



EVALUATION OF ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN ELEMENT IN SAIDINA ABU BAKAR AS SHIDDIQ MOSQUE ON SOCIAL INCLUSION

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Alexander Ng
Department of Architecture
UCSI University
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
alexng@gmail.com

Ching Wee Han
Department of Architecture
UCSI University
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Bibohan97@gmail.com

Mohd Tajuddin Mohd Rasdi
Department of Architecture
UCSI University
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
tajuddin@ucsiuniversity.edu.my

Teoh Chee Keong
Department of Architecture
UCSI University
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
ckteoh@ucsiuniversity.edu.my

Intan Liana Samsudin
Department of Architecture
UCSI University
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
intan@ucsiuniversity.edu.my

***Yusra Zulkifli**
Department of Architecture
UCSI University
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
yusra@ucsiuniversity.edu.my

***Corresponding Author:**
Email: yusra@ucsiuniversity.edu.my

ABSTRACT

The secret to success for the country's stability is a harmonious religious relationship, which calls for the importance of uniting all groups, regardless of ethnic religion and ethnicity. This research's objective is to evaluate architectural design elements in mosques on social inclusion. This study reviews the literature regarding race relation issues and religious conflicts in Malaysia and evaluates the architectural design elements of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque as the focus of social inclusion. A field analysis of the mosque was conducted by observing the internal and external spaces and interviewing Encik Shukran Bin Noh, one of the mosque administrators. The data collection was recorded based on a few criteria: perception of the building material concerning the surrounding; scale & massing; iconic historical imagery; gates & fences; level of visual access; and furniture & landscape. The analysis result shows minor setbacks on the elements in the territoriality of buildings regarding the parking spaces reserved and unoccupied. Nonetheless, the other aspect of the criteria has proved that Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque has shown social inclusion in its architectural elements, which are friendly to the public.

KEYWORDS:

Mosque, Social Inclusion, Religion, Ethnic and Race

INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this research paper is to evaluate the elements of mosque architecture of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque to determine whether the architectural language of design speaks of a friendly or non-friendly message. The paper is divided into three sections: issues of religion in Malaysia, a literature review on mosque architecture in the country, and an analytical description of the Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque design from the inclusive and friendliness aspects. Finally, this paper concludes on how these observations relate to the development of social interaction and the strong integration and friendliness of its religious members and the broader Malaysian culture.

RELIGIOUS TENSION IN MALAYSIA

Concerning religious tension, the last 20 years have seen a worrying rise in Malaysia. This fact can be ascertained by wide media coverage of five key incidents that merit serious concerns. The first is Allah issue which surfaced just before the 13th General Election [1]. The issue was using the word "Allah" in the Malay translation of the Bible, commonly used in Sabah and Sarawak. However, when these same Bibles were confiscated in Peninsular Malaysia, it caused the Church leader take Selangor Religious Department to Court [2]. This case caused several Malay groups are together in protest. This critical case led to another threat that PERKASA Chief, Ibrahim Ali would burn Malay Bible. Although the threat was never carried out, several Churches were vandalized with arson and

paint smears [3]. The suspicious case of pig heads wrapped in plastic thrown in a mosque were suspected to be the work of provocateurs. Islamic Religious Council of Selangor recently released a book outlining the threat of Christianization in Malaysia after a public university held a Muslim-only academic conference warning of the Christian threats [2]. The "*Kafir Harbi*" issue also placed a high tensioned situation with the Pahang Mufti proclaiming non-Muslim citizens who voted against the tabling of the *Hudud* Bill by PAS as "enemies of Islam" [4]. The destruction of a Hindu Shrine by the Muslim chief Minister of Kedah drew comments from Indian communities and political parties [3]. Although no riots or clashes of communities result in physical violence, Malaysia remains a nation with deep mistrust. If this situation is allowed, it is feared that this distrust will fester like a wound. Soon, this can cause a serious escalation.

MOSQUE ARCHITECTURE

Writings on mosque architecture fall into four main categories. The first kind is on styles or typology which discusses design issues related more to the question of identity and aesthetics [3][5][6]. The second type of mosque study looks at the role of the mosque as a community centre that would create a more socially conscious Muslim society [7][8]. The third aspect of mosque research focusses on technological issues concerning sustainability of light or water usage and other elements of utilities [9]. The fourth aspect is a new knowledge pool related to the idea of the mosque as a potential facility that might bring communities together and contribute to a sense of national harmony between races and faiths [10]-[16].

The present research helps to build up data on the fourth category of research and evaluates mosques according to their friendliness to the community through their design intentions and make-up. Some friendly aspects can be emulated by other mosques, while those that deem unfriendly can be optional to the designers.

OBJECTIVE AND METHODS

This study attempts to evaluate the social inclusiveness of the Architectural Design elements in mosques. Generally, the religious buildings in Malaysia tend to overlook the terms of their "inclusivity" and "friendliness" to their religious adherents and the larger Malaysian community. Every religious building should metaphorically embody a particular sense of architectural expression with inclusivity. In this report, Masjid Saidina Abu Bakar, Bangsar is selected to be analysed to carry out a study about social inclusiveness of the architectural aspects.

The houses of worship chosen must be of the following criteria:

- a. At least ten years in operation.
- b. Have a good community track record in society.
- c. Has been designed as a purposeful building for a religious function.
- d. Being sited in a diverse urban area.

The justifications for each criteria of evaluation are as follows:

Perception

- The similarity of Building Material presents the idea that the more similar the material of a building will increasingly familiar to the surrounding environment. Thus creates a sense of partisanship or "being a part of".
- Regarding the scale and mass of the building, the more the building mass is broken up into smaller pieces, the more it relates to the surrounding two or three-storey domestic architecture. Thus presents a more welcoming image.
- Iconic imagery provides a reminder of conflicts between historical religions. The less the building defends its historical identity, the friendlier it becomes.

Permeability

- Visual Permeability: The more one can see from the front gate the activities of the inner sanctum, the more open the building is in terms of public access. The visual permeability creates the message of "sharing" with outsiders.
- Visibility: Gates and Fences need to be evaluated because the less imposing the gates which are in terms of height and material that provides visual access would make the building not being seen as a private entity but as a public one.

Territoriality

- Furniture such as seating and planter boxes that can be seated in front of the building suggests a more public space than mere paving with no landscape element. Users can claim spaces and furniture for their use and defend the area. However, if space and furniture need to be asked for permission to be used, then it lacks territorial worth.

Evaluation of each attribute is by the impressionistic ranking of Not Friendly, Friendly, or Very Friendly.

CASE STUDY: SAIDINA ABU BAKAR AS SIDDIQ MOSQUE

Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque is located in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur. Construction of the mosque began in 1979 under private individuals' efforts. Still,

the government took over the project and placed it under the Third Malaysia 5-Year Plan upon the request of the Malay community. The mosque was designed by Datuk Hajeedar Abdul Malik and completed in 1982 with the qibla determination officiated by the Mufti of Kuala Lumpur, S.S. Datuk Sheikh Abdul Mohsein bin Haji Salleh in 1980.

Initially designed for up to 3,500 people, it can accommodate 500 more people after the expansion work was done in 2010. The architecture features a minaret with a height of 43.3 meters, arches, a dome with a diameter of 16.6 meters and 24 meters from the ground, and Islamic motifs but modern form.

Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque is located at Jalan Ara, Bangsar Baru, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. It is situated at the junction of Ara Street and Maarof Street, easily located amid landed houses and the renowned shopping mall of Bangsar, Bangsar Village Shopping Mall. Moreover, there is a bus station just 200 meters away from the mosque, which offers an option of public transport for visitors. Mr. Shukran Bin Noh, the mosque administrator, mentioned that most of visitors who came for prayers or activities are Muslims working or living around the Bangsar area and people from Damansara Height who are just along Maarof Street.

The mosque consists of three levels. The mosque's ground floor has classrooms for religious classes, office space, and a public library. A multipurpose hall that can accommodate up to 200 people with an adjustable wall partition is for conferences, religious classes, a public canteen, a public toilet, and places for ablution. Whereas the first floor houses the main praying space for daily use for up to 1,000 people. The other areas have a maximum capacity to accommodate 4,000 people during Friday prayers. The second floor consists of additional space for Friday prayers and special occasions. The west side of the building is attached to classrooms and offices for the young religious school, Sekolah Rendah Agama Abu Bakar Al-Siddiq. The east side of the mosque comes with accommodation to house *Imam* and multilevel parking spaces dedicated to the administration (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)

RESEARCH FINDINGS PERCEPTION OF BUILDING

The analysis of the perception of the building, Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque determines how the mosque portrays itself in the public's eyes. First, in the sense of material and finishes, which identify whether it complements the surrounding building typology, whether the scale and massing of the building overwhelm the neighboring buildings in terms of the volume, and finally, whether the mosque portrays itself as traditional Muslim architecture.



Figure 2. Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque and its context (Author)

As shown in figure 2, the mosque's architectural usage of materials and finishes such as bricks and plaster complement the surrounding buildings in a context such as Bangsar Village Mall and the housing settlement across the road. The material and finishes of the mosque also do not overwhelm and alienate the surrounding ecology.

Additionally, the scale and massing of the building also reflect well into the building typology of the site. Regarding the massing breakdown, similar elements reflect the space planning of vernacular Malay house architecture, such as the introduction of *Anjung* as the foyer or waiting area. The administration office, detached from the main building and consisting of the prayer hall, complements the architecture of the surrounding typology in terms of its height and does not emphasize dominance in the surrounding context (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Scale and massing of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)



Figure 4. Iconic imagery of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)

The mosque consists of elements reminiscent of populist Islamic architecture, highlighted in figure 4. Domes, minarets, and arches are commonly seen in populist Islamic architecture. However, this mosque does not overly emphasize such features. The minaret's height of 43.3 meters, the dome's diameter of 16.6 meters and 24 meters in height, coupled with the moderate use of arches in the windows and openings at the face of the building, complement well in the size and massing of the building.



Figure 5. (a) and (b) Interior space of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)

Features such as ornamentation representing Islamic architecture can also be seen in the interior motif. These include the arches between the structural column and a cantilevered platform for additional spaces for prayers. The clerestory windows also have Islamic patterns carved which gives additional lighting to the double volume of the prayer space. The iconic ornamentation of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque representing its Islamic features shows practicality and conventions which does not overly portray its own Islamic identity in the building's architecture (Figure 5).

PERMEABILITY OF THE BUILDING

This section analyses and discusses the visual permeability of the overall mosque. Visual permeability can give people a sense of belonging, no matter which cultures and ethnicities they belong to. More visual permeability would portray a friendlier and inclusive religious building to the people, not a private entity but a public one.



Figure 6. (a) and (b) are a Main gate and fencing of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)

As shown in figure 6, Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque is fenced up around the compound. The fence around is transparent and lower than the typical human height. Hence, the fencing provides total visual permeability to the outsiders. Thus creates a sense of isolation from the bustling surroundings. It portrays the idea of inclusiveness and friendliness towards the surroundings.

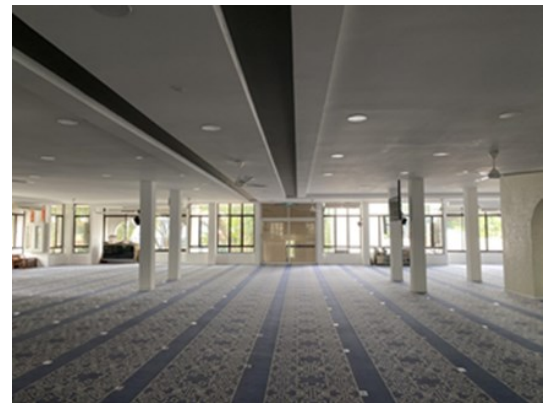


Figure 7. The prayer hall of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)

In Figure 7, it shown the interior perspective of the prayer hall of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque. Large and clear openings can be found around the prayer hall, which provides visibility to the public. Thus, the activities within the inner sanctum are visible to everyone. This visibility will eventually create the message of "sharing" and "friendliness" to outsiders



Figure 8. The main entrance of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)

According to Mr. Shukran, although the fencing around has prohibited the movement and created a discontinuity of pedestrian flow, the main gate of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque is always accessible and open to the public, except during Friday prayers (Figure 8). The absence of a guardhouse has eliminated the sense of unapproachability and exclusivity to the public. At the same time, it generates the idea of inclusiveness for everyone, regardless of faith or race. As a result, the public can approach the mosque anytime and access the public facilities provided to serve them.

TERRITORIALITY OF THE BUILDING

The territoriality of the building is the analysis of the mosque's architecture on whether the spaces portray "friendliness" or "openness" to the public in general. In this section, we analysed the mosque based on these aspects from the perspective of non-Muslims visiting the mosque.



Figure 9. The planter box around the perimeter of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)

As shown in figure 9, planter boxes are placed along the fences of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque. This feature complements the low fencing height mentioned in the section before and gives the mosque a "soft" sense of security. In addition, the existing landscaping along the pavement of the exterior perimeter, such as the planter boxes, provide a pedestrian-friendly walkway for the visitors and passer-by.

Additionally, complementing the rear entrance shown in figure 7, there is access straight to the public canteen of the mosque, as shown in figure 10. This entrance opens at dusk and closes at dawn. The gate was kept open all day, which allowed visitors or passers-by to have their meal at the canteen regardless of race and religion. The opening of such a space portrays the message of "acceptance" to the general public.



Figure 10. Public canteen in Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)



Figure 11. (a) Private parking and (b) Public parking in Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)

As shown in figures 10-11, the vehicle parking is within the boundary of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque. The image on the left shows the private parking space, which is multilevel and shaded, and the image on the right shows the open visitor parking. Mr. Shukran mentioned that parking is allowed for other visitors every day, except Friday. So, in a way, they are providing parking for visitors to express "exclusivity" to the general public, which came as a "visitor".



Figure 12. (a) public library, (b) toilet, and (c) water dispenser. Examples of public friendly elements in Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque (Author)

Other public facilities, such as a public library with many Islamic teachings and history, share their knowledge with the general public (Figure 12). The public can also use the toilet and water dispenser. According to Mr. Shukran, the local people and the congregation regularly frequent the open space and

the facilities at the mosque's library. The integration of public spaces at Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque enables the surrounding communities to foster kinship. They do not only emphasize spiritual bonding but community bonding as well.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDING ON MOSQUE SOCIAL INCLUSIVITY

PERCEPTION OF THE BUILDING

The material of a building is a vital element that creates a psychological perception of a person. The material used will generate a complementary effect or create a contextualism crisis that overwhelms the surrounding context. Similar to the scale and massing of the building, the spaces of the building should not be crammed into a singular mass and massively dominate the whole context. However, the building should break down into smaller groups in which architecture plays a role in determining the spaces' ergonomics. Subsequently, religious ornamentation on a building should be moderate, for instance, with a slight indication of the architecture and not overwhelmingly implemented. Thus, it is friendly to the neighbourhood as it does not show dominance or self-importance of one's religion.

PERMEABILITY OF THE BUILDING

The visual permeability of a religious building is crucial to portray general friendliness and inclusivity regardless of different cultures and ethnicities. Therefore, the public's approachability and inclusivity should be considered while designing a religious building.

For instance, the usage of transparent and lower height fencing, implementation of large and clear openings for the elevations of buildings, and the absence of guardhouses can give the idea of social inclusivity to the surroundings. Enhancing the visual permeability aspect can reflect a "sharing" and "friendliness" message to outsiders. The building should be part of the community and should not be excluded from the community. It should be a place that speaks of humility and humbleness. The public can approach the Masjid anytime and access the public facilities to serve the public, regardless of culture, faith, or race.

TERRITORIALITY OF THE BUILDING

Landscaping portrays a sign of "acceptance" and "exclusiveness" to the architecture of the building. Complementing "soft" and "hard" into the architecture expresses how one can adapt and complement each other. Adapting the architecture into the existing ecology of the site strongly conveys the message of inclusion to the people.

Regarding the space planning of the architecture, especially considering the motive to be "public

friendly", everyone should think of the ergonomics of the architecture to be approachable because it shows openness. For instance, implementing a cafeteria, toilet, and visitor parking allows the public to use, regardless of race and religion. Moreover, the addition of necessities like water dispensers in the public space add points to the social inclusion of the building. With that said, the issue of limited visitor parking of Saidina Abu Bakar As Siddiq Mosque and the unoccupied reserved parking, for instance, the mosque is advised to open a wider area for reserved parking areas to allow more visitor parking for the public in approaching the mosque.

CONCLUSION

The religious architecture must be designed within the true idea of religion, inclusive, progressive, dynamic, tolerant, and friendly within each communal location. These elements of communal-spiritual ideas must govern architecture in a religious building. Any lack of faith, mistrust, and discontent between cultures or ethnic groups can only build insecurity and conflict. A good mosque should have a multifunctional space that can be wholly used. It functions as a focal point of human activity that successfully engages conversations in all social contexts, including social interactions with strangers, and where opportunities for participation are natural and available to all. For instance, the mosque's public space is open for most of the day without discrimination against new or permanent visitors; everyone is welcome to come together regardless of status and position. Besides, mosque design has a significant impact on enriching the quality of life. A natural surrounding is also the crucial factor bringing humankind closer to their Creator. Thus, the mosque's spatial organization, accessibility, and activities are among the factors that can lead to a better quality of life, meanwhile reducing the socio-political division between Muslims and non-Muslims.

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