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# **Designing for Homeless in Kuala Lumpur: Concepts and Case Studies**

### Nadiyah Noor Hisham<sup>1\*</sup>, Noor Dina Md Amin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Architecture, Faculty of Civil Engineering and Built Environment, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia, 86400 Parit Raja, Johor, MALAYSIA

\*Corresponding Author

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**Abstract:** Homelessness issue in Kuala Lumpur has no permanent solution. There are current needs to provide definite helps and solutions. This paper aims to identify and explore the concepts and ideas in providing shelter for the homeless in Kuala Lumpur. A qualitative and conventional content analysis of narrative data is implemented to achieve the research aim. Series of case studies explains the concepts and ideas that may be implemented as part of the possible solutions in providing shelter for the homeless in Kuala Lumpur. This study will hopefully provide significant finding that may be applied towards designing a proper basic community shelter for the homeless in Kuala Lumpur.

**Keywords:** Design for homeless, qualitative study, Kuala Lumpur

#### 1. Introduction

In Kuala Lumpur, the presence of the homeless has become more visible over the years and has raised concern over the effort to rejuvenate the city of Kuala Lumpur [1]. The Kuala Lumpur City Council revealed that as of February 2016, there are around 1,500 to 2,000 homeless people in Kuala Lumpur alone [1], [2]. In Malaysia, there is no definite policy to cater to the affairs of the homeless. Homelessness in Malaysia has no official definition and has been lumped under the duty mandate of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development [3].

The current act that governs the issue of homelessness is the 1977 Destitute Persons Act. The act is "to provide for the care and rehabilitation of destitute persons and the control of vagrancy" (Bomb-KL, 2014). The act has not been reviewed since 1977. However, there few studies disagreed with the implementation of the act for the homelessness issues in Malaysia [4]. Under the jurisdiction of DPA, there is no definite solution for homelessness as homeless people will be categorised as vagrants. Under the same act, the government has implemented several initiatives to provide shelters that includes several self-help programs for the homeless such as Anjung Singgah, Pusat Transit Gelandangan Kuala Lumpur, and Desa Bina Diri [4]. Still, homelessness in Malaysia has no permanent solution and may be defined as not having proper shelter or private space for daily activities such as sleeping, living, and washing [5]. With the uncertainties in the issues of homelessness in Kuala Lumpur, there is a void that may be filled with more studies and research to fulfil the basic needs of the homeless in Kuala Lumpur.

The homeless in Malaysia has been identified as the 'Gelandangan,' which may translate as 'tramp,' which implies vagrancy [6]. The homeless do not prefer the term and have asked to be called 'Street Friend' [1]. This has somehow shown the understatement toward the homeless in Malaysia. It is known that some of the homeless in Kuala Lumpur have been sent to the Desa Bina Diri rehabilitation center under the enforcement of the Destitute Person's Act 1977, which defined them as beggars and vagrants [5]. Due to the undefined terms of homelessness in Malaysia, it is hard to draft any specific policy to address homeless affairs in Kuala Lumpur. In order to provide solutions to homelessness in Kuala Lumpur, the roots need to be identified, and the solutions must be humanistic. However, the number of homeless people in Kuala Lumpur is not decreasing. Therefore, policymakers must provide long-term or permanent shelters to

eradicate homelessness in Kuala Lumpur [7]. The homeless needs shelter, love, and understanding. Every human being deserves to live a good life, and everyone deserves at least a proper basic living shelter.

There are numerous efforts and policies to eradicate homelessness globally. From government and non-government organisations to philanthropists and youngsters with good hearts, all came in with ideas, concepts, and exertions to reduce homelessness. These noteworthy generous people who earn less-generous pay or nothing in return work out to integrate themselves within the community of homeless people for better understanding to search for the best solution. The kind acts and idea concepts in the effort to provide possible humanistic shelter for the homeless may be taken into consideration when designing for the homeless, and this study will look into some of the concept and case studies that may be applied towards designing a proper basic community shelter for the homeless in Kuala Lumpur.

#### 2. Methodology

Case study is an ideal way of designing research that seeks a holistic and in-depth investigation that is bound in a particular context [8]. Case study has been well implemented in relation to find the possible concept in providing shelter for the homeless [3]- [5]. A conventional content analysis of narrative data is implemented in this study along with five series of case study were compiled to provide insights to the researchers in exploring, understanding and investigating the appropriate design concept suitable for providing shelter for the homeless in the context of Kuala Lumpur.

#### 3. Case Study Findings

### 3.1 Case Study 1: The Food Not Bomb Movement and the Concept of Edible Community Garden

Food Not Bombs is a global movement that started in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the United States, in 1980. The movement has developed into hundreds of international chapters throughout America, Europe, Australia, and Asia [9]. The Food Not Bombs movement is generated by an all-volunteer group of people serving free vegan food to others. This movement demonstrates a form of franchise activism carried out by specific independent individuals in different places but still using the idea and the exact name of Food Not Bombs. They share vegan food with everyone in public places, and this concept is a protest against starvation, war, poverty, and homelessness [10]. Food is served in public places as a form of protest against poverty. The idea is to make poverty visible and resist shame among the poor and the homeless. Due to the visibility, Food Not Bombs has always been defied and opposed by the authorities and police. According to Keith McHenry, one of its founders, the reason behind such harassment is because the authorities themselves are unable to deal with the social and political crisis that causes homelessness and urban poverty [11].

In Malaysia, The Food Not Bombs Kuala Lumpur (FNBKL) chapter was founded in 2001 by a group of young people from the punk rock music scenes. Every Sunday, early morning, they will go to the nearby markets to get surplus vegetables to be prepared later in Rumah Api, formerly known as Gudang Noisy in Kuala Lumpur. Around 1 in the afternoon, they will start cooking dishes and prepare all the necessary food for the evening serving. Around 5 p.m, they start serving at Jalan Hang Lekiu, Kuala Lumpur. The FNBKL only provides food on Sunday evenings since the volunteers have other personal commitments on other days. The meals prepared may feed between 50 to 100 persons each time. Some of the time, the FNBKL would encourage the homeless to help with meal preparation [12].

There are three critical elements in order to collect the food fit to be eaten to feed people. To begin with, the volunteers will recover leftover vegetable from the local markets, grocery stores, bakeries and sometimes even dumpsters, which is still in good edible condition. Then, they will prepare and cook fresh hot vegetarian meals so that it is appropriate for consumption and finally, the meals will be served to the homeless and the hungry in public spaces. The group has even provided meals at rallies, protests, etc. [10]. Furthermore, this is what the Food Not Bomb movement is doing, feeding the hungry with edible, safe, and recycled foodstuff and vegetables collected from the market and other commercial outlets around town. The food is not just leftover. It is an edible leftover.

Putting aside the Food Not Bombs ideology, the whole concept behind the preparation and distribution of healthy meals to the homeless may be looking at how they collect the surplus vegetable from the local markets and grocery stores. The whole idea is encapsulated in the possibility of considering the concept of an edible community garden when designing for the homeless. Vegetables may be obtained from their garden, and they may prepare the meals together as a community. There is a direct relation between homelessness and food insecurity, especially among homeless families headed by single mothers with children [13]. With this concept, somehow will be able to provide the homeless with both shelter and food. In other way, gardening activities are a simple and economical approach to provide for mental health wellness. The activities include exercise, gardening skills, and supportive conditions within the homeless community [14].





Fig. 1 - Food Not Bomb Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (a) serving food to the poor in Bukit Nanas, Kuala Lumpur, and; (b) preparation before cooking

#### 3.2 Case Study 2: The Mad Housers and the Concept of Modular Shelter Unit

Escape homelessness. The Mad Housers believes that helping the homeless by providing them secure shelter will help them help themselves. The Mad Housers is a voluntary non-profit organisation based in Atlanta, United States, building temporary emergency shelters for the homeless. Unlike Habitat for Humanity which requires its dwellers to help in the construction process, the Mad Housers will build the huts for their clients free of charge and without obligation [15].

The Mad Housers was founded by Michael Connor and Brian Finkle in 1987. During that time, they were still studying Architecture at the Georgia Institute of Technology. They built their first hut, which measured for only 6 feet by 8 feet by 6 feet, made of a plywood box containing only a bed and shelves. Later, they built another hut and left it at a particular site. After two days, a homeless man appropriated the hut as his home. This led the group to more comprehensive proceedings. They chose their clients, ensuring they wanted huts, and started choosing materials that suited their budget and efficiencies. To date, they have built more than 70 shelters in a dozen camps around Atlanta alone [16]. The huts they build these days measure at 6 feet wide, 8 feet deep, and 10 feet tall with a loft for sleeping and keeping belongings, including a wood-burning stove for heating and cooking purposes which is self-built by the volunteers and a door with a lock for security reason. Materials used for the hut are usually donated or sourced from recycled bits and pieces that can be easily found. Each hut costs around \$700-\$1200. The blueprint drawings provided on their website explain how to erect and build the parts in a modular system to be easily transported and assembled.

The hut is a temporary shelter built for the homeless. Several of their clients have then moved to a better housing program such as low-cost housing, apartments, or family home. The hut is being considered as a tool for the homeless to begin a better life. The Mad Housers see several reasons why these homeless chose to live in their huts. The shelter homes around Atlanta are usually fully occupied with short-term residency duration, and they cannot have their privacy and secure their belongings. Moreover, the Mad Housers gives the homeless shelter, security, privacy, and self-esteem [15]. The Mad Housers ideology has shown how helping the homeless out of homelessness by providing simple shelter may help them to be able to fix and restarts their own lives. It is possible to build just simple huts that may occupy the needs of housings. The Mad Housers works with volunteers and donated material by surrounding communities. This has also shown how the strong bonds and willingness to help others within the same community will help reduce homelessness.



Fig. 2 - Constructing roof [17]

# 3.3 Study Case 3: Khuda-Ki-Basti Incremental Development Scheme, Hyderabad, Pakistan and the Concept of Self-Built housing

Creating communities of their own. That is the cliché for this entire project. The project allows the very poor and the homeless the right and pride of ownership. The project is sited in Hyderabad, Pakistan, a city with over 1.4 million populations. The site is about 170 km from the central city and stretches over 5,500 acres, separated into 52 sectors. Khuda-Ki-Basti or Allah's settlement is an incremental development scheme and is one of the 52 sectors specially prepared only for low-income householders. The scheme is part of a bigger scheme named the Gulshan-E-Shahbaz.

In contrast to the concept of modern development schemes, where the developer will develop the land with infrastructure and build houses to be sold to buyers, the incremental development scheme allocates land to the occupants who will then take charge of developing their own land with housing and infrastructure. Basically, the first step is to identify the users. The Hyderabad Development Authority (HDA) identifies the very poor and the homeless through a screening process. Only those who are compliant to this statute will be chosen. They arrive at the site with everything they own and will stay at the reception area for two weeks in a permanent shelter. After paying 1000 rupees, the families are brought to their own plot where they erect their own tent as a temporary shelter. The overall cost of one lot is 9,600 rupees equivalent to 50 USD which is paid as monthly instalments by the owner over an 8-year agreement. The houses are self-financed by the owner according to what and how they want their houses to be. After two weeks of obtaining the plot, they must start building their house or else the agreement will be cancelled. They can design, construct, and use any material according to their own style and budget [18].

The first structures are usually sheds made of cardboard, wood, or other easily found materials. These are then slowly improved to more permanent houses built with bricks and concrete with metal or asbestos roofing. Septic tanks are provided for every four houses that link to pumping stations. Electricity and individual water piping are provided to the area [19]. Khuda-Ki-Basti is not just a housing project. There are also education and health facilities and public transportation located within the development. What makes it different from any other slum or squatter settlement is that it is a planned development with permanent ownership and adequate utilities. The houses are constantly being built, renovated, enlarged, beautified, and repaired through time.



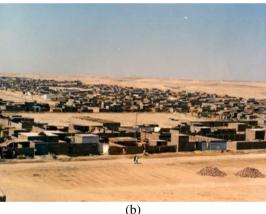


Fig. 3 - (a) Site before development, and; (b) overall view of the site [20]

### 3.4 Case Study 4: The SHARE and WHEEL and the Concept of Homeless Community Self-Managed Shelter

SHARE is the Seattle Housing and Resource Effort while WHEEL is the organisation sister to SHARE, and stands for the Women's Housing, Equality and Enhancement League that is intended for women only. SHARE was founded in 1990 with a vision of helping homeless people get their rights heard. WHEEL was founded in 1993, as an organisation that serves homeless women by educating them and others in order to encourage their empowerment and dignity.

Both SHARE and WHEEL are self-managed shelters in Seattle, United States, organised by the homeless for the homeless. It is a centre where the homeless can lookout for, protect each other and help each other in recovering from homelessness. According to Riva & Rosen [21], the homeless are the ones who understand the issues of homelessness more than others in that they are the people who know what is going on from the root level [21]. The homeless help each other in providing needs and ensure the safety of the community. Members are expected to join in and leave at certain designated times and participate in meetings where discussions on problems and decisions are made. A chairperson is appointed fortnightly and represents the shelter in weekly 'power lunches', a meeting held in an abandoned warehouse basement [21]. These self-managed shelters give opportunities for the homeless to communicate within their own community to create better understand on the problems of homelessness and its recovery.

Both organisations which are non-profit organisations sponsored and managed the self-managed Tent Cities to provide safe shelter for homeless communities up to at least 100 men and women in Seattle. Tent City 3 was on track in 2000 was their first homeless community located in Haller Lake United Methodist Church in the city of Seattle. It operates under a strict code of conduct and will remain at its current site till March 27, 2010. Tent City 4 is their second effort of homeless community which started in 2004 and situated in 205 Mountain Park Blvd, King County and will remain there till end of April 2010.



Fig. 4 - Above view of the Tent City [22]

# 3.5 Case Study 5: Pedestrian Village for the Homeless and the Concept of Homeless Community Village

Michael E. Arth is an urban designer who brainstormed the idea of Pedestrianism. Pedestrianism is an idea where a neighbourhood build with pedestrian lane aligned with trees along the streets as its obverse road. The main mission is to reduce the usage of automobiles thus creating a scheme which incorporates issues of health, economic, energy and environmental problems. Automobile accesses are design at the rear side of every house. This concept is also called the Pedestrian Village.

The idea of a pedestrian village for the homeless has been derived from the basic concept of pedestrianism. It is sited at Tiger Bay Village in Daytona Beach, Florida, United States. The village provides for the homeless, where they can have their own shelter in a better suited environment. It is a village where there is assistance for recovery, and a place that concentrates all services and amenities needed to specifically address their problems [23]. The village acts as a buffer and creates another world where the homeless can interact between themselves. There are areas for residences, banks and shops, a jail for offenders, and factories or workshops where they can find jobs enabling financial help [as cited in [24]. The idea is to help provide shelter within a community where the homeless can seek help as a recovery step. It is a village that provides housing and all the essential facilities and social services within one location.

The village is ideal for every level of homeless people; let it be the sex offenders who have nowhere else to go, the drug addicts or the alcoholics homeless. There is an existing drug and alcohol abuse rehabilitation centre nearby and this will be the first stop for the homeless as screening test. Those who are chronic and problematic will be placed at the North side of the village and the more responsible residents will be placed in the South side. Once the problematic homeless have recovered, they will be placed to the South side and vice versa. The South side is practically being accommodated with swimming lagoons, better housing, amenities and food [24].

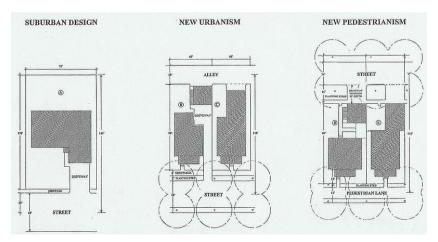


Fig. 5 - Layouts comparison of the new pedestrianism with suburban design and new urbanism [25]

Tiger Bay Village is sited near numbers of existing amenities making it easily accessible and not secluded from the real world. It is centralised by a lake and surrounded by greenbelt as buffer zone with different types of housings, from sharing unit apartments to individual cottages. To date, the concept of Tiger Bay Village is just merely an idea. A lot of efforts and co-operations needed to make it real. The whole idea is an attempt on reducing homelessness, help in recovering the state of homelessness, rather than keeping them at bay without giving them help as everyone deserve a good life.

#### 4. Discussions of Findings

#### 4.1 Concept and Definition of Homeless Shelter

Findings from the five series of case study related to designing for the homeless were emphasise on three major concepts: community. village. home. A community of homeless in a village where they may call home. Placing the homeless in a community helps the homeless in adapting to the social life of homelessness with extra help in motivation as recovery effort. They can socialise well among them, learn from each other, motivating and uplifting spirits and protect themselves. The idea has been proved to be worked quite well by The SHARE and WHEEL are self-managed shelters in Seattle, United States. The self-managed (which is managed by the homeless for the homeless) will give them a better communication and understanding of the homelessness problems. Table 1 summarise these concepts.

Table 1 - Concept, definition and understanding of community, village and home

Concept	Definition	Remarks
Community	All the people who live in a particular area. A group of people who share the same religion, race, job. 3. The feeling of sharing things and belonging to a group in the place where you live [26].	'Homeless within a community of homeless people' sounds rather helpless for a homelessness recovery scheme. But the idea is supposed to work as a helping machine in reducing the numbers of homelessness. How can the scheme work?
Village	Very small town in a country area [26].	A community of homeless people living together, building a whole new settlement in urban Kuala Lumpur. The concept extracts from the concept of a 'village' whereby it is self-build by the homeless but with authorisation from the government.
Home	The house that you live in especially with your family [26].	The idea is to allow these homeless to self-build their own shelter where they can call HOME. And this HOME will be within a whole new settlement in one community of homeless people.

The scheme works around the idea of developing a settlement for the homeless within the area of central urban Kuala Lumpur. The ability of building their own self build housing by the poor in previous case study on Khuda-Ki Basti presents the idea of a settlement reside by these homeless where the shelters are being built by themselves. Self-build shelters are economical as there are no main contractor involvements. Thus, this will at least save up the cost for building Homeless Village. It has been said that these builders have greater initiative in building this settlement compared to universal builder whereby they devise their own plans and design plus they used material which are much suited to local lifestyle and economy. This whole scheme can even be a government aided homeless centre where the government controlled the whole development so that we can contain the inclined numbers of homeless in Malaysia.

#### 4.2 Would This Idea Reduce the Rate of Homelessness in Urban Kuala Lumpur?

Placing this settlement in central Kuala Lumpur will create numerous disagreements and criticisms from the government itself and also urbanite communities surrounding Kuala Lumpur. But homelessness is a crucial problem where the government and local communities are unaware of. The implementation of Anjung Singgah, Pusat Gelandangan Kuala Lumpur and Desa Bina Diri shows the government has initiated programs to help eradicate the issue of homelessness. This effort reflects that Malaysia realise the visibilities of homeless communities. However, more studies are required as this is only the beginning of recovering steps for homelessness. Thus, the idea of homeless village for the homeless will at least reduces the rate of homelessness in urban Kuala Lumpur and this has been agreed via the steps taken by Malaysia government recently.

# 4.3 What Are the Consequences of This Proposal for the Homeless in Creating a Better Living Standard?

This question has risen up on the query of the scheme compatibility to be applied in Kuala Lumpur. The scheme is being planned as a protection for the wellbeing of the homeless in Kuala Lumpur. Thus, it is not just a recovering centre or a common shelter for the homeless. This planned settlement for the homeless offers amenities within its compound such as shops, community halls, health centre, workshops and the most important element, shelter. It is in other word, a village. This village offers recovery, protection, friendship, shelter and job opportunities.

With all the good words promised, there are doubts on whether this proposal will encourage further growth on the rate of homelessness in Kuala Lumpur. Therefore, as what the developer for Khuba Ki-Basti done before the selection of its habitant, screening session needs to be carried out. Only eligible candidates will be chosen and prize with a plot for self-build shelter. The screening will be looking at the possibility on monthly income, personal background, health condition and the search of family members to ensure the novelty of their homeless status.

Another qualm for the realisation of this proposal is the siting of the development. Nowadays, Kuala Lumpur is rapidly developed, creating massive urban expansion. As a result, land prices within central Kuala Lumpur are really high. This can only be allowed for prestigious projects which will contribute financially to the country or individual parties who can afford the high land price. Hence, is it appropriate for a development of homeless village to be sited in central urban Kuala Lumpur? Homelessness in Kuala Lumpur is critical. The price of having a place for the recovery of homelessness is priceless. By having reduced the rate of homelessness can ensure economic stability and this will attract more investors to invest in Malaysia. This will help the country in gaining positive image globally and at the same time stabilised Malaysia fiscal.

# 4.4 What Are Appropriate Methods or Design Criteria in Building Living Spaces for This Community, or Village, for The Homeless in Urban Kuala Lumpur?

The key element for this scheme is the site. Where is the most suitable site to build homeless village for the homeless? As homelessness is an urban phenomenon, to address this crisis is to create space for them within urban area itself. The homeless are urbanites and this crisis occurs due to urbanisation. By sending them to out of nowhere or secluded area in the country would not help in recovering. They will keep on coming back to the city after being release. Why? Because a city will give them the opportunity to live. Finding jobs and other opportunities are easier in the city.

#### 4.4.1 Food

The Food Not Bombs gives an illustrative concept of free self-cooked food. Surplus vegetables can be obtained from nearby wet market. Surplus vegetables are free and easy to get from any market that sells vegetable. These vegetables will then cook by the homeless community themselves. It is a way of promoting cooperation among the homeless and the idea of sharing. The food will be free to be distributed to all and this way will fight hunger due to homelessness. In a way, the concept reduces food wastage as "Food Is Enough for Everyone".

#### 4.4.2 Modular Design

Each shelter in the homeless village is in module units. As the shelters are self-build, the designer will create module units that come in as standard size columns, wall systems and roof systems. These module units will be assembled by the residents according to their design. Each lot will be marked equally and provided with the construction items and material. This idea will at least help them by providing safe construction method with variety of design options.

#### 4.4.3 Site Zoning

The master layout for the whole development will have a central area acts as communal area for socialising. This area will give an impression as mean of communications among the residents. The communal area can be a place for motivational talks, parties or just as a gathering spot. The shelters will be surrounding this communal area. The idea is to provide cooperation and a friendly neighbourhood environment. Other amenities such as the health centre, workshops and shops will be located to other zone next to main road for easy access for the public and the residents. The village is not a detention centre for the homeless. It is a place for shelter but with the added value of owning a shelter whereby the word itself has change the meaning of "homeless".

How do we launch this idea or concept? Overall, the existence of homelessness crisis in Kuala Lumpur needs to be responsive among all urbanites and the government. Understanding and explanation of the problem, the causes on why it happens and how to address it is what needs to be done in firsthand. The importance of having homeless shelter within urban fabric of Kuala Lumpur must be aware by all. This can be done by having awareness campaign or exhibitions on homelessness. Mass media such as newspapers, magazines or any television shows should take part of

the awareness campaign as to promote the existence of homelessness in Kuala Lumpur. As the most important part of the development is funding, understanding on the crisis is very much needed to avoid public criticisms.

As government initiated Desa Bina Diri in Jerantut and Mersing, a homeless village is much more reliable. The Desa Bina Diri works as welfare centre and situated in secluded areas of Pahang and Johor. The concept is there but a homeless village in urban Kuala Lumpur will provide better environment, recovery plans and opportunities as the scheme developed from the idea of providing out shelters to the homeless and each one of us have our own right to live, to have shelter and to have proper food to consume. This scheme can be part of Desa Bina Diri programs. It works as motivational centre but also as shelter provider. Is it permanent? The scheme plans out opportunities including job opportunities. Thus, human life will be upgraded once they are able. From homeless to living in a small hut then to a low cost flat, apartment, terrace house and so on. There will be no duration and the homeless can stay if they want to. Even though homelessness is an ongoing phenomenon; it is still under control if we know how to contain the issue.

#### 5. Conclusion

Homelessness is a phenomenon. It has been existed in Malaysia from early 1900s. There are ways of handling or solving the crisis. But is it the best way? Does it work? Ideas and concepts have been thrown out by the idealists on how to resolve homelessness. It is impossible to recover homelessness. Then, at least we can try to contain the problem from sprawling and destroy Malaysia's positive image. This paper wraps in the ideas and concepts of Homeless Village in urban Kuala Lumpur. Mainly, it is still ideas which probably have the opportunity of realising it if we ever realise the importance of recovering homelessness.

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