



AENSI Journals

Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences

ISSN:1991-8178

Journal home page: www.ajbasweb.com



The Indicator of Factors That Make an Environment Truly Islamic in Malaysia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 September 2014

Received in revised form

17 November 2014

Accepted 25 November 2014

Available online 6 December 2014

Keywords:

Islamic built environment indicator, open public spaces, Delphi Method, Islamic built environment Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Background: As Islam is the nation's religion, the government of Malaysia strives to adopt Islamic image in Malaysia's built environment. Yet, given Malaysia's heterogeneous society, the Islamic concepts implemented should be appropriately in the construction of Malaysia's built environment. The question is what are the indicators to measure the extent to which a certain environment is considered to be Islamic? **Objective:** The objective of this paper is to impart an indicator of factors that make an environment truly Islamic in open public spaces in Malaysia. The indicators in this study are developed by sieving through the interpretation of Malaysian public opinion shapers referred as 'experts' in this study. The 'experts' is defined as those who are relevant as a Malaysian opinion shapers or related in the design process from the variety of races and religious in Malaysian heterogeneous society. This research employs descriptive and survey-based research designs rooted in qualitative research paradigms with two research techniques (1) Delphi Method and (2) Media Content analysis. **Results:** There is ten themes was underlined as indicators; (T1) Natural Environment, (T2) Social Need And Human Comfort, (T3) Religious Identity, (T4) Tolerance, (T5) Order, (T6) Jannah, (T7) Intellectual And Knowledge, (T8) Hygiene, (T9) Economic, and (T10) Safety. The total of 71 passages (P) was coded from 25 experts for the analysis in this study. **Conclusion:** The study found a majority of the experts have a distinct personal interpretation of the Islamic built environment issues in Malaysia. Some of the public or political figures have a more distant when provide suggestions and ideas. The view expressed on the basis of harmony and universal values of Islam to suit the heterogeneous nature of Malaysia. The findings will help Malaysian administrators and professionals in built environment industries to generate a better and more appropriate process of implementing an Islamic built environment in Muslim countries.

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To Cite This Article: Norliza Mohd Isa, Ismawi Hj. Zen, Ahmad Long, The Indicator of Factors That Make an Environment Truly Islamic in Malaysia. *Aust. J. Basic & Appl. Sci.*, 8(23): 53-61, 2014

INTRODUCTION

The term Islamic is so synonymous and are very popular in Malaysia. This compatibility is likely seen aimed as a 'branding' or label, it is so strategic to Malaysia that has been striving for a long time to create its name as a Muslim country with a developed nation status, as reviewed by Gregory (2006) in his article entitled "Foreign Occupation: Islamic Symbolism in Malaysia". This situation fits Malaysia as a country that placed Islam as the official religion. Besides the fact that the Malaysian community composition comprising Muslim majority of 61.3% (Department of Statistics, Malaysia 2010), the sensitivity of Muslims in Malaysia is also seen as very high when it comes to issues regarding Islamic affairs.

When the name of Islam is linked to other phrases such as 'Islamic Architecture', 'Islamic Fashion', and 'Islamic Music' and various other terms that came together with the word 'Islamic', it is an effort to bring forth religious element and the sanctity of Islam through other mediums as well. The same motive applies when there

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is a mention about the Islamic built environment. It translates into an atmosphere and environment that is built based on Islam. The question is, what are the indicators to measure the extent to which a certain environment is considered to be Islamic? What is the justification for allowing an environment that is built and designed by architects, planners and qualified engineers deserving to be termed as 'Islamic'?

Through literature studies, this study justifies that 'Islamic built environment' is a "situation or setting that encompasses the combination of created elements (spaces, places and structures) with the implementation of Islamic ideology to serve human needs and values. The concept considers the suitability of people's lifestyle (both Muslim and non-Muslim) by symbolizing spiritually and physically the essence of Islam" (Mousthapa, 1979; Khurshid, 1989; Al Obaidi, 1992; Spahic, 2002; Kamali, 2006; Al Sari, 2010; Sarkawi, 2011; Zen, 2011) as in Figure 1.

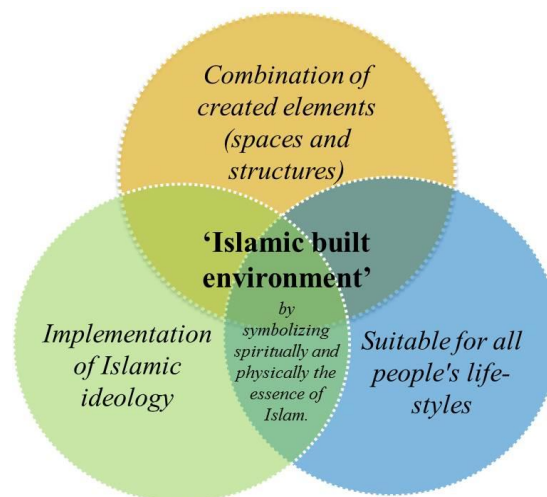


Fig. 1: The three elements to define an appropriated 'Islamic built environment' in Malaysia.

Islamic built environment in malaysia:

Islamic built environment when interpreted in Malaysia actually brings much more unique complications. This is because Malaysia is a country where Islam is practiced as the official religion, embraced by a large number of people in the society (61.3%) but also has a composition of heterogeneous community that practices religious freedom. Data collected from the Department of Statistics, Malaysia (2010) found that the Buddhist faith stood at 19.8%, followed by Christianity at 9.2%, Hindus at 6.3%, and others 3.4%.

Henceforth, the evaluation and adaptation of 'Islamic built environment' in Malaysia should be different from the implementation done in other Islamic countries that has totally all Muslim population or those countries with overwhelming majority of Muslim community such as the Arab countries, Africa, and the Middle East.

The influence of acceptance in a society professing a given religion are elements that can have a huge impact on the adaptation of a development especially on architectural aspects besides factors like the weather and local culture. Against climate differences, social and local culture, this study also opines that the definition of 'Islamic built environment' in Malaysia should differ from the 'Islamic built environment' in the African countries, Europe, as well as in China and India.

Research design and methodology:

This study has applied two types of research methods (Figure 2) using qualitative paradigm and the first (1) Delphi method and the second (2) Media content analysis method. Delphi technique is the main method used in this study to gather opinions from the 'experts'.

This study is designed to answer the research questions on what are the indicators to measure the extent to which a certain environment is considered to be Islamic in public open spaces in Malaysia. In generating an indicators of a certain concept and framework of thinking from academic aspect, this study need to consider which group of Malaysian public whom are qualified enough to have their ideas and framework of thinking be adopted.

For that purpose of this study, the names of great as well as charismatic figures are carefully selected amongst (1) professionals in the field of built environment, (2) political figures and administrators, (3) academics, and (4) Islamic scholars. These groups of respondents are referred to as the 'experts' in this study. 'Expert' in this study does not mean an expert in the field of 'Islamic built environment', but each respondent

that is involved is an expert in their own field. Since the 'built environment' is an environment built for general or public use, therefore anyone is a user to a 'built environment'.

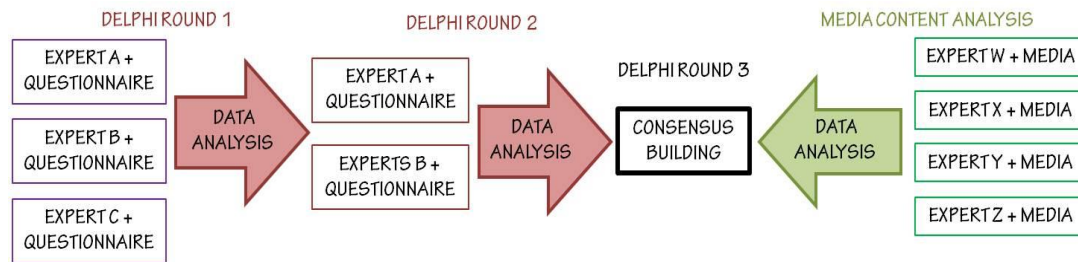


Fig. 2: Research Methodology conducted in this study.

The step-by-step process that was carried out under the Delphi technique was aimed at getting a precise result from the group of 'experts'. Results will only be decided after a consensus among the 'experts' is reached. Given the status of these groups of 'experts', which comprise of high profile personnel and professionals with very tight roles and responsibilities, a screening process was carried out in three stages for this study. At each stage, the number of 'experts' was reduced depending on the response and commitment they give.

This study has adopted an additional initiative by adding one more research method as an alternative method of gathering the opinions of important national figures. Media Content Analysis (MCA) research method has been applied as a supporting technique to add more to the data collection. By applying the second method, opinions from public figures, prominent names, and popular personalities such as administrators and state politicians was obtained as part of the data. By conducting both research methods as described, this study has successfully formed one framework of indicator of factors that make an environment truly Islamic appropriate to Malaysia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the survey conducted in Delphi round one, Delphi round two, media content analysis and consensus building in Delphi round three, this study has determined ten factors that make the built environment truly 'Islamic'. There is ten themes was underlined in this study analysis; (T1) Natural Environment, (T2) Social Need And Human Comfort, (T3) Religious Identity, (T4) Tolerance, (T5) Order, (T6) Jannah, (T7) Intellectual And Knowledge, (T8) Hygiene, (T9) Economic, and (T110) Safety. The total of 71 passages (P) was coded from 25 experts for this analysis. The details analysis as summarized in table 1.

The first factors are Natural environment. Six experts stated in order to achieve an Islamic ambience we should emphasize and embedded the aspect of natural environment in built environment (Fig.1). Islamic built environment is represented by religious building with Islamic architecture which supported by the surrounding landscape and natural environment (Rosnawati, 2012). Nik Malik (2012) highlighted the importance of hinterlands to bring back the built environment to the nature, which is the natural Allah creation. Environmentalism is the key factor in Islam such the green concept, recycle and revitalization of natural resources (Maszlee, 2012).

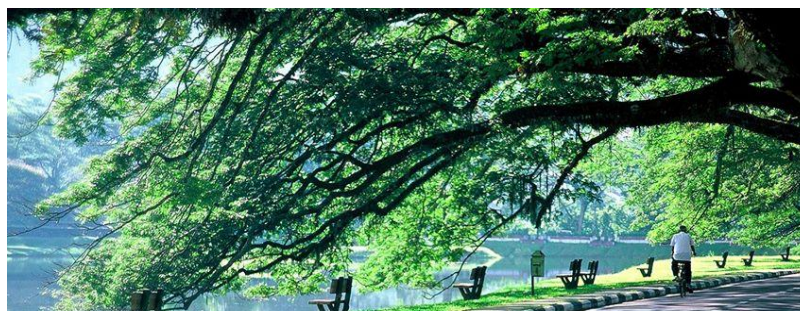


Fig. 1: Example of space that emphasizes and embedded the aspect of natural environment.

According to Abdul Aziz (2012) one of the vital elements in Islam is to respect the nature, to respect local customs and generate the sustainability. As a khalifah it is a responsibility to practice good values and conform to nature and the 'fitrah' of the environment. Mohd. Yusof (2012) explains the natural environment is an

important element to be embedded in modern built environment by plant lots of trees and preserve the natural resources. Another obligation to create the real Islamic built environment told Mohd Yusof (2012) is to develop friendly environment for the peoples.

The second factors are Social Need and Human Comfort. Five experts asserted in order to attain an Islamic ambience in the built environment; the important aspect is to consider the setting that concern to the social need and bring human comfort (Fig. 2). Islam is about conveying good values and always appropriate to functions (Abdul Aziz, 2012). Agreeing with Mohd Yusof (2012), the main element in Islamic built environment is providing basic facilities such accessibility and parking that's work for all with consideration of nice features. Nik Malik (2012) clarifies that built environment must able to bring human comfort in term of visual, sound, feelings. Mohd Tajuddin (2012) suggests that the developer should provide friendly facilities. It is a necessity to bring ease for the user especially to those 'musafir' (Mohd Tajuddin, 2012) and concern for disable community by providing an OKU-friendly environment (Maszlee, 2012). Consideration and lay emphasis on social needs with people participation such 'wakaf', bazaar and parks that can contribute to the society is key factor to execute Islamic culture. As an example, Maszlee (2012) justify that Turkey during Othmanian era is the best city that implements good public utilities along with excellent architectural design.



Fig. 2: Example of space that concern to the social need and bring human comfort.

The third factors are Religious Identity. Five experts conforming that the factor to make the built environment truly Islamic is by adapting religious identity. Yet, the identity must also suitable to the local culture (Fig. 3). The development with Islamic concept aims to revive the glorious history of Islamic civilization (Khalid Ibrahim, 2013). Consequently, in order to developed the Islamic identity in Malaysia, Nik Malik (2012) and Shamsul Amri (2012) states that Islamic ambience requires religious identity that is based on the suitability of the local community and should represent the local culture.



Fig. 3: Example of space that adapting religious identity and suitable to the local culture.

Rosnawati (2012) also supports that Islamic image will only truly divulge by considering local value, context and option to implement new material to suit current situation. Mohd Tajuddin (2012) fortifies the designer must follow and respect the local culture and contact by down play the traditional ornaments as Malay carving is the manifestation of 'tasauif' with the symbolic of 'zikir' in the motif (Abdul Aziz, 2012).

The fourth factors are Tolerant. Eight experts coincide that the key factor to make the built environment truly Islamic is when it is able to brings spirit of tolerant and liberty among community (Fig. 4). Abdul Aziz (2012) explained Islamic built environment must conform to the fundamental or 'fitrah' of human being regardless of any religious belief. According to Ramanathan (2012) the development for public open spaces

must have the sense of toleration to other religious. Division and separation in built environment will lead Malaysia to loss of racial bond he added. This statement supported by Suresh (2012) when he enlightens and suggests that the core value in Islam which is universality and humanity should be emphasis. The design should illustrate the strong toleration among Malaysian heterogeneous society.



Fig. 4: Example of space that able to bring spirit of tolerant and liberty among community.

The presence of gates and rules for visitation and accessibility is against the Sunnah. The design must give accessibility to all and we should train better staff to treat non-Muslim respectfully said Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi (2012). This is very important because Islam should be interpreted in the environment that able to bring justice to all society (Mohd. Yusof Hj. Othman, 2012). Nik Abdul Aziz (2013) enlighten that Islam is a universal religion and is suitable for all races. Takiyuddin Hassan (2012) belief Islamic built environment is not an issue or something that could cause religious tension, as it only involves architecture and design, however the adaptation of Islamic elements in architectural features according to Tan Ken Ten (2013), seems like PAS leaders could use a refresher course in the basics of the 1Malaysia initiative that supports racial diversity and religious differences for all Malaysians. That philosophy has won us a different kind of attention, one of worldwide respect and commendation. The PAS government must be mindful that Malaysia is a multi-cultural and multi-religious society that respects the differences of each community. Therefore, it should appreciate this diversity which makes this country unique he added.

The fifth factors are Order. Six experts harmonized to the statements that setting and planning with order that impose Islamic vibe is another factor to make the built environment truly Islamic (Fig. 5). In Islamic built environment the space should able to provide a 'Tauhidic concept' (Abdul Aziz, 2012). Nik Malik (2012) states that planning the Islamic setting using mosque as core will bring the soul wave and setting with Qiblat direction will bring a sense of unity and uniformity (Lilian Tay, 2012). The placement of a mosque in space planning can provide aspiration to the remembrance to Allah said Zainuddin Muhammad (2012). Supported by Abdul Khalid (2013) he agreed that in Islam the most important concept is that everything is centred on the mosque. Therefore, the State Mosque in Shah Alam will become the central axis to the development of Islamic city in Shah Alam. This is in line with Mahathir Mohammad (2013) interpretation of Islamic built environment concept, thus Putrajaya was developed in the image of an Islamic city by the inclusion of prominent mosques.



Fig. 5: Example of setting and planning with order that impose Islamic vibe.

The sixth factors are Elements of Jannah. Three experts believed that the factor to make the built environment truly Islamic is by the translation elements of Jannah (paradise) which is intelligence, beauty and tranquillity (Fig. 6). Fulfilment of the concept and the element of Jannah is an approach to adopt Islamic image (Shamsul Amri, 2012). Zainuddin Muhammad (2012) clarified, the element of Firdaus illustrated in Quran being translated such as intelligence, beauty, cool and calm with water elements, garden, flora and fauna. Mahathir Mohammad (2012) was aspired to establish Putrajaya with Islamic ambience which inspired from the Paradise (Firdaus), the highest level of heaven.



Fig. 6: Example of environment with translation elements of *Jannah* which is intelligence, beauty and tranquility.

The seventh factors are Intellectual and Knowledge. Four experts described that the factor to make the built environment truly Islamic is through the expression of intellectual and knowledge aspect in Islam (Fig. 7). Jimmy Lim (2012) urges to explore the ‘intellectual aspect’ of Islam in Islamic expression. The element of Islamic will be positively translated by implementing the sense of knowledge (intelligence) said Suresh Kumar (2012) and the intellectual value in Islam is vital to be implemented supported by Mohd. Yusof (2012). The elements of education on building is very essential, the designer should provide enough information to the user added Mohd. Yusof (2012). Thus, the declaration of Kota Bharu as Islamic City was based on the concept of knowledge, which were part of Islamic tenets (Nik Abdul Aziz, 2013).



Fig. 7: Example of environment with elements of education.

The eighth factors are Hygiene. Four experts conforming to emphasis on hygiene and cleanliness as another factor to make the built environment truly Islamic (Fig. 8). Cleanliness is demanded in Islam and part of Islamic tenets which must be applied as fundamental in Islamic built environment (Nik Malik, 2012; Nik Abdul Aziz, 2013). Maszlee Malik (2012) also urges that public awareness in the aspects of environmental hygiene is demanded in Islam. Cleanliness must become a priority to the management in order to create true Islamic atmosphere (Mohd. Yusof, 2012).



Fig. 8: Example of environment with emphasis on hygiene and cleanliness.

The ninth factors are Economic system. Five experts’ reveals that executing honest and worthy economic system based on Islamic value is the key factor to make the built environment is truly Islamic (Fig. 9). Maszlee Malik (2012) explained the cost for development must depending on the need of the society. The government is

compulsory to practice wasteful indulgence to avoid extravagant expenditure and waste of sources. The process also required to execute fair and transparency such as open tender. The development must aims to give back to the society such good accessibility and recreational needs.



Fig. 9: Example of design which executing honest and worthy economic system.

Mohd Tajuddin (2012) supported by reminding to stop using expensive and lavish material, do not spend luxuriously for decoration and ornament. This is harmonized with Nik Abdul Aziz (2012) mission in the declaration of Kota Bharu as Islamic City was based on the concept of prosperity and welfare. According to Mohd Asri (2012) if the construction of the state is built from an adequate amount of wealth not from extraction of public property, then it is something very admirable in the competitive world of civilization. However, if it is taken from the hardships of the people, then that's an injustice.

Finally the tenth factors are Safety setting. Only one expert identified the safety setting as a factor to make the built environment truly Islamic. According to Nik Malik (2012) the Islamic built environment must able to provide safe environment to the community.



Fig. 10: Example of design which provide safe environment to the user.

Table 1: Analysis Summary on Islamic Factors.

Analysis Passages	Inputs Summary	Experts
(P= 10)	T1) Natural Environment Emphasized and embedded the aspect of natural environment in built environment	(1) Tuan Haji Nik Malik Bin Nik Zainal Abidin (2) Ar. Lilian Tay Wai Fun (3) Pn Rosnawati Othman (4) Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maszlee Malik (5) Assoc. Professor Abdul Aziz Bin Shuaib (6) Prof. Dato' Dr. Mohd. Yusof Hj. Othman (7) YB Dr Shafie Abu Bakar
(P= 9)	T2) Social Need And Human Comfort Setting that concern to the social need and bring human comfort	(1) Tuan Haji Nik Malik Bin Nik Zainal Abidin (2) Professor Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi (3) Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maszlee Malik (4) Assoc. Professor Abdul Aziz Bin Shuaib (5) Prof. Dato' Dr. Mohd. Yusof Hj. Othman (6) Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim
(P= 8)	T3) Religious Identity Religious identity that suit to local culture	(1) Tuan Haji Nik Malik Bin Nik Zainal Abidin (2) Prof. Dato' Dr. Shamsul Amri Baharuddin (3) Pn Rosnawati Othman (4) Professor Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi (5) Assoc. Professor Abdul Aziz Bin Shuaib (6) Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim
(P= 15)	T4) Tolerance	(1) Assoc. Prof. Dr. K. Ramanathan a/l Kalimuthu

	Able to brings spirit of tolerant and liberty among community	(2) Dr. V.Suresh Kumar (3) Assoc. Professor Abdul Aziz Bin Shuaib (4) Professor Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi (5) Prof. Dato' Dr. Mohd. Yusof Hj. Othman (6) Datuk Takiyuddin Hassan (7) Tan Ken Ten (8) Tuan Guru Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat
(P= 7)	T5) Order Setting and planning with order that impose Islamic vibe	(1) Tuan Haji Nik Malik Bin Nik Zainal Abidin (2) Ar. Lilian Tay Wai Fun (3) Prof. Dato' Dr. Zainuddin Muhammad (4) Assoc. Professor Abdul Aziz Bin Shuaib (5) Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad (6) Tan Sri Abdul Khalid Ibrahim
(P= 3)	T6)Element of Jannah The translation elements of Jannah (paradise) which is intelligence, beauty and tranquillity	(1) Prof. Dato' Dr. Zainuddin Muhammad (2) Prof. Dato' Dr. Shamsul Amri Baharuddin (3) Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohammad
(P= 5)	T7) Intellectual And Knowledge Expression of intellectual and knowledge aspect in Islam	(1) Prof. Dr. Jimmy Lim Cheok Siang (2) Dr. V.Suresh Kumar (3) Prof. Dato' Dr. Mohd. Yusof Hj. Othman (4) Tuan Guru Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat
(P= 4)	T8) Hygiene Emphasis on hygiene and cleanliness	(1) Tuan Haji Nik Malik Bin Nik Zainal Abidin (2) Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maszlee Malik (3) Prof. Dato' Dr. Mohd. Yusof Hj. Othman (4) Tuan Guru Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat
(P= 9)	T9) Economic Executing honest and worthy economic system based on Islamic value	(1) Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maszlee Malik (2) Professor Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi (3) Tuan Guru Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat (4) Dato' Dr. Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin
(P= 1)	T10) Safety Safety setting to the built environment	(1) Tuan Haji Nik Malik Bin Nik Zainal Abidin

Conclusion:

As a conclusion, in reference to the experts opinions, the framework of indicator outlined ten factors that make an environment truly Islamic as listed in Table 1. The highest factor underlined by the experts is Tolerance, followed by Natural Environment, Social Need and Human Comfort, Religious Identity, Order, Economic, Intellectual and Knowledge, Hygiene, Jannah and Safety.

The findings will help Malaysian administrators and professionals in built environment industries to generate a better and more appropriate process of implementing an Islamic built environment in Muslim countries, particularly with regard to public open spaces. This study is most important and relevant to Malaysia and its Asian cultures.

In doing so, decision-makers must balance and match the concept of an Islamic built environment with the Malaysian people's economic, cultural and political lifestyles and consider the impact of Malaysian multi-racial and multi-religious people's suitability and sensitivity to increase the acceptance of an Islamic built environment among Malaysians. It is congruent with the nature of Malaysian heterogeneous society and with Malaysian current agenda by 1 Malaysia and the moderation (Wasatiah) concept.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The study was funded by the Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia (KPT) and Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM).

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