

# **Waterfront as Public Space**

## **Case study;Klang River between Masjid Jamek and Central Market, Kuala Lumpur.**

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*Abstract:* - The revival of waterfronts began more than 40 years ago, when waterfront areas became centers of intense redevelopment activity. Active and evolving programming is essential to waterfront success and may also be used to generate revenues. This paper explores the issues of waterfront as public space through a case study of a waterfront along Sungai Klang between Masjid Jamek and Central Market. This paper focuses on the characteristic and analysis of the public space of the waterfront. The first part of the paper is about understanding the subject. The paper then outlines the physical location of the study area and the attempts to make use the waterfront as visions of urban space. Public space at the case study area is currently used as public access along the river. The aim of the research is to analysis and study the effectiveness of the waterfront in creating a pleasant public space. Development and planning processes are explored in some detail to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the public space. The study concludes with some comments on the relevance of the case study for debates on urban theory. At the end of this chapter, the overall framework for the study is presented.

*Key-Words:* - waterfront, public space, urban study, pedestrian, public activities, river

## **1 Introduction**

In prehistoric times, human civilization begins from the edge of the water. A while ago, the river is associated as the heart of a society, especially in the early days of the opening of human settlements. The reason for the river valley was selected as the location of early human settlement is because of the constant water supply. River also provides basic transport and communication with the source of protein. Suitable climate and fertile soil are also the main characteristics of the selection of rivers. Most of the city starts from the settlement on the shores of the river-side. For example, the city of Kuala Lumpur starting from the village of tin ore miner located in the meeting between Sungai Gombak and Sungai Klang.

Water has the magic to attract people and have been favorite location for celebration and ceremony. It can act as a focal point and fundamental attraction in all culture and among all classes of people.

Waterfront has the advantages to recreate the image of the city, recapture the economic investment and attract people back to deserted downtowns.

## **2 Methodology**

In order to achieve the objective of this study, the effort on finding, collecting and analyzing data was generated by several methods

### **2.1 Literature Review**

Reviews on previous work relating to research scope were done. The references consist of books, journal and articles. These academic references are gathered and kept at certain place. The places that were visited to search on printed information were Main Library, University Kebangsaan Malaysia, National Library and Arkib Negara. Sources of information were also generated from the internet.

### **2.2 Site Visit and Observation**

Site visits and study were conducted to get visual evidence and information. The photographs of the site were captured to be analyzed. Besides the data collections, observation on the site is also essential to fulfill the objective of this study.

### **2.3 Writing the Report**

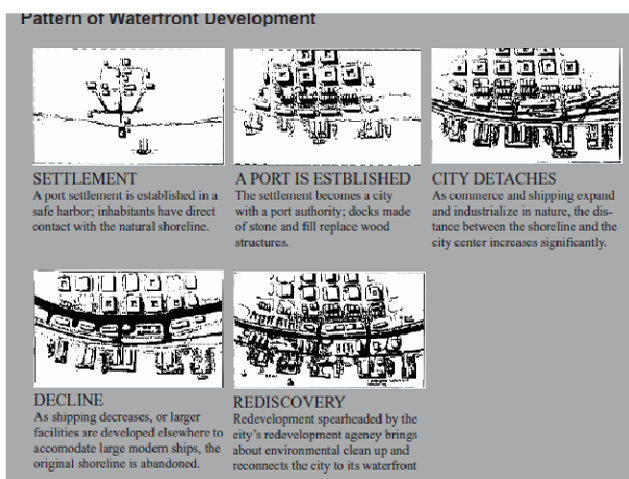
The data and information of the study are evaluated and reported in writing. The objectives and problem statements will be concluded at the end of the writing.

### 3 Waterfront Definition and Background

Waterfront can be defined as piece of land or a part of a town next to an area of water and borders a body of water. Lake, pond, canal, river, sea and bay are considered as the body of water including man made water element. The urban waterfront could include any urban area that overlooks or adjacent to a river, sea, lake, canal or an artificial water body.

Vibrant public waterfronts represent the signature of a great city. Cities all over the world, which are blessed with ocean or bay views, have learned one principle: the greater the public access, the more valuable their harbor areas become.

Waterfront development is a trend that hit the big cities of the world since the 80's, and still popular nowadays. The development started in the 1960s by the beach cities in America that make use of vacant lands formerly a port that had been developed into empty container port area to be developed as the business area, entertainment, and residential area. It was then copied by European port cities and then spread to all corners of the world.



**Figure 1: Pattern of waterfront development**  
Source: Seattle Open Space 2100: Waterfront Typology

### 4 Concept of Public Space

Carr et al. (1992: xi) regard public space as a fundamental feature of cities. They represent sites of sociability and face-to-face interaction, and at the same time their quality is commonly perceived to be a measure of the quality of urban life. Cybriwsky

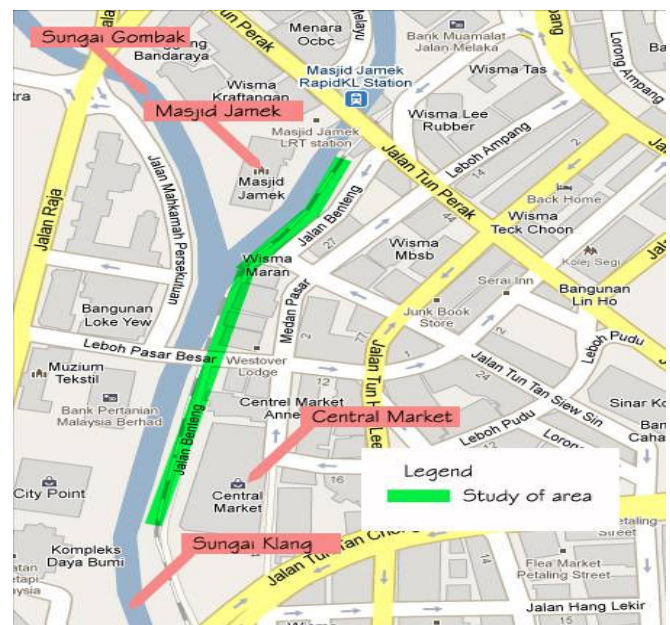
(1999: 224) defines public space as “Developments that are freely accessible to the public and are intended for social interaction, relaxation or outdoors.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary (1993), the term public means, “in general and in most of the senses, opposite of private”.

A public space may be a gathering spot or part of a neighborhood within the public realm such as waterfront that helps promote social interaction and a sense of community. It is clear that public space is important in term of how the spaces are controlled and used for the betterment of the public.

### 5 Case Study

Waterfront area that linked two historical building; Masjid Jamek and Central Market have its own characteristic. The study area can be defined by a comfortable 380 meter long promenade and lined with high-density commercial buildings (See figure 2). Walking distance from Masjid Jamek to Central Market is about 4 minutes. The long waterfront promenade provides public access along the river.

Public that pass through the walkway consist of various type of users. They are everyday users that work in the area, passerby who passing through the area going or coming from the LRT station or adjacent buildings, tourists and visitors who come for special programs or events. From observation, the public path along the waterfront has potential to serve a great space for the public and become a focal point of the city.



**Figure 2: Waterfront along Sungai Klang that connect Masjid Jamek and Central Market as case**

study.

Source: Google map

Masjid Jamek is formerly served as Kuala Lumpur's main mosque. This historic mosque was built in 1909 which is also known as the oldest mosque in the city (See figure 3 & 4). The mosque is situated at the confluence of Sungai Klang and Sungai Gombak, the birthplace of Kuala Lumpur.



**Figure 3: Masjid Jamek, 1910**

Source: [www.architorture259.blogspot.com](http://www.architorture259.blogspot.com)



**Figure 4: Masjid Jamek nowadays**

Source: [www.richard-seaman.com](http://www.richard-seaman.com)

Central Market or Pasar Seni is one of the places of interest in the city of Kuala Lumpur. The old market square had been transformed to be functioned as cultural and art centre (See figure 5 & 6). There are 300 shops that sell handicraft products and cultural activities that reflect the image of this multiracial country.



**Figure 5: View of the Central Market during early 1900s formerly functioned as a wet market.**

Source: [www.malaysian-explorer.com](http://www.malaysian-explorer.com)



**Figure 6: Latest image of the art and cultural market.**

Source: [www.malaysian-explorer.com](http://www.malaysian-explorer.com)

Both buildings have their own characteristic and uniqueness due to rich historical value and robust with public activities. These strengths should able attract and act as chain of public spaces.

## 6 Waterfront Review

One of the keys to success for a public domain is the strength and clarity of its pedestrian connections. The waterfront pedestrian promenade is connected back to the streets and public space that provided along the path. Integration of building form with the waterfront and will create a vibrant and safe public space where the landscape forms a green setting for the buildings and provides usable space for the occupants to appreciate.

The challenge in this study is to evolve the waterfront characteristics into the design of public space. The study is focus on the aspects of accessibility and permeability, elements of variety, comfort and stress, landscaping and street furniture as well as the environmental issues.

### 6.1 Accessible and Permeability

Visual access to the waterfront area is enhanced by providing series of view corridors. The accessibility to the waterfront for pedestrians is maximized by providing physical linkages from the urban core areas (See figure 7). Promenades are provided along the waterfront and had been reserved for retail, tourism, offices, recreational and cultural activities.





**Figure 7: Long pedestrian walkway along the waterfront linkage that lined with high density commercial buildings.**

The mosque is easily to reach by public using Star LRT (station Masjid Jamek) and nearby on walking distance is the Central Market, China Town, Little India and the Merdeka Square. While Central Market can be accessed by many modes of transportation such as Putra LRT and get off at the Pasar Seni station, or hail a cab and travel a direct route to Central Market (See figure 8). This accessibility encourages people movement and provides easy access to space for public.



**Figure 8: The public pathway direct the user to LRT station provide easy access for pedestrian.**

## 6.2 Variety

Variety of experience implies places with varied form, uses and meanings. The area study is placed with varied users and has varied building types and from. People can experience variety of building form with different functions as they pass through the waterfront (See figure 9).



**Figure 9: Variety building form and function can be seen as passing through the waterfront.**

Masjid Jamek will always visit by the crowd as it is a place with variety of activities. It is not only a place for praying, but can be a place for education, meeting, the place that holding a festive ceremony in connection with the religion of Islam and other. This mosque will be over flooded with the crowd up to the street during Friday prayer (See figure 10).



**Figure 10: Common view during Friday prayer.**

Central Market is a one stop shopping centre for Malaysian products such as handicrafts, art, kebaya, songket, batik as well as Malaysian cuisine. Besides shopping, it can be a place for recreation, relaxation, entertainment, eating and drinking which create variety of activities to the city.

These two attractions form the core of a well-known image that draws people like a magnet, a key and potential point to achieve the waterfront as a great public space.

Sungai Klang is enthralled with series of murals created by anonymous artists on the wall of the river bank. The colorful drawings are more popular with the name of "graffiti". According to Wikipedia, Graffiti means is the name for images or lettering scratched, scrawled, painted or marked in any manner on property. The graffiti is mostly produced by young people whom they have no money to rent a booth (See figure 11&12).



**Figure 11 :** The wall of river bank where anonymous artists produce their masterpiece.



**Figure 12:** The Graffiti drawings at the end of the walkway

The pedestrian walkway along the river is directing people to the Central Market and an open stage at the edge of the river (See figure 13). The stage created cultural and recreation activities which variety to the site. The crowd can enjoy a variety of presentations and demonstrations such as drawing batik with traditional methods and aerobic dance.



**Figure 13:** Open stage attract the public for cultural and recreation activities.

### 6.3 Comfort and Stress

In order to provide user friendly and pleasant linkage, the waterfront should bring the sense of comfort that be able to experience by the users. Shadows that created under high rise building along the waterfront provide shade that give comfort to the public (See figure 14). Series of landscapes at some part of the pedestrian walkway break down the stress in the city by providing more greenery elements. Series of wide pedestrian walkway shows that the waterfront is concerning pedestrian comfort.



**Figure 14:** Shadows that created under high rise building along the waterfront provide shade that give comfort to the public.

### 6.4 Landscaping and Street Furniture

From observation, the landscaping along waterfront promenade is less in optimizing greening areas to the public space. Landscape elements should be enhanced more to provide shade and create attractive visual environment. The vegetation can be maximized in order to improve microclimate and provide thermal comfort.

Street furniture for public amenities is hardly found along the walkway. Benches, signboard and lightings are among the furniture that can create a visual interesting environment. Street lighting is lacking at the site which will reduce the sense of safe and secure to the public during night (See figure 15). These weaknesses should be highlighted by the authorities to create more inspiring and pleasant space for public.



**Figure 15:** Lacking of vegetation and street furniture at the site.

### 6.5 Environmental Quality

According to Wikipedia, Sungai Klang is one of the major rivers in Selangor measuring approximately 120 kilometers. Sungai Gombak and Sungai Klang are included in the list of polluted rivers in Kuala Lumpur. According to Wikipedia, the river flows through Klang Valley is a heavily populated area of more than four million people, it is considerably polluted.

The river is visually clean as there is no absent of trash or garbage thrown into the river but the public that passing through the river can smell

the unpleasant odor from the polluted water (See figure 16).

The water need to be treated to achieve good water quality and create better sense of smell for the public. Aspect of quality environment is an important element in dealing space for public comfort and health.



Figure 16: Quality of water at Sungai Klang

## 7 Summary: Evaluating waterfront as public space

The study of area has left much of the potentials characteristic of its waterfront to become a 'unique selling point'. The waterfront at study area portrait its own characteristic in order to create vibrant public space. The area has the strength to promote human contact and social activities as it is already a place of public interest and be able to promote community involvement. The buildings along the waterfront itself have design and architectural features that are visually interesting which reflects the local culture or history. Besides that the place has a unique or special character to become a successful public space.

The points as discussed previously are to explore the waterfront characteristic in order to rejuvenate the waterfront as a place of public interest.

### 1. Accessible and Permeability

- The pedestrian promenade is integrated with public space.

### 2. Variety

- Variation of visual and activities that can attract people especially tourist are provided.

### 3. Comfort and stress

- Considering elements for pedestrians to move comfortably.

### 4. Landscaping and street furniture

- Enhanced more on vegetation and street furniture for public usage.

### 5. Environmental quality

- To maintain and treated the water quality of the river

To create more successful public area, it is important to redevelop the waterfront as safe, welcoming, and accommodating for all users. The waterfront has the potential to be a beautiful destination that is rich in public open spaces and activities besides celebrates the city's culture and history.

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