

The Impacts of Open Space on Urban Population

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By the year 2025, 65 % of the world population might get concentrated in urban areas. The scenario can be seen happening in big cities such as Kuala Lumpur. In relation to that, many had expressed concern for issue of land availability in big cities. As the population gets bigger, more housing estates are needed. Due to that, more land need to be developed into housing. Occasionally, some green spaces will be converted into this land use.

Introduction

It is evident that green areas have gradually decreased for giving allowance to human settlement. Since dwelling is among the necessities that cannot be compromised, planning and design of this land use should be properly thought. In relation to that, open space should be introduced to housing areas with high population such as urban areas. The idea of providing comfort and healthy living environment with high population density can be very challenging. So, local authorities must be experiencing uphill task towards providing the environment, which emotionally, physically, and mentally fit the needs of the people. Due to this reason, housing development of urban area should consider the provision of open space that indirectly contributes to visual, economic, social, and psychological impacts to the residents.

Impacts of Open Space

People living in urban areas may be emotionally and mentally affected by the hustle and bustle of big cities. This living environment is observed to have direct impacts on their well-being. For instance, people may easily get exposed to stress and tension, if they often deal with traffic jams, noise and crowds. Due to that, it is important to introduce appropriate design and planning to offer a better living condition for the people, by providing open space in urban setting which can be seen as a potential to promote a better living environment.

People need to be close to nature, even though they adore modern and urban lifestyles. This is true because nature has always been closed to man since the creation of the first man (e.g. *Adam A.S.*). Nature is created to serve man and in return, he must use it wisely. In short, this describes that man and nature are always good friends. True enough, nature has benefited man in many ways. Nature is often associated with scenic beauty that pleases one's eyes, and therefore, allows him to live in *sakinah*. Thus, nature in the form of open space can psychologically and physically influences ones' well being. Probably, it is not too much to say that the concept of *haayatun taiyyibin* can be evoked by considering the importance of open space to urban design and planning. Such idea is not new and in fact, has been discussed at the governmental level.

Narrow green areas of a terrace house reduce the potential of activities to be carried out.



It is said that the demand for a public park increases,

if a neighbourhood park fails to function accordingly. This is somewhat directed to the inappropriateness of location or size of open space (e.g. garden and lawn) as found in some housing design. For instance, the garden or lawn is often treated as an edge along a driveway or placed behind a kitchen. So, the importance of open space is not recognised accordingly. Only a small portion of open space has been provided to the design of a terrace house. Perhaps, this is due to the factors of cost and availability of land. Thus, this limits the size of open space offered to the respective housing estate. It is found that the size of open space can influence the types of recreational activities (e.g., gardening, sitting and viewing) conducted.

Recreational activities on the other hand, can be categorised as active and passive. For instance, jogging, walking and playing badminton are among the active activities that require bigger land area. However, sightseeing, sitting and reading are among the

Exercise is one way to reduce stress as well as to maintain health

passive activities, which need lesser space. Open space in the context of urban serves to complement the urban environment by evoking the senses of joy, happiness and fun. Indirectly, the space has significant contribution to physical and mental development of the population. The importance of open space has been widely explained in many reviews. For instance, lower level of stress and obesity can be overcome through outdoor activities in green areas. Therefore, it is clearly proven the importance of open space to ones' health. Open space is not only contributing to a healthy lifestyle, but also acting as public space. Open space namely Neighbourhood Park can be a place for urban population to get socialised. As a result, such space can encourage good interaction among the residences. In short, open space contributes to scenic, psychological, educational and good impact on the aspect of social welfare.

In the context of urban setting, open space is claimed to influence the value of a property. Studies show that urban green spaces can increase the value of a property. For instance, in Malaysia,

the price of a house viewing or locating near to greenery is higher than the house without such view. So, the scenic beauty of a landscape is certainly associated with the economical value of a property. As a result, many people are willing to spend more money in order to own a property that possesses nice landscape. Preference for natural scenic beauty seems to become the vogue to urban life. Perhaps, people do not mind paying more in order to be close to nature. Here, the term of nature can be translated as open space as well. Therefore, this concludes that the desire to live with nature can contribute to the economical impact.

However the recreational interest of teenagers would be slightly different. Teenagers are the frequent users of an open space. Furthermore, they can be identified as the most active group. They are also keen in the same nature of recreations, as the children do.



Need for Recreation of Different Age Groups

It is observed that the need for recreations of people at a public park may vary according to their age groups (e.g. children, teenagers, adult and elderly). For instance, most children would actively involve in the running, climbing, or sliding activities.

The design of children play equipment should be fun and interactive to encourage the development of their motor skills.

Since they are more matured than the latter group, therefore, their idea of fun is to experience it in a group. Soccer, futsal and basketball are among the popular games, which the teenagers may enjoy playing in a group. This shows the desired activities between both children and teenager may be influenced by the age factor.

At present tai chi is among the most popular work out preferred by senior citizens.

Adults on the other hand, may experience open space in both active and passive manners. Some adults enjoy the scenic beauty of a landscape. For instance, they would not mind spending time watching the sun sets. This is very much directed to the passive activity. On the other hand, some energetic adults may prefer to jog, tai chi or play badminton. This shows that they are also fond of the active recreations as the teenagers do. Due to the factor of age, the interest in recreations of the elderly has limitation. It is observed that most of them prefer to stroll, sit or just watch others doing their activities. Interestingly, it seems that some of the elderly may enjoy visiting park with lots of crowd but others do not. Parallel to that, studies found that living and walking in green spaces can increase the longevity of the elderly. Again, this proves the importance of open space to the aspect of health to a specific group of park users.

However, it should be highlighted that facilities and utilities introduced to the elderly should be safe and suitable. Due to their age factor, they are prone to accident (e.g. falling down and slipping off), which may lead to physical injuries. So, it is compulsory to provide universal design structures and materials (e.g. ramp and railing), for a better and safer mobilisation around the park. **Conclusion**

The provision of open space in urban population gives impacts towards many aspects of life. Among these, it has impacts on health, social, aesthetics and economy. It is proven that open space benefits users from various group of age. In relation to that, planning and designing of this open space should consider age, need, and fitness level of the users as the guiding principle towards providing a functional open space. It is evident that the elderly is the most sensitive group due to the age factor and their involvement in the active activity is found limited. In another case, both children and elderly would have high tendency of getting injured while using facilities at park. In short, the safety of park users should become the priority when designing an open space. In conclusion, open space can contribute great impacts on the well-being of urban population.

