REVITALISING CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF URBAN DECAY FEATURES

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Abstract
Conservation and sustainability of historic cities in Malaysia have been drawing a lot attention from different stakeholders as many researches were undertaken relating heritage conservation and heritage tourism. The declaration of historic cities in Penang and Malacca as World Heritage Cities by UNESCO had proven that the conservation and preservation of tangible heritage assets not only essential to sustain the continuity of local cultural identity but also contribute to the economic regeneration and domestic heritage tourism. However, there have been only a small number of studies done on the urban decay features experienced by old towns in Malaysia and the corresponding revitalisation tools which suit the local culture context. Based upon the conflicts between urban decay issues arise within Ipoh Old Town and the lack of effective revitalisation efforts, the objectives are to identify the urban decay features currently experienced by Ipoh Old Town and to recommend the critical components to be revitalised in Ipoh Old Town. The mixed methods research which incorporated both quantitative and qualitative research approaches is adopted as the methodology for this study. The quantitative data is obtained through questionnaire surveys whereas the qualitative research methods involved the gathering of information through interviews and case study analysis. These suggestions are categories into three major themes which are revitalisation, stricter enforcement and financial funding.

Keywords: conservation; heritage; revitalisation efforts; sustainability; urban decay.

INTRODUCTION

As a city develop the urban form changes to accommodate the growth and major structural changes in global economies, government public policies, transportation and social conditions. Urban decay is a result of the interaction between social, economic and physical changes in cities (Andersen, 2003). As a matter of fact, the urban problems of traditional towns are often in a declining economy, unemployment, physical decay, and poor amenities (Clark, 2013). Therefore, the revitalisation of the city is a long term and continuous effort and it is inevitable to face challenges and issues during the restoration process. The revitalisation of historic cities demands sensitive treatments and skilful financial and institutional engineering of the viable economic reuse as well as the tools of restoration (Serageldin, Shluger, & Martin-Brown, 2001).

In the history of architectural conservation, the revitalisation movement started in the nineteenth century in Europe whereby the increasing significance was attached from national to local identity and more attention were drawn to the preservation of traditional buildings, artworks and other intangible heritage assets (Rodwell, 2008). There has been an expansion of research of historic building materials, construction methods and workmanship due to the increasing awareness to secure these buildings through alteration and adaptation. The conservation effort also emphasized on the retention of buildings' authenticity in order to preserves its cultural identity. The architectural integrity of existing buildings should be recovered through facade retention instead of demolishing the structure in order to elevate its heritage value.

The involvement of various parties such as government and local communities is essential in revitalize old towns as the buildings conservation has evolved from nostalgic preservation of particular buildings into a wider scope supported by both public and private organizations (Rodwell, 2008). However, the conservation efforts for historic cities was initiated in Malaysia about four decades ago (Mohamad, Akasah, & Rahman, 2014). The gap in knowledge for urban conservation especially in revitalisation of historic cities is yet to be filled as not much is known regarding the techniques of conserving traditional buildings.

This paper focuses on the revitalisation of Ipoh Old Town, a former prosperous town in early 1900 due to tin mining which experiences all the symptoms of urban decay even though it remains as the capital state of Perak. Ipoh Old Town is the area in between S.P Seenivasagam Road and Leong Boon Swee Road, on the west bank of Kinta River. During the Japanese occupation of Malaya, it became the capital city, in place of Taiping. The collapse of tin prices and closure of tin mines during the late 1970s had stagnant the economic growth of Ipoh and further encouraged the migration of

residents to other metropolitan areas such as Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. As a result, Ipoh has been colloquially known as a decaying town. There are many intricately-designed British architecture and interesting colonial Chinese old shop lots located within the Old Town, for example the Town Hall and Railway Station (Taj Mahal of Ipoh). These buildings exhibit a tint of neo-renaissance and neo-gothic design in the structure. The Old Town is the historic core of Ipoh and it deserved more attention from the local authority in reviving the physical and economic quality of the declining traditional inner city. It is vital to have well-planned management and maintenance on traditional buildings as part of the revitalisation efforts for the city so that the future generations can understand the essentiality of urban conservation and experience the valuable heritage architectural structures.

URBAN DECAY

The review of literature revealed that there is no universally accepted definition of urban decay. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "urban decay" is simply defined as the degeneration of the buildings and infrastructure in an urban area. In addition, the Urban Decay Analysis prepared by Economic and Planning Systems (EPS) in United States defined urban decay as the prevalent and substantial physical deterioration that impairs the proper utilization of affected real estate or the health, safety and welfare of the surrounding community. As a result, the previously functioning part of city falls into decrepitude and turning into a desolate city landscape gradually.

However, as the city continues to develop and expand rapidly with growing population, it often boosted investment demands within a short timeframe beyond their capacities which leads to the occurrence of monocentric and congested city centres (Morichi, 2005).

URBAN DECAY KEY FEATURES

Urban decay is often associated with the deterioration of an urban area due to neglect or the area has age. The key features allegedly aggravated by urban decay are studied to understand the fundamental reasons which contributed to this phenomenon in the urban fabric and how it related to the condition in the decaying historic cities. Furthermore, the prominent characteristics of urban deterioration can be seen in physical, economic, and social context of the traditional towns (Clark, 2013).

In the perspectives of physical aspect, many historic cities are exposed to various physical deterioration symptoms of urban decay such as building abandonment, abnormally high business vacancies and other disorders in physical dimension. According to Skogan (1990), physical disorder is evident in many inner city neighbourhoods through the observation of visual signs of negligence and unchecked decay due to the lack of maintenance: ill-kept properties, widespread appearance of trash in abandoned buildings, vandalism of property, extensive gang or offensive graffiti on walls and abandoned and stripped vehicles in alleys. These physical symptoms are referred as the continuous conditions.

In addition, urban decay also contributed to the occurrence of social unrest which is a matter of behaviour. It includes public drinking, prostitution, catcalling or sexual harassment (Skogan, 1990). These symptoms threatened the safety of surrounding neighbourhood and clearly associated with the increase in crime rate where these old cities house drug addicts, prostitutes and criminals. In comparison to the physical deterioration, the social disorder appears as a sequence of episodic events instead of ongoing conditions. Besides, most historic cities such as Ipoh Old Town suffers from depopulation due to the economic and social development of suburban area in close proximity. Consequently, the local citizens and entrepreneurs would move out and seek for a less congested secondary site at the outer city ring (Bogue, 1956).

In an economical point of view, old cities are the historic core of urban areas and were once the backbone of urban civilization overflowing with retail, commercial, and government administrative activities. The town centres are an important part of the public domain due of the high concentration of public culture assets which promote social interaction and raise personal awareness of civic society (Evans, 1997). Unfortunately, these cities that were once prosperous are experiencing economic meltdown due to the negative impacts caused by physical deterioration. The abandoned buildings and commercial sites discouraged the owners and investors to initiative new business ventures or cultural projects. This also led to high unemployment rate and deindustrialization as the old cities lose its urban function as the main economy centres.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main method used for this research is the mixed methods approach which incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methods through questionnaire survey, key informant interviews and

exploratory case study approaches. For the purpose of data collection, both primary and secondary collection methods are adopted to identify the urban decay features currently experienced by Ipoh Old Town and to recommend the critical components to be revitalised in this historic city.

Recommendations will be focused on revitalisation of Kinta River, adaptive reuse of Pre-War Shop houses, better management of the road and drainage system, open air and pedestrian friendly mall and parking bays as these are prominent features of Ipoh Old Town.

Data Collection

The process of primary data collection was undertaken via two methods which including the distribution of questionnaires and face-to-face semi-structured questions interviews with the expertise from both public and private sectors. The targeted group of respondents for the questionnaire survey is the local citizens who are currently living at Old Town, New Town and within the municipality area of Majlis Bandaraya Ipoh (MBI), including the professionals (i.e. architects, valuers, historians and town planners) and enforcement bodies (i.e. MBI, Town Planning Department, and Valuation Department). These parties are targeted for the research because they are familiar with the developmental history and cultural heritage of Ipoh, particularly the Old Town area. The questionnaires are designed using the Likert scale with open ended questions. Interviews are conducted with the respondents to identify the urban decay features currently experienced by Ipoh Old Town and recommendations on the critical components to be revitalised in Old Town based on their opinions.

Area of Survey

The chosen survey area covered the whole Ipoh city which included the Old Town, New Town, municipality area within MBI and other areas which located within the border of Ipoh. The focus of this research is on the revitalisation of Old Town Ipoh. Hence, the targeted respondents are those who has been living within the selected area, particularly the Conservation Area as well as those who are deemed to be qualified in giving relevant information.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive analysis of the questionnaire survey shows that 54% of respondents were male and 46% of respondents were female. In the aspect of age group, this study aimed to identify the perception of local users on the need to revitalise Ipoh's Old Town, hence more emphasis are placed on the elder age group particularly respondents whose age are 60 and above as they have a deeper personal attachment to the Old Town and they experienced the urban changes in terms of physical, economic and social aspects. Therefore, 28% are 60 years old and above; 25% are aged between 50-59 years old; 20% are 30-39 years; 17% are 40-49 years and 10% between 20-29 years old. In terms of the highest education qualification, most of the respondents are degree holders (i.e. 37%), followed by 21% and 14% of SPM and Diploma holders respectively. Moreover, 12% and 11% of the respondents had attained the highest education qualification of Master and STPM or Matriculation levels respectively. Lastly, there is a 5% of PhD holders. For the area of residency, 37% of respondents stay within the municipality area under the jurisdiction of Majlis Bandaraya Ipoh, whereas 33% and 30% of the respondents are living in Old Town and New Town areas respectively.

In the aspect of employment, 42% of respondents are working in the private sector whereas 23% are involved in the public sector. In addition, 25% of respondents are self-employed whereby most of them are the historic shop houses' owners who run their own businesses in these premises. Last but not least, 3% of respondents are in the non-government organisation and 7% are grouped under the other category. The results have shown that 39% of respondents are professionals whereas 22% falls under the non-professional category. In addition, 11% and 16% are semi-professionals and retirees respectively. 9% are from the government and public administrative category and 3% are university students. The selection of respondents from various job categories reflects a comprehensive study of opinions from the local community as public participation plays a vital role in any revitalisation effort. In terms of the sectors of occupation, the major sectors with a relatively higher amount of respondents are education (i.e. 18%), food and beverage (i.e. 16%), construction (i.e. 12%), finance and insurance (i.e. 11%) and legal services (i.e. 10%). There are also respondents who involved in other minor sectors such as real estate, manufacturing, healthcare and retail.

Urban Decay Features: Ipoh Old Town

Physical Aspect

The respondents were asked to rank the above statement which best reflect their opinions on the urban decay features currently experiencing in Ipoh's Old Town. The most significant statement regarding the physical urban decay features that most respondents agreed to is that most buildings and infrastructures in the Old Town has shown obvious visual signs of negligence and major decay symptoms such as mouldy walls and collapsing mortar work. This is proved by the mean value of 4.30 and SD value of 0.56 as shown in Table 1. This indicates that the respondents are not satisfied with the current condition of most old buildings in the Old Town where there is ample room of improvements to be done. The lowest mean value obtained among the results is 3.50 with the highest SD value of 1.059 which shows that most respondents show low agreement with the statement on the owners of historic buildings should be responsible for all the maintenance cost incurred. The maintenance costs of old buildings are relatively higher as compared to the modern shop houses and hence the respondents reckon that incentives should be provided by the local authority in maintaining these heritage buildings, particularly the old shop houses.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Physical Aspect of Urban Decay Features

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Old Town experienced major building abandonment	100	3.8500	.796
Obvious visual signs of negligence and urban decay can be seen due to the lack of maintenance	**100**	**4.3000**	**.560**
Physical urban decay symptoms are common within the Old Town	100	3.8200	.914
The physical deterioration is curable as the cost of repair could not outweigh the increase in building value.	100	3.9500	.641
The owners of historic buildings should bear all the maintenance cost.	100	3.5000	1.059

Legend: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Social Aspect

The tabulated data (Table 2) shows that most respondents reckon that the most pertinent statement regarding the social aspect of urban decay features shown in Ipoh's Old Town is that social issues are due to urban decay would hinder the revitalisation process from being undertaken. This is proven by the highest mean value of 4.08 (SD value of 0.774). This indicates that the respondents are aware of the implications of unresolved social issues due to urban decay which could be a hindrance to the revitalisation process. The safety of heritage area is crucial in attracting foreign and domestic tourists and hence the elimination of any social unrest not only increases their confidence in visiting Ipoh's Old Town, but also improve the efficiency of revitalisation works. However, the respondents disagree with the statement that Old Town suffers from depopulation due to the economic and social development of suburban area within close proximity. This is shown by the lowest mean value of 3.14 among other statements. The respondents think that the main reason of depopulation in the Old Town is not due to other developments of suburban area but the lack of housing units to sustain the growing population.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Social Aspect on Urban Decay Features

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Urban decay causes social problems other than physical symptoms	100	3.5200	.904
The occurrence of social issues due to urban decay threatened the safety of surrounding neighbourhood	100	3.9400	.930
The Old Town suffers from depopulation due to economic and social developments of suburban area in close proximity	100	3.1400	1.247
Social issues would hinder the revitalisation process	**100**	**4.0800**	**.774**

Legend: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Economic Aspect

In regard of the economic aspect of urban decay features on buildings in the Old Town, the descriptive statistics (Table 3) shows that the most significant statement with the highest weighted mean value of 4.07 (SD value of 0.7) is that most building owners focus more on the increase in property value instead of conserving the heritage value of their properties. This implies that the respondents are aware of the lack of appreciation on the heritage value of old buildings from the owners. Instead of revitalising the building façade and conserving the cultural identity of the building, some owners would chose to emphasise on the increase in property value by leasing the building to other parties. The respondents disagree with the statement of local citizens and entrepreneurs would

move out to seek for a less congested area for better business opportunities which led to high unemployment rate and deindustrialisation in the Old Town. This is proven by the lowest mean value of 2.63 and it shows that the respondents still believe that Ipoh's Old Town has the economic potential to be revitalise and remains as the hotspot for commercial and tourism activities despite the physical decay of buildings.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Economic Aspect of Urban Decay Features

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Economic meltdown due to physical deterioration of traditional buildings	100	3.4400	1.12205
Abandoned buildings discourage owners and investors to initiate new business ventures or cultural projects	100	2.9600	1.22202
Local citizens would move out to less congested area for better business opportunities which led high unemployment rate and deindustrialisation	100	2.6300	1.18624
Most building owners focus on the increase in property value than conserving the heritage value of buildings	100	**4.0700**	**.70000**

Legend: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neutral; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REVITALISATION OF IPOH OLD TOWN

The respondents were asked on their opinions of recommendations for revitalisation of Ipoh's Old Town and the results in Table 4 show that most respondents agreed on the statement that cooperation between all stakeholders can further enhance the effectiveness of any revitalisation tools adopted to revive the Old Town. This is shown by the highest mean value of 4.41 (SD value of 0.621) as compared to the other statement. This implies that the respondents understood that the revitalisation effort required the cooperation of government and private sectors as well as individual building owners to ensure the success of reviving the Old Town and also further enhance the efficiency in implementing any revitalisation plan as proposed by the local government.

The recommendations to revitalise the Kinta River is to construct bicycle lane from riverfront to Batu Gajah and leisure activities along the river such as jogging and cycling. As for pre-war shop house, the recommendation is to insist on the established guidelines to ensure the facades and 5-foot way is well maintained. Moreover, no demolishment and must maintain or rebuild the façade of the building as before if demolishment is necessary with similar building material if possible. Better management of the road and drainage system is to manage their waste properly to maintain the cleanliness of the tourists' hotspot. Vehicles should be prohibited from entering the back alley in between the old shop houses. Tourist and locals should feel freely around Ipoh Old Town without worrying about the traffic. Lastly, multi-storey parking building should build to cater the increasing amount of cars especially during public holidays and festive seasons. Locals tend to avoid going to the Old Town due to heavy traffic and the lack of ample parking spaces and more car parks for buses.

PERCEPTIONS ON THE PHYSICAL URBAN DECAY FEATURES

The physical urban decay features is selected to be cross-tabulated with the area of residency as it is the most significant aspect as compared to the social and economic aspects. This argument is supported by the highest mean value of 4.30 as displayed by one of the physical variables. As shown in the tabulated data below (Table 5), the respondents who lived in the Old Town, New Town, and the municipality area rank that the most prominent physical urban decay features is the obvious visual signs of negligence and unchecked decay of buildings and infrastructures due to the lack of maintenance. Many shop houses are left in a depilated state, particularly the vacant lots which are seen as urban sore.

Subsequently, the respondents from the Old Town and New Town also reckon that the physical deterioration is curable as the cost of repair would not outweigh the increase in property value after the improvements are done on these buildings as the second most significant matter regarding the physical urban decay issue. This implies that the respondents who lived within the heritage area are supportive of the concept of revitalisation as they believe that the physical deterioration is not detrimental and repair works should be undertaken instead of demolishing these old buildings. The respondents from Old Town rank the statement of physical urban decay symptoms are common as the third most observable feature within the Old Town area. Ill-kept properties, vandalism, and stripped vehicles in the alleys are the few obvious physical urban decay symptoms which can be seen within the Old Town. Meanwhile, the respondents from New Town reckon that the Old Town area is currently experienced major building abandonment as the third most agreeable perception. The lack

of proper maintenance of old buildings causes major abandonment which led to business vacancies and urban sore.

However, the respondents who lived within the municipality area rank both statements of Old Town is currently experiencing major building abandonment and the physical deterioration is curable as the second most agreeable perceptions on the physical urban decay issue. This shows that the respondents has lower confidence on the curability on old buildings as compared to those who lived in the Old Town and New Town areas.as the second most pertaining matter. This might be the lack of living experiences as compared to those who stayed within the Old Town area and which explains the difference in perceptions.

Table 5: Ranking of Area of Residency in Perception of Respondents on the Physical Urban Decay Features

Ranking	Old Town		New Town		Within MBI (Municipality Area)	
	Variables	Mean Value	Variables	Mean Value	Variables	Mean Value
1	Obvious visual signs of negligence and urban decay	4.21	Obvious visual signs of negligence and urban decay	4.27	Obvious visual signs of negligence and urban decay	4.41
2	The physical deterioration is curable	3.91	The physical deterioration is curable	4.13	Old Town experienced major building abandonment	3.84
3	Physical urban decay symptoms are common	3.88	Old Town experienced major building abandonment	4.07	The physical deterioration is curable	3.84
4	Old Town experienced major building abandonment	3.67	Physical urban decay symptoms are common	3.93	Physical urban decay symptoms are common	3.68
5	Building owner should bear all the maintenance cost.	3.46	Building owner should bear all the maintenance cost.	3.70	Building owner should bear all the maintenance cost.	3.38

The open-ended question was designed to provide opportunities for the respondents to give recommendations regarding the revitalisation of Ipoh's Old Town. There is only one open-ended question in the last part of the questionnaire survey.

What are the other practical actions or suggestions can be proposed to control the issue of urban decay currently experienced by Ipoh Old Town?
From the views of targeted respondents on this question, most of them agreed that the Old Town is showing obvious physical urban decay symptoms and many historic buildings are in a run-down condition. The responses on the suggestions to control urban decay issues in Ipoh Old Town are categorised into 3 main themes as shown in Table 6.

The top recommendation that has been suggested by majority of the respondents is that Old Town should be revitalised to enhance its heritage value and cultural identity. They proposed that the traditional buildings should be maintain instead of building new shop lots because the heritage value is priceless and tourists from foreign countries would prefer to visit heritage buildings as they have many modern buildings in their own countries. Cafes cultures should be promoted to attract the younger generation but also the older generation by maintaining the heritage façade of the building to ensure the sense of nostalgia. In addition, the Old Town area should more pedestrian friendly and emphasise on the food culture by bringing back the roadside hawker stalls which were very much the identity of Ipoh for those long lost years. However, proper regulations on the hygiene and cleanliness requirements of the surroundings are important to ensure the heritage area is not polluted by the hawkers, particularly the five foot way of historic shop houses. Subsequently, there are a majority of respondents who suggested that an efficient enforcement of regulations and monitoring can help to curb the urban decay issue in the Old Town. The respondents reckon that the urban decay symptoms can be tackled through stricter enforcement on compliance of regulations in the conservation works

and scheduled monitoring. The enforcement body should not accept any form of bribery which give leeway to the illegal demolishment or reconstruction of old buildings.

Last but not least, there are a few of the respondents commented that the lack of funding on traditional buildings further contributed to the urban decay issue in the Old Town. Hence, they suggested that the local authority should provide financial funding for the maintenance of privately owned old buildings to lessen the burden of shop houses' owners and decrease the occurrence of shop houses being left in dilapidated state.

Table 6: Responses on the Suggestions to Control Urban Decay Issues in Ipoh Old Town

Themes	Suggestions
Revitalisation	• Maintain traditional buildings to attract tourists from foreign countries. • Instil cafés culture in old shop houses to keep the nostalgia feeling and also attract both younger and older generation. • Make Old Town into a pedestrian friendly area. • Emphasise on food culture (e.g. • roadside hawker stalls)
Stricter enforcement	• Stricter enforcement on compliance of regulations • Ensure there is no bribery between the government officers and developers/owners to prevent illegal construction work on old buildings
Financial funding/ Incentives	• Provide funding for the maintenance of privately owned old buildings • City council should offer incentives to property owners or developers to encourage the undertaking of revitalisation projects on old buildings.

REVITALISING CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF URBAN DECAY FEATURES: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES

Face-to-face interviews with semi-structured questions are conducted with experts from both government and private sector, including architects, town planners, valuers, historians and local users. A series of questions were asked in these semi-structured interviews to obtain the perceptions and comments which are related to the research objectives from the interviewees who are in different industries. This allows the researcher to identify the major revitalisation issues based on various perspectives and provide a better justification to quantify the rationales arise from the analysed data. Furthermore, recommendations on the revitalisation of Ipoh Old Town are suggested. The responses are presented in the form of metrics of interview sourcing.

From the perspectives of architects, there is a mix response from architects from the government and private firms. Architects from government feels there is a good cooperation between government and private organisations through the implementation of Special Area Plan 2020. However, private architects feel that local authorities do not have enough effort to revitalise Ipoh Old Town. The respondents suggested forming committee to inspect and monitoring in order to ensure the sustainability of these buildings.

Furthermore, when the respondents are asked on the issue on lack of proper maintenance by owners of the heritage buildings, both government and private architects agreed that building owners are responsible to maintain the buildings. However, the maintenance of the buildings should be done through the local authority. Local authority should impose law or penalty for negligence to ensure the effectiveness in maintaining the building. Both architects from government and private also agreed that there is a lack of public awareness. Awareness campaign on historic and heritage buildings is important to tackle the issue of urban decay especially in the social aspect.

From the perspective of Town Planners, in terms of cooperation between government and private organisations, the private town planners feels there is a lack of cooperation between government and local town planners that resulted to the inefficient revitalisation effort. The government town planners however reiterate that the city council has made many initiatives to cooperate with NGO in promoting the Heritage Trail and infrastructures such as roads, pedestrians, walkways and signboards.

Apart from that, the perspectives of government and private valuers are more towards the economical aspect. The government valuers argued that the lack of demand for old shop houses is due to potential tenants will take the building condition into consideration before deciding to rent. The cost of renovation and reconstruction will have an impact on the rental and the rental rate will fall. The private valuers agreed to this statement and added that investors prefer to rent newer shop houses due to the fear of hefty maintenance costs.

In addition, respondents also feel that the city council lacks planning savvy and unable to supervise "building re-conditioning' according to effective urban environment sustainability. One of the most important arguments on lack of proper maintenance by owners is that property owners will mind their money and think conservation as their responsibility. The lack of entertainment activities and ill-kept shop houses make the Old Town seems like a ghost town at night. In terms of public awareness, the local residents and everyone involve in conservation has to learn history in order to preserve and promote the town's heritage. Furthermore, the public is not well-equipped with the knowledge of heritage conservation. The public has to learn that preferred practices of conservation do not need to be expensive but gives a priceless value to the town.

CONCLUSION

The acknowledgment of urban decay issues in terms of physical, social and economic aspects plays a significant role in ensuring the sustainability of revitalisation effort undertaken in Ipoh's Old Town. The case study research of Old Town includes both content analysis on the Special Area Plan 2020 which focused the guidelines and regulations of the conservation plan and direct observation on the current physical condition of old buildings. In addition, the key informant interviews with professionals with expertise in different relevant fields such as architecture, town planning, valuation, history and local users were conducted to gain insight into a different perspective regarding the urban decay issue and what are the major challenges in revitalising the historic town. The conduct of questionnaire survey had shown results for the most significant urban decay problems based on the respondents' perceptions and suggestions are proposed to overcome the difficulties arise from the revitalisation effort. These suggestions are categories into three major themes which are revitalisation, stricter enforcement and financial funding. This proves that the results of the findings are consistent with the statement as claimed by Skogan (1990) on the impact of the physical deterioration and also Steinberg (1996) regarding the role of government in emphasising the importance of a comprehensive revitalisation approach. However, the results also shown that the economic and social aspects of urban decay features are not as prominent as the physical deterioration.

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