A Spatial Analysis of Organizations in an Intelligent City: An Ethnographic Approach

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ABSTRACT

Studying spatial experiences in intelligent cities is a unique research experience. This study offers an analytical view of spatial experiences in selected Information Communication Technology (ICT) based organizations in Malaysia. This study is based on a six-month ethnographic fieldwork in the Malaysian Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) intelligent city. The research employed a multi-method approach, namely, ethnographic interviewing, structured interviewing, participant-observation and official documentation. Based on the research findings, the researcher proposes a concentric model circle to understand spatial experiences in organizations.

Keywords: Ethnography, ICT, intelligent city, organization, space

INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this paper was to investigate the spatial experiences of *Merdekawira*[1] city dwellers in the first intelligent city in Malaysia. The city was developed by the Malaysian government, and is allegedly functioning as the planners envisaged it would. In order to answer the research objective, the researcher carried out a six-month ethnographic fieldwork. The Malaysian Super Corridor

[1] This is a fictional name of the city.

(MSC) is a planned national project to transform Malaysia into a knowledge-based economy (Mahathir, 1998, 2002). It was an innovative project to put Malaysia back on track after the economic crisis in 1998. The MSC project was a result of a bold dream to transform Malaysia into a modern and powerful nation, i.e. a nation with a new robust economy that is sustained by a knowledge-based society. The project was the brainchild of the visionary fourth Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad.

The concept of an intelligent city emerged from the attempt to create and poise knowledge economy as the key engine for economic growth (Agar, Green

& Harvey, 2002; Intelligent Community Forum, 2007; Komninos, 2002; Mitchell, 2000). Inevitably, knowledge economy is closely associated with Information Communication Technology (ICT), and as suggested by the official website of Intelligent Community, it is a broadband economy (Bell, Jung, & Zacharilla, 2000, 2008; Intelligent Community Forum, 2007). The term broadband refers to ICT facilities and network which accommodate and facilitate the flow of information among the main players such as the corporations, the states and individual consumers.

Most debates on the concept of an intelligent city revolve on two main elements – virtual and physical attributes of the city (Agar *et al.*, 2002; Kavanaugh, 1999; Komninos, 2002; Mitchell, 2000). Indeed, the idea of making *Merdekawira* as a high-tech city is an attempt to create a city with the latest ICT facilities and to provide virtual networks, all of which are concentrated in one physical space. Even though one could argue that virtual technology is sufficient to create an intelligent city, it is difficult to create a virtual city without having the latest ICT facilities and supports. As Castells (1996, 2010) has argued, in the 'network society', the hubs and technopoles that succeed in the global economy provide a 'milieux of innovation', that is, the physical infrastructures for cutting edge R&D as well as command and control centres. Thus, spatial factor is vital in developing an intelligent city. In more specific, it complements the virtual technology and gives it a 'social' anchoring.

Significance of the Space Study

Architects and engineers can plan and construct buildings with their modern designs, but more importantly how do people cope with the space created in these habitus. Previous research has shown that in constructing a space, the human aspect is an important variable and should be given due consideration (Guinness, 2003; Troy, 2003). For illustrations, Corbusier (2004) and Howard (2003) state that in the Brazilian case and several other city spaces, created by prominent modern architects, the designers have failed to accommodate the needs of the people. Meanwhile, in affluent research on high tech spaces, Castells and Hall (1994) also found the same dilemma, whereby people's needs and organizations' plans are in conflict.

Postmodernists have argued that the modernists' idea of internationalization of architecture is an oxymoron (Mohamad Tajuddin, 2008). Furthermore, Mohamad Tajuddin (2008) also argued that the communication theory proposed by Jencks and Kropf (2006) propagates that in building space, culture and tradition need to be taken into account because it is the occupants who will use the spaces, not the builders or the architects of the buildings. In light of these arguments, this paper attempted to propose a space model using an ethnographic approach.

The Study

More specifically, this study was an attempt to understand the usage of space in selected ICT – based corporations. The three

corporations studied were a financial institution, a telecommunications company, and an educational servicing corporation. All these corporations have gained an international reputation and are actively operating in the city.

Using the multi method approach which included participants' observation, ethnographic interviewing and structured interviewing, the researcher made an attempt to understand the microcosmic details of the life world of the office workers at selected corporations.

In this paper, the spaces in the organizations undertaken in this study are in concentric circles as a means of representing their degree of accessibility. First, the lobby which represents the outer most fourth circle, or the first accessible space in organizations, and second, the refectories which represent the third outer circle that circumscribes the socialisation space or area. Third, the inner socialization areas which include gymnasiums, play rooms, kitchen and rest area; these areas are represented by the second circle. Finally, the most restricted areas are the office spaces, as these are found in the innermost circle, or within the core of the concentric model.

The key question in this paper is why the organizations are protective of their spaces. In other words, will this posture of being protective lead to the control of movement and activities of employees and visitors in the organizations? In short, companies are keen to protect their physical and intellectual properties. Nevertheless, the consequences of this type of measure have led to a type of strict control that is similar to the panopticon gaze of Jeremy Bentham and adapted by Michael Foucault in his book, *"From Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison"* (1977). This panopticonian approach is useful to explain how the authority imposes total control in monitoring spaces in organizations. The Panopticon is a symbolic mode of power, which in Bentham's case is an architectural form of power (Foucault, 1977). It is a mechanism of control from above. In relation to space in organizations, the panopticonian gaze and measures are associated with the concept of surveillance of employees and visitors of organizations. Every movement is constantly monitored. The upper level management in the organizations studied claimed that they needed to do that for the sake of the security of their corporations. Indeed for the management, the desire to control is an attempt to make life in the organization appear normal and structured rather than chaotic, i.e., out of control. It is a visible and active control of the movements and the activities surrounding life in organizations. In Lefebvre's (1991) view, this type of space is associated with the ideological representation of space, whereby policy-makers rationalize the need to control on grounds related to the security and safety of organizations. Thus, the price of safety is a constant surveillance and a strict control of movements and activities within the corporations' vicinities. The corporations are like fortresses deploying sophisticated equipment or gadgets with

advanced technology, i.e., closed circuit televisions (CCTV) and security guards policing and monitoring every inch of the organizations' spaces, day and night.

Following from the foregoing discussions, the researcher found that the spaces are protected by the security guards and codes of the organizations. This phenomenon eventually led to restricted accessibility in the organizations. Hence, not everyone is welcomed in the organization's space. Only certain spaces were made partially free for everyone to roam about, such as the lobbies and the refectories. Strangers were thoroughly checked and monitored before they could gain entry to these organizations. Everything is about control. Security is gracefully embraced. As noted by Miss Amy, a secretary at an IT company:

> You can notice the difference in this company. People especially strangers have to identify themselves before they can enter the company. I seldom see office worker entertain "non-business visitors" (Amy, personal communication, October 10, 2004).

Before I visited any office buildings in the city, I had to make appointments with the office workers.

In this context, I was a purposive stranger visiting the companies to get the viewpoints and stories of the office workers themselves about life in this city. Entering the office buildings in this city was a matter of following protocol. I dressed like an office worker with formal working attire. I usually wore long dark trousers with a long sleeve shirt. The first person I usually met at the entrance of the companies was the security guard.

After I had obtained my visitor's pass, I would park my car at the car park for visitors, and then accessed the lobby of the company. I usually visited the companies in the afternoons during the lunch breaks from 12 noon until 2 p.m. to meet my informants. It was during this time that I could get to meet many of the employees who were also found waiting around the lobby. This was the first office space which I could enter to begin my research. Let me now turn to the discussions on the research method section.

METHODOLOGY

Ethnography is a descriptive analysis of a subject matter. The term ethnography connotes the meaning of studying local people in their specific cultural surrounding. Ethno means people and graphein refers to writing – and ethnography is a systematic description of habits, customs and norms of people who are the designated research subjects in a nuanced and detailed manner. It is about a culture studying a culture (Spradley, 1979; Creswell, 2007). It is about learning from people or the informants rather than merely analyzing relevant subject matters which are related to them. The ethnographic method was chosen in this study to comprehend the lived experiences of the city citizens. Moreover, ethnography is a practical way to provide

an in-depth understanding of the life world of the informants. LeCompte and Goetz (2001) argue that the strengths lay on its formulation of problems, nature of goals and application of results. Ethnographic researchers formulate their research aims by understanding the interactions of various elements in the natural state of the fieldwork. Thus, the nature of goals is to search theories that are able to explain the data. This is in line with the application of research findings which focuses on comprehending, refining and validating the constructs for the advancement of knowledge in the field. As Geertz (1973) argues, ethnography is an art of systematic analysis of a phenomenon. In his approach of thick description, ethnography is the science of providing rich cultural description of a specific cultural group or phenomenon.

Many ethnographic accounts are descriptive because ethnographers are trained to engage with the micro perspectives of particular subject matters, and pay close attention to how people perceive these. For example, Bronislaw Malinoswki's (1922) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, Margaret Mead's (1928) *Coming of Age in Samoa*, William Foote Whyte's (1955), *Street Corner Society*, Clifford Geertz's (1973), *Balinese Cock Fighting*, Paul Willis's (1977), *Learning to Labour: How working class kids get working class jobs* – are the classical ethnographic works. The contemporary ethnographers who share similar descriptive writing styles are John Postill (2006), Paul Atkinson (2006), Andreas Wittel (2001), Sara Pink (2001),

Micheal Buroway (2000), Philippe Bourgois (1995), Michael Agar (1996) and Kunda Gideon (1992).

The ethnographic study employs various methods. In observing the site, the first encounter with the life world of *Merdekawira* was framed by adopting Spradley's observational approach, i.e. to understand and know how the locals (the Merdekawirans) act in the space known as *Merdekawira* (Spradley, 1980). The data were collected through a structured observation journal. Meanwhile, thirty-one informants were interviewed using the ethnographic and structured interviewing approaches. The interviews were recorded and transcribed according to the themes and theories related to the aim of the research. The transcriptions of the interview sessions came to about 400 pages. The following interview protocol key questions guided the study:

1. What are your role(s) in the organization?

2. How do you see the company's role in space management?

3. To what extent do the staff value facilities (space usage) in the organization?

The respondents in this research consisted of a total of 31 informants from three different companies. Approximately 48% (n=15) were males and 52% (n=16) were females. About 10% (n=3) of the informants were administrative staff, 45% (n=14) were assistant managers and 45% (n=14) were senior officers and managers.

Meanwhile, 80% of the interviews took place at their respective organizations involving every facet of the circles.

Space of Control: A Concentric Model

The organizations' lobbies:
The fourth circle

Building on Kracauer's argument in The Mass Ornament (1995) on the hotel lobby as a social place, which paradoxically lacks sociality, the researcher argues that the lobby environment and the culture in organizations in this city are rather different. If Kraucauer (1995) suggests that the lobby is where people are guests, and they treat the lobby as a place for loitering in a fashionable way, it is then just the opposite of the perception of the use of the lobby in the present study. The lobbies in organizations are heavily monitored by receptionists and security guards. Although they are social spaces that are accessible to a purposive stranger (like me), I was closely watched with suspicion. I felt completely at ease when my informant came down from his or her office and started to greet and talk to me about my research project. To sit in the lobby waiting for my informant made me feel like I was being under the watchful eyes of the police; whose members would immediately pounced on me should I decide to commit a crime in the vicinity.

Furthermore, the lobbies were spotlessly clean. It is another form of the extension of space for control. Sterility is a part of the organizational culture and the representation of this particular aspect of the culture is through the lobbies. There are always some office cleaners who wipe glass tables and vases in the lobbies. While visitors are waiting at the lobbies to meet office workers of the companies, they will either be just looking around, using their mobiles, reading the company's newsletters (which are readily available at the lobbies) and checking their email. Some of the office workers usually hold the appointment with their visitors at the lobbies. The Lobby was turned into a 'makeshift' office to conduct whatever business that was scheduled for during the appointment. As aptly stated by Miss Linda:

> *I usually saw office workers entertained 'formal visitors'. They seldom met visitors for social purpose here. As in this company, we treat mostly business visitors* (Linda, personal communication, September 21, 2005).

Her statement was not uncommon. It is supported by Miss Zola's comment:

> *It is strange to see office workers to treat or meet with non-business visitors. Here, we usually meet our 'business' clients* (Zola, personal communication, September 23, 2005).

Most of the time, the lobbies in the corporations are used by their office workers to meet and host visitors and business associates. The lobbies represent spaces for conducting business, and not merely as social spaces in the organizations. Reflecting on such spaces, Turner (1982) draws attention

to the concept of a luminal space as he further elucidates, "... in liminality, profane social relations may be discontinued, former rights and obligations are suspended (p.27). A more recent illustration of this controlled space is highlighted by Douglass (2006) in his study on commodification of urban spaces in the context of globalization. This work addresses apparent discrimination between 'legal' and 'illegal' users of urban spaces as being defined by the owner of the spaces.

The layout and construct of the lobbies are usually spacious and have a modern outlook. Some companies take great efforts in decorating their lobbies. For instance, big companies like Adson[2] and Malta have spacious lobbies. There are sets of sofas at the lobbies, which are carefully chosen to project the professional and international image of the corporations. In addition, the colour, décor and arrangement of the sofas usually reflect the organizational culture of the company. Most of the companies choose black or dark colours for their sofas, which symbolize the life in the corporations, or a life which is geared towards the priority of work over socialization. Meanwhile, the sets of sofas are arranged in such a way that they are always adjacent to each other and this appears to suggest that the lobbies are the sites or places for conducting business, and thus, private talks are discretely discouraged. The lobbies never cease to remind me that I am sucked into the formal territories of the companies. Some companies display their brochures on

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[2] Pseudonym name(s) are used to protect the identity of the research subjects and the companies.

the racks next to the decorated sofa, while some others arrange them on the glass table and some are available at the receptionist's front desk. This deliberately structured environment communicates the idea that the particular corporate image and identity are important to be recognized by the visitors and employees of the organizations. The organizational images and identities are communicated to the visitors and employees through the portrayal of company's logos, spatial constructs, staff smart cards, visitor's tags, as well as guards and their uniforms. These physical artefacts are parts of organizational culture (Balzarova, Castka, Bamber, & Sharp, 2006; Gabriel, 1999; Hickson & Stacks, 1998; Martins & Terblanche, 2003; Schultz, 1995; Wilson, 2001). The organizational culture appears as an attempt to embrace homogeneity and differentiate the office workers from others, i.e., strangers (like me). Even though the culture is quite subtle as the employees do not wear uniforms, the staff tags say it all. We are one and the same, and you are different, not one of us. You are different and therefore, you do not belong here. In an interview with Mr. John on this issue, he responded:

> It has been an understood norm we identified each other by the company. Thus, if anyone is different from us i.e., not wearing any company's identification tag, we normally noticed that they are not from here (John, personal communication, September 27, 2005).

The tangible items are represented as the artefacts of the companies, such as the logo, the spatial structure, the brochures and the staff's identity cards. On the other hand, the intangible items are values, norms and practices which shape and influence the employees' attitudes in workplaces. It is worth pointing out that the organizational culture seems to have a certain effect on the working practices and attitudes of the office workers (Kunda, 1992; Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000; Styhre, 2008). It is because they see themselves as one against the others. The others here refer to the other office workers from other companies and also visitors or purposive strangers (like me). Thus, it is argued that organizational culture is another form of control. Although it is subtle, it is effective in influencing the practices and attitudes of office workers in these organizations.

Thus, the lobbies which represent the spatial construct of the organizations seem to be another extension of the invisible, yet intentional mode of control by the corporation's top management. These are controlled spaces even though they are supposed to be social spaces in the organizations. They may appear as open spaces where visitors are welcomed, and yet they are consciously closed to non-members of the organizations. Another social space in the organizations, i.e. the refectories, is discussed in the subsequent section.

The Refectories: The Third Circle

On the other hand, the refectories are more receptive to the strangers of the corporations.

Here, people appear to be quite relaxed and they are drinking, eating, talking and joking with their colleagues. The management determines the designs of the refectories. Some are in open spaces while others are indoors. Some are substantially decorated with modern furniture and also with artificial pond and water fountain, while others present or embrace the image of simplicity in the design and arrangement of their furniture. The prices of food and drink in most of the corporations' refectories are relatively cheaper compared to eating places (restaurants, food courts and cafes) available in the city. As pointed by Mr Yodam:

> *Here, good food comes with affordable prices. The place is much cleaner* (Yodam, personal communication, August 21, 2005).

Miss Chelo further elaborated on this issue:

> *You can observe here, the customers are not only from the company. Other colleagues from neighbouring companies also usually come to have lunch at this place. Sometimes, we can see visitors who are not from this city, perhaps they are visiting their friends here* (Chelo, personal communication, August 22, 2005).

Hence, the refectories are not exclusive to visitors and employees of the companies only. Office workers may also patronise other refectories in other corporations. It is interesting to note that social spaces

usually embrace and engage people from different social backgrounds (Bendiner-Viani, 2005; van Lieshout & Aarts, 2008). In this context, however, as a newcomer, you need to have an escort or a tour guide, someone who can guide you to the place. It is because most of the users of the space are regular customers and it seems odd to have someone new in the place. The regulars will simply notice the newcomer at an instance.

The refectories are another 'permissible' social space in the organizations. As the only outer socialization space in the organizations, they present a more relaxed image compared to the lobbies. Social spaces, such as refectories, are supposed to act as places where social activities are carried out, and as meeting points for visitors and friends (Bendiner-Viani, 2005). Nevertheless, to spend your free time loitering around these places are not recommended. As mentioned earlier on, regular customers are particularly aware of the newcomers to the space and this can make one feels uncomfortable. In this space, it is not the gaze of the upper management that matters, but the gaze of the regular users. Thus, the spaces are partially free as they are controlled by the users most of the time.

The Inner Socialization Space:
The second circle

This space is exclusive only for the members of the corporations. In other words, this space is usually a privileged space for employees who work in big companies. As argued by Vasconcelos (2010), inner

socialization space represents the tranquillity of mind. In similar vein, this space also offers freedom for its members to release their work stress (Stryker, 2004).

The management has provided facilities for its employees like the game rooms, kitchens, gymnasiums, prayer rooms for Muslims and a resting area. They are the hidden social spaces in organizations, where office workers spend their social time during their working hours. This socialization space is shared among the members of the organizations and considered as a private territory compared to lobbies and refectories which aree partially more opened to strangers. Miss Jannah was excited to mention about the facilities:

> *In this company, we have good facilities for office workers. Perhaps the best is the gym facilities. It is free for the workers and many of my colleagues are keen of using it* (Jannah, personal communication, December 19, 2004).

Miss Sham also pointed out an interesting point:

> *Do you know in some companies, they have game rooms for office works to take break after long working hours? Some play ping-pong. That's why you can notice why some staff are good in the game when we have inter-company games in the city* (Sham, personal communication, September 27, 2005).

On one hand, providing an inner socialization space seems like an ideal way for the company to strike a balance between work and play. On the other, looking at the provision of the inner socialization space from a different perspective, one cannot help coming to the conclusion that the organizations has now had the ability to contain and control their employees' movement and activities by providing almost everything under one roof. It is like creating an island where every possible need of humans can be fulfilled. Hence, the organizations are attempting to become complete places of living and working in their own respective ways. Drawing on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1968, *cited in* Hickson & Stacks, 1998), the lobbies, refectories and inner socialization spaces signify the efforts of the top management to fulfil physiological needs, safety and security needs, as well as social needs to motivate and boost the work performances of their employees. Perhaps, to develop employees who are self-actualizers by providing supportive social spaces is a far fetched dream. However, it can be rewarding and beneficial in a sense, as by using these spatial constructs, the top management can at least foment high self-esteem amongst the employees.

As pointed out earlier on, self-contained organizations are able to impose subtle control over their employees by rewarding them with social space privileges. They are retaining and containing the employees in the most indirect way, which is through the 'soft control approach'.

Office Space: The first circle

There are two types of office spaces. First, there are offices where I cannot enter due to data security reasons. These spaces represent the inner rooms of the privileged spaces, where only privileged members have accessibility. The second type is accessible office space. In those offices, I was allowed to enter and observe the working space, the employees and the culture of the organizations.

Alluding to the concept of the office space in an organization, there are several reasons I would like to highlight now to explain how working spaces came to be considered as privileged spaces. First, they are heavily monitored using advanced technology and human surveillance. Second, there is a common 'ritual' adapted by the office workers in the space. Third, outsiders are not allowed to enter the spaces unless it is for an emergency, or with very valid reasons.

With the increased monitoring of the organizations' spaces, the management practice of invoking the concept of privileged space is therefore not something unusual. Technology driven surveillance, with the support of human surveillance, is put in place every where in these organizations. In addition, these surveillance mechanisms are policing and guarding every movement and activity happening within the organizations' territories. One of the senior officers made this clear by saying:

> As you can observe, the security officers will keep on asking the

visitors especially when they are not the regular clients. Usually they will ask what is the visitor's agenda? And who do they intend to meet? Some organizations have a very strict rule where every 10 minutes, the officers will come and ask about your presence in the space (Dania, personal communication, September 27, 2005).

The spaces are well-guarded, and these types of surveillance seem to reinforce the idea that those who are members of the organizations have to be privileged as they are free to roam around these spaces compared to the others who are considered as outsiders or strangers and have to be watched closely each time they enter these spaces. As a stranger, you feel like you were a fish in an aquarium. You are being scrutinized by the security officers, the receptionists and the office workers. This phenomenon is linked to the ritual of the office workers in the organizations. Mr. Adham, a Vice President, argued on this particular issue:

Well of course, there is an exception the office is open to special guest. And when there are emergencies, and other specific situations, we need to open the office to the respective visitors (Adham, personal communication, September 15, 2005).

The following fragment of a confession further illustrates this point:

I have to tell you the truth. I can invite you to my room and other office spaces but certain spaces you can't enter due to data security reasons (Dahlia, personal communication, September 16, 2005).

Ritual practices are mostly associated with interpretive or symbolic studies of organizations (Brown, 1998; Elsmore, 2001; Gherardi, 1994; Harris, 1994; Hickson & Stacks, 1998; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Schultz, 1995; Schultz & Hatch, 1996). The practices symbolise how people behave, react and survive the organizational climate by adapting to the 'core' or the established practices in the organizations. The established practices are usually introduced by the seniors or members of the top management through myths, stories and rumours to produce an imaginary code of conduct on how appropriate or acceptable practices should be carried out in the first place (Brown, 1998; Elsmore, 2001; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Schultz, 1995). In addition, group pressure also contributes to the attachment to and adaptation of organizational culture among the employees (Hickson & Stacks, 1998; Elsmore, 2001).

In the context of the current research work, the ritual practice of the privileged space refers to the degree of accessibility of strangers to the space and the significance of the staff identity cards. It is common

knowledge in the organizations that only members of staff are permitted to access the so-called privileged space. How do they get access to the place? It is through their staff cards. These cards are granted to those working in the corporations. The card symbolises the power of accessibility and the privileges accruing from it. By being accepted as members of the organization, they are to be trusted and can access almost all the facilities and spaces in the organizations. In short, the cards enable the employees to extend their territories from the lobbies (fourth circle), to refectories (third circle), to the inner socialization space (second circle), and to the most highly exclusive space, which is the working space (first circle). Hence, the cards marked the unwritten rules of the organizations. The cards gave the identity to the office workers and distinguish them from the non-members. As for the office workers, they always wear their staff cards with pride. During my fieldwork, I noticed that these office workers were without fail wearing their staff cards even though it was during their lunch time break in the public places in the city.

Thus, without the employee security cards, strangers visiting the organizations appear to be repressed as they do not have the accessibility to the privileged places. These places, which are heavily guarded with high-technology mechanisms and security officers, represent another controlled space in the organizations. In comparison, other spaces in the organization are restricted to members only. It is only in

times of emergencies, such as fires, health problems or machine breakdowns, the non-members will be allowed to enter these out-of-bound spaces. Another exception would be when there were visits from prominent personalities and auditors.

The accessible office spaces where I could conduct my observations shared similarly unique characteristics. Majority of the workers occupied open spaces and the managers were allocated with individual rooms. It is interesting to note that the manifestation of self-identification could be observed in cubicle rooms. There are personalized calendars, memos about appointments, and lists of 'things to do', as well as photographs of their vacations and work achievements on the cubicle boards. On the desks, there are decorated personal computers, trays with stacks of documents, used mug and stationary. Office workers use their cubicles for socialising and working purposes. As John argues:

> Since cubicles are quite the same, some office workers love to colour their cubicles with their own personal belonging. It is a way to make others know the cubicles belong to whom (John, personal communication, September 27, 2005).

His statement is supported by Miss J who stated:

> In a hot desking environment, usually office workers could not put their personal belonging at the

cubicles as others will be using the same space. In a way, it is lucky for those who don't have to be in the hot desking space. You cannot personalise your office space (J, personal communication, September 17, 2005).

On the contrary, the rooms for managers and the directors are spacious. In one of the executive director's rooms, the office is smartly furnished with a black sofa set, colourful vase, carpet, photos of family and racks of files. In most offices, slogans or statements relating to the company's vision are carefully displayed on the walls. The settings of the meeting rooms are formal sterile and visible to the office workers. Most of the rooms have glass walls which portray visibility to the non-participants of the meetings is not an issue. This reflects the idea of the panopticon gaze, whereby the privileged can observe the others without being seen. Meanwhile, the arrangement of the cubicles in open spaces reveals the organizational culture which attempts to be more open and competitive. Studies in psychology, architecture and organization argue that spatial arrangement can affect the job motivation of the employees (Nathan & Doyle, 2002; Rashid & Zimring, 2003, Sundstrom, Burt & Kamp, 1980). Hence, the spatial arrangement of the working space can either motivate or hinder the employees work performances (Nathan & Doyle, 2002; Rashid & Zimring, 2003; Sundstrom, *et al.*, 1980).

The central premise of the spatial arrangement of the office spaces is the emotion associated with the space allocation. The managers appear to be happier as they are entitled for individual rooms. On the other hand, the office workers who are occupying the cubicles seem to use the discussion rooms for their daily office work, for it is here that they spread out their working documents, discuss and exchange views with their colleagues and write points from discussions on the white boards found in the room. Perhaps, occupying the discussion rooms made them more enthusiastic with their work as they have then found a larger working space and a group of colleagues who can share and discuss ideas on ongoing projects. Mr. Yodam argued on this matter:

Even for office workers who have their own cubicles, they would prefer to work at the discussion rooms. I always observe their style of working and for them more space means more interaction with the colleagues especially when they have to complete group projects (Yodam, personal communication, 22 August, 2005).

Thus, a bigger space tend to inspire them to be more progressive at work, rather than the feelings they have when in their small cubicles, where they will naturally feel contained and restricted in the small space made available to them.

CONCLUSIONS

Drawing from Castells and Hall (1994) and Mohamad Tajuddin's (2008) arguments that understanding a spatial context requires knowledge of the local culture, this study embarked on the objective to investigate the spatial experiences of the city. The findings revealed that due to the protective culture of the organizations, spaces in those organizations could be interpreted in concentric circles. First, the lobbies represent the outer most fourth circle, i.e., the first accessible space in the organizations. Second, the refectories represent the third outer circle which circumscribes the socialisation space or area. Third, the inner socialization areas, which include the gymnasiums, play rooms, kitchen and rest area, are represented by the second circle. Finally, the most restricted areas are the office spaces, and these areas are found in the innermost circle, or within the core of the concentric model. Studies from different scholars have been used to discuss these circles (Bendiner-Viani, 2005; Douglass, 2006; Kracauer, 1995; Styhre, 2008; Rashid & Zimring, 2003; Vasconcelos, 2010). Drawing from the arguments and discussions, the study attempted to reflect the distinctive circle model which had resulted from the controlled culture of the respective organizations.

This study also found that the top management have been using spaces in their organizations to create an organizational culture that evokes the feeling of pride for and belongingness to the companies. Furthermore, as a non-member, the author's accessibility in the organizations was rather restricted. Indeed, the organizational space represents a controlled space, or an exclusive space in which invasion by strangers is not possible. A description of the organizational spaces in a planned city and an explanation of why they are heavily protected from the gaze of the outsiders have been presented in this section.

These findings reflect a new perspective into the organizational space in the Malaysian context, i.e. from the organizational communication framework as there have been limited studies on this area. Moreover, the study attempted to offer an Eastern perspective on the spatial experiences in an intelligent city in Malaysia. This research, however, focused only on one specific location, i.e. *Merdekawira* city. Thus, more research needs to be conducted in other similar intelligent cities which share similar cultural experiences with Malaysia. Finally, researchers may benefit from extended fieldwork in the site(s), provided that they have financial and administrative supports from the research funds.

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