

Strategizing New Growth Methods to City Shophouses

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Evidence of city shophouses can be found in abundance in Kuala Lumpur for the past few decades (Gullick, 2000). Besides the rapid urbanization of Kuala Lumpur, land scarcity has become a major issue in the city where every piece of lands is considered valuable properties for development. However, due to the nature and limitations of city shophouses, they do not reduce the scarcity issue resulting in majority of shophouses to be demolish just for complete redevelopment (Wagner, 2017). Therefore, ideation needs to be done for city shophouses which represents typology of a past era. The research methods used for this research will be qualitative interviews on factors leading to its decline and the prevalent strategies to revitalize it. The research will ideate the future possibility of city shophouses in term of its history, place-making, and necessities for the community in attempt to contribute in improving shophouse typology across all places and serve as a design framework in the future. Variables such as materiality and engineering can be further researched to formulate the ideal method of implementing the research.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Study

In a survey done by Journal of Malaysian Institute of Planners (2020), it is found that KL City Centre is ranked first in intensive land use and growth rate in all Malaysia. Due to this, land prices around Kuala Lumpur City almost doubles the prices outside city as lesser and lesser land are available for new developments. However, developments in the city still in demand even in the soft property market. This creates a scarcity of land in Kuala Lumpur, where big companies want to attract and concentrate “talents,” innovation and creativity in the city center.

Shophouses is an interesting typology located in the city center due to its culture and abundance. Even today, there is still “abundant evidence of the exuberant and eclectic style of shophouse buildings” in Kuala Lumpur especially in Market Square (Medan Pasar) and the Chinatown area. (Gullick, 2000, p.171).

However, due to conditions, shophouses had become an unattractive choice of property in relation to other city typologies because of their fixed dimensions, high price, high maintenance despite being located in a prime location in Kuala Lumpur. This causes shophouses to be abandoned and disappear at an alarming rate (APSA, 2005). As the city continues to run out of land to build, vacant shophouses proposes a potential solution where it can help reduce land scarcity in city and reintroduce value into shophouses. Thus, a new and modern typology of shophouses should ideated that aligns with the current urban growth of the city.

1.2 Problem Statement

1.2.1 Motivational Problem

According to National Urbanization Policy 2 (2019), Kuala Lumpur is expected to increase its residents from 18.98 million people (74.8%) in 2015 to 22.58 million people (83.3%) in 2025.

Due to this, land scarcity in KL city becomes a serious problem that needs to be tackled.

This has led to forest reserves and green lands are being prioritized for redevelopment even in and around Kuala Lumpur. A study shows a total of 7,246.96 hectares (17,907.6 acres) was gazetted as a permanent forest reserve in 1927, but today only 957.6 hectares (2,366.3 acres), or just 13%, remains today. (Global Forest Watch, 2022). World president of FIABCI International 2005/06 Datuk Alan Tong Kok Mau said land scarcity is an unavoidable issue but it can be addressed with proper planning in place as Kuala Lumpur steers into a developed nation status. He voices out that certain typologies in the city that are not fully utilized or even ignored. One example are present day shophouses in Kuala Lumpur that are being abandoned and vacated at an alarming rate, even though Malaysia is getting more and more urbanized. However, there are not much efforts to address the land scarcity issue of KL city. Moreover, there are even lands in city that are being abandoned, specifically shophouses, and not utilized to improve on the situation when they can potentially improve it.

1.2.2 Research Problem

Shophouses are one of the first building styles that emerged when Kuala Lumpur began to expand as a trading center in 1900s. It served as the foundation of commercialism, as people can do business on the ground floor while residing on the upper floor. However, in recent years, many of the families who used to occupy the shophouses has left to get away from the crowding in the city and to build bigger, better and more modern homes in suburbs. (Lee, 2019). VPC Alliance Sdn Bhd managing director James Wong said that the deterioration of shophouse typology can be link to various issues, notably the valuations and planning guidelines of city shophouses. On average, one lot size for Kuala Lumpur shophouse is just 20ft by 80ft but can amount up to RM8.1million in transaction. This disparity between cost and actual property discourages people from picking up shophouses and eventually deteriorates under no maintenance.

Under Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL), most shophouses fall under the plot ratio of 1:4 and declared shophouses must maintain their facades. For generational owners, there is no motivation to upgrade and renovate their shophouses because even with the repeal of the Rent Control Act 1966, the rents are still not at

prevailing market rental rates. However, the architecture aspect of shophouse is not intended for cityscape and has not change for almost 40 years. Therefore, the current typology should be regarded as a typology of a previous era and further ideated for the current and future era.

1.3 P.O.D.

The study aims to explore how to integrate vertical growth into shophouse to promote greater living experiences in cities in consideration of the present and future.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions related to this study are as follows:

Main RQ: How to utilize existing shophouses for the imminent land scarcity issue and growing populations in cities?

Sub RQ1: Why and how shophouses lost their attractiveness in cities?

Sub RQ2: How to fully utilize shophouses to accommodate for future densification of cities?

1.5 Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To examine the reason why city shophouses has loss their attractiveness and the important of people approval
2. To analyse the current shophouses to determine their suitability in the current era
3. To identify the strategy to fully utilize shophouses to accommodate for future densification of cities

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Land Scarcity

As the capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur's population keeps increasing, due to the economic activities that are drawn in and only happens in the city (Januar & Arora, 2018). Addressing the growing population influx without hindering the socio-economic growth is a vital problem that all cities have to deal with, and one of the main issues that comes along is land scarcity and overcrowding (Mazarro et al., 2021). Rapid urbanization and changing of land values in cities resulting in informal housing such as slums

for the more needy. High quality and prime lands are being picked up by real estate and individual developers and leaving little to no place for affordable housing for general masses (Alam, 2018). Unbalanced development processes of urban densification and de-densification spatial inequality across different built-up types. In the rapid construction of office buildings and residential, another issue is maintaining city growth without straining of the existing land or area for sustainability, in other words, controlling a city size based on its environmental capacity and efficiency for land use. Careless design and planning will lead back to insufficient land, diminishing green pockets and even construction in restricted areas (Mao et al., 2020). Therefore, strategies for capital accumulation and decision of land uses must be carefully planned in times of land scarcity, requiring global efforts and local experiences (Altreiter & Litschauer, 2020).

2.2 Gentrification

Gentrification is a phenomenon which known as a shift of socio-economic upgrading of neighborhoods. It often involves direct and indirect displacement of the local population to make way for the more financially potent newcomers, mostly happening to old towns when developments start aggregating due to foreseeable economic future and urban growth (Reduan, 2016). Similarly, cases of gentrification had occurred in various parts around Kuala Lumpur district and the end result is usually does not favour the poorer population (Othman, 2017). In the case of South Korea, tenant shopkeepers waging collective actions to protect themselves from dispossession and displacement while mobilizing under their collective identity as workers against gentrifications. This shows that even though gentrification might help improve an area's economic wealth and popularity, they also need to consider the local workers' rights in both urban and political sociology, as to how to coexist between the new developments and the existing urban realm (Lee, 2019).

According to Zhan Yang, China has started rehabilitation and formalization of informal housing in city, as a new comprehensive improvement of the gentrification scheme so that instead of sweeping demolition, they can slowly integrate the old neighborhoods into metropolitan cities. This new gentrification scheme is fluid in the sense that it comprises an assemblage of heterogenous actors, socialist institutions, market

mechanisms, and development regime cohesively without disregarding any parties (Zhan, 2021). If there is no preconceived idea of tackling gentrification, the rising fortune of a city can yield very expensive neighborhoods and commercial areas, leading to the death of the neighborhood (Moskowitz, 2018).

2.3 Shophouses

The shophouse typology has been around Malaysia since pre-1900s. Even today, there is still "abundant evidence of the exuberant and eclectic style of shophouse buildings" in Kuala Lumpur especially in Market Square (Medan Pasar) and the Chinatown area (Gullick, 2000, p.171). However, today shophouses in Kuala Lumpur are widely considered to be an unfavorable typology as the profitability is low because of the bigger better office towers that can be built without the hassle of need to readapt or renovate. Even obsolete laws such as The Control of Rent Act 1966 had restricted the prospects for some of these pre-war buildings. Even though repealed in 1997, it caused low rental rates and high maintenance costs along with the ever-increasing land price (APSA, 2005).

Due to urbanization, the outcome of these buildings became a complicated mix of new spontaneous dwellings featuring different urban morphology from different eras (Dang, 2020). This requires the education of inclusive urbanism as the inclusion of the environmental awareness genesis, attitudes toward urban design, cognitive biases and the acceptance of contingency so that the different typologies can coexist properly (Fritsche, 2021). Study found that shophouse typology promotes good microclimatic conditions and constituents that create the urban spatial form of residential neighborhoods, creating good thermal, airflow and daylight satisfaction for occupants (Dang, 2020). Shophouses can be given an uplift to correspond more to the current era, using the latest digital tools and techniques in architecture. Buildings designed, calculated and built-in this way tend to look very different from everything previously designed. They also tend to meet specifications better because, in this spirit, the calculations are way more precise and beyond individualistic thinking (Baros, 2020).

2.4 Urban Life

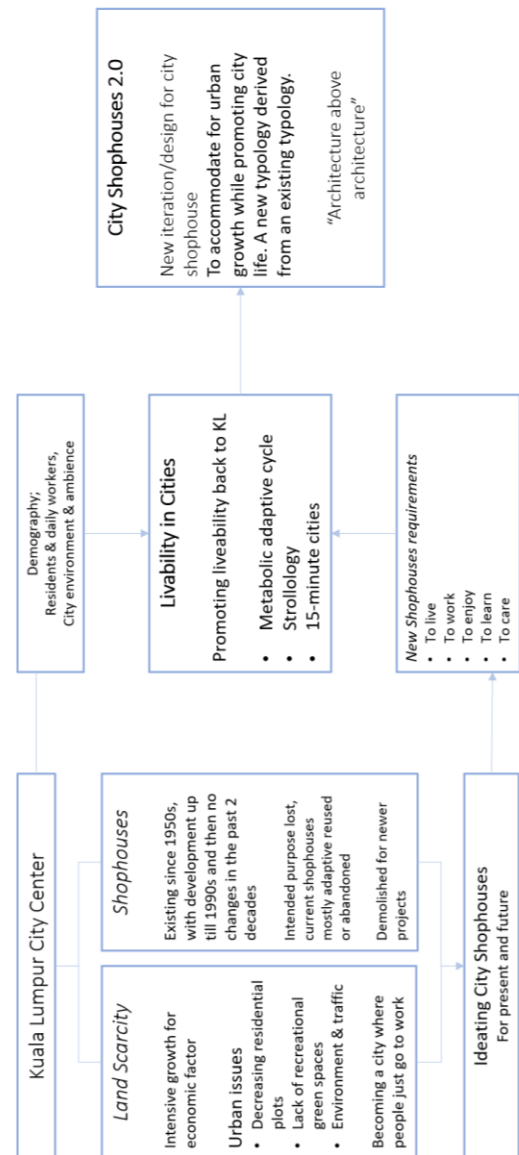
The term urban life is defined by living in high population density and infrastructure of built environment that can be categorized by urban

morphology such as cities, towns, suburbs and others. Wishful prospects draw a number of ‘floating population’ from their rural homes to temporary jobs and uncertain status in the city. Cities attracts dreamers expecting to make their mark, or families hoping for a better life. Immigrants in turn have been the lifeblood of cities, bringing diverse customs and making it possible to find international foods, languages, and ideas on a single street (Clydesdale, 2022). However, cities are managing a dual existence. While they are cultural, architectural, economic and scientific centres, they also tend to utilise enormous resources to maintain, bringing the question that how much are for the well-being of resident, or even the environment at large (Murgas, 2018).

Study shows that the size of a city directly correlates to quality of life and human behaviours, providing suggestive evidences of the negative effect of commuting on well-being caused by reduced time availability for fostering personal relationships and engaging in leisure activities. Therefore, by reducing the amount of time people spend in an unpleasant state potentially can spur agglomeration economies and their contribution to aggregate productivity and growth, while maintaining the balance of positive sociology in cities (Loschiavo, 2019). Carlos Monero proposed chrono-urbanism where time is an important element in city planning. Factors such as proximity and location helped establish the “15-minute City” concept as a Sustainability, Resilience and Place Identity in future post-pandemic cities in effort to improve urban life and allow people have more free time for themselves. Similarly, green landscapes in city also serve in important purpose in urban life. Due to rapid urbanism, green space distribution has disparities in quantity and accessibility of these open spaces has always been a problem (Hwang et al., 2020). Green amenities have become GreenLULUs (Locally Unwanted Land Uses) and socially vulnerable residents and community groups face a green space paradox, whereby they become excluded from new green amenities they long fought for as part of an environmental justice agenda (Anguelovski et al., 2018).

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual framework is planned and illustrated as below:



4. CONCLUSION

This research aims to address the research question of “How to utilize existing shophouses for the imminent land scarcity issue and growing populations in cities?” by investigating existing shophouse typology appeal and architecture methods of improving said typology to accommodate for future densifications of cities. One of the research objectives is to examine the reason why city shophouses has loss their attractiveness and the important of people

approval. This allows for strategizing ways to make shophouse appealing again as a typology to live and to invest in. Another objective is to analyse the current shophouses to determine their suitability in the current era. This is done to find out what requirements does shophouse have in progressing towards to future so that it can accommodate and fulfil the needs for city residents. The last objective is to identify the strategy to fully utilize shophouses to accommodate for future densification of cities. This is done to prepare for the imminent population bloom of cities so that the urban growth is possible without straining of the existing land or area for future sustainability.

5. CONTRIBUTIONS AND BENEFITS OF RESEARCH.

5.1 Research Contribution

This research aims to contribute in addressing the ever-growing need for land in cities, specifically Kuala Lumpur. In the urban landscape where land scarcity is imminent, the shophouse typology exist from a past era that did not underwent any architectural advancement from the last few decades. Because of this, most city shophouses are rather demolished to build office towers and skyscrapers in favour of higher plot ratio and profitability. However, this will cause the issue of gentrification, as the newer modern development sweep away the traditional culture and neighborhood that existed for years, resulting in a loss of identity for people and city. Rather than the development choice of clean slate, this research aims to ideate the city shophouses to have new vertical growth, preserving the traditional and incorporating the modern into one typology. This research can also make the effort to return urban planning obligations that was neglected in the late 1950s due to rapid urbanism, such as green parks and community area.

Moreover, the research approach of reimagining growth does not need to necessarily apply to just city shophouses, rather any outdated existing structures that require rejuvenation. This eliminates the need of demolition, a procedure that requires a lot of time and effort as well as generating unnecessary pollution. Furthermore, the approach is metabolical, so that integration can be done in small steps, as oppose to one giant development.

5.2 Benefits of Research

Kuala Lumpur City Hall

Kuala Lumpur City Hall, or Dewanbandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) can benefit as the design criteria of this research encompasses all outdated building typologies. It can help to provide a new opportunity to amend for previous masterplan flaws for the current setting and the future. It can also help pedestrianize Kuala Lumpur by introducing a new network above the existing network.

Department of Town and Country Planning

Department of Town and Country Planning can benefit from the proposed new design model that can be integrated to all existing shophouses and shoebox buildings. This allows for creation of new vertical property in effort to combat land scarcity in cities.

Shophouse Owner

The shophouse owners benefit from owning the shophouses where new vertical property can be built. A co-proprietor of land parcels allows for income and investment as shophouse owners get an alternate way to enhance shophouses without demolition or heavy refurbishment.

City Residents

All city residents get to enjoy a new network above ground level, improving walkability, convenience and sociability. Creation of vertical lands also might reduce property value, making living in city possible without heavy funding on real estate.

6. LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

6.1 Introduction

This research contributed to understanding the present needs of a past era typology which is the shophouse. This requires community participation in the urban dimension to address the strength and shortcomings for city shophouses. However, due to the pandemic and Malaysia's lockdown status, this research proposes the use of online method as opposed to the traditional face to face method. Interview session via Zoom or Google meet might not be as engaging as a physical interview, as well as less interaction with the interviewees. For questionnaires, data collected via this method might not be as accurate as people might misunderstand the questionnaires. The responses from the online questionnaires might also be skewed as the elderly generation are

not as competent as the younger generation in term of technical gadgets, therefore the majority result can only represent the opinions of younger aged public. Another issue of inconsistency is sample size, sample statistics, significance of data/insight must be sufficient for the survey results to be meaningful. Margin of error has to be determined and estimated first.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

In future researches, the exploration of building materials and technology can look into as current building materials and technology does not conform well in this highly conceptualize study to reimagine vertical growth to shophouses without inducing a large cost for resources. Therefore, as light building materials and more efficient building technologies can be achieved, this research will surely benefit from it.

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