close to the folk customs, spacious space and fresh air. Small towns are short of the economical superiority, but have more local characters. The small town

character is the resultant of many forces and should be reflected under the direction of city plan. Lacking the city plan is an important reason influencing the image of small town. After the plan design, most towns' construction would enter the architect design directly according to the district function and land quality, even just according to the like of local leaders. All the reasons above create the confusion of small town's style and features. The style, color and image of buildings lack necessary relation. Pekan Parit also has the issue that reflects the problem above. The character of Pekan Parit still becomes a stigma where till now the characters cannot be derived from observation and inventory. From general overview, Pekan Parit has the potential to becoming an attractive rural small town according to the geographical location, natural setting, besides the historical value of architecture, culture and economic perspective. But, the entire element that created Pekan Parit as its now, is so weak and neglected. Thus, the goal of the research is to enhance and preserve not only historic or unique town fabric, but also to maintain the spirit of the fabric as the small town undergoes inevitable growth and change. Pekan Parit was a perfect choice for this study because it is: 1) located in a unique natural setting with the surrounding landscape of Sungai Perak and 2) a unique townscape with fine old commercial structure and architecture.

2.2 Basic Character: Small Town

The character of small town itself has been discussed and debate. Garnham (1985) define that the major components of identity the character have been found to be: 1) physical feature and appearance, 2) observable activities and functions and 3) meaning or symbols. The identification of unique character must precede change, and change must be designed to accommodate the preservation of that uniqueness. Growth and change, however, have often introduced a regrettable sameness to many towns – a sameness which has eroded their individual qualities and destroyed their unique character. This analysis limits itself to the effect of physical and perceptible objects.

2.3 Physical Features and Appearance

The old town centre is seen as a district of the town itself due to the identifiable character of this area. The most distinctive visual unit is usually the main street because this is where the old shophouses are located and the other key buildings are in the town. The other visual units that can be found are in the form of government quarters area or the traditional village setting still found in the town.



Photo 1: Image of Pekan Parit 1940
Source: www.facebook.com/orgparit



Photo 2: Image of Pekan Parit 2012
Source: *Author (2012)*

The actual physical of the place, the reality of its building, landscape, climate and aesthetic quality is the element that has to be considering as part of the Pekan Parit identity. The contents of the town character so far studied, which are referable to physical forms, can be conveniently be classified into five elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks (Lynch, 1960).

2.3.1 Path

Paths: “channels along which the observer customarily moves” defined by Kevin Lynch is part of element that give the cities life and movement with large activities include social activities and economic sector. Path is the dominant element that provides accessibility and linkages towards generates social life, economic and physical growth.



Photo 3: Path along Sungai Perak
Source: Author (2012)



Photo 4: Bridge connecting Pekan Parit and Tanjung Blanja
Source: Author (2012)



Photo 5: Parit to Tanjung Blanja. Ferry is to be early transport to connect people from Tg. Blanja to Pekan Parit
Source: www.facebook.com/orgparit

2.3.2 Edges

The river appears to play quite a significant role in the structure of the town as an edge due to their influence in the location of the town. It also play a role as the minor path in the town although their importance as a path is not that significant anymore compared to road.



Photo 6: Sungai Parit
Source: Author (2012)



Photo 7: Sungai Perak
Source: Author (2012)

2.3.2 District

“Represent medium-to-large sections of the city”



Photo 6: Aerial view of Pekan Parit
Source: Author (2012)

2.3.3 Nodes

There are three types of major nodes that are observed in the towns studied which are the market. The first type of node is represented by a public space such as courtyard that can be seen near to the foodcourt as the space for recreation and gathering. The other type of node is in the form of market place where the rich cultural values displayed in the market activities.



Photo 7: Wet market of Pekan Parit
Source: Author (2012)



Photo 8: Pekan Parit Plaza
Source: Author (2012)



Photo 9 and Photo 10: Junction as a main 'nodes' that provide space for people interact by running economic activities
Source: Author (2012)

2.3.4 Landmark

The landmarks in Pekan Parit are dominated by the colonial shophouses which evokes the sense of place. The significant structure can be seen by the emergence of clock tower in the center of the town.



Photo 11: Clock Tower that becomes a special landmark at Pekan Parit
Source: Author (2012)



Photo 12: Masjid Rodhiatul Mardhiah
Source: Author (2012)



Photo 13: Flooding that occurred in December 1967
 Source: www.facebook.com/orgparit

3. Methodology

This analysis limits itself to the effect of physical and perceptible objects. The contents of the town character so far studied, which are referable to physical forms, can be conveniently be classified into five elements: paths, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks (Lynch, 1960).

Research Process Chart

Setting up the Stage



Problem Statement

The loss of essential town character

Purpose of Study

To enhance and preserve not only historic or unique town fabric, but also to maintain the spirit of the fabric as the small town undergoes inevitable growth and change.

Literature Review



Understanding of the Unique and Basic Character of Small Towns

The meaning and the morphology of small town
 Physical Feature and Appearance
 Observable Activities and Function
 Meaning or Symbol

Data Collection and Analysis



Case Study: Pekan Parit

[Data collection]

Background Information – Architectural style, unique natural setting, the use of local materials, craftsmanship, sensitivity in the siting of important buildings and bridges, cultural diversity and history, public environment which are visible and accessible, townwide activities, daily and seasonal.

Output

Identify and redefine the unique character of Pekan Parit

Small town typology identification

As a guideline to local authorities toward preservation and maintenance the rural small town characteristic

CONCLUSION

Pekan Parit recognized by its own important uniqueness and the spirit of place. This process, which is heavily dependent upon citizen participation and energy, identifies the ingredient of town character and provides a method to guide town growth and change while maintaining town character. Pekan Parit is a small towns that are recreation, retirement destinations and adjacent to an abundance of natural assets. It is also can be categorized as a small town with historic downtowns or prominent cultural or heritage assets.

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