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Bringing the New to the Old : Urban regeneration through public arts

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Abstract

Old cities usually suffer from abandonment. Concerning this issue, public arts are seen as a good alternative for regeneration. Therefore, this paper focuses on the effects of public arts to the user on the urban environment focusing more towards mural since it has gained the attention of several parties to induce urban regeneration. This research uses literature based methodology. Data is collected from various literature and site observations. The analysis is done to measure the impact of public arts on physical, social and economic aspects of Ipoh Old Town. However, the limitation of this study is that each physical, social and economic aspects of urban regeneration is studied based on several detailed criteria only. In future research, more criteria will be included to measure each impact. The results show that there is a significant impact to Ipoh Old Town regeneration.

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1. Public Arts in Malaysia

Arts are traditionally exhibited in galleries and buildings shows exclusivity. In contrast, arts nowadays are scattered around outdoor public spaces for ordinary people to enjoy. This type of art is called public art. It is the art for the public. Sometimes the production of the art also involves the public. Therefore, it could also become art from

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the public to the public. Public art is the physical expression of ideas, feelings and message to public viewer in a public space. Public art encompasses both functional objects in the landscape and expressive, decorative forms either permanent or temporary, that belong to any established classic or contemporary artistic disciplines such as but not limited to sculpture, mural, relief; installed with the intent to enhance, physically define, promote or establish identity in a space or a place (Landi, P.J, 2012). According Mustafa, M. 2009, public art is sometimes seen as a manifestation based on political and cultural aspirations that intersect with the city's beautification. Public arts in old cities can help to bring new life to the decaying cities. By carefully placing site specific public arts at little corners of streets, backlanes and walls, the unappealing dying spaces of old cities will be transformed into energetic and vibrant little pockets of lively spaces. Public art gives impact to the physical/aesthetic of the city, the social environment and the economic well-being.

1.1. Physical/ Aesthetic

Public arts in urban area will help to improve the visual quality of an area. A dull wall will be given a new life with an addition of murals or 3D public arts. Public art is expected to contribute visually and experientially to the quality of life of those who experience it as an element in their daily environment (Shin Dongshuk, 1999). A previously neglected alley filled with trash and molds can be transformed into a cleaner space after intervention of public arts. The presence of public arts requires the space to be properly taken care of before the construction of the public art and even greater care and maintenance after it successfully constructed. Therefore, the physical appearance of old heritage buildings in the city especially in an old city like Ipoh which experiences aging process through time by weather can be enhanced to look more appealing instead of looking scary and uninviting. This is important to produce comfortable feelings for the city's residents and visitors to experience the city. The addition of public arts around the heritage buildings also catalyses adaptive re-use of the buildings. As old cities normally suffer from high numbers of abandoned buildings, public arts are introduced near the buildings to attract visitors that will trigger more buildings to be transformed into other uses such as cafes, restaurants, galleries, boutiques and hotels. When the outdoor spaces becomes more lively with public arts sightseeing activity, higher volume of people will come and will create more opportunity for new use of the buildings around it. At first, the activity around the public arts will support the adaptive re-use of the buildings, then, the adapted re-used buildings will support the activity around the public arts. This cycle continues to create a symbiotic relationship between public arts, the outdoor spaces and the old heritage buildings.

As the heritage buildings are re-used to perform new functions, there will a need for preservation of the heritage buildings which will requires facade uplifting and structural conservation of the buildings with the help of guidelines from local authority to ensure an acceptable aesthetic quality. In addition, this reaction triggered by the public arts reduces the need for new unexplored land for development (greenfield development) but focuses more on re-using the existing buildings or opting for infill development that makes it more sustainable. The public arts foster more development for the local residents and tourists. Image of the city of strengthen where the public arts create new nodes and the spaces around the public arts produce new vibrant districts in the old city. Other than that, the city will have higher sense of identity where it can be well-known from the public arts available around the city. People would be able to recognize the presence of the city through its public arts and overall physical and aesthetic appearance. Lastly, as new development increases, new facilities will be provided for the convenience of people.



Fig. 1. (a) Hummingbird mural by Ernest Zacharevic; (b) Old Uncle with Coffee Cup mural by Ernest Zacharevic
(Source: Lipstiq blog)

1.2. Social

As mentioned previously, the physical or aesthetic improvements of an old city will attract more people. Higher volume people usually leads to higher social interaction. Social impacts of public art can be seen towards the local residents and among the tourists. By adding public art to a neighborhood, in this case the old city, the local residents will have a sense of pride with recognising the public art as part of their home. Simultaneously, they will have higher sense of belonging to their neighborhood and their love of the space and the motivation to keep maintaining the public art and be apart of the mission to make the area clean and tidy. Additionally, to get better support from the local community, the process of designing and constructing the public art should also involve the members of the community from the beginning. As mentioned in the earlier part of this paper, a good public art is the one from the public made for the public. Therefore, with the participation of the local residents, the local identity and value can be incorporated into the public art making it very site specific and more meaningful to that area and its community. Public art has been identified to have the ability to transform the quality of a place that has vanished or has been ignored from place by celebrating an event and a local history (Himid, L., 1994). By involving all members of the community, bond between them is strengthen and with the involvement of outside residents and tourists will show the strong commitment of the community for the outsiders to respect. It is an important revitalization in the public sphere when public art highlights the sense of community (Mohd Fabian, et.al., 2011).

As more visitors/tourists come to interact with the public art and with highr sense of belonging from the local community to their neighborhood, there will be more opportunity for public surveillance. People would be more aware of their surroundings. As a result, a safe environment will be created . Furthermore, fear of crime will reduce. Public surveillance will also create less opportunity for vandalism. With more tourist, policeman will monitor the area more often creating an even safer environment. The safer the environment, the more tourists will come to visit the area.



Fig. 2. Trishaw 3D mural at Concubine Lane 3 by Ernest Zacharevic
(Source: Lipstiq blog)

1.3. Economic

This impact of public art is the impact from the combination of physical/ aesthetic and social/safety aspects. When the physical environment is positively changed, more people come to visit the public art and safe environment is achieved, business opportunity will blossom. The environment creates a perfect setting for bigger and more stable market. As mentioned earlier, more buildings will be re-used to accommodate new businesses such as art related businesses (galleries), cafes, restaurants, boutiques and hotels. With more construction of permanent public arts, this ensures the sustainability of the businesses. The application of adaptive re-use of the heritage buildings as part of the authority's guidelines will reduce the construction cost as it eliminates the need to construct new buildings (greenfield development). The businesses create a dynamic environment to support public art sightseeing as it gives more choices of tourism activity. This will strengthen the tourism industry by increasing the number of tourists to the city. Simultaneously, tourism will increase investment and the property value. Public art can make a vital

contribution to the economic recovery of many cities and towns featuring in cultural tourism (Public Art Agency, Queensland, 2004).

2. Urban regeneration of Ipoh

Most urban area in Malaysia started with a small colonial town with pre-war buildings such as Kuala Lumpur, Georgetown and Ipoh. With more modern buildings are built around the colonial town, this creates a competition between the old part of town and the new part of town, This competition usually won by the new part of town that is obviously more modern with skyhigh buildings overshadowing the short old buildings. Unfortunately, this situation causes the old town to turn into a decaying forgotten city. In contrast, old should not be forgotten. Old parts of towns are the origins of the city. It should be preserved and conserved to remind the city dwellers about the city's history and glory. Therefore, new life should be injected to the old part of town. This could be achieved through the introduction of public arts. Public art is not totally a new idea. Traditionally, public art during the colonial times comprises of statues of leaders or founders of the place. Today, new form of public art could be used to bring new life to the old town. Then, the urban area could be regenerated.

Regeneration involves the physical, social and economic aspect. 'Regeneration' is defined as the renewal, revival, revitalisation or transformation of a place or community. It can have physical, economic and social dimensions, and the three commonly coexist (Evans, G. & Shaw, P., 2006). Regeneration could be considered as the rebirth of the city, allowing the city to live a second life as it was once became dead. The physical, social and economic aspect of the city are transformed and improved to achieve higher or at least the same level as its glory days. Regeneration refers to the process of positive transformation of the city that had once became a great city but then suffered a decline in physical, social and economic quality. It is the process of a city to become a great city again. The concept of heritage urban regeneration is emphasised on the effort to preserve the heritage value of the buildings along with other heritage spaces in the city (Wu, 2010) which eventually intriguing the economic player to bring the business, retail and other services back to the city (Noonan & Krupka, 2009).

3. Public art and urban regeneration

As old cities are usually filled with old elements like old buildings and structures and not taken care of, new contrasting elements are needed to break the monotonous landscape. Therefore, new wave of public art movement in Malaysia is seen as a great tool for regeneration. As old city has its own charm, public arts introduced by Ernest Zacharevic (either Georgetown or Ipoh) succeeded to create a phenomenon. Ernest enhanced the old charm of local culture where his theme for his artworks usually taken from everyday life of the local community. His artworks are not only appealing to the tourists but most importantly the artwork touches the heart of the locals and make them proud. Public art in Georgetown and Ipoh have triggered urban regeneration. The regeneration can be seen in three main aspects which are physical, social and economic.

3.1. Public arts in Ipoh

There are two main classifications of public art in Ipoh town. There are public art by Ernest Zacharevic and by the local artists and community. The public art by a Lithuanian artist, Ernest Zacharevic is the pioneer where seven public arts are placed around the Jalan Panglima carpark, Market Street, Jalan Bijeh Timah, Concubine Lane 3, as well as two along Jalan Tun Sambanthan and Jalan Padang which are launched in June 2014. The other public arts are produced by local artists and community launched in December 2014, are located mainly around Jalan Masjid as part of an event initiated by Perak State Government and supported by Ipoh City Council and Tourism Perak.

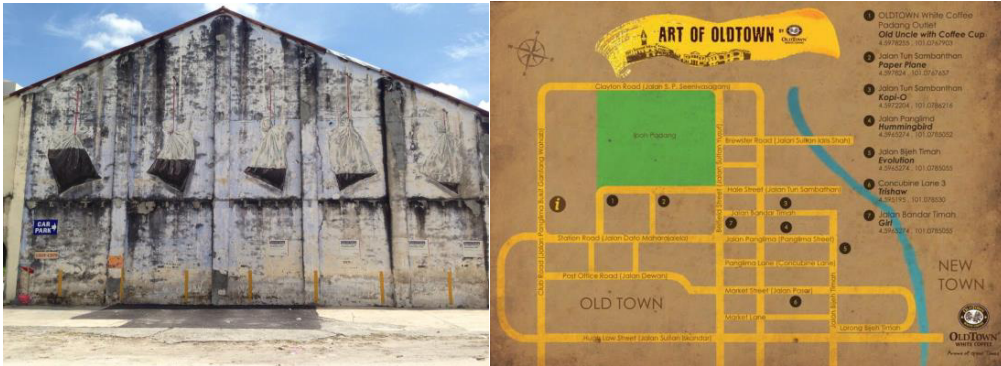


Fig. 3. (a) "Kopi-O" mural shows the way the locals drinks their coffee in a plastic bag; (b) Art of Old Town map. Source: Old Town White Coffee

4. Results and findings

4.1. Physical/ Aesthetic

Before the introduction of public arts around Ipoh old town, most buildings were left in poor condition. The buildings were taken over by effects of weather as no conservation steps were taken due to various factors. Parasitic plants, molds and peeling paints were the main threats to the building walls giving a bad view to the city. As the buildings were not taken care of, the environment around it has also been vandalised and polluted. Backlanes were filled with rubbish and created a very unsafe and uncomfortable environment for pedestrians. One of the artist who painted murals at Jalan Masjid, Ipoh, Eric Lai said to *The Star* newspaper that in early 2013 when he started painting, rubbish and overgrown weeds dominates the back lanes. A research in 2013 by Hew. et.al. recorded that most of the buildings which are located at the edge or narrow streets were decaying with peeling paintwork, rotting woodwork, mouldy walls, crumbling mortar work and structurally and aesthetically affected by parasitic plants. Based on an interview with former tin Tan Sri Hew See Tong by *The Star* in 2013, he suggested that state government and local governments should look into, along with improving facilities and cleanliness as due to lack of awareness of the public on the places of interest in Perak.

When the public arts movement in Ipoh started in early 2013 by the local artist, Eric Lai, the image of Ipoh old town was transformed. The previously dull and dirty back lanes were transformed into vibrant public spaces that attracts many visitors. After painting a mural on one the shops, other shop owners started to request for murals to be painted on their buildings too. This shows a very positive impact in terms of the physical and aesthetic improvement. According to Lai, the council was supportive of the idea but he had to make sure the paintings were that of multi-cultural motifs, permission from all the shop owners obtained, and the building left undamaged. Strong visual images borrowed for public art help facilitate a memorable structure and give the city its identity (Mustafa, M., 2009). This movement was then continued by the famous Lithuanian artist, Ernest Zacharevic with the collaboration with Old Town White Coffee, a cafe franchise that originated from Ipoh in conjunction with the Art of Old Town project in June 2014. Many old buildings were transformed and becomes Ipoh's identity. Public Art can be a very valuable tool in creating local distinctiveness (Pycroft, 2009). These public arts from the local and international artist encourages more buildings facades to be uplifted and re-used for new businesses to support the public arts. Indeed, the process of upgrading and conserving the heritage elements will highlight the uniqueness of local culture and it gives prospect to the tourism sector (Arthur & Mensah, 2006). The streets are upgraded to accommodate new comfortable pedestrian walkways linking the public arts with a continuous pedestrian system. In other words, the whole city is transformed, not only the building walls but the building use and the whole environment around the buildings. Overall, the information gathered regarding the physical and aesthetic impact of public arts here came from site observations and supported by articles in *The Star* newspaper.



Fig. 4 A local visitor adoring the creativity behind mural produced by local artist that paint mural that blends with the existing molds and plants on the old building's wall
(Source: The Star)

4.2. Social and safety

4.2.1. Public participation

In this part of the study, data is collected from site observations and supported by articles in local newspaper and other researches. In the case of public participation on public arts movement in Ipoh Old Town, as mentioned earlier, the public art movement in Ipoh started by local artists. This shows that the public art has given an opportunity for local people to contribute to the regeneration of Ipoh. Through the launching of Ipoh Mural Arts Lane at Jalan Masjid, local community, school students, university students and international visitors are given a chance to paint murals on the walls along Jalan Masjid. University students from nearby local university, Universiti Teknologi MARA (Perak) also contributed on the mural painting activity. This is parallel with the benefit mentioned by Public Art Agency, Queensland, 2004 that the public arts can increase opportunities for innovation and experimentation in the design and development of public spaces. The public arts produced by the participants are part of Ipoh Mural Art trail that covers places from Jalan Tun Sambanthan to Jalan Bandar Timah-Jalan Panglima-Jalan Bijeh Timah-Jalan Market and Jalan Sultan Iskandar, before ending at Jalan Masjid. The event also involved exchange students from China and Japan. The involvement is a proof of how public art is able to regenerate the city socially to strengthen social bond and increase social interaction between the locals and visitors. Opening up opportunities for people of all backgrounds to tap and build on the artistic heritage of a city can help develop a shared sense of identity (Regional Cities East, 2010). This collaboration will increase the sense of belonging and sense of community which will then create a healthy environment for the city dwellers and to foster good relationship between the tourists who come to Ipoh with the old town residents. Art is seen as a way to rejuvenate cities by enhancing public spaces (Baker, A. ,1998).



Fig. 5. (a) & (b) Local artist painting mural on the wall
(Source: The Star)

4.2.2. Reaction & interaction

The public arts in Ipoh ignited many positive reactions from the locals, tourists and media. Not only the public are willing to participate in the production of public art, the requests from building owners also show their willingness to be contribute to urban improvement. According to a newspaper article in 2013, the rest of the shop owners in Jalan Masjid requested for murals to be painted on their shops. The newspaper article also pointed out a positive reaction from a retiree that said the painting brought back sweet memories of his younger days. This is because most of the paintings depicts local lifestyle such as Malaysia's traditional dances and children playing traditional games. Most visitors interact with the public art by posing in relation with the pose shown in the public arts. They act as if they are part of the public arts. This reaction shows how successful and interactive the public arts are. One of the shop's owner feels happy when seeing many people including families come to the alley and taking pictures of the painting and posing with it whether it rains or shine. The shop owners agree that the murals have made the alley look more vibrant and lively. The act of taking photos with the public arts and uploading them onto the internet are helping to promote Ipoh tourism industry. Perak State Tourism Committee chairman Datuk Nolee Ashilin Mohammed Radzi said that tourists can post the photographs with the public art on Facebook, Whatsapp or Instagram. A visitor mentioned that many people have asked the whereabouts of the public arts to come see for themselves once she uploaded the photographs on her Facebook account (NST, 2014). According to Christopher Pycroft, Development Manager Douglas Development Partnership, Isle of Man, 2009, public arts can provide an important photo-opportunity for visitors or a subject that can be used to market or promote a location. He also mentioned that besides being physical and visual landmarks public art can also become social landmarks where people meet and mini-cultures can develop. Fortunately, this situation can also be seen in the case of public arts in Ipoh. Overall, the information gathered regarding the physical and aesthetic impact of public arts here came from site observations and supported by articles in local newspaper.



Fig. 6. (a) & (b) Ipoh locals were having fun with the murals (Source: The Star); (c) Visitors interact with public art by posing and taking picture

4.2.3. Safety

The impact of art in reducing crime and contributing to crime prevention is an element considered by researchers. Crime is mentioned both in the frame of urban regeneration and in the frame of social inclusion; in the frame of social inclusion it is considered as one of the combined problems – with ill-health, unemployment, low income, poor education, and housing and family breakdown – which leads to social exclusion (Jermyn, 2004). As there are an influx of tourists to Ipoh after the introduction of public arts, Ipoh Mayor Datuk Harun Rawi suggested to put up more lightings along areas covering the Ipoh Mural Art trail. Lightings around the public arts will not only allow tourists to view the artworks at night but also increase the level of safety in the city. The streets that were previously unsafe is transformed into a cleaner and safer streets to walk. In 2014, Ipoh district police chief ACP Sum Chang Keong said the police would rope in more volunteers to monitor the mural art areas. (NST, 2014). The local artist who painted the murals even witnessed a snatch thief in action before the murals project take place but now agreed that the back lanes are now safe to walk (The Star, 2014). According to a research on the effect of mural on personal crime and fear of crime conducted by Md. Sakip, R. et. al. (2016) in Ipoh, most of the back alley users in Ipoh strongly agree that they are feeling safe when using back alley with the art mural on a wall. Safe environment is achieved as there are better opportunity for public surveillance caused by the increase of tourist and local

community's awareness. If the environment continues to be safe, the more tourists will be attracted to visit the city. The public arts in Ipoh has caused urban regeneration with the artworks as tools. As mentioned in Mobile Access to Knowledge: Culture and Safety in Africa : Documenting and assessing the impact of cultural events and public art on urban safety Final Report 2011-2014, art can be an element of the process of urban regeneration and it can add a sense of well-being by showing that the site is clean, maintained and cared for (SUPSI University, 2014).



Fig. 7. (a) & (b) The launch of Ipoh MuralArt Lane in December 2014
(Source: Utusan)

4.3. Economic

The data gathered for economic impact of public arts are based on WTW Property Market Report, Tourism Malaysia and various reports. Economic problem before the public art introduction was cited from a research in 2009 by Deraman et.al. is the lack of tourist come to Ipoh affecting the income of hotels in Ipoh and it was caused by the location of most of the places of interest that are far from the city (Deraman et.al, 2009). According to WTW Property Market Report 2015, murals around Ipoh Old Town has contributed to more tourists visiting Ipoh. It has lead to the increase in the number of hotels in Ipoh such as The Weil Hotel, The Citel, Ipoh Bali Hotel, M Boutique and some other budget hotels. Due to emerging of more tourist hotspots, more tourist inflows are expected and there is room for growth in the market in the state (WTW Property Market Report, 2016). Based on WTW Property Market Report 2015 and 2016, there is an increase in average room rate in Ipoh in 2015 compared to 2014 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Ipoh average room rate

	2013	2014	2015
3-star hotel			
Average Room Rate (RM)	NA	120-150	160-180
Average Occupancy Rate (%)	NA	NA	NA
4-star hotel			
Average Room Rate (RM)	NA	160-180	180-250
Average Occupancy Rate (%)	NA	NA	NA

Source : WTW Property Market Report 2015 & 2016

In year 2014, Perak has the highest number of local tourists in Malaysia with 7 million. In 2015, new businesses along Concubine Lane is set up by the locals. Based on a local newspaper article, a local tour operator says that his personal sales in hotel bookings had grown by 100% in the past year. Comparison between hotel guests in two major cities with popular public arts which are Ipoh and Georgetown shows that the number of hotel guests increased in the year after introduction of public arts. The details of hotel guests data is shown in Table 1.

Table 2. Ipoh and Georgetown hotel guests

City	Domestic			Foreigner			Total		Change (%)
	2013	2014	Change (%)	2013	2014	Change (%)	2013	2014	
Ipoh	1,169,202	1,385,229	18.48	148,080	139,305	(5.93)	1,317,283	1,524,534	15.73
Georgetown	1,431,132	1,665,299	16.36	1,014,862	1,265,840	24.73	2,445,995	2,931,139	19.83

Source : Tourism Malaysia (based on Hotel Survey)



Fig. 8. Concubine Lane's image is uplifted with new signage and new businesses

Based on The Star, January 2013, Perak Human Resources Committee chairman Datuk Mohammad Zahir Abdul Khalid said Ipoh's vibrant tourism scene had created many employment opportunities as more industry players, such as hoteliers and restaurateurs, were confident in tapping into the local market. According to statistics provided by the Ipoh City Council, there are 150 hotels in Ipoh in 2012, three times the number compared to 2008. In terms of hotel occupancy rate in Ipoh, WTW Property Report 2015 and 2016 show the rate has increased in 2015 and 2016 as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Ipoh hotel property data

Transaction Activity			Price Trend			Take-up/Occupancy Rate		
2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016	2014	2015	2016
Unchanged	Unchanged	Unchanged	Unchanged	Unchanged	Unchanged	Unchanged	Increased	Increased

Source: WTW Property Report 2015 & 2016

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion, the public arts has helped the process of urban regeneration in Ipoh. Physically, the public arts has helped transformed the dull decaying city to become more vibrant and lively. In terms of the social aspect, the

public arts has succeeded to bring new life to the city by creating more opportunity for the locals and tourists to socialize. The safety around the city has also increased in low fear of crime among the visitors. Lastly, the economy of the city has increased with the increase of hotel guests, number of tourists, occupancy rate and increase in new hotels and restaurants. Although public arts are new modern addition to old cities, when it is introduced in the right way, the public arts will not become an eyesore but will become a long-needed accessory to the existing city structures. As seen in Ipoh, the public arts are great addition to the city regenerating the dying city to be enliven. For future research, all three impacts (physical, social and economy) of public arts will be divided into smaller details and compared to each other to see which of the impacts is the most significant. Comparison study could also be done between various locations of public arts in Ipoh Old Town to see the factors of successful public arts and its impacts.

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