

## **SOCIO-SPATIAL INTEGRATION OF LANDSCAPE BACK LANE OF HOUSING AT BANDAR BARU NILAI: PRIVACY AND COMMUNITY**

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### **Abstract**

Urban informal spaces in the form of back lane tend to promote socio-spatial integration between neighbourhood communities. The Back Lane Planning Design Guidelines issued in 2014 by Town and Country Planning Department of Malaysia identified back lane as such a place to encourage communal lifestyle whereas an area of owns residents' privacy. In reality, back lane portrays as the wasted unfavourable paths thus several social concerns of safety, security, health issues as well as invading privacy and sense of deficiency community bonding issues arise. This study quantitatively analyses dwellers' perception focusing to level of visual privacy and level of spiritual neighbourhood interaction towards effectiveness of newly landscape back lane (LBL) in contemporary urban dwellings. Comparison of socio-spatial integration between two types of back lane design in grid-linear housing scheme; the pleasing greenery landscape back lane (LBL) and the plain empty bare paved back lane (PBL) in residential area of Kota Seriemas, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan. Structured questionnaire distributed to 115 respondents to assess on privacy and comfort level, neighbourhood activities and communal lifestyle, back-lane usage, resident's perception and expectation. The study proved the landscape design back lane (LBL) is ensuring own right privacy lacking in promoting community interaction among the residents due to contemporary urban lifestyles.

Keywords: Social-Spatial integration, Back lane design, Urban planning, Privacy, Community, Housing.

**Abbreviations**

JPBD	Department of Town and Country Planning
KLIA	Kuala Lumpur International Airport
LBL	Landscape back lane
PBL	Paved back lane

**1. Introduction**

Back-lane is neglected areas in limited plot, a common place in residential terrace where most of people turn their blind eye. Frank Lloyd Wright back in 1916, in his urban planning declared back lane is anachronism [1] The statement was agreed by [2] and [3]. Back lane in residential area is characterized as a matter of misplaced and out of time. It just only a setback of residential, a small area, the distance between the rows and rows of houses. Despite as be seen wasteful, Lohnman concluded back-alleys were still appropriate for commercial development, but no longer necessary components of modern residential neighborhoods [4].

Back lane of residential housing in Malaysia undoubtedly seen as disgusting area as similar as experienced by other developed countries. Although the issues had been written up vividly in America and Canada [5,6] it had been less discussed in South East Asia particularly in Malaysia. It is still remain to be less considered as unnecessary and unimportant; a minor urban topics to be discussed and remain under- researched [7].

Roughly two million units of terrace houses built throughout the nation. Back lane in terrace housing adapting English Georgian type constructed massively during Industry Revolution came into existence in Malaysia in 1960s. The earliest rows of terrace houses were built in Section 17, Petaling Jaya, State of Selangor, the first satellite town in Malaysia. The town was the government planning strategy in extending Klang Valley administration and business activities [8].

Several issues related to this “well planned” living environment neighborhood have been argued .Terrace houses just like a pigeon’s hole, according to [9] portrayed as having poor ventilation, poor natural lighting and lacking space. [10] in her studies brought up issue of terrace houses in Malaysia which is truly lacking of culture and lack of religious aspects. [11] agreed on the issue and terrace houses contain lack of community spaces and unfriendliness conventional urban dwelling designs.

Back lane played a major role in providing utility lines from each houses. It is a vital element in giving access of natural ventilation and lighting to every houses promoting good he [12].

Department of Town and Country Planning (JPBD) under the supervision of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government was taking serious action and drafted Back-Lane Guidelines in the mid of 2012 principally for developers and urban planners. The final guidelines issued in 2014 set as regulation reference in designing an ideal back-lane for sustainable terrace housing scheme in the future without forfeiting the safety and health aspects of the dwellers and residential community [12].

From public point of view, back lane is identified as irrelevant, disorganized and unsystematic. It is associated with social problems mainly safety and crime issues, health condition, cleanliness, maintenance issues as well as privacy behavioral and neighborhood.

Quiet and dark back lane ambience and always disregarded and ignored. [13,9] agreed back-lane seen as strategic access points for criminals to enter the house from the back door. Occupants make a fence, or alley-gating to avoid crime and robbers entering their house. Health issues, namely dengue are a serious concern. Rates of dengue fever rising, particularly during hot weather. Debris scattered and water stock up in polystyrene, tires and flower pots, potholes. (*Statistic Health Ministry*).

Recently, in America and Canada back lane or back alleys have been indicated by New Urbanists for their ability to revive pedestrian activities throughout neighborhoods [14]. Contemporary New Urbanist models reintroduce the alley as an important element of residential design to help recreate the street as a live hood social space. [15, 16].

The Back Lane Planning Design Guidelines by Local Government Authority [12] outline new concept of back lane to be applied to all new housing scheme. The new concept of landscape back lane (LBL) is foreseen to have four main advantages.

- i) Back lane to encourage community interaction,
- ii) To increase the value of the property.
- iii) Third, back lane practicable as a safe play space for children.
- iv) Landscape back lane is able to improve the visual environment and fifth landscape back lane potentially as recreation areas for group of ages.

Ahmad Hariza [17] agreed by having of external spaces encourages interaction among the communities as these spaces act as the social place for meeting and interaction among the people which eventually strengthens the community bond.

Privacy is basic human needs. Robert [18] identified three concepts of privacy connection; privacy connects creation of knowledge, dignity and freedom. In dwellers life, discussion and argument of privacy connection concept is related to dignity and freedom.

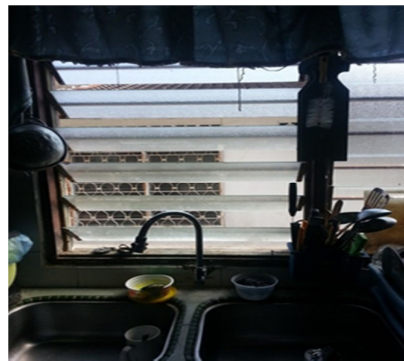
Back lane is a place to ensure the human rights of privacy owners between rows of premises. Narrow back lane has resulted in less visual privacy and family intimacy [17] as well as lack of individual privacy [19, 20] stated that the grid layout of terraced houses with close proximity and narrow back lanes creates visual violations to its dwellers. In the norm location terrace houses built on a linear plot. Back lane is mostly empty and bare. No aesthetical elements have been added. The reason of having an empty back lane is due to its easy maintenance, lowering the construction cost as well as maintenance cost.

The architectural, social, and psychological dimensions of privacy are fundamental to the daily life of a Muslim. To control privacy in the built environment, architectural and behavioural variables must operate in tandem in order to satisfy the psychological needs of its residents [21].

Ahmad Hariza [19] from their findings indicates most muslim women wished for more visual privacy from adjacent neighbors. They feel uncomfortable zone due to size of windows, narrow back lane width even sometimes they can see their opposite neighbors. As Muslim women they have to take care about the *aurat* from non-*mahram*. Muslim women must cover their whole body from men excluding their *mahram* (father, husband, children and brothers) except their face and hands. As the back of the house is too close to the neighbors, they can see each other directly and it is sometimes inconvenient they experience no privacy even in their own house (Figures 1-2).



**Fig. 1. Narrow width of back lane in terraces houses in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan completed in 1984 [7].**



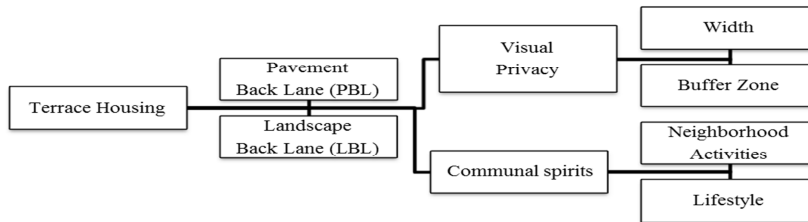
**Fig. 2. Windows opening facing each other weakening the visual privacy.**

## 2. Objective, Methodology and Study Area

The study aims to examine the statement of Back lane Design Guidelines related to landscape back lane (LBL) in terrace housing in promoting community interaction and ensure own' right privacy is achievable.

This research is to investigate perception of residents who resided in two different type of back lane with landscape and pavement in regards to multi-racial issue, harmonious and neighborhood spirit.

Figure 3 below shows the structural studies of this research related to social aspects and parameters studies which examine privacy and community issues between two types of back lane.



**Fig. 3. Structural studies of research.**

A qualitative study of 115 residents from 75 houses including structured questions and an interviewing approach. Randomly selected respondent from total population of 1074 current population lived in double storey terrace houses in Kota Seriemas, Nilai, Negeri Sembilan.

Kota Seriemas is a well- planned 2,400 acre township situated in Nilai, North of Seremban District, Negeri Sembilan. It is close to transportation hub of Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA and KLIA 2) crafted to be Resort- Living: The Art of Living Well by the Developer; Seriemas Development Sdn. Berhad. The township development is based on the eco-friendly concept where residential homes and commercial businesses co-exist within their lush, natural surroundings as a perfect abode for residents to live, work and play.

Selection of Kota Seriemasis due to its variety design of back lanes: backlane loaded with plants and softscape landscape (Landscape Back Lane LBL), and plain pavement rough cement rendered back lane (Pavement Back lane PBL). The study compares perception of visual privacy, community activities and level of comfort between two areas of terrace houses.

Structured questions are divided into 2 sub section. Demographic data and level of residents perception regards to privacy and community elements towards their type of back lane. Total of seven questions been asked focusing on perception of comfort and privacy level, and community bonding and activities. As predictors, or independent variables, the questions were assessed on 5-point Linkert type scales; 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The questionnaire was delivered to randomly-selected 115 residents.

The quantitative method involved use of structured questionnaires and qualitative element added based on personal observation and non-structured interview grounded with respondent real-life context. It was aim to obtain a diverse viewpoint so as to cast light upon the problem and to identify some of the issues that were aroused during the survey. Julia Brannen [22] found that the two types of data analysis were broadly complementary, providing different kinds of insights into the different aspects of the social phenomena which constituted field of interest.

For this study, 74 houses and 115 respondents were involved which is 13.53% from total of 547 houses in the study area. The justification of using min 10% of known population is based on [22].

**Table 1. Distribution table of case study size.**

	<b>Bakawali B (Pavement back lane PBL)</b>	<b>Bakawali A &amp; C (Landscape back lane LBL)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Total Houses</b>	251 unit	296 unit	547 unit
<b>Respondent (houses)</b>	35 unit	39 unit	74 unit
<b>Percentage</b>	13.94%unit	13.18%unit	13.53% unit
<b>Respondent</b>	58 people	57 people	115 people

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1. Demographic data

Most respondents are middle age between 36 and 50 years old and have a stable household income between RM5, 000 to RM 10,000. They are married couple and having average of 3 numbers of children.

#### 3.2. Privacy: relationship between privacy and back lane.

Table 2 below indicates Pavement Back lane (PBL) residents feel they are not satisfied and not in comfort level whereas Landscape back lane (LBL) are satisfied on their existing back lane. Both group PBL and LBL are agreed to have trees and green infrastructure to be planted at their back lane as buffer elements to increase their visual privacy. Trees providing shades as well as act as screen can reduce direct visual interaction between back-to-back dwellers as shown in Figure 4.

**Table 2. Relative frequency and percentage distribution of respondents on their perception of privacy issues regards to existing back lane.**

Likert Scale	Pavement Back Lane (PBL)						Landscape Back Lane (LBL)					
	1	2	3	4	5	Total	1	2	3	4	5	Total
<b>Perception on comfort level</b>												
<b>n</b>	10	18	5	9	8	50	3	14	7	15	11	50
<b>%</b>	20	36	10	18	16	100	6	28	14	30	22	100
<b>C %</b>	20	36	66	84	100	-	6	34	48	78	100	-
<b>Trees to be planted as buffer to increase visual privacy</b>												
<b>n</b>	3	8	13	15	11	50	3	7	14	17	9	50
<b>%</b>	6	16	26	30	22	100	6	14	28	34	18	100
<b>C %</b>	6	22	48	78	100	-	6	20	48	82	100	-
<b>Wider back lane provide higher privacy</b>												
<b>n</b>	0	0	17	14	19	50	0	6	7	20	17	50
<b>%</b>	0	0	34	28	38	100	0	12	14	40	34	100
<b>C %</b>	0	0	34	62	100	-	0	12	26	66	100	-

1=Extremely disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Extremely Agree



**Fig. 4. Fruit Trees and palm trees planted at Landscape Back lane (LBL) act as buffer and lessen view. It assists to increase visual privacy of occupants.**

Both of the group agreed that the back lane width have direct associated to their privacy. The wider the back lane, the greater their privacy level. The wider back lane means that the distance between row of houses are increase.

Back lane is seeing to be a place promoting neighborhood spirit. In reality it turns out as vice-versa. Based on observation taken at site, there were no neighborhood activities took place. No bonding of neighborhood and community spirit in back lane. Even though the design is trying to create ambience which attract and assist dwellers to be contact with each other but it is remain introvert.

Most of neighborhood bonding happened in front street. For most people back lane is considered as private place. From observation and studies been made most residents lock their gate and seldom use the rear gate to get access to the back lane.

### **3.3. Relationship between perception of residents' privacy and house extension.**

From the interview been made, residents who renovated their house agreed that they have lack of privacy even when they be at their own house particularly at kitchen. This is mainly due to distance between houses too near to each other. As for typical Asian women, kitchen is considered as their second room for women who most of the time carried out household duties in the kitchen.

The highest percentage on lack of visual respondent privacy was identified at Bakawali B area, Pavement Back Lane (PBL) due to its back lane design which is bare and empty. Whereas in Bakawali C, Landscape Back Lane (LBL) trees act as barriers preventing direct visual contact hence increase own privacy. Figure 5 shows the Pavement Backlane (PBL) design of Bakawali B and Landscaped Back Lane (LBL) Bakawali C.



**Fig. 5. Pavement Back Lane (PBL) design of Bakawali B (left) and Landscaped Back Lane (LBL) Bakawali C (right). Pavement Back Lane (PBL) is clear and plain for easy maintenance but lacking of visual privacy among dwellers.**

**Table 3. Relative frequency and percentage distribution table of respondents towards community aspects.**

Likert Scale	Pavement Back Lane (PBL)						Landscape Back Lane (LBL)					
	1	2	3	4	5	Total	1	2	3	4	5	Total
<b>Backlane as medium to enhance community</b>												
n	10	15	5	11	9	50	4	9	15	12	10	50
%	20	30	10	22	18	100	8	18	30	24	20	100
C %	20	50	60	82	100	-	8	26	56	80	100	-
<b>Backlane utilised as a communal area to meet up to socialised with neighbours</b>												
n	24	14	1	7	4	50	17	17	6	5	5	50
%	48	28	2	14	8	100	34	34	12	10	10	100
C %	48	76	78	92	100	-	34	68	80	90	100	-
<b>Sharing backlane get to know closer neighbour who lives at back row of the house</b>												
n	7	15	7	11	10	50	3	3	14	27	27	74
%	14	30	14	22	20	100	6	6	28	54	6	100
C %	14	44	58	80	100	-	6	12	40	94	94	-

1=Extremely disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Extremely Agree

From the chart above, residents who lived in pavement back lane areas (PBL) believe back lane is not suitable place to promote and enhance neighborhood spirit. Compare to Landscape back lane (LBL), residents agreed back lane is an appropriate place to encourage neighborhood bonding. Some of them used their back lane for gardening so that they may enhance the neighborhood activities.

Data shows most respondent of both back lane types (LBL) and Pavement (PBL) do not utilized their back lane as a communal area for fostering neighborhood bonding. They do not perform any activities together such as talking, gardening or even cleaning. Respondent in landscape back lane (LBL) doing gardening activities at the back lane but yet do not actively socialized with their neighbors.

Both PBL and LBL residents disagree that back lane to be utilized as communal area to meet up and socialize with neighbors. Pavement back lane (PBL) is empty and no elements which can generate neighborhood activities.



Most of residents rarely used the back door to the back lane due to safety and security aspects. Most of the time the gate are locked and not accessible from their house. LBL residents' seldomly used due to lack of maintenance, bushy and unsafe. From personal observation and interview, residents mentioned that they spotted even snakes at their back yard.

PBL residents perception are neutral by sharing back lane they get to know closer neighbors who lives at the back of their house. Unlike LBL, they are disagree on the statement. Some of them get to know their neighbors from segregation at *Surau* during prayers time or community meeting. Even some of them does not know person who lives opposite of their kitchen doors.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The landscape design back lane (LBL) as specified in the new Back Lane Guidelines issued by JPBD for terrace housing is ensuring own right privacy but unable to promote community interaction among the residents.

LBL design offers higher visual privacy to occupants. Palm trees and fruit tress act as buffer to lessen direct view towards first floor bedrooms which located facing directly to each other. It is also lessen direct view from kitchen. Visual privacy is most concerns by Muslim women due to the religion restrictions. Contract with PBL Residents who dwells PBL house which undergone extension feels their lacking of visual privacy when they in their kitchen and bedrooms.

Several factors on deficiency in communal spirits in urban dwelling have been notified. 1) Time constraint, 2) working environment, 3) smartphone application and 4) lifestyle. Compare to Malay traditional kampung house, urban lifestyle are different even though they are sharing walls. The traditional Malay communities are always keeping updated on their neighborhood situation. Even though they lived quite distance from each other, they still doing the visiting activities in daily mode

Back lane is not being used as a communal space in fostering neighborhood bonding/ ties. Urban lifestyle has changed. Most people surrounded with hectic lifestyle and are not around in the house during weekdays. Some people travel to work 40-50 kilometers in daily basis and only be back in late evening and even night. Even in the weekend most of dwellers are also not at home; where family activities take place such as visiting and short holiday or outing. Ahmad Hariza [17] also indicated from their research that the majority of the respondent has minimal interaction with their neighbors partly due to the minimal time for interaction

Urban lifestyle and smartphone era among the factors that influences of decreasing in social integration. People sharing their walls and live next door to each other however communicating through interactive social media such as *watapp*, *wechat*, *messenger* and others. Park [23] analyses that the motives of smartphone use were positively related to bonding relations but negatively related to bridging relations.

Dense population in urban living has lower overall sense of community. Residents living in larger, higher density and more ethnically diverse cities in a suburban region had a lower overall sense of community [24]. In this research

case study, community bonding is created among residents through religious segregation and activities at mosque or *Surau* as well as community meeting.

On the other hand, back lane as a form stimulates children brain .The outdoor space is spacious and opens towards the surrounding that affords the children to move more freely than inside the building. It is a space that their senses are readily stimulated by greenery and animals [25]. In as much, outdoor experience allows the children to interpret and extrapolate the differences of features and phenomena from the indoor experience [26] Play and experience in the nature then contributes to children's cognitive, physical and social development, as well as, associates positively with environmental attitude and behavior [27].

The wasted land in the form of back lane indeed potentially is transformed to more valuable and meaningful area in creating livable and sustainable living. This is parallel to Tajuddin [20] who agreed that proper design can enrich a genuine sense of community in Malaysia housing estates.

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