

Revitalizing Malay Royal Town: A Case Study in Alor Setar Kedah.

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Malaysia's Malay Royal Towns (MRTs) are the outstanding models of early Malay town development going back to the 16th century. MRTs' identity, on the other hand, remains vague today, since they are susceptible by the rise of urbanization and development. This paper aims to study what are the elements of MRT that can be utilized in order to improve the significance impact towards Alor Setar MRT. This research approaches qualitatively which accommodates literature review of previous academic research papers, visual survey, town scape appraisal and semi structured interview. The case study for this research is Alor Setar due to the fundamental factor towards the identity and character of MRT in Malaysia. According to the conclusions of this study, Malay Royal towns play a important role in the development of Malay towns in Malaysia. These towns also exhibit several townscape features that are associated with urban heritage, such as a strong sense of identity, cultural relevance, and architectural importance. The article indicates that traditional conservation methods are inadequate to preserve and retain the entire character of a Malay Royal town. In effort to preserve the uniqueness of the Malay Royal towns, which reflects both local and national identity, a new recommendation of preservation and conservation will be developed.

Keywords: Malay Royal Town, Revitalizing, Identity

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, revitalizing means to give life, activity or success to something. In the light of Malay Royal Town, this paper aims to highlight the strategy to revitalize the its significance and uplift the representation of our Malay Royal Town. The early Malay cities had a strong impact on Malay Royal towns in Malaysia, and the Malay Sultanate builds the early foundation for the urban environment that moulds the classic Malay Royal town in Malaysia. This is evident in the morphology, which includes a palace compound, government facilities, public structures, religious structures, population areas, marketplaces, and a

river that serves as a transit corridor (Shukri, 2018a).

1.1. Definitions of Malay Royal Towns

A royal town is described as a town with significant historical and cultural worth, as well as a strong linkage between community expansion and the progress of the urban environment, particularly in terms of constructed aspects s (Royal City Comprehensive Plan, 2009). Locally, the (PLANMalaysia, 2016)'s 2nd National Urbanisation Policy (NUP) report defined 'Royal Towns' as towns with unique qualities and services that fall under the 'Tourist Town' category. The notion of the Royal Town is said to

have been created in the mid-1800s to separate the authority of a local ruler from that of a colonial dictatorship. The presence of 'Royal Towns' in Malaysian towns was discovered to be poorly marketed and defined locally. As a result of the National Historical Department's efforts, more buildings connected with multi-cultural cultural traditions have been designated as heritage structures. In reality, some of the structures revealed are linked to the nine (9) historic Malay sultanates that formerly existed in contemporary Malaysia. These royal cities must be preserved since they are a tribute to the Malay Royal Institution's monarchy system's magnificence (Muslim et al., 2013). The main problems igniting this research is due to the traditional conservation methods are inadequate to preserve and retain the entire character of a Malay Royal town. This causes the Malay Royal Town to lose its identity from time to time.

1.2. Characteristic of Malay Royal Town

Research finds that there are ample numbers physical elements of Malay Royal Town setting, as well as the stated qualities that have been established, have its significant impacts. According to (Samsuddin et al., 2018), Malaysian Royal towns have a king's palace, traditional Malay townships, and defence systems. Further review done by (Shukri,2018), the elements that justify Alor Setar as a Malay Royal Town is based on these characteristics; -

- i. Istana (palace)
- ii. Kubu (fortress)
- iii. Gerbang (gateway)
- iv. Masjid (mosque)
- v. Padang (Public open area)
- vi. Pasar (Marketplace)
- vii. Sungai (River)
- viii. Kampung (Settlements)

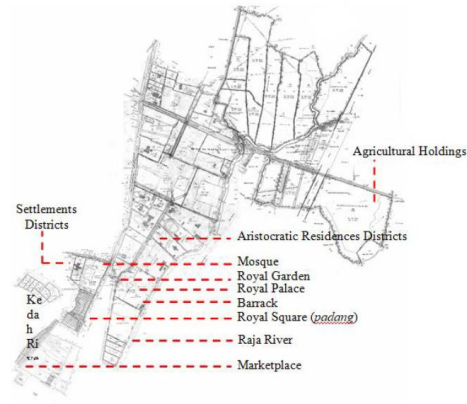


Figure 1: Old map of Alor Setar showing characteristic of Malay Royal Town
Source (Shukri M.S. et all. 2020)

1.3. Identification of Malay Royal Town

Components used to determine the identity is categorised into three broad topics based (Shamsuddin 1997) are;-

- i.the physical environment;
- ii.human behaviours and meanings;
- iii.and culture.

The physical environment, which is a component of the qualitative factors or structure of place and includes architecture, landscape, and natural environment, is the first of three parts of identity, according to (Shamsuddin,1997) and (Garnham,1985). The second category is human activity, which includes the communication between people and the built environment as well as the link between people and location. Last but not least, there are meanings and culture, which are intangible components linked to experience and experienced factors. which are the most fundamental of the identity components. These topics can be easily understand using figure below in context of Alor Setar setting.

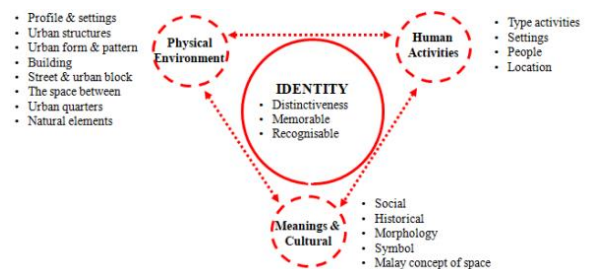


Figure 2: The relationship between all elements in distinguishing identity of Malay Royal Town
Source (Shukri M.S. et all. 2020)

1.4. Aim and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to provide an overview of the research that has been done to better understand the evolution of traditional Malay settlements regarding on its identity according to (Shukri, 2020). On the other hand, this study is to identify and describe the definition and critical issues that may be deduced as the character of Malaysia's Royal towns as part of key elements to revitalize the significance of Malay Royal Town in Alor Setar. As a result, utilising observation, mapping, and semistructured interviews, components of the physical features that build the personality of the Malay Royal towns were investigated in this research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature assessment of academic works is also conducted to elucidate the link between cultural relevance and heritage conservation. The protection and maintenance of cultural monuments has spawned a plethora of literature in the field of Malay Royal Town. The research papers is being narrowed down to focus on the case study which is Alor Setar and other relevant supporting research done by established scholars.

A Malay royal town is classified as a Malay heritage area in which the monarch and administrative buildings may be found (Harun and Jalil, 2012). Based on d (Shukri, 2018a), the Malay royal town has been identified as a historical town with a strong connection with the people, the defensive stronghold, and the king fort, which is where the monarch governing area is situated. Meanwhile, (Muslim et al., 2013) classified Malay Royal Town as an ancient capital with a high level of cultural and historical relevance, as well as the best relationship between the community and the area's urban expansion.

It is necessary to have a thorough grasp of a town's physical structure in order to relate Lynch's work on establishing the identity of a town, which includes five (5) primary categories of features that define the city's image: pathways, edges, districts, nodes, and landmarks (Lynch, 1960). The Malay Royal towns' routes may be divided into two kinds. The first are the main roads that go into and out of the town. This includes rivers, canals, and off-road routes that connect towns. The second kind of route is subsidiary or domestic routes, which are generally narrower and allow for travel inside the town (Shukri, 2018).

The importance of Malay Royal Town in Malaysia is to keep our nation's identity. A city

devoid of historic sites is like to a person who has lost his memories. Many cities have neighborhoods with historic and cultural linkages that give people a sense of place and identity. Their aesthetic and functional aspects are key parts of the city's identity and image, and they are frequently an inherent component of the city's beauty and attraction (Ayob, 2010). It is vital to identify and conserve historical Malay royal towns, since they are testimony of Malaysia's Royal Institution systems' power and magnificence a (Mohidin et al., 2012).

3. METHODOLOGY

Historic map overlay, semi-structured interviews, and site observations were used as data gathering methods to determine the features and features of Malay Royal towns. The information was then analyzed to have a full grasp of the results. The observation was carried out and recorded using two major techniques: a visual survey to examine the town's structure, and a townscape evaluation to examine the perceptual and sensory fabrics of the built environment that gives the town its identity and image. This comprises the town's physical and non-physical characteristics, as well as any nearby environment and the town's urban setting. All of this information will aid in a better understanding of the Alor Setar Malay Royal towns' major qualities. Semi-structured interviews were used in addition to site visits to provide and verify data. The information gathered during the interviews aided in the development of a more comprehensive knowledge of the physical and social aspects of Malay Royal cities. Following that, the material acquired from the interviews was filtered, transcribed, and analyzed.

4. FINDING: IDENTIFICATION OF MALAY ROYAL TOWN IN ALOR SETAR

Conferring on to the findings based on (Shukri, 2020), the Malay Royal town identity is determined by three factors listed with its subfactors:

- i. physical environment
 - a. Profile and Setting
 - b. Urban Structure
 - c. Urban Shape and Pattern
 - d. Building
 - e. Street
 - f. The Space in Between

- g. Urban Quarters
 - h. Natural Components
- ii. Social and human activities
 - a. Context
 - b. People
 - c. Place
 - d. Activities
 - iii. meaning, and culture.
 - a. Social
 - b. Historical
 - c. Morphological
 - d. Symbol

Based on these findings, there are 3 sub factor that shall be highlighted due to its significance towards the purpose of this study as findings in this research.

4.1. Morphology of Alor Setar Malay Royal Town.

In General, the urban morphological zones in Alor Setar can be conclude as core zone which houses the royal complex, middle zone for the traditional settlements and buffer zone for district and edges which consists of river and highway.



■ core zone ■ community zone ■ buffer zone

Figure 3: The summary of morphological zoning for Malay Royal Town in Alor Setar.

To support the morphological zoning diagram, a study based on (Shukri et al, 2018) which come out with a Malay territory model used to distinguish zoning for Malay Royal Town as shown in the following figures.

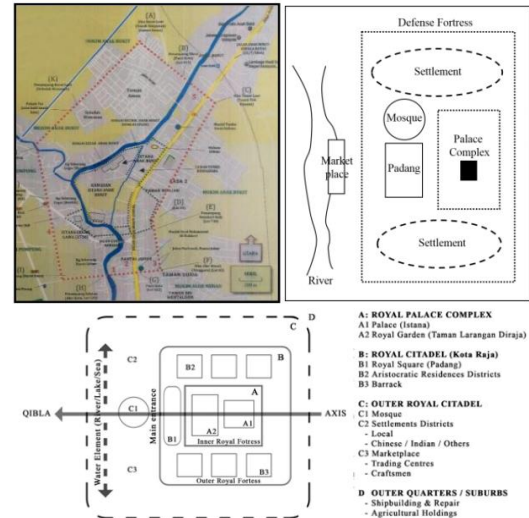


Figure 4: The summary of morphological zoning for Malay Royal Town in Alor Setar.

4.2. Human activities in Alor Setar

The behavior that are related to what is going on in the area are a component of the town center's identity. People are more likely to recall a location because of the activities that take place there. People identify two sorts of activities with a location's identity: activities that took place within a structure, such as commercial operations, and activities that took place outside on the streets, such as street vendors selling items on the side of the street. The type of the structure in which retail activities take place is critical in assisting consumers in recognizing locations, such as whether they are permanent structures or temporary structures in the form of stalls.

The role of 'padang' as a public open space in the current Alor Setar Royal town does not offers a pedestrian friendly fascility such as shaded area for the pedestrian access. These problems will result in lack of celebration and interest for the public to use as shown in figure below.



Figure 5: Showing the current conditions of existing 'padang' that has been redesigned several times.



Figure 6: Showing the previous conditions of 'padang'

4.3. Meaning and Cultural Significance of Malay Royal Town in Alor Setar

Sultan Muhammad Jiwa was the first to discover and create Alor Setar in 1735. The city was formerly a tiny village at the confluence of the Sungai Kedah and Sungai Anak Bukit (Tanjung Chali) River serves as an important port for merchants travelling to and from Kuala Sungai Kedah. City's name comes from the terms 'alor', which means river stream, and 'setar,' which comes from a tree 'pohon setar' (Bouea Macrophylla), which grows beside the village river stream. The Sultan was compelled to travel and relocate the city capital during this era of widespread antagonism between the Empire of Siam and Aceh. (Ahmad & Ibrahim, 2007)

5. DISCUSSION: IDENTITY OF MALAY ROYAL TOWN IN ALOR SETAR

5.1. Morphological and Physical Environment

Based on the findings, there is no physical border to distinguish the Malay Royal Town Zone with the neighboring modern development. The idea to separate the two different zone is to keep the identity of Malay Royal Town inside the spatial zoning as well as to create focal point

towards Malay Royal Town. It is very important as to also create a visual border that can enhance the sense of place upon entering into Malay Royal Town districts.



Figure 7: Showing current city skyline showing Masjid Zahir and Menara Alor Setar

The view from Lebuhraya Darul Aman that goes further towards the Alor Setar Tower shows that the silhouette of Malay Royal Town has been damaged by the neighbouring developments. The height of the building visible surrounding the core centre cannot be higher than Masjid Zahir's minaret as a symbol of respect towards the landmark of Malay Royal Town. By distinguishing the border between core centre and neighbouring development, it will not eliminate the focal point towards Masjid Zahir as one of the core identities of Malay Royal Town and other identities. This is a step towards creating a zoning district that separates from the modern development and at the same time promoting the core as key tourism area and promoting our Malay town urban culture.

5.2. Social Activities

As a historic place, Alor Setar will be one of the historical tourist attractions and with the social activities are not celebrated in Alor Setar, all heritage conservation work to sustain the identity of Malay Royal Town will turn into waste. Social activities are very important towards the growth of economy. For example, when Alor Setar become a major tourist attraction, obviously the economy will grow rapidly and businesses will start to grow.

Although social activities are something that we cannot predict, it is understandable to do more research on how to develop social activity in Alor Setar.



Figure 8: showing Lebuhraya Darul Aman which link Masjid Zahir complex on the left and Medan Bandar on the right.

The main problem in this figure is there is not visual connectivity towards Medan Bandar with Masjid Zahir thus will impact the social activity between these two major elements of Malay Royal Town

5.3. *Lack of Meaning and Cultural Significant exposure*

People needs to be educated on the historical buildings and places especially in Malay Royal Town. Every Malay Royal Town Element has very special historical attributes that are currently being forgotten by the local people. This issue has to be tackled straight away as soon as possible before our current generations will soon forget the importance of each heritage buildings and places.

6. RECOMMENDATION

6.1. *Creating Visual Barrier to Establish Morphological Zoning*

Early Malay kingdoms have skillfully utilised a portal (gerbang) as their emblem and landmarks since the commencement of Malay civilisation in Southeast Asia. The building of the gateway, fortress, stronghold, and trenches are all considered defensive rather than offensive. The royal gateway will be a main entry to the town and will always be guarded and protected, according to traditional Malay historiographic literature. The portals were created to serve as a symbol and entryway for the villages, as well as to secure the royal complex from the rest of the city (Aziz, 2010). This portal (gerbang) must be sturdy, and it is typically constructed of hardwoods such as cengal, meranti, and teak, as well as stones (Nasir, 2010).

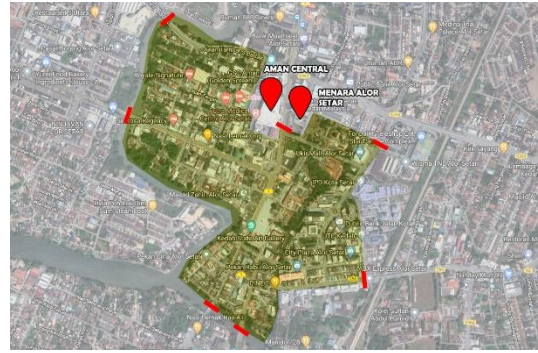


Figure 9: Shows recommended locations for Portal (gerbang)

Implementation of portals to separate the zoning and at the same time highlighting Malay royal Town is one of the recommendations to create visual barrier and at the same time to improve sense of welcoming to the town center.



Figure 10: Shows impression of integrating portal to create a visual barrier from outside

6.2. *Improving the Quality of Life in 'Padang'*

Padang serve as a distribution node for people moving to and from the important structures in the neighbourhood, as well as a link to nearby routes (Home, 2013 & Kostof 1992). Daily public activities, both formal and informal, took place in and around the padang. Formal events such as the Sultan's coronation and birthday celebrations for the general public were also conducted here. In such cases, the padang serves as the genuine municipal and town centre (Zakri, 2008 & Ariffin et al., 2007).

The approach that shall be taken into consideration to improve the social quality in Medan Bandar is to reincorporate green area such as turfing and softscape to bring back the memoir of 'padang' as one of the main Malay Royal Town characters and at the same time to invite social gathering for the people of Alor Setar.



Figure 11: Shows the previous 'padang' that needs to be reverted to and improved.

Incorporating green area in Medan Bandar will improve in terms of the quality of life as people will use it as linkages between the surrounding building in a more comfortable way. The usage of industrial pavement to replace the turfing will cause in the rise of temperature, hence people might ignore the original purpose of having 'padang'. To create visual linkages with Masjid Zahir, the archway can be reflected across the Jalan Perak as a monumental entrance showing they both shared the same importance of Malay Royal Town elements.

6.3. Redesigning the Urban Pavement to Highlight the Character of Alor S3etar Malay Royal Town

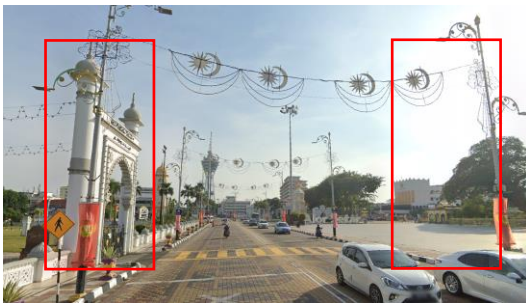


Figure 12: showing the archway entrance of Masjid Zahir

Based on figure 12 there is no visual connection and linkages except the normal pedestrian crossing between Masjid Zahir and Medan Bandar. Therefore one of the recommendations to improve visual linkages is to propose an archway with the same design element as Masjid Zahir's as an entrance towards Medan Bandar. This will promote the social activity from Masjid Zahir and Medan Bandar thus creating a clearer connectivity between the two iconic places.

Effective design for pedestrian walkway is found through the correct realization of behavioural features, as well as necessities and characteristics of pedestrian, who can be more intricate with safety planning and understanding countless resolutions as a result of invigorated use of pavements and better safety of existing possibilities. The crucial factors are functional pedestrian path, as well as the accessories that are safe to use on it. Pedestrian walkway shall be convenient for the people with disabilities as well as non-obstructing towards the traffic (Zegir,2006).

7. CONCLUSION

Malay Royal towns are the finest evolution examples, with strong characteristics, identities, and historical significance, yet they are still unclear and constantly threatened by blistering change caused by rapid industrialization, economic development, and urban development, which are worthy of protection.

They get their identity and image from a mixture of traditional structures, locations, and cultural activities. In the historical and morphology of Malay Royal Towns, the urban shape and environment of these royal towns has played a key role. The historic aspects of historical buildings, structures, shape, context, surrounding environment, and human activities are all vital aspects.

The Malay Royal towns' diversity of character, as well as their architectural elements, urban structures, and cultural diversity, make them distinctive and deserving of preservation. The research also indicates that the preservation and protection of cultural and physical features is an important feature of a Malay royal town's urban conservation strategy. As a result, it is critical that a set of criteria be established to govern the documenting and preservation of this cultural property. The outcomes of this study are also expected to help shape a comprehensive strategy for saving the royal Malay town from extinction. Preservation and protection of these ancient monuments will provide variation to the city's image and character while also preventing the decline of Malay royal towns (Adam, 2016).

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