

## **Dynamism of a night market**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the factors leading to the dynamism and performance of night markets, the characteristics of the night market, the traders, the customers and the visitors; and to determine the density and diversity of the night market. The Malaysian night market was based on the concept of open-air shopping, where street hawkers or petty traders occupied a designated part of a street to set up their stalls. The night markets offered wide range of foods and non-food items and they would usually operate once or twice a week depending on the popularity of the night markets in the area. They could be considered as business incubators for aspiring entrepreneurs since they would need to put in a very small investment to start the business, the risk of failure was minimal, and there was the opportunity to earn a hefty income. The six variables studied were: Market characteristics, Traders profile and characteristics, Customers profile and characteristics, Visitors profile and characteristics, Local authority level of support and services provided, and Surrounding communities and characteristics. Additionally, three other aspects that were also examined were the economic effects on surrounding communities, the aspects of competition among traders, and the product type, range and prices. The findings indicated that the night market studied was very vibrant with high density of traders and customers especially during peak period; high diversity of customers with the different ethnic and age groups; and high degree of social interactions with encounters that represented 'heads up' interactions among and between customers and traders.

Keywords: Night Market, Dynamism, Diversity, Density

## INTRODUCTION

A Night Market is a grouping of temporary outdoor stalls operated by petty traders where products are displayed for sale. The night market popularity steamed from the convenience they provided for the local residents to do shopping for their household needs within their residential areas. Thus, they provided an alternative shopping option. Additionally, the night markets, with their friendly and relaxed atmosphere, allowed the customers to enjoy the diverse environment, the wide choices of freshly cooked food and fresh vegetables at affordable prices. The interactions and mingling of local residents from various ethnic backgrounds could further strengthen community spirits and solidarity. The atmosphere, the sight, the smell, the sound, and the food were among the factors that contributed to repeat visitations. Visiting the night market had become a popular leisure activity for the locals. They would stroll from one end of the night market to the other end, spent time looking over the goods, greeted some friends along the way, acknowledged the traders, asked for the prices of products, bargained for some discounts, and they may chose to buy or just walked on.

The Malaysian night market was based on the concept of open-air shopping, where street hawkers or petty traders occupied a designated part of a street to set up their stalls. The designated street, a normally busy one during the day, would be closed off to traffic from early evening until late at night. The area would be transformed into a network of stalls with kaleidoscope of multi-coloured lights for as far as the eye could see. The night markets reflected a piece of the Malaysian unique culture for they portrayed the eating preferences, interaction patterns and some of the evening leisure activities of the various ethnic groups in the country. Night markets termed as "Pasar Malam" in the Malay language had become entrenched in the Malaysian shopping scene. Night market was defined by Huang, Liou and Tzeng (2009) as a trading place during the evening, where small businesses offered a variety of cheap products and cooked food. Lee et al. (2008) defined night markets as "street markets operating at night, mainly in urban or suburban areas that generally tend to have more leisure, shopping, and eating areas". Khalilah (2010) added that night markets were "temporary weekly event that usually takes place at available open spaces and on roads or parking lots that are temporarily closed to allow for their operations". A study on night markets in Taiwan found that the main factors that attracted Taiwanese to the night markets were the low prices, the variety of products, and the convenient neighborhood location (Lee et al., 2005). The night markets offered wide range of foods and non-food items and they would usually operate once or twice a week depending on the popularity of the night markets in the area. The traders would sell tropical fruits, vegetables, fish, meat, poultry, dairy product, toys, accessories, clothes, or local jungle exotic plants and food that would be peculiar only to the specific areas that they operated.

### Importance of the Night Markets

Local authorities had begun to realize the night market's roles in encouraging the youth population greater involvement in business. They could be considered as business incubators for aspiring entrepreneurs since they would need to put in a very small investment to start the business, the risk of failure was minimal, and there was the opportunity to earn a hefty income. The night markets provided the opportunity for those individuals to develop self-confidence, to enhance their business and marketing skills, and to build rapport with suppliers and consumers. According to the Population Reference Bureau 2006 Report, there were 7.4 million youth whose

age ranged between 10 - 24 years in Malaysia. It was believed that a large proportion of them, if given sufficient incentive and enough encouragement, could be enticed to participate in this small retail business, and twenty years from now, they could form the core strength for economic stability and growth of the country. Alternatively, the Malaysian federal government, in the face of several recessions, had provided an incentive scheme that allowed low-income public employees to opt for early retirement so that they could start their own small businesses as a major alternative revenue source. The government had provided training schemes and soft loans to ensure high success rates in operating a business for these middle age population. A substantial number of these employees had taken up the offer and participated as traders in the night market business.

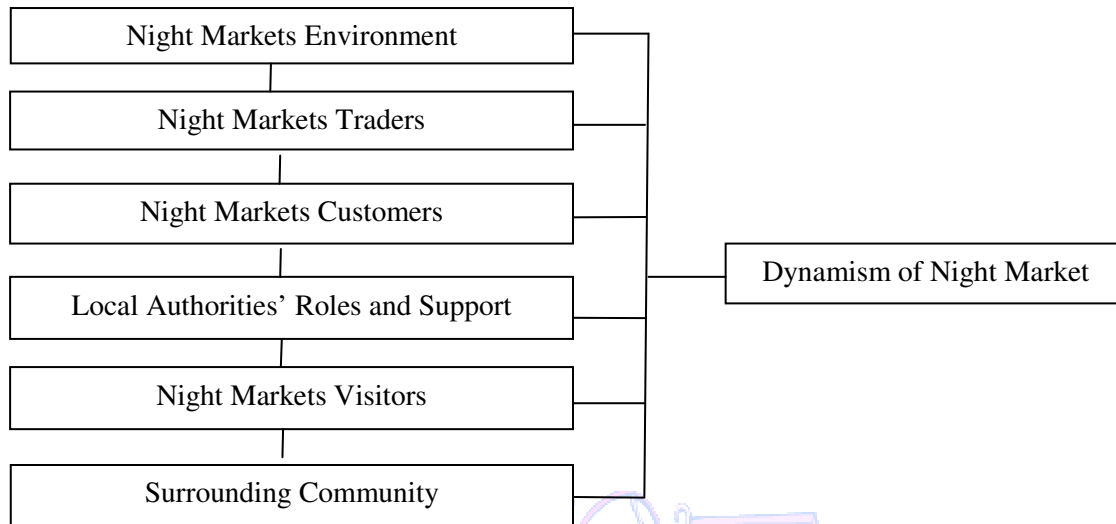
## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to gain a better understanding of the factors leading to the dynamism and performance of night markets, the characteristics of the night market, the traders, the customers and the visitors; and to determine the density and diversity of the night market. The performance of the night market was determined by five factors: the characteristics of the market itself, the volume of traders, customers and visitors, and the support extended by the local authority. The night markets' dynamism was measured on the density (number of customers, traders and visitors), diversity (demographic profiles of customers, traders and visitors), and social interaction (nature and intensity of encounter between and among the traders, customers and visitors). Another factor that was also examined was the overall health of the night market which included community support, aspects of accessibility, types of support services and facilities, safety, hygiene and cleanliness factors, and the intensity of competition among the traders. The sustainability and success of a night market would be depended on its ability to satisfy the traders, the customers, the visitors, and the local community.

## STUDY APPROACH

The market characteristics, demographic profiles and behavioural aspects of traders, customers, surrounding communities, and visitors were clustered to discern common patterns. *Market Environment* was examined from its physical setting, market atmosphere, the night market size, and the variety of products. *Traders* which were small, petty traders, who participated in the selling activities at the night market on a full time job, or to supplement their income, or for the purpose of learning business skills. The *Customers* were those that patronized the night markets, whether on a regular or irregular basis. *Visitors* were tourists or individuals who came to the market not with the main intention of buying. *Surrounding Communities* were residents living in the same locality and shared some common characteristics. *Local Authorities* were the government agency/body or the association delegated by the authority to organize, control or monitor the night market. The *Night Market Dynamism* was measured on the vitality of the night market based on the combination of three factors: Density of participants throughout the period the night market is opened: Diversity of participations which included the ethnic and age breakdown, and their social status; and Social Interactions among traders, customers, visitors and communities where the focused was on the pace of movement within the market. The following study framework indicates the relationships among the variables to be examined.

## Conceptual Framework of the study

**METHODOLOGY**

The research design adopted was a combination of exploratory and descriptive design. The data were collected to provide an understanding on the elements and dynamism of a night market. Data were collected via interview sessions with the local authority (Kuala Kangsar Town Council), and interviews and surveys with traders, customers, and local residents living within a 3-mile radius surrounding the night market. Observations were made on the physical market setting, and the behavioural patterns of the traders, customers and visitors. The surveys were conducted during the night market operation from 2.00 pm to 11.00 pm when the local authority's employees started clearing and cleaning the night market area. Data collection was conducted for two consecutive Saturdays in October, 2010. The face-to-face interviews with the local authority of the Kuala Kangsar Town Council which took about 60 minutes was conducted a week before the on-site data collection. The interview with each trader and the customer lasted, on average, about 15 to 25 minutes, while the interview with the visitors would take about 10 minutes. Through convenience sampling, a total 40 traders, 80 customers and 10 visitors were selected, ensuring as much as possible that the survey reflected the diversity of ethnic/racial, gender, and age categories, all of which were somewhat visually discernible.

Six major instruments were utilized: (1) Market characteristics – layout, size and space, accessibility, facilities, density, diversity, atmosphere and interaction patterns, (2) Traders profile and characteristics, attributes, motivations, and attitude, (3) Customers profile and characteristics, attributes, motivations, shopping frequency and average duration of visit, average spending, attitude, preferences and perception, (4) Visitors – profile and characteristics, motivation, (5) Local authority level of support and services provided, and (6) Surrounding communities and characteristics, attributes, motivations, shopping frequency and average duration of visit, average spending, attitude, preferences and perception. Additionally, three other aspects that were examined were the economic effects on surrounding communities, the aspects of competition among traders, and the product type, range and prices.

## FINDINGS

### The Night Market -Physical Setting

The night market being investigated was the night market at Jalan Dato Sagor in the town of Kuala Kangsar, in the state of Perak, Malaysia. The night market was held once a week every Saturday. According to the local authority, the market had been in operation for almost 20 years. It was located about 2 kilometers to the north of Kuala Kangsar town, in front of the Tsung Wah Secondary School. It was fringed by a row of 12 2-storey shop houses, a few terrace houses, the Jalan Dato Sagor main road, and a side road which linked to Jalan Taiping. There were scattered houses close to the site. The shops within the vicinity were all closed for the day's business, except for the few restaurants which anchored the two rows of shops. The main parking area was a grassy cum sandy open space alongside the side road, adjacent to the Fire and Rescue Station. Alternative parking areas were alongside the shop houses, on grassy patches opposite the shops area, and along the main road. An article in *Thing Asians* stated that, "Each Night Market comprised of a different combination of stalls, and new items were constantly being added on in line with current trends and market demands. So, there would always be something new and exciting to look forward to at each visit. From as early as 4 pm, the suburb night market would already be buzzing with activities and with display of colours, and the traffic would start to bottleneck around the designated street as vendors parked their vans and mini-trucks indiscriminately in order to unload their wares. Shoppers would try to beat each other to any available parking spots in the vicinity".

The activities at the Jalan Dato Sagor night market peaked between 5:00 pm and 7:30 pm where the immediate areas would be congested with stream of pedestrians walking in from all directions and with disorderly traffic with cars weaving in and out of small parking space, and amazingly without bumping into each other. The drivers seemed to be experts in squeezing their cars in the smallest available spots. Public transportation was available with bus services provided by the red and yellow buses that ply back and forth from Kuala Kangsar to Taiping. There was a bus stop on Jalan Dato Sagor on the opposite side of the night market site. However, customers mainly arrived by cars, while a smaller number arrived by motorcycles and bicycles. Those in nearby areas walked to the site. There were four major entrance and exit areas, mainly from the main roads. The traffic along Jalan Dato Sagor was not as heavy as those in Jalan Taiping, since Jalan Dato Sagor was an alternative road to Jalan Taiping and it linked Jalan Taiping in Talang, a suburb village about 1 kilometer from the Night Market site.

At the Jalan Dato Sagor night market, there were 241 stall lots of which 207 or 86% were already occupied with licensed traders. As a comparison, this night market could be considered a medium sized night market. The large night market would have between 400 to 700 stall lots and could extent over an area the size of a football field. The small night market, on the other hand, could comprise below 50 stall lots. At the Jalan Dato Sagor night market, the stall lots were not grouped or designated based on product types. Therefore, clothing stall might be placed next to a food stall. Each stall lot measured 2 by 2 square meters, thus there was sufficient space for a trader to place a table, an area for the stove, and with sufficient space at the front for 4 standing customers. This particular night market did not provide table and chairs for customers to have their food there. All food had to be carried away. There were a wide range of products/items for sale and they could be grouped into the following categories:

Table 1: Type of Foods and Goods for Sale

No	Category	Types
1	Fish and Sea Products (Fresh)	Various types of fresh water and salt water fish, prawns, squids, etc
2	Vegetables	Root and greens, fresh vegetables, , potatoes, onions, etc
3	Fruits	Local fruits – durian, langsung, pineapple, banana, corn, rambutan, etc
4	Cooked Food & Drinks	Local delicacies such as mertabak, char kueh teow, mee goreng, laksa, burger, ayam percik, nugget, popia, pau, otak-otak, kerepek, apam balik, rojak, nasi ayam, air kelapa, syrup, cincau, soya bean, putu mayam, satay, yong tay foo, etc
5	Electronic and Household Items	Kitchen utensils, clocks, watches, games, etc
6	Clothing – Bundle	Jeans, t-shirts, shirts, shorts, jackets, blazers, etc
7	Accessories – shoes, watches, books, etc	Handphone casing, belts, sport and tennis shoes, pouch, handbags, etc
8	Chicken and Meat	Fresh, whole and cut chicken pieces, Freshly cut meat – big and small pieces.
9.	Others	Flour, oil, etc.

The aisle's width for walking was about two meters wide, in between the two rows of stall lots. Thus there was ample room for four customers to walk in both directions without bumping into each other. During peak period, however, it did get a little tight, especially when family members walked in groups.

The traders would usually place their products in trays or plastic containers for display on the tables, but improvement could be made on the display and arrangements. The cold beverages however, were placed in big round plastic transparent containers that displayed a spectrum of colours. These attracted the young customers, especially in the hot and humid late afternoon weather. The local fruits seemed to be placed haphazardly. Very few stalls had placed price labels. Some traders had handwritten the price on small cards which they hung from the tent pole. Those that sold a variety of products/items had placed small price cards next to a few selected items. It was a usual practice for customers to bargain or haggle for price discounts and it was also a common practice for traders to give discounts. Packaging was a simple process of putting the purchased goods in clear plastic bags. The traders had not understood the relationship between attractive packaging and price, or if they knew it might result in a cost increase that customers might not be willing to absorb. As stated by one trader, "the nice packaging would required more preparation time and it would also incurred additional cost which might deter their customers from buying". Anyway, she was of the opinion that all the customers wanted were the goods, not the packaging or wrapping. So everything went into the plastic bags.

## **Role of the Local Authority**

The Night Market site was under the jurisdiction of the Kuala Kangsar Town Council. One department in the Council was the Licensing Department that was in charge of the various types of markets (Night Market, Farmers Market, Day Market, Main Market) located in the district. The department was headed by Mr. Amir Adha, a soft-spoken man with vast experience on issues related to the issuance of license and permits. The Enforcement Officer was Mr. Abdul Rahman who, with his team would literally walked through every night market sites to ensure that the traders abided by all the regulations stipulated by the Council, and also to collect day permit fee from the traders who, as yet, had not been issued a permit. The day's permit cost only 50 cent per stall lot. According to Mr. Amir and Mr. Rahman, the amount collected from the license and permits were not sufficient to cover even the cost of operations, not counting the salary for the staff who were directly involved in monitoring the markets' operations. "The Night Market was more of a public service", declared by both Mr. Amir and Mr. Rahman. Mr. Rahman had developed a very friendly, trader-centered approach in dispensing his duties. He had forged a very close rapport with the traders whom he regarded as friends who were also trying to earn a living. His positive attitude had earned him the respect of the traders. The Council's role was to support these small traders. A few disabled traders were given special stall lots that were accessible with their vehicles and they were allowed to park them at their stall lots. The other traders would have to find parking spaces once they had unloaded their wares and other necessities.

All traders were required by the Town Council to get their typhoid VI injection and to attend a day's lectures and discussion sessions on food handling and food safety conducted by the Council before they were given license/permits. The Council provided guidelines on how to maintain the foods wholesomeness, on how to handle food, equipment and utensils, how to ensure the use of clean water supply, and on the disposal of solid waste and garbage. The Department, in collaboration with the Health Department, would conduct regular food sample testing to ensure their quality. Failing any of the stipulated conditions, the traders would be fined and a warning letter issued. Repeated offense or failure to comply would result in the revocation of the license/permits. The Department gathered information on the breakdown of the number and type of traders at the night market, as illustrated in Table 2. There were 35 traders or 49% of the total traders that were involved in selling cooked food and drinks. This was followed by 9 traders or 13% that sold vegetables. Another 6 traders each were selling fish and seafood products, electronic products, and accessories such as shoes, watches, and books.

Table 2: Types and Breakdown of Traders

No.	Type of Traders	Occupying Number of Lots	Percent of Lots	Number of Traders	Percent of Traders
1	Fish and Sea Products	18	9	6	8
2	Vegetables	27	13	9	13
3	Fruits	15	7	3	4
4	Cooked Food & Drinks	61	30	35	49
5	Electronic Items	30	14	6	8
6	Clothing – Bundle	30	14	5	7
7	Accessories – shoes, watches, books, etc	20	10	6	8
8	Chicken and Meat	6	3	2	3
	TOTAL	207	100	72	100

### The Traders – Density and Diversity

The traders' earnings depended on the density of the Night Market. The density or 'self-congestion' as defined by Whyte (1980) as quoted by Fulford in his MA dissertation, represented the "natural social pull around areas which created a sense of collective safety. It is the number of people choosing to be at the same place at the same time". The traders' density level was measured by the number of traders at the night market. As indicated earlier, there were 241 stall lots, and 207 or 86% were occupied with licensed traders. The vacant stall lots were offered to traders without permits, who might just want to set up stall for the particular night. They were charged 50 cent per stall lot per night. The Council gave temporary business permit for a maximum of six times per trader, after which they would have to apply for a license. Mr. Rahman and his associate would issue and collect fees for the temporary permits. According to Mr. Rahman, he had no difficulty in identifying which trader had no license/permit for he knew every trader and had maintain a close rapport with them as he had been doing the job for 15 years. The traders had high regard for Mr. Rahman. "There had been no major quarrels or disagreements among the traders, except for a few minor skirmished caused by traders overstepping over others assigned stall lots", added Mr. Rahman. When asked if there had been any complaints from the surrounding communities, he replied that there were very few, the occasions when traders failed to clear and clean up their stall lots after closing. According to him, the communities were, in fact, appreciative of the night market presence because they could conveniently get their food and their weekly supply of fresh meat, fish, vegetables, and groceries.

The traders' diversity was measured by the observable mixture of traders in terms of their age and ethnic group. The traders who held the stall permit were required to be at their stalls and to clearly display their permits. They could hire helpers, but hiring of foreign workers was prohibited. The employment of foreign workers had become a major issue that had been debated even at the ministry level. The Kuala Kangsar Town Council had painstakingly ensured traders' ethnic background and age group diversity at each of the night market under its control. Licenses/permits were given on a first come first served basis, depending on the availability of stall lots. Mr. Rahman indicated that there was a natural tendency to find more Chinese traders in a night market which was located in a predominantly Chinese residential area, and the same



applied for the night markets in the Malays or Indians areas. Table 3 indicated the breakdown of traders' ethnic background at the night market understudy. The majority 65% of traders at the night market were Malays, followed by 28% Chinese, 4% Indians, and 3% of other ethnic groups.

Table 3: Breakdown of Traders' Ethnic Groups:

No.	Ethnic	Number of Traders	Percent of Traders
1	Malay	47	65
2	Chinese	20	28
3	Indian	3	4
4	Others	2	3
5	TOTAL	72	100

Almost 90% of the traders were from Kuala Kangsar or the surrounding villages. However, some had come from as far as Ipoh, a city which was about 60 km to the south and Taiping, the next major town 30 kilometers to the north. Upon observation at the night market, the first trader, a father and daughter team, arrived at 3:35 pm to set up their murtabak stall. They arrived in their minivan from Taiping. Soon after, a Chinese trader arrived in a Proton Wira car with the trunk full of local fruits (mainly bananas) to set up his stall near an intersection at the main entrance. About half an hour later, more traders arrived, mostly in their vans, and they set up stalls by opening up their colourful, washed down giant tents. They unloaded their products and necessities after which they moved their vans, cars or lorries to a nearby parking area. Some traders were seen using the distinct maroon colour Farmers Market canopies, which indicated obviously that they had also participated in the business activities at the Farmer Market or "Pasar Tani" earlier in the day. The Farmer Market usually operated as early as 6:30 am until 12:30 pm. Most if not all, of the traders also participated in the trading activities in other night markets, farmers markets, or day markets. According to 20% of the traders interviewed, on average, each of them participated in business activities in at least four markets a week; some even had two teams, each going to two separate market locations on the same day. The traders knew each other well and they would gladly give suggestions to customers as to which stall offered the products they were looking for if they did not have those products.

At about 4:45 pm, the place was bustling with traders' activities such as unloading, setting up tables, lighting up stoves, and displaying their products on tables. The traders that came early would not have difficulty maneuvering their vans through the aisles to get to their stall lots. Once they had unloaded, they were required to park their van at the designated parking areas. At about 5:00 pm, almost all the traders were ready and standing by their stalls with caps and aprons (for those selling cooked food and beverages) ready to serve their customers. At this stage, the traders would be wondering how much they could earn this evening. Technically, based on their experience, they had a good estimate on the revenue they could derive for that day. The amount of income could be influenced by weather condition, ongoing nearby social activities such as weddings, festival celebrations, and school or public holidays. On average, a satay trader could earn a revenue of about RM1,500, the fried kuey teow (stir-fried rice noodles) trader could earn about RM600, and the kueh trader could earn a commission of

about RM400 a night. Almost all the traders ran their stall as family businesses with the father or the mother as the head and, on average, with two teenage children working with them. The children were paid reasonable wages/allowance. The traders looked upon the night market as a place to get their children interested in business and judging from the enthusiasm of the younger generations in catering to the needs of the customers, these teenagers (a majority of whom were either waiting to get into college or have graduated with a diploma) seemed to have acquired the selling skills. The business of selling at the night market was not new to almost 90% of the traders, for some had been in the business for two or three generations. Most, if not all, of the traders depended entirely on the night market business as their major income source. They had even manage to fund the building of their houses, send their children through college, owned a van or truck for the business, and led a comfortable life, all from the money earned from the night markets. About 50% of the Malay traders were in the 25 to 35 age group, and they were well distributed in terms of the products/items they sell. The Chinese and Indian traders, however, were mainly elderly, semi-retired or retired groups with a majority of them selling household goods, fruits, accessories and clothing. Mr. Rahman said that the traders' and customers' profile would be different for different night markets depending on the location.

All the traders, except the two who looked as though they had a bad day, were friendly, very responsive, were cheerful and extra helpful and would provide customers with more information than necessary. The customers and traders could be heard having intense discussions and exchanging information, while the trading took place. The traders would be extra informative, especially to new customers. They were often heard asking those customers where they were from, how long they planned to stay in town, or if they have relatives in town. They could be exchanging information or having conversations with two or three customers simultaneously. If they were not busy entertaining customers, they would be heard teasing and joking with each other.

The JamaSatay stall with several customers crowding around waiting to get their satay seemed to be among the most popular stall. Satay, beef or chicken meat marinated, skewered and grilled was sold accompanied with peanut sauce. Each stick of satay whether chicken or beef, was sold at 35 cent. Occasionally, they would also sell tripe satay (made from cow stomach lining), and each stick would cost slightly higher at 40 cent, mainly because of the difficulty to skew the tripe. The average waiting time for the satay was 15 minutes. The stall was manned by three teenage boys and an elderly man, and each of them seemed to know exactly his tasks. One would be communicating with the customers, one would be manning the grill, another would be checking and turning over the satay, and another would do the packing and collecting the money from the customers. Wonder how they could remember which customers ordered what, how many sticks were ordered, and which customer to be served next. Soon, if the business improved further, they would have to improvise some queuing system. Across from the satay stall was a trader who sold popia (similar to the spring roll). The trader had been in the business for over 20 years and the recipe was handed down from her grandfather who had migrated from India. There were five 5-gallon buckets filled with popia fillings at the stall. At about 9:15, they were all emptied and the trader would packed and leave.

Other than the Satay stall, another popular stall was the chicken rice stall named Nasi Ayam Gunung Pondok. Customers were seen standing in line for their chicken rice. A Chinese customer said that the chicken rice had been his favorite food for 2 years (that was since he moved to Kuala Kangsar) and he would try to get one or two packs every week. The Nasi Ayam Gunung Pondok stall was located at the far end of the Night Market site, away from the

congested area, thus making it more convenient for customers to wait without having to stand aside to make way for passersby. The items that made the chicken rice special were, according to the owner cum operator, the sauce which was concocted from several herbs, and the rice itself, which was made from non-glutinous rice. The trader was a very pleasant gentleman who had retired from the army. He opted to retire in 1996 at the age of 42 years. He started off by operating a chicken rice stall at the army canteen at his former army base in Ipoh. He ran the business for three years before venturing into the chicken rice business at the night market because he found it increasing difficult to travel from his home in Kuala Kangsar to Ipoh. He also sold the Nasi Ayam Gunung Pondok at three other night market locations, and his estimated weekly earning was RM3, 000. The average daily sales were about RM900. The chicken rice was sold at RM3.50 per pack, and he prepared a total of 300 packs per day. He ran the business with his wife and a helper.

### The Customers – Density and Diversity

The first two customers that arrived at 4.45 pm were two teenage boys. They walked for about five minutes before buying two packets of ‘green’ coloured beverages (apparently lime water) and went off. Soon after, four more customers, two in nurses’ uniform, walked in from the link road. They were seen chatting with the trader who sold the popia, but the popia were not ready as yet. At about 5.20 pm, several cars pulled into the open space car park. A few families came out and they headed straight for the ayam percik (roast chicken grilled with coconut milk) stall. A few children strode along slightly behind their parents, and they peaked at products to their left and right excitedly. At the Jalan Dato Sagor night market, the number of customers swelled to about 150 at 6.00 pm, and by 6.20 pm, the number tripled to 489. A head count of customers is as shown in Table 4. The majority of customers were Malays with a total of 396 or 81% of total customers. This was followed at a substantially lesser number by the Chinese customers at only 12%. To a much lesser percentage were the Indian customers at only 6%.

Table 4: Breakdown of Customers by Ethnic Group

No.	Ethnic	Number of Customers	Percent of Customers
1	Malay	396	81
2	Chinese	59	12
3	Indian	29	6
4	Others	5	1
5	TOTAL	489	100

There appeared to be no pressured selling by traders, thus, customers could ask for the product price without feeling obliged to buy. The average time a customer would spend at the night market was about one hour. Some customers were seen walking slowly through the whole length of the night market first, then they would retrace their path to stop at some stalls that they had intended to stop by earlier, especially to buy some heavier items. A regular customer was asked if she would buy the same type of things every time she visited the night market. She replied that not all the items she bought were the same type of products/items. It would depend on what she felt like eating that day. But, for the groceries and cooking materials, they would be almost the same type and in the same quantity. She added that she did not need a shopping list

for she knew exactly what to buy. Her housemate often phoned her to remind what she wanted her to buy for her. She would end up with both hands full of the purchased items. A customer, on average would spend about RM40 at the Night Market. An in-depth observation indicated that of the total 489 customers, about 10% were children under 11 years old; approximately 30% were adult male and 40% were adult female, whilst the rests were teenagers. Table 5 indicated the breakdown of customers' groups.

Table 5: Customer Groups

No.	Percent	Customer Groups
1	10%	Children: 10 years and below
2	30%	Adult Male
3	40%	Adult Female
4	20%	Teenagers

At about 7:10 pm, the number of customers peaked at an estimated 788. The breakdown in profile was somewhat similar to that at 6:20 pm, except that there were more family groups. There were about 40 families, including three Indian families. There were, on average, four members in a family group. In comparison to the crowd at 6:20 pm where the vast majority of adult customers were seen carrying on average two small plastic bags each, at 7.10 pm the family groups were carrying more plastic bags with groceries and raw cooking materials. The children, with one hand holding on to their parents, the other hand were holding plastic bags with multi-colored beverages that they sipped through straws. Some Muslim men were seen heading towards the surau or "a place of worship" for the dusk prayer.

At about 8:00 pm, the number of customer dwindled to about 271. A few traders that sold clothing, house wares and fresh food such as meat, fish and chicken were seen packing and loading their stuff onto their vans. The other traders appeared more relaxed and some had switched on the multi-coloured lights at their stalls. From the start at 4:00, the traders selling tropical fruits such as bananas, durian and rambutan had continuously replenished their baskets with heap of fruits, and even at 8:00 pm, the baskets were still full of fruits. As darkness set in, there were about 53 customers. Some were walking leisurely around while others appeared to be in a hurry to get to the stalls before the traders folded up for the evening. Table 6 showed the number of customers at the various time.

Table 6: Volume of Customers

Time	Number of Customers
4:45	6
5:20	20
6:00	150
6:20	489
7:10	788
8:00	271
8:40	53
TOTAL	1,777

A few visitors were seen walking through the market. There were several factors that made them easily identifiable: the way they dressed, the way they talked, the way they walked, and that they hardly carry anything. Among those interviewed were three college students from Petaling Jaya. They had accompanied their college mate who was from Talang, a suburb of Kuala Kangsar. His father was a trader selling durians. He sold, on average, 300 fruits a night. He had a 10-acre durian orchard. Each fruit was sold for RM5, so the father could earn quite a hefty day's collection. Some Chinese customers were seen squatting and eating the durian that they had just bought.

### **The Night Market Dynamism**

The night market presented a blend of sights and sounds, with a kaleidoscope of colours, thus making it a fascinating experience for any visitors. The dynamism of the night market was measured by three variables: Density, Diversity, and Social Interaction. The density was measured by the number of traders and customers, and the visitors. The diversity was measured by the combination of traders' and customers' ethnic breakdown and age group mixture. The Social Interaction was measured by the level of intensity of interaction among and between the traders, customers and visitors. Gehl (2001) in his writing on 'Life between Buildings: Using public space' indicated that, "A social encounter took place every time two or more people were together, thus, social encounters could range in intensity from low intensity social encounters (simply watching and listening to other people) to high intensity social encounters (such as a conversation between close friends)". Thus, the dynamism of the night market depended on the intensity of the social interaction among traders, customers, and visitors. In addition, Fulford in his MA dissertation on 'A Study of Urbanity and Markets' indicated that there were two forms of interaction: 'Heads up' versus 'Heads Down'. The difference between 'Heads Up' and the 'Heads Down' interaction marked the difference between a market and a supermarket. In a market, functional encounters were 'heads up' encounters. People congregated around stalls with their 'heads up', absorbing the sights, sounds and smells of the market, and actively engaged with the public realm. In a supermarket, by contrast, functional encounters were 'heads down'. The focus was on the task of shopping, with little designed to distract or to cause heads to look up".

The night market's density was determined by the volume of customers. The process involved counting the number of customers every 20 minutes. This was done by walking through the entire length of the night market and counting the number of customers while walking through. Additional supporting information was derived through comparison of photos taken at assigned places and time along specific points when and where the counting was done. According to Whyte (1980) in 'The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces', "A good public space should support diversity through the broad range of social encounters and that by attracting a range of different people to a public space you offered a chance of positive interaction between people who would not normally mix and this helped to break down stereotypes, and created interest, identity and a sense of place". An article by Whyte (1988) on 'City: Rediscovering the Centre', it was stated that, "The most fascinating thing about the life of the street would be the interchanges between people that took place in it".

The smells of food cooked over burnt charcoal, with the occasional fire flaring up, the sound of ladle scraping the fried char kuey teow at the bottom of the wok, the noise from customers and traders exchanging information, the sound of giggling children, occasional blaring

of car engines, the shouting from the far end trader promoting his wares, the vibrant colours from the customers' attires, and the traders' aprons and caps, the multi-racial crowd, families with their small children trying to squeeze their way through the crowd; all these variables add to the liveliness, vibrant, and dynamism of the Night Market environment. This picture would be replayed over and over every week at the Night Market, with the only difference on the size of the crowd for it would be a little thinner during the middle of the month. As indicated by Mr. Rahman, there were established patterns on the ups and downs of the night market business, and it would be closely related to when people received their pay check or the weather. In spite of the loud noise, the heavy mixture of smell, and the crowd, a walk through the night market had a definite calming and relaxing effect, especially when one was in no hurry to get anywhere.

## CONCLUSION

At a micro level, the night market at Jalan Dato Sagor was very vibrant, as indicated from the high density of traders and customers especially during peak period; the high diversity of customers with the different ethnic and age groups; and high degree of social interactions with encounters that represented 'heads up' interactions among and between customers and traders.

At a macro level, the night market's contributions to the national economy could be assessed from two perspectives: Social impact assessment which looked into a new kind of the cultural value of the markets, and Economic impact assessment that examined the commercial value of the markets. From the social impact perspective, the night market would be an avenue that brought people together which could help to promote goodwill among different ethnic groups; it had help to change the image of the local authority from 'enforcement' to 'community-centered' and it helped them to understand issues and problems of the night market at the ground level. From an economic impact perspective, it could stimulate the economy by providing convenient shopping alternative options for the community, and it could help to revitalize areas and town centre. Additionally, it provided opportunities for the youth population to participate and gain experience in operating small businesses.

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