CULTURAL, ARCHITECTURAL, 'SENSE OF PLACE' AND SUFISTIC BELIEFS IN MOSQUE TOURISM CASE STUDY: MASJID AR-RAHMAN, PULAU GAJAH, KELANTAN

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ABSTRACT

The mosque is a sacred important religious symbol for bringing Muslims together as demonstrated during the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This paper investigates the potential of Masjid Ar-Rahman of Pulau Gajah, Kelantan as a spot for mosque tourism. Although this mosque was constructed in 2016, it has demonstrated a simplicity in its scale and traditional image. It has value as a hybrid assimilation of Hindu-Buddhist syncretism and tolerance, and has coined the term Nusantara to denote its hybridised Malay and Javanese architectural styles. The typology of this humble Malay Mosque architecture is of medium-scale and reflects the Sufistic contextual value beliefs of encouraging religious and architectural tourism alike. The conceptual framework capitalises on the research gap found in mosque cultural, architectural and Sufistic beliefs. Research by further delving into constructing the "Sense of Place" in relation to the "Sacred Places". This research employs qualitative methods of interviewing visitors, applying phenomenological and case study approaches supported by architectural documentation in emphasising the symbolic and semiotic aesthetics aspects in constructing the "Sense of Place" bonded by Sufistic symbolic aesthetics. The theory is constructed in the deeply rooted Islamic Mosque architecture via Sufistic beliefs that provides a platform for mosque tourism activities.

KEYWORDS: Mosque tourism, mosque architecture, Sufistic beliefs, sense of place

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Cultural heritage plays an important role in keeping traditions alive and more so when mosque tourism is taken into consideration. Currently, most mosques in Malaysia have forms of big domes with minarets (Utaberta *et al.*, 2015). The two non-local mosque features of tower and domes elements have replaced local parts and altered the official expressions of the mosques in the Malay Archipelago.

The style was brought along by the British colonials during their period of colonisation in the then the Malay Federal States before the Independence. One of the identified problems in mosque architecture now is the loss of the vernacular style mosque architecture hence the loss of the local architectural identity. It is mainly in the use of construction materials and is has been described as a crisis for the mosque.

The traditional mosques usually reflect strong the influences of the Malay houses, way of life and the environment. Previously, the mosques used timber in their construction as opposed to the current materials of mainly bricks, steel, glass, and concrete. Among the different kinds of historical approaches employed are architectural typologies that deal with function, form, style, and materials.

Thus, these components play an important role in creating the "identity" of the mosque. The components coupled with the understanding of Sufistic beliefs of creating 'Sacred Places' would assist with the construction of the 'Sense of Place'. It is another method of bringing back the meaning of the

'Sense of Place' in a mosque. This idea cumulates all the issues on 'conceived', 'perceived' ideas of mosque architecture in creating a 'lived in' notion thus constructing the 'Sense of Place' after the 'Sacred Places' has been established.

The architectural design, symbols, iconography, and artefacts are essential to a religion. Religion affects the people's attachment to a sacred place, where space is purposely created to keep the basic concept of religions and as a mediator for experiencing faith (Gojnik & Gojnik, 2019b).

Nowadays, most mosques have lost their social characteristics. In other words, it seems that mosques in the present times are operated simply as a house of worship for Muslims, rather than being used by the whole community and are more exclusive spaces rather than inclusive ones.

The main aim of this paper is to delve into mosque tourism by looking at its connection to mosque architecture. It goes further to examine the spiritual approach of Sufism that characterises the mosque through its architectural components and space planning.

This angle is believed to have portrayed the mosque of having the ultimate beauty, simplicity, and openness thus visitors. In National Tourism Policy 2020-2030 (2019) mosque tourism falls under the Cultural and Heritage Tourism, Muslim Friendly Tourism and to some extent the Cross-Border Tourism.

METHODOLOGY

The investigation into the issue of mosque tourism looks deeper into the potentiality of a mosque to provide an opportunity for tourism activities based only on its appearance religious and other functions.

This study uses descriptive qualitative approaches, especially in the context of phenomenology, with the aim of obtaining accurate systematic facts regarding the characteristics and values of expression from the mosque architecture of the Masjid Ar-Rahman and the construction of the 'Sense of Place'. It also relies heavily on the observation process during an event, in prayer times and at quiet times.

The observation also focused on the overall composition of the mosque space and on the hybrid components of some of the mosque's architecture and design styles. A survey on the number of visitors to the mosque also determines the popularity of the mosque in attracting tourists based on its architectural features on different occasions throughout the year.

A set of questionnaires was used to indicate the attractive characteristics of the mosque and to understand the connection between the visitors, the mosque architecture and Sufism.

FINDINGS

When dealing with Sufism in a mosque architecture, it involves spirituality and strengthen by other functions that create the 'Sacred Places'. Authenticity means that the architecture of the mosque has a twofold space conception: spiritual and physical, epistemological, and aesthetical. These are fundamental areas of concern, that require deciphering to relate to the mosque tourism.

CONCLUSION

In referring to the objectives of the research, Masjid Ar-Rahman has demonstrated the success in constructing the 'Sense of Place' based on 'Sacred Spaces' for mosque tourism. It is successful in presenting the outlook of a vernacular architecture that suited the environment. This is achieved with an understanding of the architecture in relating to simplicity or in moderation for all actions, physically, emotionally, and mentally.

The mosque architecture has managed to construct the 'Sense of Place' based on the Sufistic beliefs and the creation of the 'Sacred Places' for mosque tourism. Above all the design conceptualisation of faith, spirituality, and aesthetics can support the preservation of the identity of various forms that constitute the elements of a religious edifice for men and women; elements that thematise the relationship between spiritual repose, spatial equity, and aesthetics.

Thus, the 'Sacred Places' can be identified departing from the teaching of Sufism. Above all, the Sufistic beliefs not only provide the 'Sense of Place' for Masjid Ar-Rahman but also encourages the mosque tourism in an inclusive mode as a house of worship.

CONTRIBUTION/PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The Sufistic beliefs can be related to the mosque architecture of Masjid Ar-Rahman as the environmental context and the architecture itself offer the 'Sense of Place' with openness and no 'intimidation' to the visitors. The concept of inclusivity is truly found in the 'Sacred Spaces' that provides access to all walks of life hence enhancing the real meaning of mosque tourism. This welcoming ambience encourages visitation by the worshippers and non-Muslims alike.

The Sufistic beliefs provide another angle of attraction for the visitors to the mosque. The mosque architecture of Masjid Ar-Rahman not only offers a look into vernacularity and heritage in architecture but also the meaning of inclusivity for the mosque tourism intention. Although the Sufistic beliefs are considered the fundamentals of Islamic teachings and have long been in existence, the renewal of its existence enhances the meaning of local identity and vernacularity in the mosque architecture.

This experience can be seen as an innovation in mosque tourism that can be further developed and promoted as part of the heritage trail for mosque architecture.

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