



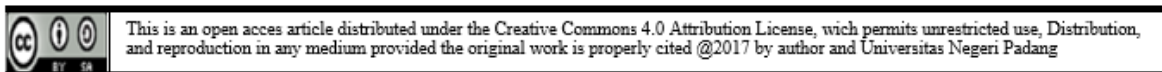
Community Perceptions of Street Hawkers in Malaysia

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Abstract

This research was aimed to analyze the characteristics and community perceptions of street hawkers in Malaysia and their impact on the environment. To collect the data, this descriptive qualitative research used instruments such as observation, interview and documentation. The data collected were primary and secondary data. The findings revealed street hawker characteristics and community perceptions of their existence in Malaysia.

Keywords: Perception, Street Hawker.

Introduction

Street Hawker or Street Trader is often included in the informal sector. In its development, a street hawker in an urban area is often associated with problems related to security and public order. Dirty, disorganized and an eyesore are the words that are usually labelled to this micro business. They exist on sidewalks, at city parks, on pedestrian bridges, and even on roads. Local government often disciplines street hawkers who are indicated to cause a traffic jam and ruin the beauty of a city. In other words, street hawkers are commonly seen as part of the problem (Hermon, 2012; Hermon, 2014a; Hermon, 2015a).

The growth of this informal sector in cities is like two sides of a coin. On the positive side, it can be a saviour in the economic sector through its contribution to employment and regional income. On the other hand, its existence in public space like roads and sidewalks does not leave enough space for pedestrians (Hermon, 2009). This condition has been a public concern because it leads to traffic congestion and interferes with pedestrian activity and creates an unclean and unhealthy environment. Environmental problems are no longer to the problem of one country but have become an international problem, the problem of environmental pollution become a more important issue in environmental sustainability (Hermon, 2010a; Hermon, 2010b). Developed countries with their consumption patterns have resulted in increasing environmental pollution from industrial waste (Hermon, 2015b; Hermon, 2016; Hermon *et al.*, 2018). As an informal economic system, street hawker has been one of a country's economy supports. The problem is how to reduce the negative impact of hawkers on the environment where they run the business.

Street hawking is a global phenomenon of informal economy activities in urban areas around the world including ASEAN. In ASEAN Economic Community's (AEC) vision, the informal sector is one of the discussion topics to be developed. Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur are the capitals of two founding countries of ASEAN. The same problem happens in the two countries. They have policies that are more or less the same but different in terms of implementation.

Street hawking in Malaysia is thought to have existed since the British colonial era. Its existence is recognized and regulated by the government as economic part of Malaysia (Bhowmik 2005) which can be



seen from licensing and taxation regulation of street hawking (Ling, 2007 in Tazilan, 2013). According to the Local Government Act 1976 the government of Malaysia defines Hawker as “a person who goes about offering goods for sale or sets up a stall offering goods for sale and include itinerant, static or temporary hawker” (Hassan 2003). In Malaysia regulating hawking, activities are the authority of a local governmental unit which name is the department of hawkers and petty traders (DHPT). DHPT is generally responsible for developing, modernizing, and managing hawkers to be in line with the vision of a city (Bhowmik, 2005; Hermon, 2014b).

The existence of these street micros or mini architectures is often associated with current functional and local needs especially in urban areas. At this time hawkers in Malaysia can fulfil buyer needs and requirements, especially in informal sector activity. They offer various foods to buyers with reasonable prices. At the same time, they also portray the aesthetic and cultural value of the hawkers because there are various ethnic groups involved and it can be seen from the food preparation process. However, there are many problems that need to be addressed for example hygiene, design configuration, security, business location, traffic and food waste disposal system. In this study, the definition of street microarchitecture was reviewed to clarify the existence of the microarchitecture and its functional involvement in urban life. This study also investigated factors that need to be considered in finding a way to a better design approach which is beneficial for the community (Tazilan, 2013; Oktorie, 2018). Therefore, the writer was motivated to study community perceptions of street hawkers in Malaysia.

Method

This research applied the descriptive qualitative research method and used observation, interview and documentation as research instruments and reviewed the literature to collect data. The researcher collected primary and secondary data from various sources (Hermon *et al.*, 2008). Primary data was collected directly from interviewees and secondary data was obtained from related documents or literature.

Results and Discussion

When people visit Malaysia their main destination is the shopping centre. The most visited shopping centre area in Malaysia is Bukit Bintang. Bukit Bintang is a shopping and entertainment centre of Kuala Lumpur where the city's main roads are located. The area where most people spending their holiday is also enlivened by the hawkers offering goods for sale. Bukit Bintang is located between three main roads, starting from Street Pudu, Street Jalan Raja Chulan in the north and Street Imbi in the South.

Kuala Lumpur City Hall forms a special unit to handle hawkers which name is Jabatan Pelesenan dan Pengurusan Penjaja Peniaga Kecil (Licensing & Petty Traders Development Department). This unit has a comprehensive function including licensing, supervising, and law enforcement to all hawking activities.

A massive development of street hawkers in Kuala Lumpur is inseparable from urbanization issue. Transmigration of Malay community from small towns to big cities contributes to increasing Malay hawker proportion in Kuala Lumpur. The increase also influences economic balance in society and becomes one of the ways to maintain Malay cultural heritage, for example, the Malay-related commodity sold by the hawkers.

From survey results, community stated that the main supporting factor of hawker emergence and increase especially in Bukit Bintang was the need to improve their socio-economy because the work could help them better their low living standard. Another factor was because they could not get a single job so one alternative way was to become a street hawker.

Malaysian community stated that street hawking activities did not really disturb them. They agreed that street hawkers were very helpful for them because its commodities are cheaper and affordable. In addition, foreign tourists also had no problem with it. According to them, its good's price was very economical and it became one of the tourist attractions. However, the community concerned about the negative impact of it on the environment. It made the environment dirty and not beautiful. It subtracted pedestrian street and interfered with pedestrian activity.



Not all street hawkers have a licence. Some of them sell in the unpermitted area. When Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur, abbreviated DBKL (Kuala Lumpur City Hall) operate, they will confiscate the goods of those hawking in illegal places because that hawkers often hinder the traffic and cause traffic congestion in that area. The operation is regulated by The Law of Malaysia Year 1974 Section 46 (1) (a) Drainage and Building Act about illegal microarchitectures and businesses such as booth, stand or stall (WPKL 1989) that can cause hindrance in public order. So, Illegal street hawkers will be sanctioned by DBKL.

Malaysian street hawkers sell their goods on the carpet and tables. The survey showed that according to types of food waste, the commodities sold by street hawkers in Bukit Bintang were divided into PSR (dry and light waste food), PSPC (heavy and wet waste food), and dry waste supplementary commodity. All hawkers in this area are not permanent. They will clean and leave the place when their goods sold out or when there are not many buyers. Their stands do not use cement construction, they only use a tent or box-like canopy stalls and tables.

The government of Malaysia actually has provided special space for street hawkers to trade on condition that the seller must have a licence. This policy positively affects street hawker condition. For instance, tourists who want to enjoy Malaysian culinary will come to Bukit Bintang which offer various culinary from around Malaysia.

The following table shows the number of ethnic-based Street Hawkers in Kuala Lumpur who already have a licence.

Table 1. The Number of Street Hawkers Who Already Have a License Based on Ethnic Groups in Kuala Lumpur, 1980-2000

	Malay	India	China	Total
1970	223 (4.4)	4,377 (80.8)	800 (14.8)	5,415 (100.0)
1980	2,596 (16.9)	11,281 (73.6)	1,445 (9.5)	15,322 (100.0)
1990	12,271 (37.0)	18,399 (55.5)	2,505 (7.5)	33,175 (100.0)
2000	11,170 (31.8)	20,812 (59.3)	3,138 (9.0)	35,120 (100.0)

Source: Hassan (2003)

Conclusion

Community perceptions of street hawkers are divided into two categories, positive perception and negative perception. Positively, Malaysia community admit that they are benefited from street hawkers because they offer cheaper and more affordable goods with the same quality as ones sold at store and supermarket. Negative perception is that generally, street hawkers could disturb city order and environment because of its chaotic and unorganized location. particularly, it could also interfere with the smoothness of pedestrian activity in the Bukit Bintang area because few of them trade in unpermitted spaces such as sidewalks and roads.

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