ROLE AND FATE OF PADANG IN MALAYSIAN HISTORICAL CITIES

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Abstract. Historic cities in Malaysia were developed in stages with most of them were part of the Dutch and British colonial settlements during the 18th to 20th century. Cities like Melaka and Penang were established as strategic trade routes while Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh as centres of tin-mining activities. The character of these cities are formed through their unique and historic buildings, historic open spaces and their natural environmental elements like trees, hills and rivers and unique local cultures of multi racial people. One of the historic open spaces is known locally as padang, a huge green open space in the heart of the many historic cities in Malaysia. It is often reinforced by distinctive institutional, commercial and public buildings of various architectural styles. The function of padang resembles square in Europe, a place for public to socialize in premier and daily events. It is the ground for joy with vibrant and colourful activities. It was once a centre of exercising nation’s rights of assembly for democracy and good life. This article is a review on the significances and fate of padang as social nodes in historic towns or cities in Peninsular Malaysia. Five padang in Ipoh, Georgetown, Bandar Melaka, Kuala Lumpur and Kota Bharu were selected. The role and the fate of padang were identified on the basis of their morphological, sociological characteristics and architectural meanings. The study revealed numbers of padang have been disrupted by the invasion of rapid buildings and recreational development which resulted to the disappearance of unique townscape qualities. This study also implies that the padang and its surrounding area convey various architectural categories of meanings which lead to the image formation of a historic cities.

INTRODUCTION

Historical city in Malaysia is bestowed with cultural and architectural heritage of various periods, ethnic and communities. The character of these cities are formed through their unique and historic buildings, historic open spaces and their natural environment like trees, hills and rivers and unique local cultures of multi racial people. The importance of these attributes within urban areas has been recognized for centuries and their stories have unearthed their significant contribution in enriching all of our lives and provide us with a sense of identity and community (Lowenthal, 1999; Steinberg, 1996; Tweed, 2007). Besides providing sense of identity and offering quality of life to the urbanites it also brings so much meaning in urban design.

However, cross-reference is seldom made between urban heritage and the less tangible heritage such as the public places which are of historical significance in urban areas and part of the urban fabric. As a result, many public places in historical cities like streets, squares, parks and old trees have succumbed to rapid commercial development (Bowen, 1996; Tweed, 2007). In some cities public place has become either unrecognizable or it has been ‘dissolved’. Besides losing the
physical and natural attributes, the changes have led to a major effect on the loss of traditional
urban form and localized identity (Mohammad, 1998; Shuhana and Nurshidah, 2008). Inasmuch,
this kind of urban landscape changes is seen as a menace and negative evolution because they
also cause a loss of diversity, coherence and identity (Antrop, 2005). This kind of breaks which
have been resulted in wiping away the existing landscape can be found in the transition of the 19th
century. Some remnants were preserved in the towns and cities in Malaysia.

In order to address the break, this study is therefore concerns on the preservation of public places
particularly open spaces and playfields pertaining to urban conservation. Using five public spaces
locally known as padang in five historical cities, this paper aims to initiate a discourse on ways to
preserve and commemorate the rich heritage of the urban heritage. The paper reviews on the
significances and fate of padang as social nodes in historic towns or cities. The role and the fate
of padang are identified on the basis of their morphological, sociological characteristics and
architectural meanings. The study concluded by addressing numbers of padang which have been
disrupted by the invasion of rapid buildings and recreational development which resulted to the
disappearance of unique townscape qualities.

HISTORIC CITY IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia derive its town planning systems from British practice and legislation, however the
process of transfer has received relatively little attention (Home, 1990; Goh, 1990). There were
no more than a score of professional town planners were operating between the two World Wars
(Home, 1990) in Malaya. The British colonial towns were less well planned and lacked
infrastructure with little influence of the metropolitan centre was shown in the urban planning
(Nordin, 2004). The interior of Malaya and most of colonial cities was controlled through the
legal device of protectorate or indirect rule leaving the traditional authority modified but intact.
These legal arrangements affected the way which town planning was exercised, and town
planning also had a symbolic role in creating an urban form which could reflect the greatness of
empire (Home, 1990).

Town planning during the colonial time operated for different client groups, primarily the
colonial administration, but also British commercial interests, traditional elites and white settler
communities. Four models of colonial town planning were introduced and for Malaya the
improvement of existing town housing and road conditions were most practiced (Table 1). The
planning activity was based on colonial status, type of activity, mechanism and geographical
factors of the town (Home, 1990). For original port cities or the site of native kingdoms (Nordin,
2004) like Melaka and Alor Setar, the planning was created to make provision for the
improvement and expansion of the towns by opening up congested areas, laying out and altering
streets, providing open spaces for purposes of ventilation or recreation and resettlement persons
of the poorer and working classes displaced. This model of planning was following the first
model initiated in Madras which acts as one of the main British port (Home, 1990; Nordin, 2004).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colonial status</th>
<th>Town planning activity</th>
<th>Usual mechanism</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct rule (usually ports)</td>
<td>Road improvement</td>
<td>Improvement board of trust</td>
<td>Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Lagos, Singapore</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Slum clearance</td>
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<td>Housing</td>
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<td>Protectorates under indirect rule</td>
<td>Layouts, Administrative headquarters, railway/mining town</td>
<td>Consultants, Branch of land and survey</td>
<td>Kaduna, Losaka, New Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre colonial urban societies</td>
<td>Conservation, garden suburbs, Parks</td>
<td>Local/ native Authority, Consultants</td>
<td>Parts of India, Egypt, Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White settler</td>
<td>Company towns, Garden cities</td>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>Pinelands, Vanderbiji town</td>
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Apart from the port town, the planning activities were concentrated outside the established crown colonies like Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Kuala Lipis and Taiping which colonial government followed an indirect rule or protectorate philosophy. These towns were created by the need of colonial administration, communications and extractive industries produced by these towns. The town planning experts were recruited from Britain on a consultancy or contract basis to design new administrative headquarters and commercial centres, particularly mining and railway towns (Home, 1990). The planning activity in the indigenous towns and royal towns like Kota Bharu, Alor Setar and Pekan were moderately practiced in which the approach was largely depended upon the interests and resources of traditional rulers and the energy of individual colonial officials (Home, 1990; Nordin, 2004).

Soon after the completion of the basic infrastructures and administrative centre in many historical cities, there were growing demand for spaces for recreation and sporting activities such as horse racing, golf and cricket and football pitches to supplement both open spaces. This in turn, led to formation of a series of public and open spaces within the city. Since the late 19th century there is range of open spaces introduced by the British, each had its own character. These characteristics are formed through gardens and parks, hill resorts, recreational lakes, and esplanades. These open spaces acted as a microcosm of colonial society and as their political, military, social and recreational hubs (Ismawi, 1993; Goh; 1990; Nor Zalina, 2005). Their establishments were on sites which function as centre of administration, commerce and European settlement (Loukaitou et al., 1998). Penang, Taiping and Kuala Lumpur are among the examples of towns with comprehensive open spaces establishment. The establishment of open spaces in the colonial town in Malaysia completed around 1930’s (Home, 1990).

DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGES

Malaysia started its modernization movement in the late 1970’s and during this period, tourism based on historic cities and scenic natural setting was promoted as an industry in the states of Penang, Melaka, Kelantan, Johor and Sarawak (Narifumi, 1998; A. Ghafar, 1998). Standards of living were generally upgraded and life styles gradually changed due to the involvement of rapid development which in turn created gradual changes. Consequently, all features such as open spaces,
streets and traditional activities; attributes that give a city its unique character and provide the sense of belonging to its community are continuously disappeared (Shuhana, 1999; Idid, 2004). The pressure for development and inability to preserve these properties and attributes has taken its toll on the sustenance of public spaces of historical cities in Malaysia. Many of these places have increasingly demolished, for example, the famous Benteng (outdoor eating area facing a river) that had for so long been synonymous with night life in Kuala Lumpur is now just another commercial building’s back yard (Ismawi, 1992). Bukit Nanas or known formerly as Weld Hill, the only piece of virgin tropical rainforest in Kuala Lumpur city centre is known as a platform for Kuala Lumpur Tower one of the highest structures in city.

The problem was made worse by the failure in appreciating and maintaining of esplanade or the padang an open space, which is of historical and cultural significance for public usage. Padang Maziah in Kuala Trengganu, Padang Merdeka in Alor Setar and Padang Kalumpang in Kota Bharu are examples of padang located in front of Malay sultanate palaces which have been converted into vehicle parking areas. Meanwhile, there are few upgrading projects on the padang which follow the concept of European plazas or roof top gardens. The padangs were paved while pavilion and concrete stage was included at the central end of padang like Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur. The most dramatic case for a historical public place is evidenced in Bandar Hilir in Melaka, where Padang Pahlawan which used to be the ground for the first proclamation of independence in 1957 was actively promoted and demolished for commercial development. The famous padang is now seen as a rooftop garden that become stage for singing contest and concert; a far cry from its role in the past.

In light to these dramatic situations, the paper aims to recover and reclaim the legacies of these public places particularly in five padangs situated in five historic cities namely, Padang Bandar Hilir or Padang Pahlawan in Melaka, Padang Club Selangor in Kuala Lumpur, Padang Merdeka in Kota Bharu, Padang Kota Lama in Penang and Ipoh Padang in Ipoh.

THE PADANG AND ITS ROLE

Padang is a Malay word which means a large field turfed with grass. Wright and Cartwright (1989) described the padang as huge ground or a grassy plain situated in the heart of a colonial town. Meanwhile Hoyt (1993) depicted the padang as an expanse of green known as a large closely trimmed lawn alien to pre-colonial, equatorial Malaya. It was also regarded as a green nucleus of a town (Anbalagan, 1999). The development of padang or also known as an esplanade started from India and extended to South East Asia, (Hoyt, 1993; Lim and Wong, 2000; Hussin, 2004). This statement somehow is conflicting with the information and photos documented in local literatures on history of Malaya where it is evidence that the existence of padang was long time before the British colonialisation (Muhammad Salleh, et.al, 1992; Moore, 2005). The said padang was located in the palace compound of Malaya Kingdom. Padang Maziah in front of Istana Maziah in Trengganu, Padang Kalumpang in front of Istana Jahar and Istana Balai Besar in Kota Bharu and not to forget Padang Court infront of Istana Balai Besar and Masjid Zahir in Alor Setar are among them.

Padang in the British colonial period often lies at the physical heart of the town which is a place with high and properly drained area between the river and sea and as a point of convergence (Nordin, 1990; Lim and Wong; 2000. Richmond, 2003; Shuhana; 2002, Chen. et.al; 1998). Normally, it will fronting a premier British recreational club and surround by municipal offices, the court house, religious and educational institutions buildings (Hoyt, 1993; Ismawi, 1993, Lim and
Wong, 2000; Shuhana, 2002; Nor Zalina, 2005). It is also surrounded by monuments represented the pinnacle of British colonial, their civic pride and the commemoration of end of World War I (Lim and Wong, 2000; Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005).
The padang was originally created as military ground for the police and army throughout the British colony (Shiang, 2002; Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005). The first padang built by the British in Malaya was located in Georgetown, Penang in 1790. Its development was then spread through all over the colonial towns like Kuala Lumpur, Taiping and Melaka. Like padang in Penang, padang in Kuala Lumpur and Bandar Hilir, Melaka housed army barracks, church and town hall at one time in the late 19th century. The padang also acted as the civic square for the British administration. It was where official occasions were staged (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005).

Eventually, the padang became the centre for sports and recreation for the British and the elites group, often complemented by a clubhouse. Cricket and football were played on regular basis and the padang evolved as the social and recreational centre while serving its civic duty as the administration hub. Perak Club in Taiping, Melaka Club in Bandar Hilir, Penang Club in Georgetown and Selangor Club in Kuala Lumpur founded in the 1880 to 1930 are examples of earliest club located on the padang (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005).

Parade and special ceremony like celebration of Golden Jubilee, Christmas Eve and formal gathering also often took place at the padang. The flexible use of the padang for important civic functions also has, in particular, led to the utilization of adjacent roads as part of the open spaces as a parade ground (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005). In short, padang was a centre for colonial life and a place to promenade and place where the British expose their power and dignity through activities held at the padang.

BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF FIVE PADANG OF HISTORIC CITIES

The following are descriptions of padang in five colonial cities in Malaysia, each outlines its development, physical characteristics, roles and social functions through out the history. The existing conditions and nature and scale of changes of each padang are also described.

Padang Bandar Hilir, Melaka

Padang Bandar Hilir was located on the eastern side of the Melaka Club, built in 1912 (Hoyt, 1993), while according to Sandhu and Wheatly (1983) in their extensive research on Melaka, the padang was built in 1937 and completed in 1939. It was built after a quiet, unspectacular and moderately prosperous period. The padang was actually situated on reclaimed land of the Melaka Straits. When approaching the Bandar Hilir in the olden days, one often impressed by the quaint and picturesque appearance of the padang, the St Paul Hill and sets of historical buildings. Near to this padang are an old Hong Kong and Shanghai bank, an Anglican church, a police training centre and the Melaka Sport club. Within the bounds of the padang, there were also Chinese dwellings of which were of bricks with attap roof (Sandhu and Wheatly, 1983). The padang then was used for military drills and it increasingly functioned as a public recreational ground after the relocation of the police barrack in. This padang became the setting for ceremonies and rituals that legitimized British rule. On its green turf English games like tennis, cricket and football were encouraged as way of draining off energies that might otherwise have found less desirable outlets.
The Padang Pahlawan is indeed a historic site and seems to be the most significant among any others. It was the setting for the first proclamation for the future independence of Malaya in 1956 (Hoyt, 1993; Zalina and Jumaatun, 2001; Sager, 2004). Melaka was the first stop in Tunku Abdul Rahman nationwide tour in 1956 in order garnering people’s support in the quest for the country’s independence. It was near to this padang, at Meng Seng Hall Tunku collected money and jewellery from the people of Melaka to pay for the independence delegation’s trip to London. The significance of choosing Melaka and Padang Pahlawan was that it was the first state to be colonized in 1511 by the Portuguese (Sager, 2004). In a symbolic change not long after that, the Melaka Club has changed into Declaration of Memorial Independent.

There was excavation works conducted by the Museum and Antiquity Department on this padang in the 2001 and ‘Save the padang’ campaign in upholding the padang as one of the most important archeological and historical site in Melaka. Unfortunately no one had listened to the people’s cries at that time. The imperative historic padang, was then has been transformed radically into another commercial centre and car parks. Another notorious development which include entertainment centres, cineplexes, exhibitions space, the International Club and area for cultural and sports events. The International Club will offer a swimming pool, a gym, a Jacuzzi, a sauna, an internet café, a cricket ground and a karaoke lounge (Sager, 2004). It is important to note that during the dredging operation, quite a large collection of archeological remain were unearthed on the padang.

Padang Club Selangor, Kuala Lumpur

Padang Club Selangor started off with undergrowth and a small clearing for Chinese vegetable plots. The establishment of the police headquarters on Bluff Road (now Bukit Aman) saw the field leveled for a police drills ground in1880 (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005). During the building boom from 1882 to 1894, the padang developed as the centre for the growing European community. In 1884, the Selangor Club was founded as a social and cricket club. Further improvements to the padang were made in 1892 by the acting Resident, E.W. Birch. This included the raising and turfing of a portion of the padang, formation of cricket pitch and tennis courts. A bandstand and fountain were also added (Ramsayer, 1991).

The padang is a significant historic site as it was here that the British Union Jack was lowered for the last time when Malaysia gained its independence on 31st August 1957 (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005; Zalina and Jumaatun, 2001). During the British colonial era, this five acre padang was a parade ground surrounded by administrative and institutional buildings like St. Mary church, army barracks, the Royal Selangor Club and the Secretariat building (Sultan Abdul Samad building). The padang soon became the focal point for parades and other official occasions as well as the scene of all major sporting events. As its function as a civic square grew, many government offices were built around the padang including the Sanitary Board, the General
Post Office, the High Court, the Survey Department and the Public Work Department (Ramsayer, 1991; Jeshurun, 2004).
No one among the early pioneers of this part of the city of Kuala Lumpur would have imagined that their much admired padang would one day be completely dug up and an enormous underground car park and commercial outlets built under it. Indeed, the completion of a massive concrete platform during the 1990’s backed by a gigantic digital monitor, bulky concrete performance stage and flanked by what is reputed to be the world’s tallest flag-pole has totally changed the character of this historical site (Jeshurun, 2004).

![Figure 2. The growth of Dataran Merdeka from 1887 to 2008.](image)

**Padang Merdeka, Kota Bharu, Kelantan**

Padang Merdeka, better known as Padang Besar among the locals, is an important historical civic open space for Kota Bharu, Kelantan. During the reign of Sultan Muhammad II in the 1840’s the site was already well known as the market square where the floating market was originally located. After the construction of the new palace by Sultan Muhammad II in 1884 which marked the birth of Kota Bharu, the square came into prominence as the market square for the new town, located exactly in front of the place gate, and was known as Padang Kalupang. Its transition into a civic square started after the construction of the Muhammadi Mosque built in 1869 and the houses of advisers and trustees to the Sultan around the padang. In 1906, during the reign of Sultan Muhammad IV, it was renamed Padang Bank, seven years after the construction of the first bank, the Pitis Bank, near the palace ground (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005).

The British decisively converted this traditional marketplace into the characteristically British padang. Typically, many government offices and public buildings were built around it, including the office for Kelantan Islamic Religious Authority and the first commercial Bank of India. The reconstruction of the Muhammadi Mosque in 1922, using bricks and mortar, added grandeur to the civic square. In 1905, on this padang the body of the legendary freedom fighter and a peasant spiritual leader who spearheaded a revolt against the colonial system of land taxes and tenancy regulation, Tok Janggut was hung upside down by the British. (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005; Nik Anuar, 2005).

The British also built a war memorial sculpture that still stands today to mark the end of the World War I. During the Japanese Occupation in World War II, the Japanese used the padang as the centre for their administration. The office of Japanese Secret Police was located here. Today, it is a place where within its gated compound one can find peace and tranquility away from the hectic city. Besides its everyday function as the place for morning exercise, various formal and royal family and dignitaries during the annual parade held to celebrate the birthday of the Sultan of Kelantan.
Padang Merdeka is also a famous tourist destination (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005). Surrounded by museums and historical buildings, it is the heart of Kota Bharu’s cultural and historical complex.

Changes after changes were undergone at the padang and its surrounding area. In the late 1970’s the huge green lawn in front of the palace was transformed into a parking area while the upper part has been converted into a gated seasonal ceremonial ground.

![Figure 3. The growth of Padang Merdeka from 1880 to 2008.](image)

The Esplanade or Padang Kota Lama, Georgetown, Penang

The Esplanade and its adjacent green also known as Padang Kota Lama among the local is the important venue for the most Penang’s important events. It was called as Esplanade after the Esplanade was created in 1880 (Moore, 2004). It is the first area developed by the British together with Fort Cornwallis in 1786 (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005; Gin, 2002). The Esplanade can be regarded as growth centres from which the town developed and expanded. The area is bounded by the Esplanade Road, Fort Road, Duke Street, Light Street and King Edward place. Initially, there were many buildings within the esplanade, administrative offices, military barracks, stores, and gunpowder magazines.

The Esplanade was the site of military encampments and quarters of the Indian sepoys and British officers of the garrison and also the house of the Superintendent (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005; Gin, 2002). Following the Napoleon Wars, the threats to security of the habour become lessened and the Esplanade was no longer used as military drills and it increasingly functioned as a public recreational ground (Gin, 2002). It acquired its present role as a recreational ground in the 1880’s after the Town Hall was built and the Esplanade was created (Moore, 2004). It also became meeting places for the purposes of conducting business and trade which were the mainstay of a colonial port. In order to facilitate communications, the esplanade is surrounded with streets and roads linking the various section of the town. During Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays nights, the esplanade was thronged with rickshaws and carriages due to the Filipino band night’s performances (Wright and Cartwright, 1989).

Monuments, statues and buildings like pavilions, institutional, administrative and sports club once stood on and next to the Esplanade. A row of imposing buildings was constructed towards the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century that subsequently became the Town Hall and the City hall. The Town Hall was the first purpose-built building for the Penang Municipal Council that was reconstituted in 1857. The town band performs from the Municipal bandstand. The Penang Municipal Council is the first such authority in Malaysia (Wright, 1989; Gin, 2002). Across the Esplanade and fronting the sea is a promenade walkway. On this walkway stands the Cenotaph, a monument in honour of those who fell in the European war (Gin, 2002).
Being located in one of gazetted conservation area, Padang Kota Lama received large number of tourist and visitors each year beside still remain as one of important landmark for Penang.

![Figure 4. The growth of Padang Kota Lama from 1780 to 2008.](image)

**Ipoh Padang, Ipoh, Perak**

In 1897, the Chinese community raised $43,000 to buy the state land in order for recreational purposes. As a result, Ipoh padang was created in the following year, 1898, in commemoration of Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee. It was the town’s first open space (Liew, 1997). In true British fashion, Ipoh Padang was the parade ground for the army. At other times, these officers can be seen enjoying a few innings of cricket or a game of football and rugby. The Perak Cricket Association was based here, with one of the best cricket pitches in the country. Criket was so important then that the ‘bulli’ soil for the padang was imported from Australia (Anbalagan, 1999). It was said to be the first padang constructed with specifically designed underground drainage.

During the Japanese Occupation, the condition of the padang was its worst. The Japanese military used to turn the padang into a dumping military vehicles. They also put up air raid shelters by digging circular well. Every morning at eight o’clock, all the staff of the government offices in Ipoh gathered on the padang to participate in a bowing and allegiance ceremony (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005). The Ipoh Town Board then redeveloped and reshaped the padang due the damage after the world war (Anbalagan, 1999). There are a number of fine colonial-styled buildings built by the British surrounding the padang including the Royal Ipoh Club, the Ipoh Municipal Council, the High Court, Masjid India and St. Michael School. The F.M.S. Bar & Restaurant, which is located at the edge of the padang, was a gathering place for famous writers of the British era. When the Indian pro-independence nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose visited Ipoh on 1st October 1943, he spoke to a large gathering here and recruited hundred of volunteers for his Army of Free India. On 31st May 1962, the Sultan of Perak declared the formation of the Municipality of Ipoh at the padang (Federal Department of Town and Country Planning, 2005). After the independence, the Ipoh Town Board had undergone reconstruction process as to bring the padang back to its original shape (Liew, 1997). Local football league finals were held on this padang before the Perak Stadium was built.

Ipoh padang faced the wrecking ball in the early 2000 (Thambynathan, 2002). The statement in an article Leave the Ipoh Padang alone (New Straits Times, September 2002) suggesting how do changes and new development proposals made by city council affected people’s emotions and their
daily life. In this article the Ipoh residents through one of their representative expressed their
gratitude for having padang as their source of pride and heritage of Ipoh and did not agree and
allow for any changes to be carried out. Ironically, it was saved by the strong support and
awareness of the local and the padang still lies in the heart of the historic city with most of its
original condition remained.

Source: Author

Figure 5. Map of Ipoh Padang from 1890 – 2008.

DISCUSSION

Series of fortunate and unique circumstances has led to the success of padang as public place in
many historical cities in Malaysia. From the descriptive analysis of the five padangs, it suggests that
it is a civic place with openness, natural features, historical buildings, diverse social, sports and
cultural activities and events are among the great advantage of life in the city centre. Padang is
considered as a place of joyful celebration, heartbroken communion, civic discussion and also as a
place to exercise the rights of assembly and free speech. Throughout history, it is evident that it is
the places of essential for participatory democracy and the good life. Therefore, it is associated with
pleasure, recreation, human encounters and communal celebrations. It also plays a significant role
in renewing and stabilizing the cities social and economic base. In other word, the padang is
intended to support the creation of convivial places (Child, 2004) as togetherness, enjoyment of
festive society and the vibrant sense of belonging to a settlement.

Additional public space benefits are obtained through the very form and nature of the city. Each
city is a place of its own, it uniqueness determined in large measures by pattern created by the
alternation of structure and void, of buildings and spaces between. Both act as spatial or pattern
relation of the object to the observer and to other object. In this case, the aesthetic quality of padang
is characterized by the structural and natural interrelation of the detail. It can be summarized
that the padang and it surrounding area conveyed various architectural categories of meanings such as:
civic and ceremonial ground, a square, a district, a landmark, a node and a central field.

These architectural meanings are the essential structure for city image. They are basic components
of a town. Lynch (1960) confirmed that a clear image through a coherent and clear spatial relation
of structures and other objects enables one to move about easily and quickly. Not only this, it may
serve as a broad frame of reference, an organizer of activity or belief or knowledge. This mean that
based on the form and condition of the structure one may also know the evolution engaged with the
place. The larger green spaces, parks and parkways, riverbanks and waterfronts give to a city
distinct character and coherence that allows the urban residents to have a feeling for the whole. Such public space may be viewed as the city’s skeleton. They are the underlying structure from which depend neighborhoods, institutional complexes and business centers (Heckscher and Robinson, 1977).

The five padang studied are distinctive because they shared similar social and morphological features which are mixture of past European and local influences. The British colonial influence was manifested in various architectural styles each of which shaped and built by the circumstances of being located within an administrative district. Recreation, cultural and social events which are the predominant activities held in each padang in the city composed by multi ethnic residents. However, the planning layout and activity pattern have changed gradually in at least three of the padang surveyed. Since the 1970’s until present there has been a various alterations and changes in the city which also directed to the changes in the layout and physical features of the padang. From a recreational ground and place for public contemplation, the padang have been transformed into privatized premises.

The findings suggest that character of a place is a continuous field, the disturbance of one element in some way affecting all others. Incompatible development and design within historical area in a city may disrupt the whole urban environment. The changes and the loss of memorable public places which marked a city a special character has directed to the weakening of place identity and at the same time affected the people’s who live in the area for number of years. This scenario should not be prolonged as both scenarios will result to the loss of place meaning. In response to these concerns the need for preserving a stable framework of familiar and valued places within the historical city should become important concerns in town planning and urban design practices.

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