

Beach as Potential Youth's Third Place to Improve Youth Social Sustainability in Kelantan

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Abstract. There are lack of green spaces and parks in Kelantan for youth to interact with their peers in a relaxed and informal setting. Transforming a beach into a vibrant youth third place involves creating a space where young people feel welcomed, engaged, and empowered to socialize, learn, and express themselves. Hence, the research aims to study favourite third place of youth and the potential of beach in Bachok, Kelantan as youth-oriented third place to improve youth social sustainability. The study employs online survey to collect data from 150 respondents aged 15-30 during the Malaysian Movement Control Order in 2020 and analysed by using SPSS 28.0. The main findings revealed that beach, mall and friends' houses are the most favoured third place. The result suggested that the beach has the potentials to cater the needs of youth in Kelantan as a third place. The findings proposed that creating an environment that fosters social connections, inclusion, and community engagement at the beach as youth's third place includes accessible amenities, cultural celebrations, environmental education, and digital connectivity. Developing a beach as a youth third place is a multifaceted initiative that can significantly enhance the well-being of young people and the community.

1 Introduction

In Malaysia, youth social sustainability refers to the establishment of conditions that facilitate the social, economic, and environmental well-being of young people. It includes giving people access to high-quality education, job opportunities, healthcare, and welcoming social

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settings [1, 2]. Beaches may become inclusive locations and welcoming places for all young people, regardless of their socioeconomic status, by providing equitable access. Coordinating ethnic festivals and community gatherings can foster understanding and social cohesiveness amongst various populations. The local economy can be strengthened through increased tourism, young entrepreneurial encouragement, and the creation of jobs in beach-related industries [3, 4]. Frequent exposure to natural settings, such beaches, can improve mental health generally by lowering stress and anxiety [5]. All tourists' physical safety and comfort are increased when beaches are kept up, safe, and have enough illumination and lifeguards on duty [6]. By giving young people leadership opportunities, encouraging community service projects, and integrating them in the planning and decision-making processes for beach development, civic participation is promoted. Examples of effective models of how beaches may support young social sustainability through a variety of activities, community involvement, and environmental protection are found at Bondi Beach in Australia, Santa Monica Beach in the United States, and Muizenberg Beach in South Africa. This paper aims to study favourite third place of Kelantanese youth and the potential of beach in Bachok, Kelantan as youth-oriented third place to improve youth social sustainability.

2 Literature review

2.1 Third place concept

The idea of a Third Place was first proposed by sociologist Ray Oldenburg [7]. These are calm, neutral locations where people are free to come and leave without having to worry about obligations to their homes or places of employment. They encourage casual communication and put a strong emphasis on mingling. They encourage regular visits and create a cosy, familiar feeling since they are easily available and friendly. Third places, modest and unassuming, provide a relaxed, fun atmosphere where people may relax and feel like they belong, almost like a second home. Third places are important social settings where young people congregate for recreation, social contact, and community involvement apart from their homes (first place) and places of employment or education (second place) [7].

2.2 Examples of third places

Youth frequently congregate in cafes, which are well-liked third places for socialising and personal leisure [8]. Recreational areas and public parks provide places to unwind and enjoy life, which enhances general wellbeing [5,9,10]. Youth have access to resources, educational programs, and cultural events through libraries [11] and cultural centres [12]. These third places encourage lifelong learning, literacy development, and intellectual improvement. Social media networks and online platforms act as virtual third places in the digital age where young people interact, communicate, and share interests in online communities [13]. When streets are planned to encourage dwell time, conversation, and participation, they can turn into third places. Parklets, street markets, and pedestrian zones are excellent examples [14]. They have climate control and security, making them appealing and popular for social activities [15].

2.3 The significance of beach as youth's third place

As third places, beaches have a lot of potential to improve young social sustainability in a lot of different meaningful ways. Young people can engage in leisure activities that promote social interaction and develop peer connections at beaches, which act as natural gathering

places [16]. The beach has therapeutic value in addition to its recreational advantages [6]. Sunshine, seawater, and fresh air work together to create a natural stress-relieving environment that enhances mental and emotional health. This absence of continual stimulus encourages awareness, which enables young people to accept the simplicity of the current moment and find comfort in it. The beach is, in essence, the embodiment of doing nothing as an art form; as a conscious decision to relax, reconnect, and renew.

2.4 The impact of third place towards youth

Research repeatedly demonstrates that limiting access to third places causes young people to feel more alone and socially isolated [17]. Young people may lack social support networks if they don't often interact in these public areas, which can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and alienation from their peers and communities [18]. Youth are deprived of spaces where they can relax, have fun, and relieve tension when there are no third places [19]. Elevated levels of mental distress, such as anxiety and sadness, can be attributed to this deprivation [20, 21].

3 Research methodology

The research took place in Bachok, Kelantan. This research employed a quantitative approach to investigate the preferences of Kelantanese youth aged 15-30 regarding favourite third places, their motive of visit and the impact of inability to visit to these spaces. The research design involved surveying a sample of 150 respondents using an online structured questionnaire distributed through social media platforms and local community networks. The survey was conducted in 2020 during the Malaysian Movement Control Order (MCO) due to the outbreak of the COVID-19. The questionnaire included demographic questions (age, gender, and education level) and inquiries about preferences for different types of third places (e.g., beaches, cafes, parks), frequency of visitation, motives of visitation and perceived impacts of restricted access to the third place.

The data was then analysed by using SPSS 28.0. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics to summarize demographic profiles and preferences, while exploratory factor analysis was employed to identify underlying impacts impact of inability to visit their third place. Internal item consistency, assessed using Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.6 to 0.9, determined the reliability of the study instruments to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected [22]. The results were presented into three parts, i) favourite third place among youth, ii) beach as youth's third place, and iii) the impact of inability to visit third places among youth. The study aimed to provide insights into how limitations in accessing third places affect youth social dynamics and well-being in Bachok, Kelantan, informing local policies and community interventions.

4 Results and findings

4.1 Favourite third place among youth

A total of 150 respondents took part in this online survey. The demographic profile such as age group, gender, and education level have been listed in Table 1. Most of the respondents of this study are from the age group of 21 to 25 by 78.8 percent. The distribution between males and females is slightly different, with male respondents (59.3%) higher than female respondents (40.7%). Most of the respondents range from SPM to bachelor's degree holders.

Table 1. Demographic Profiles of Respondents (n=150)

Description	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age group	15-20	25	16.7
	21-25	118	78.8
	25-30	7	4.6
Gender	Male	89	59.3
	Female	61	40.7
Education Level	PMR /PT3	6	4.0
	SPM/STPM/STAM or equivalent	37	24.7
	Certificate/Diploma	22	14.7
	Bachelor's degree	84	56.0
	Master's Degree	1	0.7
	Doctor of Philosophy	0	0.0

Table 2 illustrates the preferred locations where youth spend their time outside of home and work, and their primary reasons for visiting these places. The preference for beaches (17.1%) as the top third place highlights the importance of natural settings in promoting relaxation and social engagement. This finding resonates with previous studies that emphasize the psychological and physical benefits of natural environments [6,16]. Research has shown that exposure to natural settings can reduce stress, improve mood, and foster social interactions, making beaches an ideal third place for youth seeking both recreation and socialization [6]. The significant preference for malls (16.1%) and friends' houses (16.1%) aligns with research on urban youth culture, which underscores the role of commercial and domestic spaces in youth social life. Malls provide a safe, climate-controlled environment where youth can engage in social and consumer activities [15], while friends' houses offer a more intimate setting for social interaction. These findings support the notion that youth seek out third places that offer both public engagement and private comfort [7]. The high preference for cafes/restaurants (15.9%) and neighbourhood streets (15.3%) suggests that youth value accessible and local social spaces. This aligns with Oldenburg's idea that third places should be conveniently located and easy to access [7]. Cafes and restaurants provide a setting for socializing over food and drinks [8], while neighbourhood streets offer a familiar and accessible place for casual gatherings [14].

The primary motives for visiting third places are reducing boredom at home (25.1%), hanging out with friends (21.4%), and recreational activities (18.2%) which highlight the multifaceted role of third places in youth life. These motives reflect the need for engaging and stimulating environments that offer both social and recreational opportunities. Previous research has indicated that youth often seek out third places to escape the routine of home and school, and to engage in activities that provide relaxation and enjoyment[7]. The lower preference for public parks (8.1%), sports centres/fields (8.6%), public libraries (3.9%), and internet cafes (2.9%) suggests that these spaces may not meet all the needs of youth or may lack certain attributes that make other third places more appealing. For example, public parks and sports centres may be perceived as more structured and less flexible compared to beaches and neighbourhood streets. Public libraries, while important for academic work, may not offer the same level of social interaction and recreational opportunities.

Table 2. Favourite Third Place Among Youth (n=150)

Description	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Favourite Third Place	Beach	84	17.1
	Mall	79	16.1
	Friends' Houses	79	16.1
	Cafe/Restaurants	78	15.9
	Neighbourhood Street	75	15.3
	Shops	44	9.0
	Sport Centre/Field	42	8.6
	Public Park	40	8.1
	Public Library	19	3.9
	Neighbourhood Area	16	3.3
	Internet Cafe	14	2.9
Frequency of visit to the Third Place	Everyday	33	22.0
	At least once a week	85	56.7
	At least once a month	32	21.3
Motive of visit	Reduce boredom at home	103	25.1
	Hanging out with friends	88	21.4
	Recreational	75	18.2
	Buy things	73	17.8
	Having fun doing nothing	33	8.0

a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

The findings suggest that third places play a crucial role in the social and recreational lives of individuals. Beaches, malls, friends' houses, and cafes/restaurants are particularly popular, providing diverse environments for different social and recreational needs. The frequency of visits and the varied motives highlight the multifaceted importance of these spaces. Beaches stand out as a preferred third place, which aligns with the idea that natural environments can significantly enhance social sustainability and well-being.

4.2 Beach as youth’ third place

As beach was identified as the most favoured third place among youth in Kelantan, another analysis was done to examine the preference of Kelantanese youth in visiting the beach. Crosstabulation analysis was used to have more detail on how the youth utilizing the beach as their third place. Based on Table 3, most beach visitors fall within the 21-25 age group, representing 78.57% of the respondents. This aligns with existing literature suggesting that young adults are more likely to engage in outdoor and recreational activities, seeking socialization and leisure in natural settings [6]. The 15-20 age group makes up 15.48% of the visitors, indicating that teenagers also value the beach as a social and recreational space. This age distribution highlights the appeal of beaches primarily to younger individuals, potentially due to their greater flexibility in time and preference for outdoor social environments.

Table 3. The Crosstabulation of the age group, frequency of visit and motive of visit to the beach (n=84)

Description	Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age group visiting beach	15-20	13	15.48
	21-25	66	78.57
	26-30	5	5.95
	31-35	0	0.00
Frequency of visit to the beach	Everyday	6	7.1
	At least once a week	58	69.0
	At least once a month	20	23.8
Motive of visiting the beach	Hanging out with friends	64	76.2
	Recreational	61	72.6
	Reduce boredom at home	60	71.4
	Buy things	55	65.5
	Having fun doing nothing	27	32.1

Percentages and totals are based on respondents.
a. Dichotomy group tabulated at value 1.

A significant majority of respondents visit the beach at least once a week (69.0%), with a notable portion visiting at least once a month (23.8%). Daily visits are less common, accounting for 7.1% of the responses. This frequent visitation underscores the beach's role as a preferred destination for regular leisure and social activities. The primary motives for visiting the beach are social and recreational. Hanging out with friends is the most cited reason (76.2%), emphasizing the beach's role as a social hub for young people. Recreational activities (72.6%) and reducing boredom at home (71.4%) are also significant motives, indicating that the beach serves as both an active and passive recreational space[6,16]. Additionally, 65.5% of respondents visit the beach to buy things, suggesting that beaches may also function as informal marketplaces or areas with accessible amenities. Having fun doing nothing is a motive for 32.1% of the respondents, highlighting the beach's appeal as a place for casual relaxation and unwinding.

4.3 Impact of inability to visit third places among youth

Fifteen items of the impacts of inability to visit third place among youth were analysed by using factor analysis as shown in Table 4. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) value of 0.810 indicates a good level of sampling adequacy, suitable for factor analysis. The test shows a significant chi-square value of 1208.174 with 105 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.000, confirming that the correlation matrix is appropriate for factor analysis.

Table 4. The Impact of Inability to Visit Third Places (n=150)

Exploratory Factor Analysis		
KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.810
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1208.174
	df	105
	Sig.	0.000

Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	F. loading (n=150)
<i>Socially Isolated and Emotionally Distressed</i>			
I feel loss of motivation to go through my day everyday	3.0933	1.24968	0.827
I feel lonely because no one would listen to me	3.1067	1.24861	0.797
I am easily irritated because I cannot see my friends	2.9467	1.25739	0.774
I feel that I have become distant from my friends	3.6133	1.27856	0.761
I feel bored being with my family members everyday	2.1133	1.19584	0.722
I feel hard to fulfil my social needs	3.8533	1.16657	0.697
I feel bored doing the same thing everyday	3.6667	1.29877	0.674
I feel pressured facing family conflicts/problems everyday	2.3067	1.28464	0.656
I feel like I am losing places to socialize	3.8867	1.21808	0.642
Cronbach's Alpha			0.891
<i>Content and Socially Connected</i>			
I feel happy that I am getting closer to my neighbourhood communities	4.0400	1.08609	0.794
I feel happy my relationship with my family members is getting better and closer everyday	4.3600	.95031	0.766
I feel happy that I can spend more time with my parents	4.4267	.85410	0.761
I feel happy that I able to acquire something that I cannot acquire before	3.9067	1.17780	0.755
I feel happy because my online friends are increasing than before	3.6733	1.32855	0.698
I am happy that I have more time for myself	3.6667	1.21879	0.636
Cronbach's Alpha			0.838

The results from the factor analysis highlight two distinct dimensions related to the impact of the inability to visit third places, focusing on social and emotional experiences among respondents. The first dimension, "Socially Isolated and Emotionally Distressed," reveals significant factors such as loss of motivation, loneliness, and difficulty fulfilling social needs. Items like feeling loss of motivation (0.827), loneliness (0.797), and boredom (0.722) load heavily on this factor. These items reflect feelings of disconnection and emotional strain due to limited social interaction. Cronbach's Alpha for this dimension is 0.891, indicating high internal consistency among the items measuring social isolation and emotional distress. These findings underscore the importance of third places in providing social interaction and emotional support. When individuals feel disconnected from social networks and lack opportunities for socialization, they may experience heightened emotional distress and difficulty coping with daily challenges [17]. Enhancing access to third places or creating new ones can potentially mitigate these negative effects by fostering social connections and improving overall mental health. The high factor loadings and moderate means suggest a prevalent sense of emotional distress and disconnection among individuals who cannot access third places like community gathering spots or recreational venues [18].

Conversely, the second dimension, "Content and Socially Connected," illustrates positive sentiments such as happiness derived from closer relationships with neighbourhood communities, family members, and personal achievements. Higher factor loadings (ranging from 0.636 to 0.794) indicate that these items contribute significantly to the identified factor, suggesting they reliably measure feelings of contentment and social connection. Items such as feeling happy about improving relationships with family (0.766), spending time with

parents (0.761), and getting closer to neighbourhood communities (0.794) exhibit particularly strong loadings, indicating their importance in capturing positive social and emotional experiences. These reflect positive emotional outcomes associated with social connectedness. Cronbach's Alpha for this dimension is 0.838, indicating good internal consistency among items measuring contentment and social connection. The high mean scores on items like feeling happy about family relationships and community involvement indicate that many respondents experience positive emotional states and satisfaction with their social connections. Therefore, strong relationships with family and friends, as well as active involvement in community life, contribute significantly to emotional well-being [23] even without their third places.

5 Conclusion

This study emphasizes the preference of youth for beaches as their primary third place, highlighting their importance for relaxation, social interaction, and recreation. Through an online survey, it was found that natural settings like beaches significantly contribute to reducing stress, improving mood, and fostering social connections, making them ideal for young people. The study also noted that malls, friends' houses, cafes/restaurants, and neighbourhood streets are other popular third places, reflecting the diverse social needs of youth. Malls and friends' houses offer safe, climate-controlled environments for socialization, while cafes/restaurants and neighbourhood streets provide accessible local spaces, aligning with Oldenburg's concept of conveniently located third places.

In Kelantan, young adults aged 21 to 25 frequently visit beaches weekly for recreation and socializing, highlighting the beach as a prime location for youth engagement. This demographic trend suggests the potential to further develop the beach as a vibrant third place by enhancing recreational and social facilities to better meet the needs of young people. The study also revealed the dual impact of being unable to visit third places: while some experienced social isolation and emotional distress, others saw improvements in family relationships and community bonds. However, the study has limitations. The reliance on online surveys may have excluded those without internet access, potentially skewing the data. Additionally, the timing during the COVID-19 pandemic could have influenced respondents' perceptions and behaviours. The sample size of 150, though sufficient for exploratory analysis, limits the broader applicability of the findings. Future research should address these limitations by conducting follow-up studies post-pandemic and utilizing qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups. Comparative studies across different regions could also enhance understanding of cultural variations in third place preferences. Finally, exploring strategies to improve existing third places or create new ones that cater to youth could inform policies aimed at enhancing social cohesion and well-being.

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