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# The Roles of Cultural Spaces in Malaysia's Historic Towns: The case of Kuala Dungun and Taiping

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**Abstract**

Cultural space constitutes the physical, cultural and perceptual attributes of a place that creates social phenomenon and place meaning. Nevertheless, cultural spaces in Malaysia's historic town were facing alteration which resulted to place declining and placelessness. Thus, this paper discusses the roles of cultural spaces that characterised the historic town's identity of Kuala Dungun and Taiping. A case study method was conducted involving site observation and questionnaire survey to collect residents' cultural experiences. Results indicated that cultural spaces generated from routine activity, sociocultural and economic vitality contributed to identity of the historic towns.

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## 1. Introduction

Virtually, culture is the necessities of people life constantly practiced by community since past, in present and towards future (Orbasli, 2000). A culture is described as a group of people engage to the way of life inclusion thoughts and behaviour; values; beliefs; rules of conduct; political organisation; and economic activity to convey from one generation to another via learning process (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952; Young, 1994; Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008). In late 1980s, culturally led urban

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development began as a theoretical in urban planning field (Boogarts, 1990; Griffiths, 1991; Montgomery, 1990 and 2003). In accordance to the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Glossary, cultural space delineated as "a physical or symbolic space for people meet to enact, share or exchange social practices or idea" (Zanten, 2002:4). Tuan (1980) elucidates culture is one of the attributes to devote the significance of a place. Therefore, culture is an important element to create an identity, a place as well as to regeneration an urban space through the physical development, economic vitality and social liveliness (Wansborough and Mageean, 2000).

In Malaysia, cultural attributes to form a historic town are generated by the physical, social activities, psychological and behaviour characteristics (Ahmad Basri and Shuhana, 2008). The five heritage cities including Melaka, Georgetown, Kota Bahru, Ipoh and Taiping possessed significant architectural styles and town planning. They remain as administration centres and commercial hubs with multiculturalism and religious districts (Mohamed et al., 2001). For instance, Kota Bharu in the state of Kelantan has underpinned by the trading activities and cultural values. It has declared itself as *Kota Budaya* or cultural city in 1991 due to its distinctive image and traditional identity such as Bazaar Buluh Kubu (Ahmad, 1998; Mohamed et al., 2001; Shuhana and Basri, 2008). Likewise, Melaka city and Georgetown in Penang are honoured as World Heritage sites by UNESCO because of their prominent historical cultural spaces. These cities are sustained by tangible and intangible factors comprise of multicultural trading, unique architecture including religious building, festival, food and local lifestyle. Both cities were nominated as the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for the multicultural inheritances and local customs (World Heritage Convention, 2008). Apart from buildings, cultural spaces characterised the heritage city landscape. The spaces such as market, jetty, and corridor along shop-houses are where the locals conduct their routine activities.

Like buildings, cultural spaces in historic towns or cities should be conserved according the Burra Charter (ICOMOS, 1999). In fact, Fielden (1994) and Adenirah (2011) advocated that conservation is the only method to protect the cultural significant to avoid deterioration on the living cultural and local heritage. Certainly, Tiesdell et al. (1996) denote that conservation is essential to attain cultural memories and heritage, economic, and commercial value (taken from Adeniran and Akinlabi, 2011). Henceforth, cultural factor has contemplated in today sustainable development stated by Nadarajah and Yamamoto (2007). The sustainable approach stands to protect "historic place, architecture and cultural significance" which are including the cultural heritage conservation within historic settings and nature environment besides social and economic issues (Shuhana, 2011:156). In other words, the cultural heritage enables to attain the sustainable urban development subsequently to enhance quality of life (Tweed and Sutherland, 2007).

Though there are many preceding studies (e.g.: Whyte, 1980; Carmona et al., 2003; Lang, 2005; Carmona, 2010; Golicnik, 2009) had reviewed the importance of urban spaces, public spaces and cultural studies to advocate the theoretical studies of most researches. Somehow, the divergences of European urban case studies in term of historical background, urban fabric, sociocultural contextual, urban space or public space utilisation and also people perception induced to justify the research gap in this paper. Most scholars like Shuhana and Norsidah (2008); Norsidah (2010); Wan Hashimah (2010); Ja'afar, Sulaiman and Shamsuddin (2012) have accomplished their researches related to users' place attachment; perceptual of shopping; and landscape feature that influenced to the traditional street in Malaysia. On the other hand, there is inadequate study focusing on the cultural spaces in Malaysia's historic town. Hence, the aim of this paper is to examine the roles of cultural space in Malaysia's historic towns. This study also initiates by the objectives to verify the types of cultural spaces and attributes influencing the roles of cultural space in characterising the identity of a place.

## 1.1. Problem statement

In overviews, many countries have undertaken cultural heritage tourism redevelopment to increase local economic entrepreneurship (Wansborough and Mageean, 2000; Yuen, 2006). Griffiths (1993) interprets culture values not merely disclosed to human's lifestyle, but it was partly to advocate economic regeneration to sustain new cultural facilities for societies (cited in Wansborough, 2000). Indeed, the World Heritage Committee (UNESCO) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) has established to protect, conserve and restore the tangible and intangible culture inheritances (Ahmad, 2006). As aforesaid above, it can be seen that culture is essential on heritage conservation especially in urban historic site. For that reason, the most concern urban conservation issue on cultural space declining is imperative to be discussed in this paper.

Shuhana and Norsidah (2008) criticise the problem of local identity declining and incompatible development underwent in Malaysia historic districts have decayed the place characteristics. Wherein, the impact of new development such as new commercial buildings have replaced the existing traditional shophouses and eventually destroyed the local traditional street and some of the significant cultural open spaces (Shuhana and Basri 2002 and Norsidah 2008). Wan Hashimah (2010) also strengthens the prompted issue of modern buildings encroachment have replaced many traditional shophouses in Melaka and Penang. Besides, Ismail and Nor Zalina (2010) also highlighted the Padang Pahlawan in Melaka City has transformed into new commercial buildings caused to the decreasing unique character of historical public space in the earlier days. The unremitting problems on new developments intrusion have subsequently changed people perceptions and gradually turn-down the genuine identity and local sense of place (JPBD, 2006; Shuhana and Norsidah, 2008; Ismail and Nor Zalina, 2010; Norsidah, 2010). Hence, Relph (1976) explicated that the abating of a place's significant or the loss of identity namely placelessness.

Seemingly, Kuala Dungun and Taiping encountered the same problem on the declining of place characteristics or placelessness where the dramatic changes to the replacing traditional buildings and diminishing of place meanings. On the whole, the cultural space conservation in the historic town is vitality to be maintained as a living heritage for future generation. Thus, the designed for people to deliberate and reconsider culture sustainability is to heighten the historic town conservation. It is because merely local traditional town was being the role model "for urban planning and design which are more sustainable and function effectively that allow cultural values existence in that communal place" (Bashri and Shuhana, 2008:20).

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Culture and the roles of cultural spaces

The literature review with begin to discuss the meaning of the culture and cultural spaces. In general, culture is the most complex word in the English Language conveyed by William (1983) (cited in Richards, 2001). The definition of culture meant what people think, to perform and also composed of a process related to people way of life in the form of buildings, artefacts, art, customs, atmosphere and cultural (Littrell, 1997 and Richards, 2001). Montgomery (2003) describes culture is predominantly an imperative aspect to create urban public realm seeing like: spaces, streets, and squares in creating a city's identity. Concisely, Ferdous and Nilufar (2008) stated that cultural space referent to an urban spatial associated with people activities, behavior (or perception), space prototypes and the surrounding characteristics (illustrated in Fig. 1). Besides, they also highlighted cultural space has a strong implication tied to people's way of life. Cultural space is the collective of the phenomenon and a communal space to

conduct a variety of activities. A cultural space also interpretated as allied to people behavioural and psychological spaces (Rapoport, 1977:14 cited in Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008).

```
            MAN  ←———————————→  SPACES
     Perception of    CULTURAL    Physical entity
     his/her entity    SPACES       of place

                      CULTURE
                     Personal
                  interpretation of
                      material
```
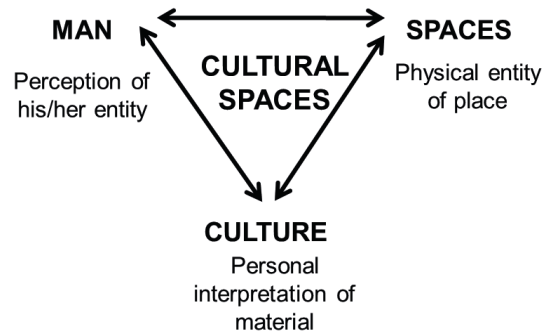
Fig. 1. The correlation of man, space and culture indicates formation of cultural space
Source: Ferdous and Nilufar (2008)

As deliberated by Ferdous and Nilufar (2008), their previous study inscribed that people utilised the urban space or open space considered as a cultural space. In general, the characters of cultural space were alike with the urban space constituted of the social factor, spatiality, physical aspect, neighbourhood dimension and human perceptions (Ibid.). The similarities of the physical characteristics and cultural space meanings can be justified in the urban space lexicon. Hence, urban spaces comprehended as a cultural space whereby people gathered to gain the social space experiences. The typologies cultural spaces are social space, neighbourhood space (known as found spaces or everyday spaces by Carr et al., 1992); human space; community space and existential space (recognised as lived space by Relph, 1976) (Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008).

In Gehl (1971) standpoints, one or more than two people participate, movement, and interaction within a communal space recognised as social activities. These social activities occurred when necessary and optional activity occurred in the urban spaces or public spaces (e.g.: children play, people meeting, greeting, conservation, communal activity, and passive interaction) (Gehl, 1971; Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007). Simultaneously, Ramezani, Zul Azri and Idid (2009) stated 'daily lifestyle' has created the powerful influences to the public space utilisation. Eventually, Dumericher and Kolb (2008) also emphasised the presence of the daily routines spaces conveyed to the enhancement of communal life in the society (cited in Ramezani, Zul Azri and Idid, 2009).

Literally, cultural spaces in Malaysia analogue to the urban space prototypes for daily practices. The cultural spaces in Malaysia derived from trading and sociocultural activities conducted in Petaling shopping street; Kota Bharu marketplace; night market and hawker stall at Melaka streets, and compound of worship (Ahmad Bashri and Shuhana, 2008). People integrated with the traditional street, marketplace and religious compound or a cultural space to perform their social activities like shopping, merchandise, social gathering, celebrates religious event, festival, funeral and wedding.

The traditional streets or cultural spaces played the role to generate an identity and economic values to such place (Shuhana, Ahmad Basri, Norhaslina and Maslyana, 2004 cited in Shuhana & Norsidah, 2008). Besides, other important cultural spaces in Malaysia composited of the open spaces (park and pocket space), square (Medan), esplanade (Padang), waterfront, street (five footway), marketplaces, transportation centre and shopping (Shuhana, 2011). Esplanade and green spaces in a small town Malaysia functioned as a public space for the physical and recreational activities (Mazlina, 2009). In sum, the roles of cultural spaces symbolised a place characteristic where people perceived the cultural

phenomenon when associated to the urban space. In all, the significance of culture spaces, sociocultural and economic activities have formed the place meaning and sense of belonging to users.

### 2.2. Components of cultural space: Physical, social and perceptual

The pivotal components of a cultural space amalgamated the social and perceptual aspect and these compositions are interconnected without fragmented (Ferdaous and Nilufar, 2008). The Authors review the morphological space implied as a physical character whilst perceptual described as qualitative or intangible entities (Ibid.). According to Lewelyn (2000), the feeling and perception disclosed to a place could be expressed through genus loci. He emphasised that people comprehended the physical character through an identity, historical morphology, natural features, socioeconomic profile, and buildings of a place or the adjacent area. At the same point of view Lynch (1960) consensuses the discernible layout and transparency of townscapes can increase the place legibility that assimilated to the physical or tangible form (cited in Norsidah, 2010). In succinctly, Ferdaous and Nilufar (2008) summarise the indispensable physical attributes in the cultural space defined by the urban fabrics, notable physical setting, street pattern as well as the structure of open space.

On the other hand, Ferdous and Nilufar (2008) expound cultural activities occurred in any spaces deliberated as 'social phenomenon'. The social attributes of a cultural space designated by cultural background; ethnography (e.g: population, ethnic), activity pattern, community engagement and the space function. Therefore, the significance of cultural space is determined by the social attributes. For instance, a traditional street conjunction to the old shophouses in Malaysia to utilise for night market trading distinguished from other western street activities (Shuhana and Basri, 2002; Shuhana and Norsidah, 2008). Jacobs (1961) discourses a successful urban place is dependent on a place that connected to human activities. Inasmuch as the image or character of the traditional shopping street in Petaling Street, Kuala Lumpur elicits a sense of place where people socialise (behaviour), conducted with the economic and cultural activities (Shuhana and Norsidah, 2008). Hence, the existence of physical attributes and social activities strongly defined an identity of place (Norsidah, 2010).

The perceptual components related to historical substance and people's feelings on their activity space. Additionally, human perception influenced to the cultural space implication base on differences cultural and physical settings in the cities urban spaces (Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008). Users would continue to stay at the public space if the genuine place meanings and activity belonged to the physical setting (Appleyard, 1979; Rapoport, 1982 in Carr, 1992). Therefore, the emotional elements to perceive cultural space's meanings or a place identity encompasses the familiarity; memory; orientation; perception and cognition; identification and imageability (Lynch, 1960; Carr et al, 1992; Mowla, 2006, Nilufar & Ferdaous, 2008). The descriptions of the perceptual elements states as follows;

### 2.2.1. Sense of place

Relph (1976) explains a sense of place means the ability to familiarise diverse places and different identities of a place. Generating a sense of place is through the collectives of past memory, event and features (Zeldin, 1885 and Mowla, 2006). The important components like orientation and sense of continuity aided to improve the identity of a place (Harvey Cox, 1968 & Relph, 1976). Conversely, Steele (1981) elucidated the sense of place shaped by the physical and social settings where people associated with such place (Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008). There are three main attributes to configure a sense of place which are the physical setting, social (activity), meaning or image (psychology factor) (Steele, 1981 in Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008; Jon Punter, 1991 cited from Carmona, et al., 2003; Montgomery, 1998). Nonetheless, Lang (2005) clarifies the sense of place interrelated with sociological and other psychological.

## 2.2.2. Memory

Memory means a process to evoke realities and experiences by taking the benefits to remember (recalling), images and identify a space through the sense of familiarity to form a sense of place (Mowla, 2006). Ferdous and Nilufar (2008) stated that the collective of memories related to time in creating the sense of place and a component to form a cultural space that portrayed a place's history. Likewise, Carr et al. (1992) explained people expressed the special meanings of a space evolving the meaningful memories. Even Rossi (1982) has mentioned a city assembles people's memories because memories attached with the objects and places (cited in Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008). In sum, memory is the primary element in place making because the more activities occurred in place meant the potential to build more memories from such place (Lynch, 1960).

## 2.2.3. Orientation

Schulz (2000) depicted that the memory exemplify as information or presumption of the orientation (refer to in Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008). Orientation indicator in a city presented by the "landmarks, buildings and spaces" (Mowla 2002 & 2006:2). Schulz (2000) specified memory was the identification of orientation. Apparently, a place orientation integrated with memory performed as an imperative element in notifying individual physical location (Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008). The visual interpretative and other senses used to identify a space orientation via visioning for the observer to see and seek (Porteous, 1996 and Carmon et al., 2003).

## 2.2.4. Perception and cognition

Rapoport (1977:178) elucidated that perception is the key process to connect people within the surrounding environment related to man and environment (quoted in Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008). Similarly, perception in the urban setting strained on how people perceived the milieu and experience of a place (Carmon et al., 2003). Whereas, cognitive defined and measured by nature and level of "people values, feelings, beliefs, and perceptions about locations, district, and regions". It has classified as portions of perception that emphasised by Ittelson (1978) and Bell et al. (1990) (cited in Carmon et al., 2003). In short, people perceive a cultural space through by seeing or intellections of the information from the urban environment while cognition required of thinking, planning and keeping information (Carmon et al., 2003).

## 2.2.5. Identification and imageability

In identifying the urban setting; memory is to record or indicate the actual circumstances. Schulz (2000) exemplified that the necessary to understand a place is through knowing a place identity (Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008). Lawson (2001) states a place identity or place character often perceived via visual senses and feeling to that space. As well as the legibility induced to read the image; the path, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks guided as direction of a district (Lynch, 1960). In other words, the imageability is the quality of a physical object whilst the spatial connections possibility to evoke the strong image for movement and legibility in a city (Lynch, 1960 and Carmona et al., 2003; Ismail and Nor Zalina, 2010).

The implications of the physical (tangible), social attribute (intangible) and perceptual contributed to making the roles of cultural spaces in characterising an identity of the historic town. In consequence, the determinants attributes identified as i) site background  ii) social cultural activities, iii) spatial attributes, iv) visual legibility and accessibility, v) architecture form and historical structure (refer to Table 1). This study also discusses on users opinions on cultural spaces when they practice as their routine activities. In sum, people experience on cultural spaces in the historic town are through the emotional feeling, reminiscent from memory, the sense of place and social activities that existence in the cultural spaces.

Table 1. Summary of cultural spaces component and research attributes

| Components | Attributes | Elements |
|---|---|---|
| Physical | Site background | Historical morphology and land use |
| | Spatial attributes | Physical setting, cultural space location and layout |
| | Visual legibility and accessibility | Landmark, view, orientation, accessibility layout |
| | Architecture form and historical structure | Architectural values, image ability and building use |
| Social | Sociocultural activities | Cultural activity, people way of life, socio economic influence, event, festival, special occasion, past event.) |
| Perceptual | Viewpoint | Perception on favourite cultural spaces, preferred sociocultural activity, memory and identity. |

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Criterion of case study

The UNESCO Recommendation (1976) affirmed that historic area considered all significant elements comprised of human activities, buildings, spatial organisation and its' adjacent area (Jokilehto, 1990). The case study areas are determined in the old part of Kuala Dungun and the historic core zone of Taiping (shown in Fig. 2). Accordance to previous studies, both historic towns thrives with rich historical backgrounds, significance of sociocultural activities and local economic vitalities. Hutchison (2010) discourses the significance of a historic city is own its spirit of place or genus loci, the significant identity and essential historical values particularly distinguishes from other places or new city. Therefore, the importance of the physical and social aspects presences in both historic town are the key criterion of site selection. Kuala Dungun and Taiping in the past developed from the mining industries, at present, both historical towns inherited of the living cultural spaces functioned as meaningful social activity nodes. Moreover, the physical and social characteristics of the cultural spaces manifested by the unique architectural building, traditional street, old marketplace, open spaces, town park, the historical features and sociocultural activities.

Fig. 2. (a) Taiping is located in Perak state; (b) Kuala Dungun is situated in the East Coast of Terengganu state

*3.2. Case study method*

Predominantly, case study is a qualitative research to examine the roles of cultural space in two historic towns, Malaysia. Based on the past literature studies, case study method exemplified a process to gather a sampling by the mixture of data collection methods in a period of times (quoted from Stake, 1995 in Creswell, 2009). A case study is essentials to investigate the actual life of the contextual supported by many verification resources from documentation, direct observations, interviews and site survey (Yin, 2003) to examine the phenomenon experiences (Groat and Wang, 2002). The research outlines constructed by literature reviews, site survey, site observation, questionnaire survey and ultimately the comparison analyses of two case studies. The research initial from literature reviews to verify the research variable (parameter) and needed secondary data. The literature resources embraced of the journals, conference paper, books, local district municipal report, local action plan, maps, brochure, website and old photographs taken from the museum. The gist of secondary data were examined through the descriptive content analyses of the site historical background, research problem, research methods and integrated the grounded theories of cultural space in this research review process.

Subsequently, the site inventory and site observation conducted to collect primary data. The field study and assessment is to substantiate the site issues, site physical characteristics (space setting, townscape, visual and accessibility linkages, buildings and historical structure) and sociocultural activities. Indeed, the townscape survey has influenced to the behavioural and site physical setting assessment emphasised by Shuhana (2011). She also indicated the sociocultural appraisal and behavioural survey entails observations on people daily practice, activity pattern, activity spot, special cultural or tradition event. All the cultural phenomenon and social experiences are records through taking photograph. Hutchison (2010) reveals the survey technique by using photograph is similar to William H. Whyte's study on human behaviour and how people utilised the urban spaces (e.g.: sidewalk, plazas and park). Consequently, the identified observation data would be documented in the mapping and table format.

Additionally, the questionnaire survey have erected in the case study area of Kuala Dungun, and Taiping to accumulate sixty respondents' opinions and their feedbacks regarding to the preference, perception and their experiential about cultural spaces in both historic towns. Yin (2003) elucidated the intention of interview data used as verbal descriptions of the behaviour information qualify to support various evidences and validate the research data. Hence, the questionnaire composed of mix interview question viable respondent commendably to recall their past memory. Local community is the target respondents to collect their viewpoints about their favourite and most significant cultural spaces in their daily life. Each respondent has taken approximately ten to fifteen minutes to answer all the questionnaires. Next, the questionnaires data transcribed and analysed into the graph and chart formats by using Microsoft Office Excel and publisher version 2007. In the final part, the qualitative data obtained from primary and secondary data are synthesised through the comparative analysis.

## 4. Findings

*4.1. Case study 1: Kuala Dungun*

Kuala Dungun located in Dungun district, the oldest district of Kuala Terengganu that being under Majapahit reign documented by Prapanca (1365 AD) in his Nagarakertagama (Dungun District Museum, 2010). Dungun named after the Dungun trees (scientific name: Heritiera littorialis) which can be founded at the river bank. Kuala Dungun known as estuaries town since the town positioned at the river estuaries (Nor Zalina and Jalil, 2012). This town begins developed as waterways to transit passengers and goods,

marketplace subsequently operated as a trading port for export iron ore. In the 1940s, Kuala Dungun began as the busiest seaport for iron ore exportation to other countries accomplished by Nippon Mining Company. The iron ores transferred from Bukit Besi (the iron ores mining site) by the railway line to Sura Jetty's seaport located at Pantai Teluk Lipat.

However, in 1970s the iron ore mining shut down induced the drastic changes that caught Kuala Dungun transformed into a fishing town. The town's morphology began from a jetty located at Dungun estuaries notorious as Sungai Buaya and extended to the inland embodied of shophouses, main street Jalan Tambun, open field (Padang Astaka) and the traditional village (Kampung Tanah Lot). At present, Kuala Dungun small town populated by 39,000 residents and the utmost landused configured by village settlements, opens spaces and integrated of the wet market, fisheries industry and small medium commercials (Dungun Municipal Council, 2008). The old street namely Jalan Tambun connected to the new town in Sura Gates.

Through the literature finding and site survey, the cultural spaces comprised of riverfront (fishing jetty), marketplace known as Pasar Besar Dungun, and pocket spaces in between old shop houses, Padang Astaka and scenic promenade at Pantai Teluk Lipat. Hence, the local cultural activities in Kuala Dungun are relative to the workplace of economic revenues and outdoor recreational. The summary of cultural spaces and activities is illustrated in Table 2 and Fig. 3. On the other hand, the physical development of Kuala Dungun old town is gradually facing declining besides facing the competitive development from the new town, Sura Gate. Due this reason, the initiative to conserve and maintain Kuala Dungun town are the must to protect the local cultural heritage especially the cultural spaces.

Table 2. Types of cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun

| Categories | The character of cultural space | Types of activities |
|---|---|---|
| Riverfront | The riverfront is locates at Sungai Dungun, a social and outdoor recreational spot. Whilst, the fisherman jetty was the busiest cultural space for trading, loading and unloading works. | Fishing, waiting jetty depart to Tenggol Island, leisure activities, photography, people watching, pedestrian walking, sitting, cycling, children play and resting. |
| Padang Astaka | A green open space located at the centre of Kuala Dungun town, utilised for certain events only. | Special event use such as carnival, fishing competition, special performance show. |
| Pasar Besar Dungun | The interior and exterior of marketplace utilised for mercantile activities, a significant place for local people meeting, eating and socialising. | Merchandise sold (vegetables, fruits, fish, seafood, meat, special utensils groceries and handicraft), food vendors activities and eating. |
| Pocket spaces in between old shophouses | There are only several mercantile activities operated at old shophouses due to the dilapidation and incompatible building used for storages, warehouses and workshop. | Trading and passive activities such buying goods, passage, chatting, and neighbourhood's interactions. |
| Scenic promenade at Pantai Teluk Lipat | The scenic promenade and sidewalk at Pantai Teluk Lipat for family gathering, leisure and recreational purposes. The beach is hazardous for water activities, but it remains as active fishing spot or fishing competition that held in every month. | Outdoor recreational, sightseeing, people walking, strolling, hang out, relaxing, cycling, and children play. |

Fig. 3. (a) Scene of Kuala Dungun riverfront at Sungai Buaya; (b) fisherman jetty and boats scenes berthed at the jetty; (c) Padang Astaka; (d) mercantile activities at the wet market, Pasar Besar Dungun; (d) food vendors at Dungun wet market; (e) informal market; (f) the timber old shophouses at Kuala Dungun; (h) scenic drive and promenade at Pantai Teluk Lipat and; (i) 'Tiang Opal' Jetty- the remnant structure of old Sura Jetty

## 4.2. Case study 2: Taiping

Taiping town is developed since the tin mining industry, tin ore exportation and trading during the 18th century. The old name of Taiping is Kelian Pauh, and it changed to 'Taiping' in Chinese term denotes as the "everlasting peace" after the end of Larut War in 1874 (MUCI, 2011). The town occupied by most of the Chinese residents who worked as miners and immigrant from southern China (Teoh, 2004; Ho et al., 2010). After the Pangkor Treaty had triggered the Larut War from Hai San and Ghee Hin secret societies, later Taiping was handover to British administration. Taiping became a capital of Perak State till 1945, and there are many first buildings and infrastructures built in peninsula Malaysia such as railway lines, government administrative; institutions, educations, publications, association and the recreational park (Teoh, 2004; Ho et al., 2010). Taiping historic town and its morphological pattern began from the main street which connected to ex-mining land. After the tin mining depleted, most of the ex-mining reclaimed land had been and rehabilitated developed as housing area and the man-make Lake Gardens.

The entire populations of Taiping had reached 191,104 residents documented in 2007 (Ho et al., 2010). Currently, the landuse distributions in Taiping heritage town predominantly utilised for commercial, residential, administrative, open spaces for recreational. Indeed, the remaining prototypes of the cultural spaces are the central market, Taiping Lake Gardens, esplanade (heritage square), pocket spaces and thoroughfares in between shophouses shown in Table 3 and Fig.4. These cultural spaces tremendously influenced by the colonial planning and townscape design: gridiron layout, colonial landscapes and architecture building styles. Henceforth, the pocket spaces at Taiping's commercial and shophouses areas are well connected to the wide streets, building facades and five-foot walkway. The visible townscape and routes articulations have increased people familiarisation on the physical spaces and spatial patterns of the town. Likewise, Taiping Lake Gardens and esplanade are physically and visually connected to Taiping town centre and the government offices by the main street of Jalan Kota. Besides, the Taiping Lake Gardens function as the channel waterways where to collect the rainwater of Taiping town (Ho *et al.*, 2010).

Table 3. Types of cultural spaces in Taiping

| Categories | The character of cultural space | Types of activities |
|---|---|---|
| Taiping Lake Gardens | A town park with peaceful landscape environment to encourage outdoor recreational and social cultural activities among the local community. | Recreation, scrolling, jogging , biking, sightseeing, water recreation (boat paddling), boating, fishing, sports event, health activity, children playground, special carnival, relaxation, picnic, bridal's photographing etc. |
| Esplanade | The Esplanade known as Heritage square utilised for formal event celebration, physical activity and sport tournament. | National Day celebrations (National Parade), soccer games, sports competition (e.g.: Taiping Heritage Run), physical healthy activities. |
| Central market | Known as Taiping old Market, comprise of two buildings that build in 1884 and 1885. This market divided into different zones of for halal and non-halal stalls. | A place for merchandise activities, eating, gathering, meeting and socialisation. |
| Pocket space between old shophouses | There are twenty-two pockets spaces which have defined the urban spaces between commercial and shophouses neighbourhood in Taiping Town (Mazlinda, 2010). | Commercial activities, shopping, community socialisation, loading and unloading works. |
| Thoroughfare | Thoroughfares or wide street in Taiping located in between the cross road, and lines with shade trees. These wide streets connected to the old shophouses' frontages attached with the street activities and commercial activities. | Passage, loading and unloading works at commercial building, trades, street vendor, sitting, stationary and cycling. |

Fig. 4. (a) The serenity view of Taiping Lake Garden; (b) the 'Chi Kong' practitioners at Taiping Lake Gardens (c) Padang or Esplanade used for soccer training and other physical activities; (d) Taiping Central Market; (e) trading activity at the market; (f) The eateries at Central Market namely 'siang malam' or 'day night'; (g) wide street in Taiping allow pedestrianize movement and street activities; (h) street vendors selling newspapers at Jalan Chong Thye Phin; (i) the Old Clock Tower

## 5. Discussion and analysis

The result findings present the roles of cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun and Taiping historic town as well the research conclusion to be discoursed accordingly in this discussion. Subsequently, the analysis part denotes two comparative case studies which based on that determinants attributes and the community perception on cultural spaces through questionnaire and interview survey.

### 5.1. Site background

Several factors of site history bakground like the morphological history, landuse pattern, sociocultural and socioeconomic vitalities substantially influenced to the cultural spaces formation in Kuala Dungun and Taiping. As can be seen, the history experiences have discovered the name of Kuala Dungun taken from Dungun tree (Heritiera Littorialis) while Taiping delineated in Chinese as peaceful or serene. Kuala Dungun and Taiping towns thrived and developed when the mining industries have operated. However, today both ex-mining town sustained because of the sociocultural impetus and trading activities.

Thereafter, Kuala Dungun remained as a distinctive fishermen town whereas Taiping supported with the commerces and commodity retails.

Indeed, the geographical factor and landuse pattern revealed Kuala Dungun located at the estuaries and coastal area influential over the local cultural spaces which have close related to marketplace, riverfront (and fishing jetty) and the scenic promenade, Pantai Teluk Lipat. As stated by Shuhana (2011), river is an important element to characterise the historic town edges and location. Apparently, the riverfront, coastal area and the existence natural landscapes demarcated the edges of the old town Kuala Dungun. In contrast, the cultural spaces formation in Taiping influenced by the colonial town planning, infrastructure, facilities, entertainment and also the town park. The profound of theories verified the strong connection between time and memory stimulates the sense of place that epitomizes the history of a place (Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008). The questionnaire survey disclosed the most memoriable cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun was Pantai Teluk Lipat attained the highest percentage (22%) and subsequent the marketplace, Pasar Besar Dungun (21%) (refer to Fig. 5a). On the contrary, Taiping Lake Gardens was leading the most memorable cultural space in Taiping with the highest percentage of 23.7% (shown in Fig. 5b).
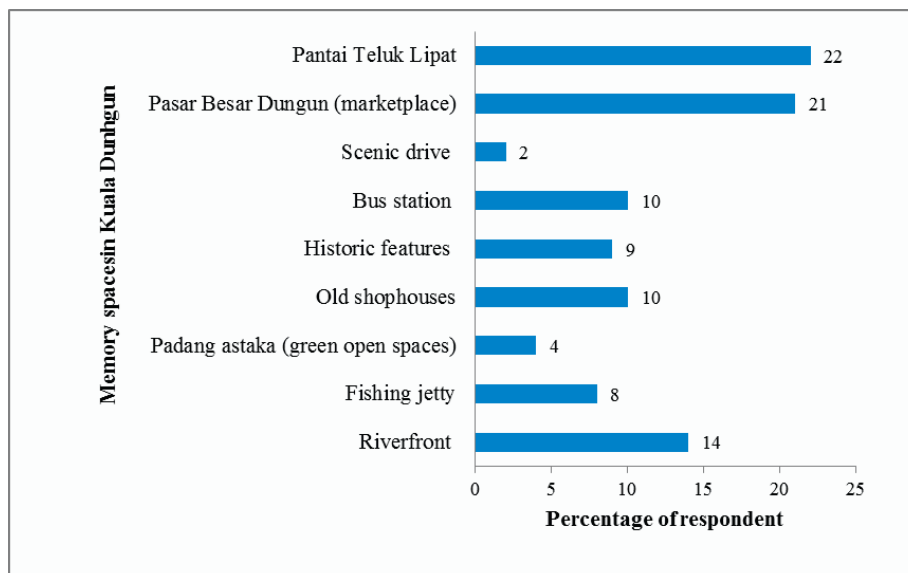


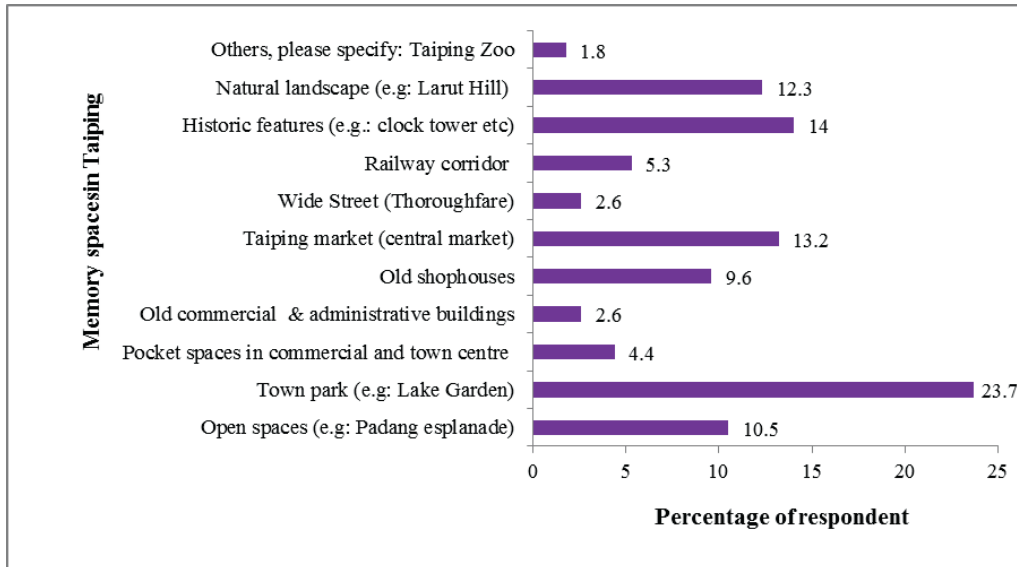Fig. 5. (a) The memorable cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun

Fig. 5. (b) The memorable cultural spaces in Taiping

As summary, Kuala Dungun and Taiping obtained a meaningful name reflects the historical backgrounds and a place's character. Such Mowla (2006) explains the name of a place composed of memory constitutes a genuine of place identity. In other words, the roles of cultural spaces in both historic towns imbued the sense of place with presence of the memory, activity experiences and the place meanings. As well as the perceived the sense of place implicated by the physical setting, social activity and people experience to the place (Steel, 1981; Ferdous and Nilufar, 2008; Montgomery, 1998; Carmona et al., 2003). Likewise, the marketplace (Pasar Besar Dungun and Central Market), riverfront and Taiping Lake Gardens remained the most significant and recognisable cultural spaces with sociocultural socioeconomic and bonding experiences. Whyte (1980) also specifies a good urban place conceivable to sustain activity demands and inspired people to the social place (in Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007). In short, the historical morphology played the vital roles in the cultural spaces configuration to evoke the sense of place associated with place's history, memory, image and place meanings to the local community. Inasmuch as the significance of cultural spaces characterised an identity of Kuala Dungun and Taiping.

### 5.2. Sociocultural activity

Apparently, cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun and Taiping historic town generated by the routine activities such as the dynamic socioeconomic, workplace, and neighbourhood activities. Through the questionnaire and interview surveys, the result revealed that favourite cultural space in Kuala Dungun dominated by the local marketplace, Pasar Besar Dungun with the largest percentage (36.2%), consequently the riverfront and fishermen jetty (29.3%) (demonstrated in Fig. 6a). Meanwhile, the findings result implies sociocultural activities in Kuala Dungun nominated by trading activity with the highest percentage (21.2%) followed by recreational or leisure activities (16.5%) which are the secondary preferred activities among respondents (shown in Fig. 6b). Undeniably, Montgomery (1998 and 2003) mentions economic activities are the most key factor to generate the greater urban place, the social and cultural aspects. Thus, socioeconomic liveliness and recreational activities occurred when local people

engaged to the cultural spaces for mercantile activities, workplace to conduct their livelihood, leisure and social gathering either in Kuala Dungun marketplace and riverfront.
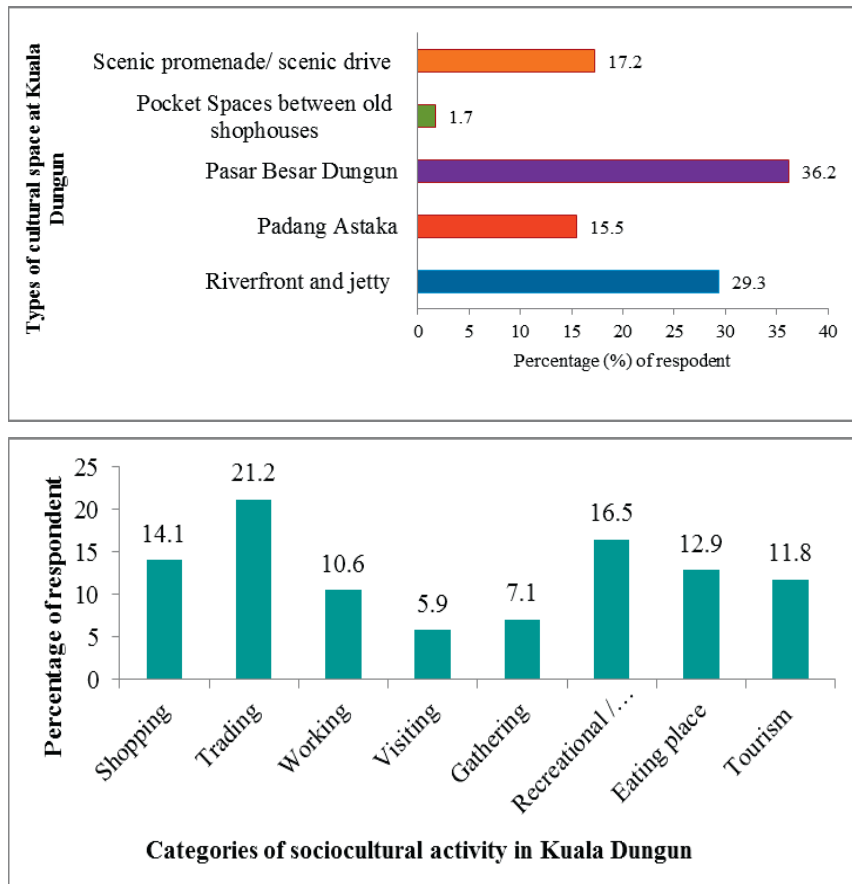


Fig. 6. (a) The favourite cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun; (b) The sociocultural activities in Kuala Dungun

The questionnaire survey discloses the Lake Gardens was the most favourite cultural space in Taiping obtained the uppermost percentage (41.1%) while Taiping Central Market achieved 20.5% (refer to Fig. 7). Seemingly, the choices of sociocultural activities in Taiping mutually connected to outdoor recreational or leisure activity (26.1%) and visiting (13.6%). Taiping Lake Gardens is the most preferred outdoor recreational possess pleasant landscape settings and comfort amenities enables local community to conduct outdoor physical activities. Gehl (1971) connotes the outdoor physical consists good conditions inevitably to increase the optional activity or choice. Whilst, the cultural phenomenon in Central Market notables as an active sociocultural core for trading activities, mercantile sold, haggling, socialisation, meeting, eating and hawking. Besides, the hawker stalls in Taiping old market namely 'siang malam' or 'day night market' because the eateries operated from morning till night-time. The survey result also indicated the eating activity (13.6%) was essential to integrate Taiping old market as a lively cultural space.
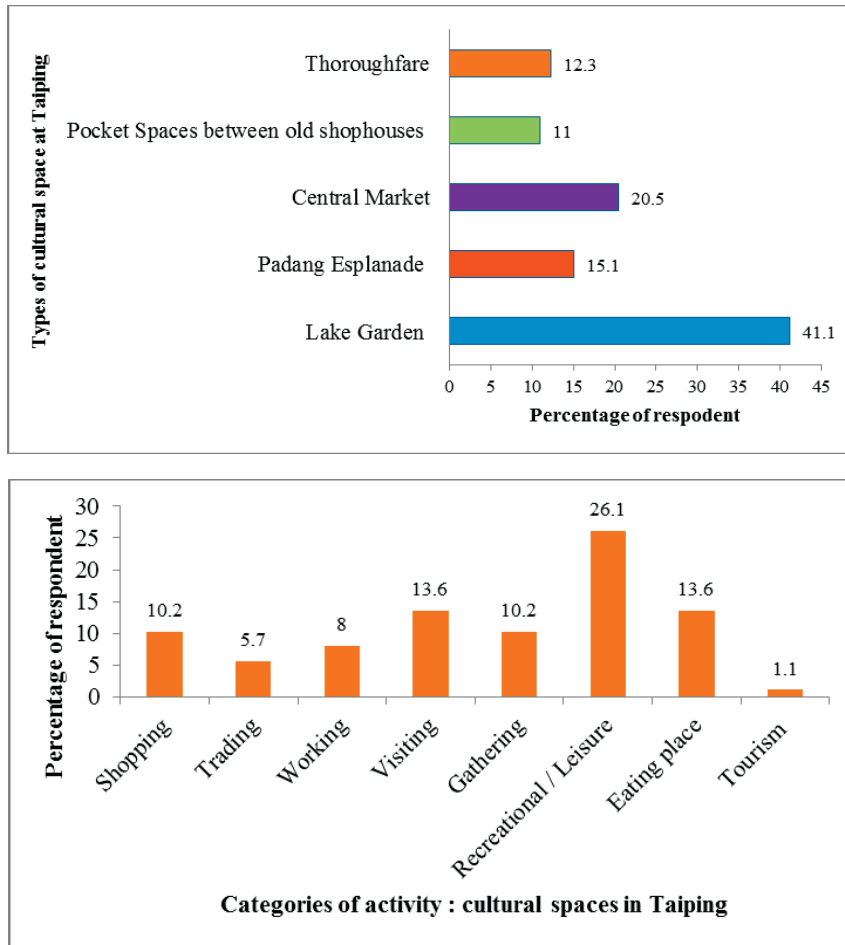
Fig. 7. (a) The favourite cultural spaces in Taiping; (b) The sociocultural activities in Taiping

The findings denote sociocultural activities for both historic towns are relative to trading activities and recreational activities. In as much as Ferdous and Nilufar (2008) explicate varieties of cultural practices are to gather people way of life and phenomenon experiences within the cultural spaces. It has signified local communities are the sociocultural and socioeconomic patronages where these activities occurred in these cultural spaces. Essentially, the liveliness of outdoor activities is contingent to the physical setting and quality of a public space (Gehl, 1971; Whyte, 1992; Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007). In consequence, the result findings notified the lethargic circumstances of the old shophouses in Kuala Dungun have affected the pocket spaces and old street being inactive compare to other cultural spaces. Nonetheless, the thoroughfares or street activities like food vendors, newspaper stall, outdoor eating stalls and pedestrian passage in Taiping still remaining as an active cultural space.

## 5.3. Spatial attributes

Initially, the spatial patterns of cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun formed the spaces between commercial buildings (marketplace and old shophouses), the natural or semi-natural urban space

(riverfront and picturesque promenade) and green open space (Padang Astaka). The questionnaire survey unveils Pasar Besar Dungun (the highest 90%) and Pantai Teluk Lipat (86.7%) are the most prominent cultural space in Kuala Dungun (Shown in Fig. 8). Kuala Dungun marketplace consists the active trading and workplace which connected to the adjacent informal market, vendor stalls, fishing jetty at riverfront, bus station. The Dungun marketplace was a famous seafood wet market for trading, selling, buying, shopping, meeting and eating. The linear form of scenic promenade at Pantai Teluk Lipat provides a space to conduct recreational activities, leisure, sightseeing, fishing and family gathering. Moreover, Pantai Teluk Lipat was a memorial place for local people to reminiscence the Sura jetty or 'Tiang Opal' the seaport of exporting iron ore. Nevertheless, the pocket spaces in between the old shophouses retained the lowest percentage (only 10%) of the overall results because of the dilapidated circumstances.
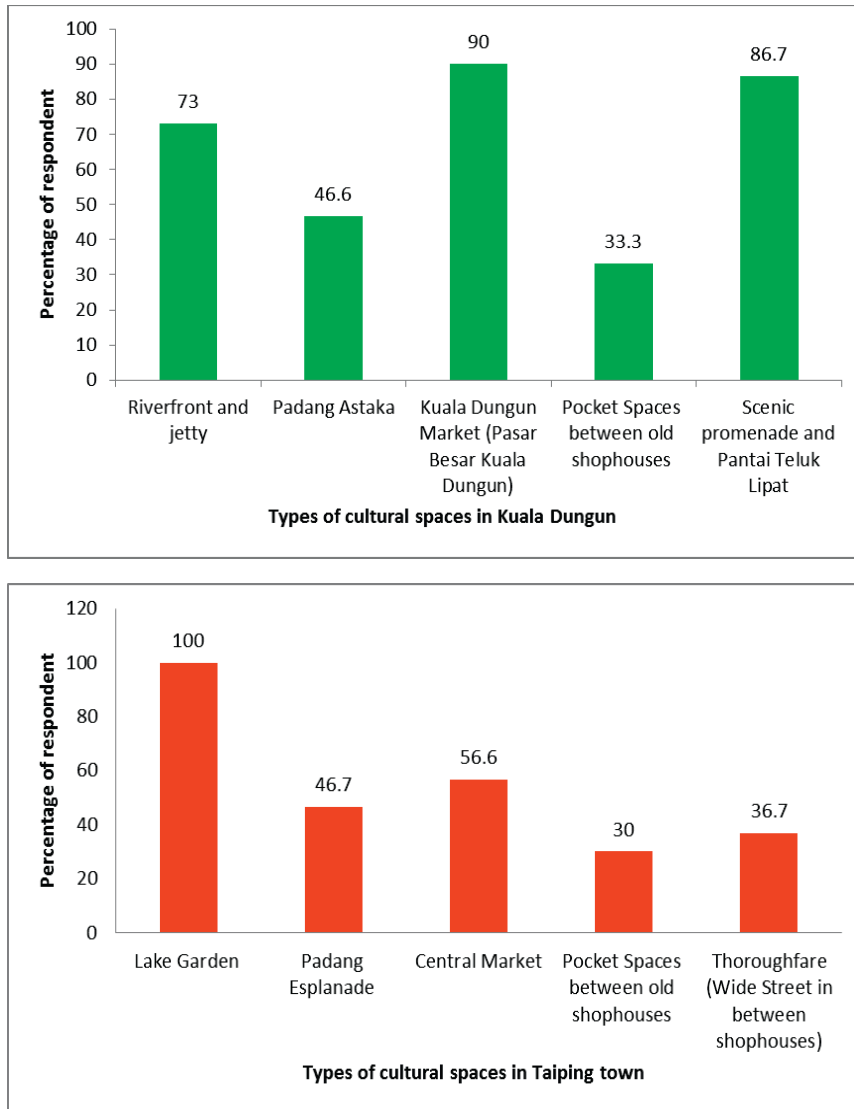




Fig. 8. (a) Types of cultural spaces perform an identity of Kuala Dungun; (b) Types of cultural spaces perform an identity of Taiping

In Taiping, the physical settings of the cultural spaces are fabricated by the recreational and commence activities. Regarding to the findings, the greatest percentage (100%) of all respondents agreed Lake Gardens is the most significant cultural space and being an identity place to the historic town (Fig. 8). The serene Lake Gardens implied as a peaceful landscape and also a cultural space in Taiping town. Furthermore, the man-made Lake Gardens and Maxwell Hill (or Bukit Larut) emerged as lush green backdrops signified as the natural landmark and functioned as outdoor leisure and physical sports activities. In contrast, the pocket spaces in between the Taiping old shophouses are not prevalent as an identity place (lowest result 30%) due to the pocket spaces are not well maintained, inadequate streetscape furnitures and some of the pocket space have turned into the parking area.

As the result, the spatial attributes are the key component to shape the cultural space and space networks in the historic town. The marketplace and recreational spots are being the most outstanding cultural space to characterise an identity of Kuala Dungun and Taiping. Hence, the roles of cultural spaces congruent to the most frequently uses of cultural space by conducting the sociocultural activities to create an identity to the historic towns. The finding corresponds to Relph's (1976) conceptions where an identity conceived through a place or physical setting; activity; meanings or symbol.

## 5.4. Visual legibility and accessibility

The site investigation has certified the legibility in Kuala Dungun town strongly supported by the linear edges of riverfront at Sungai Dungun and the Pantai Teluk Lipat beachfront. Besides, the rows of wooden old shophouses facing to the riverfront demarcated as Kuala Dungun old town. There are two main streets recognised as Jalan Tambun and Jalan Pantai Sura namely as scenic drives (8 Kilometres distances drives) connected the old town and Sura Gate, new town. Hence, the visual and accessibility legibilitiy in Kuala Dungun exceedingly reliant to the scenic water edges and the main street (illustrated in Fig. 9a). The panoramic views directed towards the Dungun riverfront, and Pantai Teluk Lipat is the most discernible scenic landscapes for way finding and cultural space's orientation. On the other hand, there are some buildings obstructed the open vista and restrained the visual cues in Kuala Dungun.

Literature studies exemplified that grid-iron road system laid in Taiping was perpendicular to the cross street (shown in Fig. 9b) increased the accessibility and visual legibility of the historic town. The wide streets and the five-foot way have connected the old shophouses to provide a comfort and friendly walking atmosphere for the pedestrians. Consequently, the images of Taiping had strengthened by the unique historical buildings, active frontages and also as the landmarks guidance people movement and visual legibility. As well as the landscape elements, the heritage rain trees intensify the visual qualities and the sense of a historic town. The clear images connected the spatial and other tangible objects probable to ease people movement (Lynch, 1960; Carmona et al., 2003; Ismail and Nor Zalina, 2010). Hence, the role of cultural space enacted to refine the imageability and legibility of Taiping as a historic town.

Fig. 9. (a) Road map indicated Jalan Tambun and Jalan Pantai Sura, Kuala Dungun; (b) The gridiron system lay in Taiping town centre (Source: Ho *et al.,* 2010) and the legibility of the thoroughfares designated by the old buildings facades and rain trees

In all, the findings reveal the linear cultural spaces such as street, thoroughfares and panoramic promenade increased the legibility of visual and accessibility for two historic towns. As stated by Moughtin (1992), people can distinguish a sense of place is through a street and active shop frontages, the street linkages contribute to build an identity of town (cited in Shuhana, 2011). Therefore, the accessibility in Taiping is more legible due to the permeable grid-iron layout patterns, unique colonial buildings or monuments, active building frontages, and townscapes compared to Kuala Dungun. However, the visual legibility in Kuala Dungun indicated by the riverfront and seafront, Pantai Teluk Lipat. People need a place which is comfort, attractive, accessible and good linkages and spaces to conduct varieties of social activities verified by Carmona et al. (2003). Also, the walkability milieu and conveniences in Taiping offers a pleasant physical setting, sheltered five-foot way, unique building facades, active frontages and hawking activities encouraged people to congregate and conduct street activities. Furthermore, the Taiping heritage trails connected the cultural spaces allowed user to discover the tangible and intangible inheritances.

## 5.5. Architectural and historical structure

Historic building is one of the main tangible components to portray the image of a historic town. According to Mohamed et al. (2001), the significance of historical buildings enables to enhance the lucid image and unique identity of a heritage town and to distinguish others places. In Kuala Dungun, the heritage buildings are like the timber old shophouses, modern commercial buildings and the Malay traditional houses located at Kampung Tanah Lot. Based on the site investigation, at present, the Malay vernacular houses and the traditional fishermen houses just left a few, ruined condition and some have modified. The rows of timber old shophouses facing to the Dungun River signified as the image old town, Kuala Dungun. However, the most concerns issue was the deterioration and incompatible usages of the old shophouses whereby the 44 numbers of old shophouses have converted into stores, warehouses, and workshops. In fact, 102 units of shophouses had indicated as poor conditions and inactive uses (Urban studio report, 2010). The shophouses deteriorations have impacted to social activity declining and liveliness of the cultural spaces.

On the contrary, the heritage colonial buildings in Taiping remained the government offices, religious institutions, associations, education, and club houses whilst the old shophouses used as commercial, hotel, storages and residential dwellings. The unique shophouses, old Taiping market, colonial buildings and Old Clock Tower located at Jalan Kota emerged as the historical landmark buildings or the visible focal point in Taiping town. Aforementioned, the building plots located parallel to the gridiron street pattern, the continual building facades, building massing and the fine grain urban forms enhanced the permeability and accessibility of cultural spaces in Taiping historic town.

The finding reveals that heritage buildings in Taiping signified as a landmark due to the unique architectural, active frontages and accentuated sociocultural activities compare to Kuala Dungun. As stated by Ahmad Basri and Shuhana (2008), the coherence physical structures like old shophouses, street frontages, five-foot way, notable structures have created visual indicator and pleasant setting of proportionate human scale to generate a sense of place. Still, Mowla (2002 and 2006) has delineated landmarks and buildings in the urban district denoted space as an indicator to avoid misplaced. Apparently, the heritage buildings in Taiping compromised the physical settings and grid iron planning system provide the greater permeability and legibility compare to Kuala Dungun. Carmona et al. (2003) expressed that building or physical spaces are the observable object whereas it has influenced to people behaviour. Therefore, the result implies the historical buildings and structures accommodated to the cultural spaces to perform as a space sign; visual cues and activity nodes to define the position and image of a historic town.

## 6. Conclusion and recommendation

This study concludes the cultural spaces of two historic towns inevitable to integrate the physical setting; social attributes and human perceptual to form the meaningful cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun and Taiping.  In a nutshell, the roles of cultural spaces is not only obliged as a community realm or social space, but it was the virtual spaces for local livelihoods, merchandise, workplace, socialise and recreation to fulfil people needs. The cultural spaces imbued people way of life and devoted cultural phenomenon are essential to build a place identity. Besides, the cultural spaces in both historic towns emerge as a sustainable living town supported by the sociocultural, socioeconomic revenues and distinct identities contrary to other modern cities. A new development or modern town denoted by Shaftoe (2008) as a modification of the old urban settings. Indeed, a new town created follows the marketable trend or a design theme by an urban designer which is totally contrasted from the cultural spaces in the historic town.  As well as Ahmad Basri and Shuhana (2008) highlighted the modern city like *Putrajaya* and *Shah Alam* only focusing on commerce and administrative but not a living place without sociocultural contemplations. In other words, cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun and Taiping have portrayed a distinctive image and yet to prolong an identity of a historic town.

The finding also indicates the most prominent cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun and Taiping dominated by the marketplace; Town Park, riverfront and scenic Promenade at Pantai Teluk Lipat and Taiping Lakes Garden formed the most distinctive cultural spaces in Kuala Dungun and Taiping. The lively cultural spaces revealed on how people perceived as an identity place in differed perceptions thru people memories, familiarisation, sense of place and the meanings of cultural spaces. Nonetheless, the study disclosed that Kuala Dungun and Taiping less significant with the physical historic town's component like traditional street, esplanade and pocket spaces in between old shophouses. In fact, Padang Astaka or esplanade in Kuala Dungun became less popular among local community due to the activity space declining.  In contrast, the traditional street and old shophouses in Melaka City remained as lively street, eateries and shopping spot.

In short, this study contributes to the historic town conservation which is to avoid overlooking the issue of placelessness and the diminishing of place identity. Therefore, the implementation of sustainability management in cultural heritage conservation is recommended in this study since there is still lacking in Malaysia urban planning policy. Likewise, the idea of cultural heritage conservation is to protect the cultural spaces in the historic town. This study will carry on by suggesting a study on local community and stakeholders involvements in the heritage conservation. The research purposes are to educate public and increase their sensitivities to conserve the inheritance cultural spaces. Besides, to explore the cultural spaces studies to look at ethnic groups influences to the place-making. It is also essential to examine local community participatory in the cultural space conservation.

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