

Abstract

Public space is traditionally defined as a place where people can share and negotiate among themselves for recreation, socialization and information. However, the pace of contemporary urban life has shaped the new demands of the people. The consequent response of these demands can be seen in the form of modern shopping malls. Public areas have transformed their position and characteristic to be the place for entertainment and excitement. Furthermore, the "public" realms have become increasingly integrated with the "private" realms to find the necessary attractions, especially in the development of department stores. In a contemporary shopping complex, such space, commonly know as "outdoor open space" or "plaza", is usually used for promotional activities such as product launching events in order to enhance the image of the premises as well as to raise additional revenue. In order to optimize the benefits for the occupants and the proprietors, there should be design guidelines for the public space of the shopping complex.

The research method is based on the reviews of relevant theories on public space as well as the investigation of the spatial characteristics of the public areas in 3 major shopping developments, in Bangkok – Siam Discovery Center, Mabunkrong Center, and Central World Plaza. The factors of the study are spatial forms, type of activities and generated income. The data was collected by using questionnaires from the people in the subjected public area, 140 persons in each place, and 420 persons in total. In addition, there are also interviews with 3 administrators from each shopping centre and representatives from 3 event organizers to study the pattern of spatial occupation, activities and revenue of the hosting shopping developments. The collected data were analysed to find the relevant relationships among factors to establish the design guidelines in the future.

The research reveals that most people who utilize the public area of Siam Discovery Center are aged with 15 – 20 years old and 21 – 25 years old. The space is most commonly used as a meeting place. For the case of Mabunkrong Center, the age range of the users is identical to that of Siam Discovery Center. However, the public

areas of Mabunkrong Center are mostly used as transitory space. For Central World Plaza, most people who utilize the public area are adults of 26 – 30 years old and more than 30 years old who use the space for sitting and relaxation. In term of demands and supplies of activities, most of the correspondents in the 3 subjected areas would like to have more spaces for public events, relaxation and meeting. In terms of the level of satisfaction with the appearance of the public areas in the shopping centers, the correspondents are highly satisfied with the location, accessibility, illumination, size and atmosphere respectively.

From the perspective of the developers, the public spaces can be used more for promotional events, such as product launching, and public relation activities. The revenues from shopping center' s public area activities are ranked second, estimated at 5 -10% of the entire revenues, only after the rental revenue from shops.

In conclusion, the guidelines for designing public spaces of shopping center should emphasize on the impacts of the location, accessibility, illumination, size and overall atmosphere of the space, on the density of use and the higher rental rate of the plaza. Moreover, an attractive public realm can be a good invitation to pull the large number of pedestrians into spending in the shopping center. Therefore, the improvement of the public realm can have multiple benefits beside the direct incomes from rental fees.