

URBAN GREEN SPACE AS PART OF ECOLOGICAL CORRIDOR AS MEDIUM TO STIMULATES SOCIAL COHESION AMONG DIVERSE CULTURE IN MALAYSIA

¹Nurzuliza Jamirsah, ²Ismail Said, and ³Mohd Hisyam Rasidi

¹Master of Architecture, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

²Department of Landscape Architecture, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

nurzulizajamirsah@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Malaysia is currently developing into an urbanized country. Malaysian's severe loss and degradation of urban green space could adversely affect ecosystems as well as human social pattern. The aim of his paper is to reformulate an Asian-based social cohesion framework by referring the previous study of Western-based one. A total of 20 articles from the disciplines of urban and landscape planning, green infrastructure, human behavior and psychology, and ecological corridor engineering were reviewed to give an insight on what social cohesion offers to human well-being, why do human needs to socialize to gain wellness and how ecological setting influence the social-bonding quality. Literatures were bracketed into 3 categories which are epidemiological, experimental and survey studies. The literature reviewed revealed several themes and relationships that relate to ecological corridor, human health and social cohesion. Result of the review suggests that social cohesion means the bond that brings people together in society, particularly in the context of multi-cultural community. Mingling in subspaces of the urban forest permits relationship between users through spontaneous conversation. The park characters that afford the social cohesion are diversity of subspaces, vegetation and animal populations, landform and water bodies. Therefore, in planning of urban forest, it is necessary to interweave the boundary of a neighborhood with another to form a continuous community network.

Keywords: Human Behavior; Social Pattern; Ecological Corridor; Social Cohesion

1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, the field research of human behavior and ecological corridor relationships are growing in number. Part of ecological corridor such as urban forest and other urban green space is the new favorite space substituting the artificial setting of designed urban parks. Urban forest too can be as the new outdoor space where public could congregate and gather in order to seek refuge from busy urban day life. It is the place for the public to be involved in natural recreation with "eco-friendly" and "eco-sensitive" recreational programs to enhance human eco-psychology.

2. ISSUE

In the context of Malaysia, its community cohesion seems to be declining. Surveys by local authorities indicate that people these days have fewer friends compared to previous decades. The factors of growing in number of indoor games, and online social networking make this outdoor social cohesion impossible. Mutz (2007), coined that social connections are declining due to geographic segregation and segmentation.

3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this paper is to reformulate a Western-based conceptual framework of associations between urban green spaces, human behavior and social cohesion (refer figure 1). By integrating literature on the concepts of urban green space and human psychology with that resulting on social cohesion, and thus reformulating an Asian-based conceptual framework as the resultant of new understanding. This is achieved through addressing three objectives: (a) undertaking a peer review of the literature on associations between urban green space components and human social pattern; (b) constructing a set of variables to steer the research on human psychology; (c) reconstructing an Asian-based conceptual framework resulting from the integration of these several disciplines. This conceptual framework eventually will help organizing existing and new insights to a single framework in order to help better understandings between Green Infrastructure and Human Behaviour disciplines.

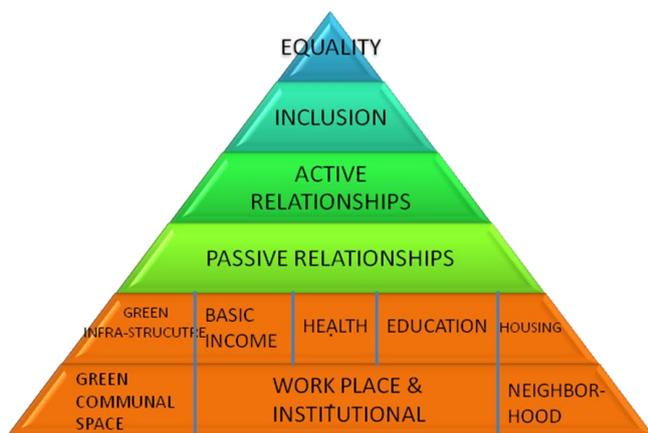


Figure 1: Toruk (2005) conceptual framework of Hierarchy of Social Cohesion.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Urban Green Space

The literature reviewed revealed a number of relationships that relate green urban space, human behavior pattern and community cohesion. The definition of urban green space is it comprise of all natural and artificial networks of multifunctional ecological systems within, around and between urban and semi-urban green spaces, (Tzoulas, 2007; Turner, 1996).

4.2 Social Cohesion

The concept of social cohesion was defined as the process of developing a community of shared values, challenges and equality in opportunities. The Canadian Policy Research Centre (2000) may consider that there are five dimensions of social cohesion which defined as belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, and legitimacy. According to Victoria Transport Policy Institute (2010), community cohesion also termed as “neighboring”. It refers to the quality and quantity of interactions intra-community as well as inter-community. This paper would like to look at the role of inclusion in stimulating social cohesion within communities in the context of Malaysia.

5. METHODS

The electric journals and books are critically reviewed and evaluated by bracketing the type of the research journal. Classification was made into three: (a) epidemiological studies; (b) experimental studies; (c) and survey studies. Later, the studies are evaluated by conducting a strengths and weaknesses analysis of the research design and its significance. Since causal relationships between urban green communal space and social behavior resulting modest result of social cohesion, it is difficult to quantify and establish it. Hence, this research only covers the literature on more towards association rather than causation.

6. DISCUSSION

This literature review has synthesized past research that had been carried out from various disciplines explored the role of urban green spaces contributes social inclusion inter-communities and intra-communities. After in depth reviews, variables and research parameters from previous research by Dunn (2009) are referred and reconstructed. By using various research methods, social psychologist accordingly examine situational and personal variables whose change can affect social perception and judgment.

6.1 Personal Variables

Personal variables are including people’s physical, dispositional characteristics, their affective states and their role whether as the perceivers or perceived by others (refer figure 2). A measurable factor that can appear different values varies according to individual perspectives.

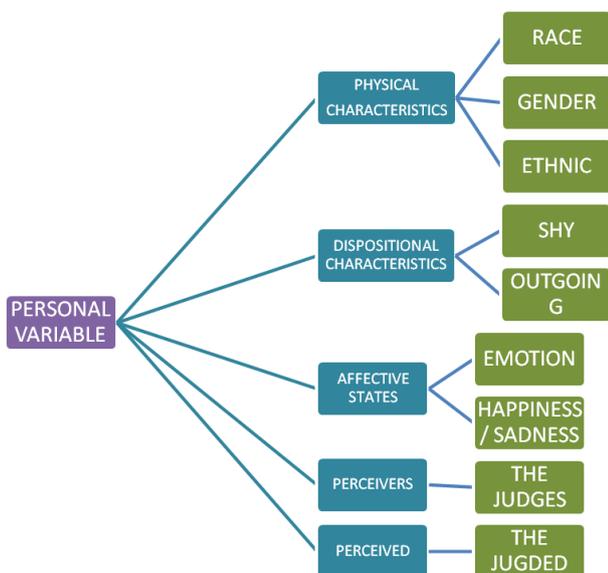


Figure 2: Reconstructed Personal Variables

6.2 Situational Variables

In contrast, situational variables is define as literally factors happens outside people, often in the environment, known as tangible, intangible and the transient influences (refer figure 3).

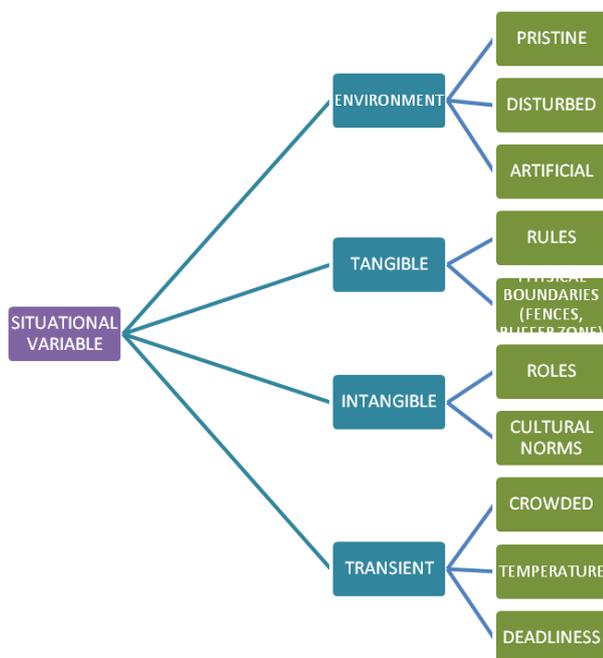


Figure 3: Reconstructed Situational Variables.

There is also clearly a need to explore the implications of economic sector towards having such green communal space. According to Bird (2004), by having sufficient recreation space nearby neighborhoods can reduce the expenses for medication when people are increasing their well-being at such green communal places.

Several indicators to see the existence of social cohesion among community also taken into consideration which are: (a) Assisting strangers; (b) Having spontaneous conversation with strangers; (Neighbors cooperating in community projects; (c) Children playing in public; (d) Multi-cultural at public realm; (e) community events; (d) Physical Challenged people travelling independently (Victoria transport Policy Institute, 2010).

CONCLUSION

. Since urban green spaces are inclusive spaces, they can be seen as possibly favorable spaces for stimulating social cohesion. However, visitors do not have many intensive social interactions at the provided green space corridor. This research will find out the factors that preventing them to have good community cohesion and what factors that triggers them socialize. People value living in a cohesive community where neighbors interact and care about each other.

However, most of the visitors feel comfortable within their own social group and do not feel the need to interact with others due to modern community behavior. Interactions with strangers are less common than those with known people. Inasmuch, human community needs to survive hand in hand with ecological sensitive community to produce new sustainable urban communal space

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Nurzuliza Jamirsah received the Bachelor Degree in Landscape Architecture (2010) from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. Currently she is pursuing her Master in Architecture majoring in Landscape Architecture at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.



Ismail Said received PhD (2006) in architecture from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.

He is an Associate Professor and Head of Department of Landscape Architecture, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. His current research interests are vernacular architecture and children's environment.



Mohd Hisyam Rasidi received PhD in Engineering (2009) from Shibaura Institute of Technology, M.A. in Urban Design (2005) from Oxford Brookes University, and B.L.A. in Landscape Architecture (2000) from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. He is a lecturer at Department of Landscape Architecture in Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. His current interests include urban design, microclimate study, and landscape architecture.