



Inter-Ethnic Interactions in Urban Public Space: The Malaysian Experience

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ABSTRACT

Social interaction entails communal experiences between people during their daily activities. People from different ethnic backgrounds in Malaysia namely the Malays, Chinese and Indians spend their leisure time in an urban square, which offers opportunities for social interaction among three ethnic groups. However, how are public spaces utilised for leisure by people from different multi-ethnic backgrounds? Does the variety of attributes in public spaces attract people from a different background? The current aim of this research sets to establish properties and attributes of urban square characteristics such as the quality of daily activities that contribute to inter-ethnic social interactions among users in urban civic spaces. The study focused on constructing indices on how daily activity attributes, and how to investigate the diversity amongst the three ethnic groups on how the urban public space is perceived. A total of 140 questionnaires were administered to measure how the public square users perceived public space use in Batu Pahat town, Malaysia Peninsular. The analysis was facilitated through analytic tool of the Rasch Model. The study revealed that the Malays use urban squares more than Indians and Chinese. Consequently, this affects the level of the Malays social interaction among others. While on the other hand, for square activities reflecting Chinese and Indian culture makes the urban square less attractive to the Chinese and Indians. It suggests that the environmental attribute quality of the square should be improved to attract social interaction amongst the three ethnic groups.

التفاعلات بين الأعراق في الفضاء العام الحضري: التجربة الماليزية

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الكلمات المفتاحية:

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فضاءات مدنية

الملخص

يستلزم التفاعل الاجتماعي تجارب مجتمعية بين الناس خلال أنشطتهم اليومية. يقضي الأشخاص من خلفيات عرقية مختلفة في ماليزيا مثل الملايو والصينيين والهنود أوقات فراغهم في ساحة حضرية ، مما يوفر فرصًا للتفاعل الاجتماعي بين ثلاث مجموعات عرقية. ومع ذلك ، كيف يتم استخدام الأماكن العامة لقضاء وقت الفراغ من قبل أشخاص من خلفيات متعددة الأعراق المختلفة؟ هل تنوع السمات في الأماكن العامة يجذب الناس من خلفية مختلفة؟ الهدف الحالي من هذا البحث هو إنشاء خصائص وسمات المربعات الحضرية مثل جودة الأنشطة اليومية التي تساهم في التفاعلات الاجتماعية بين الأعراق بين المستخدمين في المساحات المدنية الحضرية. ركزت الدراسة على بناء مؤشرات حول كيفية سمات النشاط اليومي ، وكيفية التحقيق في التنوع بين المجموعات العرقية الثلاث حول كيفية إدراك الفضاء العام الحضري. تم إجراء ما مجموعه 140 استبيانًا لقياس كيفية تصور مستخدمي المساحات العامة لاستخدام الأماكن العامة في بلدة باتو باهات ، شبه جزيرة

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ماليزيا. تم تسهيل التحليل من خلال الأداة التحليلية لنموذج Rasch. كشفت الدراسة أن الملايو يستخدمون الساحات الحضرية أكثر من الهنود والصينيين. وبالتالي ، فإن هذا يؤثر على مستوى التفاعل الاجتماعي للملايو من بين آخرين. بينما من ناحية أخرى ، فإن الأنشطة المربعة التي تعكس الثقافة الصينية والهندية تجعل الساحة الحضرية أقل جاذبية للصينيين والهنود. يقترح أنه يجب تحسين جودة السمة البيئية للمربع لجذب التفاعل الاجتماعي بين المجموعات العرقية الثلاث.

1. Introduction

Public places provide people with avenues to spend their leisure time outdoors in the urban community, and they also offer a comfortable environment for interaction among ethnic groups living within a particular society. Urban Square in Malaysia has lost their inventive function as a meeting place and interaction among each other (Ali & Nawawi 2006). Public space studies in Malaysia have given a little attention on how ethnic groups interact with each other in urban public spaces. Thus, absence of such studies leaves a gap in our understanding of ethnic diversity of multicultural societies such as the rapidly urbanizing Malaysia. Urban squares are among the key spaces that represent inter-ethnic interactions.

Urban Square are outdoors places which people like to access for free (Madanipour 1999). In urban areas people prefer to interact among themselves on daily basis. Thus, people in urban area prepare to have quality of life whereas the effect of people interacting with each other is central to that (Das 2008). For instance, an urban square in a city center plays a crucial role in promoting social interaction between residents. Consequently it is perceived as important component of cities and towns that offer a range of benefits for people in urban community (James et al 2009).

The attribute quality of public spaces such as urban park, squares and streets can provide opportunities for ethnic groups to socialize and interact. The significance of urban square is to provide opportunity for social interaction and communication with other different social groups as well as friends and neighbors who may come from different cultural backgrounds. Even though social interaction and livability strongly depends on people's expectations on an individual scale (Liu & Xiao, 2021). Therefore, social interaction can be within or across ethnic groups. This current study sets to investigate how the three major Malaysian ethnic groups namely the Malays, Chinese and Indians interact with each other while utilizing urban public square.

The specific objective of this study is to determine the perception of users of urban square in Batu Pahat Malaysia based on the three ethnic diversity.

1.1 People Relationships in Urban Square

To identify the relationship between human and urban parks has recently become a subject of scientific interest. A considerable amount of research investigates people's utilization and satisfaction with urban parks, as well as influencing factors (Liu & Xiao, 2021). Therefore People choose visiting or not to visit a public space not only for the place attributes but also for the condition of such particular location and its quality attribute. In the case of community attached to the public space such as park and square in the neighborhood and residents behavior for engaging to manage these places that have effect on public space utilization and create relationship between place and people for social community (Mohapatra & Mohamed 2013). Thus, public space in town has been realized as the main contributor to the welfare of urban community. Ali & Nawawi (2006) found that public space is emerging as one of the most significant places in the urban areas. This revealed that public space is a multi-purpose in towns and cities particularly through the way it offers social, economic and other benefits to the people. Nevertheless, public space helps to enhance the development of a town and city that can improve the quality of urban resident's community life. Every town and city have different type of public space which are publicly access to people such as squares, parks, streets and communal spaces (Gelh, 2001, Carmona et al 2003 & Beck, 2009). Urban Square is a space that is located usually in the town and city center where

people gathering took place with family and friends as well as interaction with new people to share activities and experiences. In addition, the activities in the urban square make a milieu for people to utilize and bring with them a need for other cultural activities.

People in public space provide communal benefits that provide a place for people to gather and interact in urban community activities. Urban square attraction present weak relationship with attribute quality of such of urban square, whereas it present a strong relationship among the community members (Oloruntoba et al. 2013). "it can be argued that the public space of the city perform a number of their functions with varying degrees of success: it is best recreational and entertaining, partially creative, and the function of storing the "collective memory" (Polyakova et al., 2020). People perceive place experiences and attribute quality of place in their everyday interaction in urban community. Tree elements, seating, and beauty of place are some of the significant elements of urban square attributes which attract people and promote their visitation, relaxation, engaging in social activities and share experiences with each other (Nasution & Zahrah. 2012; Gehl 2002); Kaplan & Kaplan 1989). Therefore, people's attraction to urban square is likely to promote relationship among them through medium of environmental settings of urban square which promotes social interaction.

1.2 Relationship between urban Square attribute and ethnic diversity interaction

Social interaction among people of different gender and age group has been identified to be crucial in promoting positive sense of relationship and sense of trust (Gobster 2002). Thus, the relation between public spaces users, attribute quality, and the quality of people relationship are significant indicators of social interactions in urban areas. People are concerned about public space condition design which play significant role in attracting them and facilitating social interaction. This is because public space is a place where people prefer to socialize, interact, and engage in their leisure activities in urban community (Wiles et al. 2009). Whilst urban square create better space for people to understand each other in ethnic diversity behavior. Ethnic groups perception of urban square relate to social interaction and place activities which become critical to attract people and improve urban community environment attribute (Peter et al. 2010). Place attribute and quality of life of people in such space as urban square which attract people to create interaction with others in the urban community setting (Das 2008). Public space can play a significant role as a 'mixer' to solve the problem of involving the migrants in the public life, their arrangement should reflect the ethnic diversity of the city's population, such as presenting information on street signs in a different language (Polyakova et al., 2020).

Public space participation is the main element of people functioning. Public space community is a social relationship and engaging in social activities that people participate in daily of life and relating to how people use the environment that is significant in their urban community. The quality attribute is important as it offers opportunity for ethnic groups to enjoy attributes of space that they need. Public space attracts visitors to engage in activities as a group or individually where they engage in walking, jogging, exercises and in some cases some people prefer to join other type of sports with a relatively high involvement. Example of these sports include football, volleyball and golf (Gobster 2002). In this study, social interaction, activities and attribute quality of place exhibit people's perception on urban square in Batu Pahat town, Malaysia. Ethnic groups from different

background do not always utilize public space in urban community concerned with place itself or environment attribute. In addition, there are three major factors that affect how people utilize and perceive the attractions of public space (Nasution & Zahrah 2012; Ali & Nawawi 2006). Nevertheless, ethnic diversity could be responsible for public space perception differentials between people of different cultural backgrounds.

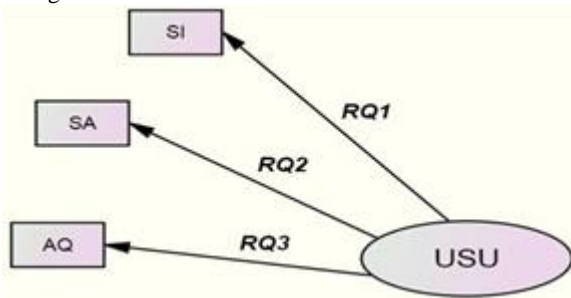


Figure 1: Research theoretical framework

Note: USU= Urban square utilization, SI=Social interaction, SA=Social activities, AQ= Attribute quality.

2. Method

Batu Pahat district of Johor State in Peninsular Malaysia is located on latitude 1°51'N and longitude 102°56'E about 240 kilometers away from Kuala Lumpur. The population of Batu Pahat town is constituted by the major Malaysian ethnic groups where the Malays constitute about 37%, the Chinese are in majority as they are about 60% of the population whilst the Indians are the least about 2% of the total population (Binti Kasmon et al., 2014). This study was conducted in the town center and specifically focused on urban square that has become the most popular place for gathering and meeting friends and its own identity which is the weekly night market holding in the weekend. This market holding at the urban square is visited by people regardless of their cultural background. Batu Pahat is a town located in Johor State and the town is witnessing rapid development. Batu Pahat has variety of public space such as open spaces which the public utilize easily. These public spaces include urban square, urban park and playfield where ethnic groups have different perception to visit these spaces due to their culture need and quality of life. Urban Square is one of the popular environments in Batu Pahat town. Thus, urban square is an important site to study and evaluate the resident’s relationship among each other regarding to different cultural and outdoors spaces need of attribute quality, and leisure activities as well as their social interaction among ethnic diversity background in the town.

2.1 Data Collection

A total of 140 sets of questionnaires were randomly distributed, this is for the reason to elicit data from people who visited the urban square at different times during weekends and other days. The questionnaires consisted of different sections; in the first section. The demographical profile of the respondents of this survey such as ethnic, age, and educational level were given. In the second section, the survey questions elicited data on how people utilize the urban square and how they interact. The third section contained the questions in regards to activities people prefer to do in the square or those that attracted them most to utilize square. Finally, there were questions on how people perceive the urban square in terms of attribute quality of place. For analysis of the data the authors used Winsteps a Rasch Measurement Model software to analyze the elicited data. The Rasch Model showed the reliability and validity to establish the data to fit the model and also used to observe Different Item Functioning (DIF) of various data variables.

The Rasch measurement model has made it possible for social scientists to conduct calibrated measurement where the attention is focused on people (Bond & Fox 2013). It was mentioned that it reflects the probability among the level of inactive (person’s ability or measure) and to the measurement item (item location or difficulty). This outfit as MNSQ and ZSTD means in Rasch Measurement Model context they indicate how accurately or predictably data fit the model.

3. Results and Data Analysis

3.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The study presents results of a quantitative analysis designed to display degree of perception of ethnic group’s background such as ethnicity, gender, age and level of education of urban square visitors. The number of male respondents is square is (45%) and the female respondents number is (54%). for the respondents age they were within a range of a six (6) to fifty five (55) years and above. However, Respondents from ages of 6-12 were recorded as absent data because of the language barrier that was difficult contact between the researcher and respondents in this age group and also least respondents of this age groups utilize urban square.

Table 1 shows that there were different category of visitors among the three ethnic groups; the Malays were the most frequent visitors as compared to the Chinese and Indians. The three ethnic groups in the survey questionnaires showed that the three ethnics were different in the degree of utilization the urban square. The Malays have the highest frequency of utilizing the urban square when compared to the Chinese and Indians. In terms of the occupation degree, private sector and students were the most frequently to visit urban square. This was because of the presence of government offices and Open University were close to the square. Similarly, private sector employees and students usually visit offices whilst the students visit the space for their homework and or for their leisure.

Table 1: Respondents demographic profile factor on Square (n=140)

| Measure factors | N | Items (group) | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|-----|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | 134 | Male | 64 | 45.71 |
| | | Female | 76 | 54.28 |
| Age | 134 | 6-12 | 2 | 1.42 |
| | | 13-18 | 27 | 19.28 |
| | | 19-55 | 114 | 81.42 |
| | | 55 and Above | 7 | 5 |
| Race Group | 134 | Malay | 112 | 80 |
| | | Chinese | 24 | 17.14 |
| | | Indian | 4 | 2.85 |
| Occupation | 134 | Student | 37 | 26.42 |
| | | Government sector | 35 | 25 |
| | | Private sector | 41 | 29.28 |
| | | Retire | 2 | 6.7 |
| | | Housewife | 6 | 1.42 |
| | | Self employed Others | 14 | 10 |
| | | 3 | 2.14 | |

3.2 Reliability and validity

In the person reliability index in the data result that shows (PR) 0.75 and item reliability is (IR) 0.97; Person separation is (PS) 1.74, item separation is (IS) 5.81 to display there is a necessary number of respondents and item to measure on square utilization. Person and item separation value is 2 or less that implies that strata separated by separate people measure to two groups of respondents to this survey (Abdul Aziz 2011). Thus, if it is more than 5, that means it is excellent in terms of respondents understanding the instrument survey. Furthermore, item separation is (IS) 5.81 and item reliability is (IR) 0.97, showing that items value are excellent to measure. Bond & Fox (2007) found that fair respondent reliability index is between 0.67-0.80. Furthermore, Wright & Master (1982) indicate respondent’s separation as group differences level of ability to measure item. Thus, a good separation index is > 2.0 (Linacre 2008). It suggests that a Cronbach-’s Alpha response value from the data analysis survey is 0.97% as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Respondent reliability and separation value item and person

| Person | | Item | | Cronbach-’s Alpha |
|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Separation | Reliability | Separation | Reliability | |
| 1.74 | 0.75 | 5.81 | 0.97 | 0.97% |

3.3 Respondent’s utilization in the urban square

In the measuring of value validity is important to look at point measure correlation ((PTMEA Corr) (Bond & Fox 2007). It suggests that (PTMEA Corr) is a positive item value, which shows the degree of the items that working together to measure an underlying construct. In the Table 3, 4 and 5 that showed all items with positive value index > .20 minimum PTMEA Corr. Therefore, these positive items value of PTMEA Corr is to test that item in the instrument are constructed well.

Table 3: Item perception in social interaction statistics outfit measure.

| Total score | Measure | Outfit | | Ptmea | Item |
|-------------|---------|--------|------|-------|--------------|
| | | Mnsq | Zstd | Corr | |
| 117 | 2.47 | 1.71 | 3.3 | 0.3 | o2f_strangrs |
| 220 | 1.68 | 1.42 | 3.3 | 0.36 | o2e_neighbor |
| 251 | 1.41 | 1.24 | 2.2 | 0.35 | o2d_frindsde |
| 277 | 1.15 | 1.31 | 2.7 | 0.37 | o2a_alone |
| 361 | 0.08 | 1.13 | 0.9 | 0.34 | o2c_frindsse |
| 444 | 0.44 | 1.60 | 3.7 | 0.23 | o2b_familysp |

Table 3 shows the item fit index (outfit Mnsq, Zstd) of six items value that relate to social interaction. It shows that on how people spend their leisure time and likewise on how people perceive to interact with other in square. The result of outfit Mnsq shows that items value are above 1.50 legit, namely items o2f (spending time with a stranger from a different area) and o2b (spending time with family). In the other value of outfit Mnsq between 0.5 to 1.5 Logit, namely o2e (spending time with neighbors), o2d (friends from different ethnic), o2c (friends from same ethnic). o2a (spending time on urban park alone), in the Rasch acceptable range is between 0.5 and 1.5 logit. Thus, higher value than 1.5 logit exhibit items are unproductive for construction of measurement. It suggests that item o2f_strangrs will need more verification. That means urban square users do not feel safe to spend time with strangers and interaction with them in urban square.

3.4 Socialization dynamics in urban square

As depicted in table 4 the item fit index (outfit) Mnsq of 18 items that were analyzed and are presented in table 4 and 5 in regards to the urban square social activities and attribute quality of place. Moreover, focus was on leisure activities such as exercise and jogging, family visiting (picnic), place of recreational activity, chatting with others from same and different ethnic, dating, photo taking, working as doing homework or work document, gathering for eating, drinking, and children play.

Table 4 Item perception in human activity statistic outfit measure.

| Total score | Measure | Outfit | | Ptmea | Item |
|-------------|---------|--------|------|-------|---------------|
| | | Mnsq | Zstd | Corr. | |
| 321 | 0.69 | 1.40 | 3.0 | 0.19 | o3j_workingg |
| 377 | 0.53 | 1.20 | 1.5 | 0.44 | o3f_datingce |
| 276 | 0.26 | .73 | -2.2 | 0.44 | o3e_chatdeth |
| 392 | 0.21 | .72 | -2.2 | 0.48 | o3d_chatseth |
| 379 | 0.09 | .90 | -.7 | 0.4 | o3h_phottak |
| 372 | -0.01 | .89 | -.7 | 0.53 | o3k_gatherin |
| 320 | -0.43 | .76 | -1.8 | 0.5 | o3c_recreatn |
| 406 | -0.44 | 1.11 | .8 | 0.38 | o3l_chidnply |
| 428 | -0.48 | .66 | -2.7 | 0.45 | o3b_familyvi |
| 339 | -0.98 | .86 | -.9 | 0.36 | o3g_leactvits |
| 471 | -0.91 | .84 | -1.2 | 0.38 | o3a_exercise |

Furthermore, table 4 shows that in urban square of Batu Pahat town, where the three ethnic groups prefer to utilize and spend their leisure time. Thus, this research found that the three ethnic groups preferred to engage in all square activities and important factor for all the ethnic groups. However, the three ethnic groups perceive activities in different fashions and specifically by using urban square. The output Mnsq in the result present 18 items values which are between 0.5 to 1.5 Logit. These items values exhibit that the degree of these items are productive for measurement whereas item outfit Mnsq with less value than 0.5 Logit exhibits overlapping items with other item value. However, these items value needs further verification. In addition, these items value have an acceptable range.

On the other hand, the result in Table 5 shows the items of attribute quality of place as shown on outfit mnsq value namely o5a (shaded trees); o5b (night market), o5c (water element), o5d (pathway), o5e (shelters and seating), o5f (aesthetic of place as an environmental quality) and o5g (social activity area of different ethnic) that have all items value with acceptable range. Furthermore, Z standard value for the item namely o5f (aesthetic of place as an environmental quality) indicate the value is (-2.2) which more than acceptable range. Therefore, other items value of Z standard indicate range value that exceeded proposed range by Linacre (2008), suggests that value is -2 to +2 which mean these items have to perceive from respondents differently.

Table 5: Item perception in quality of place statistic outfit Measure

| Total score | Measure | Outfit | | Ptmea | Item |
|-------------|---------|--------|------|-------|---------------|
| | | Mnsq | zstd | Corr. | |
| 389 | 0.06 | 1.06 | 0.5 | 0.21 | o5b_nighmakt |
| 383 | 0.04 | 1.02 | -.2 | 0.44 | o5d_pathway |
| 406 | -0.12 | 1.06 | -.5 | 0.44 | o5g_socialac |
| 438 | -0.58 | .81 | -1.4 | 0.47 | o5e_sheltset |
| 441 | -0.73 | .79 | -1.6 | 0.47 | o5c_waterelm |
| 454 | -0.95 | 1.11 | -0.9 | .29 | o5a_shadtres |
| 468 | -1.10 | .72 | -2.2 | 0.46 | o5f_aesthetic |

In terms of respondents and their hierarchy of item difficulty, person item-map in the Rasch Measurement Model is showing a rule generated from the measurement of ethnic diversity users on urban square that shows users ability to carry df out of their leisure on square utilization. This person item-map that has shown degree of square activities as well as users perception the level of attribute quality of place that are exhibit needed in urban square setting. Person item-map in Rasch Measurement Model had shown the degree of respondents with high ability of users (easy to like and agree) on the bottom side, and lower respondents (difficulty to like and agree) at the up of the map scale.

The most difficult item (o2f-strangers) with difficulty in perception t measured 2.47 Logit, which stop in up scale while the simplest item (o5f_aesthetic) was in the lower part of the scale with measurement value of -1.10. The person item map shows difficult items could be answered just from high capability. Easy items might be able to answer by high and low ability. Respondents showed the high ability, whereas respondents might answer easy item with high and low ability (Linacre 2008). According to Bond & Fox (2007) suggests that overlapping items measure different elements with different levels of difficulty as shown in Figure 2 and Tables 2, 3, 4.

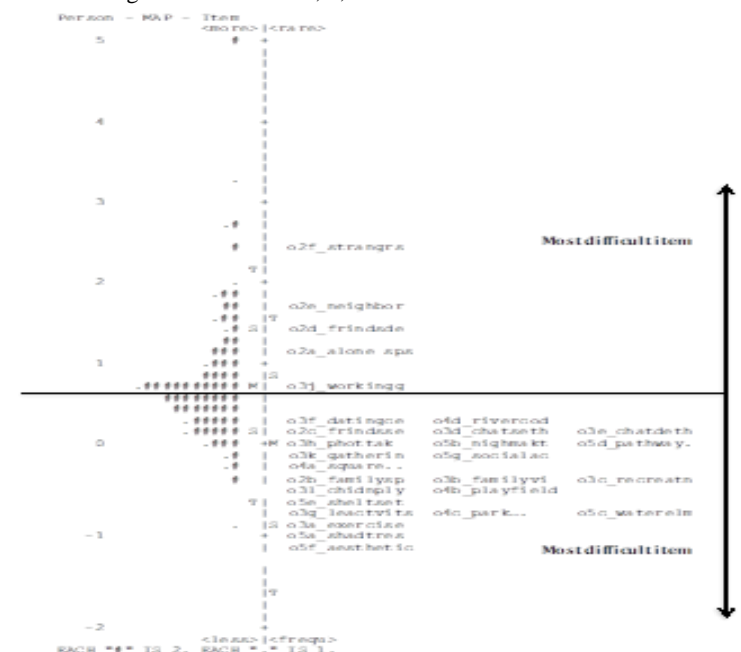


Figure 2: Person- map item of distribution map awareness on Square utilization.

Based on the distribution of ethnic and gender, the result of 24 items

analysed in Figure 3 and 4 showed that the calculation was analysed based on DIF values drawn from Rasch Measurement Model which also reflected on the three factors namely social interaction, human activities and attribute quality of place in square. Under social interactions different t-value were observed between male and female particularly on item o2a_alonesps (spend time alone) who set-value was 1.44 for female groups and -1.58 for male that showed the most significant perception of urban square utilization alone. Majority of the indicators appeared to have a small difference with regard to gender groups. Furthermore, the analysis has shown how gender difference influenced visits to urban square. Generally speaking, people have different perception of urban square activities. Thus, human activities factor indicates that the male group users prefer to utilize urban square to do exercise, walking and jogging more than female group users. The result showed correlations by gender value in activities items that least different between male and female in these items t-value (See Figure 3).

Furthermore, the 7 items of attribute quality theme, the item o5c_waterelm (water element) appeared to be less significant in t-value index 0.92 for male groups whereas female perceive this item as more significant compared to the male group a with index t-value -0.87 (See Figure 3).

The result of Different Item Functioning analysis showed that the ethnic groups perception on square utilization. Factor social interaction among ethnic groups that shows, the Chinese groups to utilize square and perceive this indicator o2a_alonespas (visit and spend time alone) index t-value -2.83 whereas Malays and Indians perceived this indicator least when compared with the Chinese. In fact, this item is considered to show the most significant item and has bias value. The item o2e_neighbor (spend time with neighbours) has index t-value 2.18 was perceived by Chinese while perceived less significant and bias than Malays and Indians in this theme. Furthermore, based on the figure below, the items of the square activities and attribute quality of place are showed to be in t-value with bias degree while these items are still have slight different of t-value among each other based on ethnic groups perception on urban square utilization (See Figure 4).

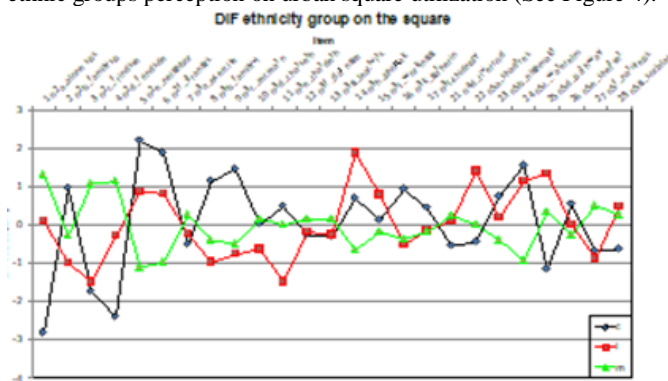


Figure 3: The result of different t-value of ethnicity stratification

4. Discussion

4.1 Ethnic groups perception level in social interaction

According to the findings of this study, the three ethnic groups namely the Malays, Chinese and Indians have shown different ways of perceiving urban square utilization. Similarly, the three ethnic groups perception on social interaction also extended to gender based differences in public space perception. Thus, females groups chooses less than males group to utilize square alone, whereas females chosen more than males to utilize square with family and friends from same ethnic. Nevertheless, the preference of males appears to be more than that of females who preferred to spend their time with friends from different ethnic, neighbors and strangers in urban square. Conversely, males mostly interact with them and consequently, females seemed to be less likely to interact with square users that they do not know. This is in contrast to males who showed more tendency to interact with all square user regardless of their ethnic background. Therefore, females exhibit more security and safety consciousness more than their male’s counterparts in respect of interacting with urban square space users.

For the three ethnic groups the Chinese prefer more than Indians and

Malays to spend time alone and with friends from same ethnic group. This is perhaps because of lower numbers of the Chinese people users of the urban square. Consequently, the Chinese groups interact with family members or with neighbors and are least to accommodate strangers. On the other hand, the Indians have more preference than Malays and Chinese in terms of time spending with family members. In other words, the Indians prefer more than Malays and Chinese to have more interaction with their family members. Similarly, they seem least in trusting others because not many Indians use utilize the urban square. However, the Malays have more preference than Indians and Chinese for utilize the square and spending time with their neighbors and strangers. Nevertheless, the Malays prefer more than other ethnic groups to have more interaction with neighbors and strangers. Thus, the Malays interact less with Indians and the Chinese because they feel less interesting to engage and interact with them in square utilization activities. This finding is parallel with Ho et al (2005), found that and suggests the difference among African Americans, Hispanics and Whites were more prefer to utilize the public space alone compared to Chinese, Japanese and Korean and found that Chinese, Hispanics and Koreans prefer to utilize the public space with three or more people. The perception level of ethnic group’s activities in urban square utilization.

The findings of this study reveals the roles of urban square in generating different leisure and social activities for the urban population. For instance, the females prefer to engage themselves with photo taking and gathering with friends or engaging in other activities such as picnic and chatting, or walking. Whereas, the males prefer to engage with their kinsmen for chatting and this shows that it is an important activity for them. Thus, this result finding has two different findings among females and males that found parallels with females and rejecting with males in the finding from past studies by Makinen and Tyrvaainen (2008) where the females prefer to walk and males prefer to engage with more physical activities such as sports. In the context of Batu Pahat, the three ethnic groups interacting on urban square appear to show differences both in perception and utilizing the public space. For instance, the Chinese engage more than the Indians and Malays in doing exercise in the square. The impact of ethnic group activities in urban square seems to be consistent with Elmendorf et al (2005); Peters et al (2010) who observed differences among ethnic groups in meeting friends and having picnics or a barbecue and other physical activities.

4.2 The perception level towards attribute quality of place among ethnic groups

This research finding underlines the significant impact of gender on square attributes quality. Thus, the results of seven items show almost the same level of preferences by gender towards environment attributes quality on square utilization. However, it shows that the females group prefer more than the males in perceiving water element quality as an interesting attribute quality attraction available in the square. The means female visitor feels more comfortable to utilize the part of the square where there is water element and high quality attribute to spend their leisure time and engage with urban square activities. In the finding of the three ethnic groups that perceive attribute quality of place has shown almost same value perception among the three ethnic groups. Malays have a greater preference that Chinese and Indians for the water element quality and night market attendance in urban square. Chinese have greater preference than Malays and Indians for the pathway quality.

5. Conclusion

This study has been able to examine those factors that underline the importance of urban public space use and paid attention to urban square utilization among the major three ethnic groups of Malaysia. It was noted that social interaction in the urban square reflects the preference of activity based on cultural differences amongst social ethnic groups in the Malaysian setting. However, there are similarities and differences in the preferred activities of the three ethnic groups and their cultural needs that facilitate social interaction. Moreover, the Quality of place has been noted that has a significant

role to enhance people to use of the public space and interaction with each other. This implies that urban designers and town planners should consider user background and the quality of place during the planning for or designing of public spaces as that will create more effective and sustainable civic spaces for everyday usage regardless of social background.

6. References

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