

AN OBSERVATION ON PROVISION AND CONSIDERATION OF SEATING IN THE SUPERREGIONAL SHOPPING COMPLEXES IN KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of shopping complex development in Malaysia, especially in Kuala Lumpur were obviously seen for the past 10 years. Big shopping complexes seem to attract lots of visitors due to their commercial variations and outlook images. The bigger the shopping complex, the longer time-spend at the shopping complexes. Conveniences to shop and rest were major factors in influencing the mood to shop, to enjoy leisure activities or just window shopping. As shopping complexes becoming most frequently visited places in urban area, comfort has become an important issue. Comfort on seating facilities has become an issue to shoppers, at regional size shopping complexes. Investigation on seating provision requires further research to ensure shoppers are comfortable and will attract to visit the shopping complex frequently. Thus, the paper presents a finding on the observation of seating provision and the consideration of seating aspects in superregional shopping complexes in Kuala Lumpur. The consideration of few aspects of seating such as type, arrangement, location, material and number of seating has been identified. The research found that the aspects of seating at three selected shopping complexes do satisfy the users. However, total number of seating at Suria KLCC is inadequate as compared to One Utama Shopping Center and Mid Valley Megamall since it has the highest number of visitors per year. Based on the findings also, seating is in need due to the activities done in shopping complexes which is related to the users' duration of stay. Consideration on the provision of seating seems to have positive feedback by the users' thus it enhances the business and benefited the shopping complexes management.

Keywords: Seating, provision, consideration, superregional shopping complex

INTRODUCTION

The paper highlights the problem of seating in selected superregional shopping complexes in Malaysia. It presents the data on observation of seating at three superregional malls, which are among the most popular and visited in Kuala Lumpur and Klang Valley. The investigation was initiated due to the growing number of people visiting shopping malls for shopping and for many other activities such as entertainment, leisure, socialization, etc. making it as one-stop center. In the context of this study, one-stop center refer as a place which provide many facilities, services, amenities and entertainments for people in a same time at a same place. Due to this, the time spent in shopping mall increases and the comfort of the users is given emphasis by the shopping management. Seating is one of the shopping mall facilities which can enhance the shopping activity. It is needed to provide rest after a long walk of the shopping and acts as a point of meeting for friends, acquaintances and family members. The investigation aims to survey the seating provision in shopping malls in Malaysia. The objectives are to examine the provision of seating in shopping mall with regards to the numbers, arrangement and design at selected malls.

LITERATURE REVIEW

At present, the number of shopping malls in Malaysia built is growing vigorously. Visiting a shopping mall has become a weekend activity, a place of leisure to provide relief from daily working pressure and a place to spend together with family and friends. People visiting the mall may not necessarily go there to buy anything but for the many facilities and services provided. Various services have been offered in shopping mall like salons, movies, and bowling alleys. Zhang, Chaipoopirutana & Combs (2011) mentioned that there are different reasons and opinions of the importance of shopping mall from the shoppers who visit shopping mall frequently. Therefore, it not only serves as a place for buying goods (Khairul Anuar & Ong, 2010), but also as a place for recreation (Connie, Sutoto & Lenny, 2002). Shopping mall has gained status as a social phenomenon. Users of the mall are persuaded to stay longer in the mall by the provision of places to rest and eat (Downie, Fisher & Williamson, 2002).

Regional and superregional shopping centers are the most common shopping mall in Malaysia. These types of shopping mall are typically enclosed, offering a variety and assortment of merchandises. The regional and superregional shopping centers are the most typical size of mall which most likely to have the ability and resources to make consumer more entertaining (Zhang et al., 2011). Regional shopping center has 400 000sqft to 800 000 sq ft GLA(gross leasable area) with 40 to 100 stores anchored by one or more department stores while the superregional shopping center has more than 800 000 sq ft GLA with more than 100 stores, including several department stores. Therefore, the superregional shopping center has more variety and assortment. (ICSC, 1999)

The role of shopping mall has evolved from being only a place to shop goods to a place for recreation (Connie et al., 2002). According to Banerjee (2002), some people went to the mall to spend good time with friends by watching movies. Sometimes, people may visits mall for the purpose of socializing with family and friends, browsing and gathering information on possible future purchases and relieving boredom rather than making purchases of goods or services (Downie et al., 2002).Wolf (2002) stated that shopping mall can be called as a habitat. This is because people can find food, basic needs and shelter at the same time. For young people and seniors, mall acts as a place for people of different age group to meet. Shopping mall provides facilities for the various group of users such as amusement stores, children playground, cinemas, ice skating and other game centers (Connie et al, 2002). The conveniences of shopping mall are many. Convenience in shopping mall is defined in terms of i) accessibility and availability or parking, ease of parking access and ease of parking, ii) efficiency such as one-stop shopping and travel time for users' home to the mall and iii) perception of users on layout of the mall, provision of toilet, climate control provided by the enclosure and shopping services (Clulow & Reimers, 2009).

Jim & Kim (2003) in Clulow & Reimers (2009), suggested that convenience of mall can be labeled according to three groups; facility convenience (e.g. parking and climate control), service convenience (e.g. credit card payment, trading

hours and public transport) and shopping convenience (e.g. check out and aisle width). Security, cleanliness, interior design of the mall and supporting facilities are also part of the convenience in the shopping mall. Seating can be considered as a component of convenience as it needed to allow users to rest. This is particularly needed given the fact that shopping mall is not only visited by young people but by people from different age group. Provision of seating is one of the facilities which are given emphasis by the shopping mall management as it can enhance shopping and other activities in shopping mall. Observation made by the researchers of this study on the shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur and Klang Valley suggested that seating has been given importance over the years. In some cases, seating is not only provided along the corridor but seating areas or lounges are provided in between shops or in several points in the shopping mall. Seating is also provided in many stores especially in certain department where users normally spend time browsing and trying a good before deciding to make a purchase. At the same time observation indicates that in some department stores, seating is provided especially for shoppers' companions to wait. In some cases, people are entertained by life piano performance depending on the time of the visit.

The effort to improve the provision of seating in shopping mall indicates the importance of seating in enhancing shopping activities. Seating is specially needed for users of certain age group such as the senior citizen and young children. This need become more pressing given the role of shopping mall as a place of leisure and a one-stop center for many activities, making it a place for families to frequent especially during weekends and holidays. Seating is also required when one has to wait for friends, colleagues and acquaintances during casual meetings. However, review of literature indicates that there is almost no study focusing on seating in the shopping mall. This paper is an attempt to examine the provision of seating in shopping mall given its importance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Observation and inventory of seating are used in this research to achieve the objectives of the investigation. The methods selected

explain the nature of the study. The following steps were carried out during the investigation:

1. Review on shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur and Klang Valley

Information on shopping malls in Kuala Lumpur and Klang Valley are gathered and potential shopping malls for the study are identified. Based on the information gathered, a survey of shopping mall is carried out to identify the types of shopping mall and to select the appropriate shopping malls for the study. Most of the largest shopping malls are located in the capital city of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur and around Klang Valley area.

2. Survey on selected shopping malls

Based on the survey, three superregional malls were selected based on its location, floor area, number of shops or outlets, facilities provided and number of visitors. The shopping malls are One Utama Shopping Centre, Mid Valley Megamall and Suria KLCC. These malls are among the most frequently visited shopping malls in Malaysia and have attracted many visitors around the country including tourists from outside the country.

3. Observation and inventory of seating in the shopping malls

This stage of the study involves identifying the layout of seating and areas in the shopping mall where seating is provided. Areas considered as appropriate place for seating are also recorded. Inventory of seating namely numbers, arrangement and design were carried out and lastly observation on users of seating in the shopping mall was carried out. Observation took place on weekdays and weekends. The research measured the physical aspects of seating within the circulation areas of the mall such as the corridors, lobby and anchor tenants. These parameters were selected to be observed because there are many people frequently wandering within the circulation areas. Therefore the possibility of seating usage is more in need because most of the users' time-spends is within the circulation area. Circulation area serves as a main path to connect users from one place/shop to another.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results identify the appropriate superregional shopping malls for the study. Table 1 shows the summary of the gross leasable area (GLA), number of visitors and location of the three shopping malls within Klang Valley area.

Table 1 Summary of the selected malls'

No	Superregional Shopping Mall	Gross Leasable Area(sq ft)	Number of visitors	Location
1.	One Utama Shopping Center	5 000 000	10 080 000	Bandar Utama, Selangor
2.	Mid Valley Megamall	4 500 000	48 400 000	Seputeh, Kuala Lumpur
3.	Suria KLCC	1 500 000	40 000 000	Jalan Ampang, Kuala Lumpur

Sources: Ng, A., 2011 & www.mallhistory.com, 2013

The results also indicated that provision of seating varies between the shopping malls as discussed in the following sections:

1. Number of seating

The number of seating varies between shopping malls. The most number of seating are in the largest shopping mall, One Utama Shopping Mall and the least number of seating are in Suria KLCC, the smallest mall respectively. The number of seating provided in One Utama Shopping Mall appears to offer sufficient seating to users and the seating is strategically located. In comparison, seating appears to be lacking in Mid Valley Megamall which is slightly smaller in size than One Utama. Therefore the number of seating cannot accommodate the number of people who desire to have a sit at the same time. Observation indicates that most of the seating type in the three malls such as benches can accommodate more than one person, allowing more people to sit at a given time. The result also indicates that more seating is provided on the levels where most activities take place except for Suria KLCC. Observation indicates that the number of seating is most required in areas where seasonal activities such as festivities promotion take place as people tend to linger or stay longer and wait for their companions in these areas.

Result on seating in anchor tenants or shops indicate that the number of seating depends on the tenants. However, ample

number of seating is provided in anchor tenants in Mid Valley Megamall and Suria KLCC. Observation indicates that the number of seating is ample to provide convenience to the shoppers. Seating is not provided in smaller stores except for stores selling shoes, gold jewelries and restaurants, food court or eateries. Table 2 shows the provision of seating at the studied shopping malls.

Table 2 Number of seating at the selected shopping malls

Seating	Shopping mall		
	One Utama Shopping Mall	Mid Valley Megamall	Suria KLCC
Seating in the corridor/ outside outlets	- Lower Ground: 22 seats - Ground Floor: 55 seats - First Floor: 112 seats - Second Floor: 83 seats - Third Floor: 42 seats - Fourth Floor: 1 seat Total: 316seats	- Lower Ground: 4 seats (can accommodate 6 person per seating) - Ground Floor: 22 seats - First Floor: 1 seat - Second Floor: 33 seats - Third Floor: 11 seats Total: 67 seats	- Concourse Floor: 2 seats (continuous seating attached and surrounded the column) - Ground Floor: 0 seat - First Floor: 4 seats - Second Floor: 12 seats - Third Floor: 22 seats - Fourth Floor: 8 seats Total: 46 seats
Seating in anchor tenants	-Parkson: 12 seats -Jusco: 9 seats -Cold Storage: no seating (except in the food court and fragrance section)	- Metrojaya: 32 seats - Aeon: 22 seats - Aeon Big: no seating - Cold Storage: no seating (exclude seating in the food court and fragrance section)	- Parkson : 51 seats - Isetan: 54 seats (exclude seating in the food court and fragrance section)
Seating in retail outlets	-normally provided in outlets selling shoes, gold jewelries, and eateries	-normally provided in outlets selling shoes, gold jewelries, and eateries	-normally provided in outlets selling shoes, gold jewelries, and eateries

Source: Field Survey, 2013

2. Arrangement of seating

Seating arrangement is important in this study because it assists in determining the appropriate place for seating. Appropriate seating arrangement allowed comfort to the users as they are introvert to sit or loitering along the corridor. The arrangements also deem to be significant in maximizing the usage of seating. Furthermore, the seating arrangements help to add value of comfort and make it interesting. Interesting seating arrangement create pleasurable environment which allowed diverse activities. When seating were

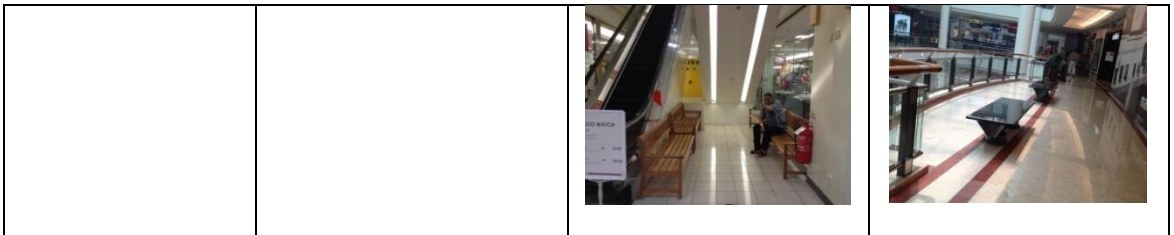
placed at high traffic and limited spaces, it is inappropriate for users to socialize excessively as many people passed by. Result shows that the arrangement of seating varies between shopping malls but there are some commonalities in the arrangement:

i. Seating along the corridor

Seating was arranged in a linear manner along the corridor is the most frequent seating arrangement observed in all the three shopping mall. However, the frequency of seating along the corridor differs between the shopping malls. The seating can be single seating or benches of different length. Based on observation, this type of seating usually placed opposite the retail outlets. Sometimes the users who were having this type of seating tend to look at the outlet in front of their seat. Therefore, after some rest, users who were attracted to the merchandise offered from the shop tend to walk inside. From observation, researchers identified that this is part of the strategy by the mall management to attract users and thus benefited their business.

Table 3a Seating arrangement in front of stores in the three shopping malls

Type of arrangement	Shopping mall		
	One Utama Shopping Mall	Mid Valley Megamall	Suria KLCC
Seating along the corridor	 	 	 







Source: Field Survey, 2013

ii. Seating designed at perimeter of columns or planter box

This type of arrangement is normally found in wide areas in front of the shops or outlets especially the anchor tenants, arranged like an island. Seating designed at perimeter of column can be seen at all the three malls. However seating designed at perimeter of planter box is only observed in the One Utama Shopping Centre and Mid Valley Megamall. This type of seating is not meant for socialization due to its extrovert arrangement since it did not encourage interaction. The seating seems to be intended that way because it gives privacy to the users for relaxing. Observation indicates that people sitting usually do not interact with others except with their own companions.

Table 3b Seating arrangement at gathering area in the three shopping malls

Type of arrangement	Shopping mall		
	One Utama Shopping Mall	Mid Valley Megamall	Suria KLCC
Seating around column/ planter box	 	   	

Source: Field Survey, 2013

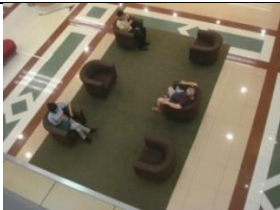




iii. Lounge arrangement

Lounge type arrangement can be found in all the three shopping malls but different in character. The seating in One Utama consists of single seating which are arranged individually apart from one another. The lounge seating in Mid Valley Megamall is not located outside the shops but in main level of one of the anchor tenants. A piano is located in this area to complement the

ambience of the space and piano recital is provided on specific time to provide relaxing atmosphere to the users. Observation indicates that most people who seat there are waiting for their companion busy shopping or paying after making a purchase. Researchers found that the location of the seating was different for each of the selected mall but basically it is still placed at low traffic circulation area because it promotes the sense of exclusiveness. The quality and design of this type of seating arrangement are usually comfortable, fashionable and made from high quality material.

Most of the lounge seating arrangement is found in Suria KLCC. This type of seating is convenience for a group of users waiting. Observation indicates that this type of seating is also located in front of an anchor tenant as seen in Suria KLCC. Lounge type arrangement appears to be very comfortable for long seating and waiting. Researcher also found that this type of seating serve as a place for users to read newspaper or books while relaxing, listen to the music, surf internet and sleeping.

Table 3c Seating arrangement in the three shopping malls

Type of arrangement	Shopping mall		
	One Utama	Mid Valley Megamall	Suria KLCC
Lounge seating arrangement			  

Source: Field Survey, 2013









3. Design of Seating

Design of seating in shopping mall is essential to drive competitiveness, innovation and value for attracting users. Most of the design of seating varies between the three malls. Design also varies between the types of seating. Most of the seating is freestanding. For example seating arranged along the corridor is normally bench type design, which apply hard material such as timber (in One Utama Shopping Mall and Mid Valley megamall) or marble (in Suria KLCC). The colours of the benches are natural timber colour and black and white marble which can easily match well with the rest of the interior of the mall. Timber benches also appear to be relaxing and inviting to the eye.

Unlike the benches, the seating around the column/ planter box is designed to provide more comfort with softer fabric material, bright colours and curve shaped couch and sofa to provide a

relaxing feeling (Table 3b and Table 3c). Some of this seating has armrest providing comfort for long seating and waiting. There are many sofas in the lounge arrangement area in Suria KLCC are nicely designed and complemented the interior of the space. Table 4 illustrates the variation of design and characteristics of seating in the three malls.

Table 3d Seating design (material, structure and colours) in the three shopping malls

Seating Design Characteristics	Shopping mall		
	One Utama Shopping Mall	Mid Valley Megamall	Suria KLCC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hard material for seating in the corridor - Soft material for couch and sofa - Armrest for comfort - Bright colours complement the ambience of the shopping mall - Variation in sofa designs 			
			
			

Source: Field Survey, 2013

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Result indicates that provision of seating in terms of the number of seating provided is not consistent between the shopping mall. The factors of the inconsistency may be because of the mall size and space provided is not enough. Therefore an additional area for

seating should be planned well by the mall management. However, some similarities can be observed in terms of the types, arrangement of seating in the corridor and the design of seating is based on its arrangement. Seating along the corridor is designed to provide short rest and wait for the shoppers and their companions as they walk or shop along a stretch of outlets. On the other hand, the provision of seating at wider areas such as lobby area or areas in front of anchor tenants are meant for longer wait or rest. Therefore it is designed to provide comfort to the shoppers.

The study which is a preliminary in nature provides the importance of provision of seating in enhancing activities in shopping mall which has gone beyond shopping and involves people from different age group. As in the observation, users from different categories noticed that seating is important to them and the most preferred type of seating is bench which located along the mall corridor. Understanding of the needs for seating will allow designers and shopping mall management to design and provide comfortable seating which will enhance shopping activities, benefiting both shoppers and shopping mall. Several recommendations and considerations required in terms of type of seating such as the location, arrangement or material can be made to increase the satisfaction of mall users. Further recommendations are as below:

1. Provide seating in a particular area with reading section and small screen on each floor to promote tranquil environment

Special area with provision of seating on each floor promotes comfortable for users. Besides, mall management can also provide small reading corner near the seating area to enhance the usage of seating, whereas, small screen such as television can also be provided to entertain users while waiting for their companion. The provision of screen in the seating area also can be useful to the management to promote their products and outlet and at once can increase their business. This can also attract children by showing the programs which are interesting to them. They no longer have to wait while their parents went for shopping which children considered the time is long and boring.

2. Provide seating with vibrant colour to attract users

Vibrant color of seating can attract users to the location of seating. Besides, the vibrant and attractive colour can enhance the mood of customers by providing the interesting decorations which can make them feel much comfortable in the crowd environment of shopping. On the other hand, right arrangement and good design of seating for example can create the grand and great visual effect to the shopping mall. A happy customer is a good customer, moreover what is nice to the eyes always near to the heart. So, it is an important matter to look after for the shopping mall management.

3. Include the signage of seating at the information screen

By having signage for a seating location in shopping mall, users can easily search for seating. This can avoid the users from wandering everywhere while they are in search for an available space to sit and wait. Therefore this may affect shopping mall customers crowding at unwanted area. People can easily heading to the direction of the seating area. Users like old folks or parents with small or many children will be constantly in need for seating where they can stop for a while to release their fatigue and regain their strength. Users who accompany their friend or spouse would rather have an ideal place to wait for their partner than standing along at the retails area. This also creates more space at the shopping area therefore create a better shopping environment for the users.

In advance, the mall management can also get many benefits in enhancing their business. Users' satisfaction level also can be improved by indentifying problems and issues arise at selected shopping malls. The feedback and response from users are able to enhance the users' awareness of seating. Besides, it also can increase the strategies of mall management in enhancing the attractiveness of shopping mall thus it help to generate the income of the country.

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