

# PLACE ATTACHMENT TO CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC-FUNDED MOSQUES IN MALAYSIA

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Place is a Physical location formed by people's relationship with physical environments, activities, and meanings. In this essence, Place Attachment is a concept that could describe the quality of the people's relationship with a place. Although religion has a significant impact on the public place attachment within religious places, the architectural features and attributes of such physical settings could still play an influential role in leveraging this attachment. However, the role of architectural characteristics and features of Islamic religious places, as the components that make them meaningful, has not been adequately explored within the context of Malaysia. This paper reports the results of a conducted study for investigating Malaysian users' attachment to five Malaysian mosques from three different architectural styles. The paper explains how Malaysian users attach to the mosques and which attributes of these places affect their attachment. In-depth interviews with 23 worshipers in the mosques and questionnaire survey with 288 people were conducted to address this objective. The study identified the drivers of Malaysian users' attachment to the selected mosques. This study is a new approach to investigation of physical and ambient quality of mosques based on empirical data, hence providing theoretical basis for further investigations and improvements.*

**Keywords:** Sense of place, Place Attachment, Place Identity, Malaysian Mosques

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Place is a space associated with people's relationship with physical environments, individual and group activities, and meanings. In this regard, physical features, activities, and meanings are considered as the three main constructs of a place. Religious places are some physical settings correlated to religious or sacred events that could cultivate fundamental human values and enrich human soul (Stokols, 1990). These places are often embellished by architectural structures and art. In this regard, religious architecture represents the physical space in which humans attempt to bring themselves closer to the divine (Shampa Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993, 2004). This study was motivated by existing literature reflecting contributions of physical settings and attributes invigorating people's place attachment, due to their contribution to the symbolic meanings of the environment.

Studying feelings and emotions that people develop towards places is getting increased attention, while the concept of place attachment lies at the heart of these studies (Altman & Low, 1992; Giuliani & Feldman, 1993; Kyle, Graefe, Manning, & Bacon, 2004; Manzo, 2003). Place attachment is defined as the emotional and affecting bond established between people and places. The importance of physical features and conditions of place is

advocated in the construction of place attachment (Lewicka, 2010; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Shumaker & Taylor, 1983; Stedman, 2003; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). According to Stedman (2003) meaning of a setting is based on its environmental characteristics. Stedman (2003) noted that the physical attributes do not create sense of place directly, but affect the symbolic meanings of the environment which are in turn associated with evaluation on the strength of place attachment. In this regard, Stedman (2003) claimed that the physical characteristics strengthen both place attachment and satisfaction. Place attachment could be developed towards places that differ in size and function, e.g. room, house, neighbourhood, city, recreational settings, communities, religious places etc. (Altman & Low, 1992; Hay, 1998; Tuan, 1977). With respect to religious places within the Islamic culture, 'Masjid', or mosque, is considered as the house of Allah so is recognised as the most important structure.

Due to its large Muslim population, Malaysia has numerous mosques dispersed all over urban and rural areas. However, they adopt varying architectural styles influenced by varying ethnic sub-cultures, periods of colonialism, foreign influences, technology utilisation and the political environment (Ahmad, 1999). Stedman (2003) argued that in the context of recreational settings, the existing physical features and attributes of places could affect people's place attachment in different ways. Literature on one hand argues that the physical setting and its characteristics could contribute to construction of sense of place and place attachment (e.g., Stedman, 2003) and on the other hand, it indicates the significant and profound influence of religion in creating people's place attachment (e.g., Shampa Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993, 2004, 2009).

This study argued that different environmental perceptions could be evident within religious contexts due to the strong influence of religions on people's perceptions, as per discussed in (Shampa Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009). However, there is a theoretical gap in existing literature in investigating the environmental characteristics of mosques as Islamic religious places. In other words, the preceding subjective and descriptive studies often do not provide a sufficient theoretical basis for the academic investigations of the environmental qualities of mosques.

(Shampa Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2009)

In order to fill the aforementioned theoretical gap, this study investigated the actual parameters influencing the environmental quality of Malaysian mosques by surveying users' place attachment. Employing a mixed method research approach, the study discovered the multi-dimensional aspects of place attachment and its meanings in the aforementioned contexts. In this essence, the dimensions of place attachment were examined in the context of the 5 contemporary Malaysian state mosques from 3 different architectural styles, i.e. Modern, Postmodern and Vernacular. The study objectively highlighted the role of different architectural attributes of the studied places in strengthening people's attachment and the significance of this attachment in creating the sense of place.

In studying human-place relationships within the selected contexts, the study combined two seminal theories in the field, i.e. 'Place' (Relph, 1976) and 'Place Attachment' (Altman & Low, 1992) theories. Place theory defined the concept of place and introduced the common core components of places; whilst, Place Attachment theory defined the concept of attachment to a place and presented the main factors that could influence people's connections to different places.

Basically, this study relied on the objective view to the relationships between people and places that was embedded in the aforementioned two theories to discover how Malaysian users communicate with the contemporary Malaysian mosques from different architectural styles; how they attach to these places; what factors could influence their attachment; and what is the impact level of physical attributes and characteristics of these places on people's place attachment. Taking into account the nature of the problem, this aim was to be gained through: a) examination of attributes and characteristics of the selected five mosques that could influence the users' place attachment; b) identification of the meaning(s), which make people attach to the selected five mosques; and c) determination of the impacts of socio-cultural and religious activities on people's attachment to the selected mosques.

## 2 THE STUDY AREAS

Before conducting the actual study, all mosques in Malaysia were identified from the literature and interviews with the personnel of Malaysian Islamic Development (JAKIM). According to Malaysian Islamic Development (JAKIM), mosques in Malaysia can be categorised into five groups: Principal mosques, State mosques, District mosques, Qaryah mosques, and Private mosques. Among these five types, only principal and state mosques are constructed 'fully funded' by the government (Ref. JAKIM).

According to JAKIM, Masjid Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin in Putrajaya (2010), Masjid Putra in Putrajaya (1999) and Masjid Negara in Kuala Lumpur (1965) are the three principal mosques of the country. All these mosques were constructed after the independence of Malaysia in 1957. Malaysia has also 14 state mosques. These are Masjid Negeri (in Perlis state, 1897), Zahir Mosque (in Kedah state, 1912), Sultan Idris Shah II mosque (in Perak state, 1968), Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah mosque (in Selangor state, 1988), Seremban mosque (in Negeri Sembilan state, 1970), Al-Azim mosque (in Malacca state, 1990), Sultan Abu Bakar mosque (in Johor state, 1900), The Sultan Ahmad Shah mosque (in Pahang state, 1993), Abidin mosque (in Terengganu state, 1808), Muhammadi mosque or Great mosque (in Kelantan state, 1926), Penang state mosque (1979), Sabah state Mosque (1974), Sarawak state mosque (1968), and Wilayah mosque (in Kuala Lumpur, 2000). Out of these 14 state mosques 7 mosques were constructed after independence of Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak are not included since those states are located in East Malaysia or Malaysian Borneo and our study focused only on mosques in West Malaysia).

In order to have homogenous cases of the study, this research only focused on Principal and State mosques that benefited from similar allocation of resources, as the construction of all of them have been fully funded by the government. This criterion minimises those differences between the cases that are due to the shortage or abundance of resources. In order to further mitigate the risk of heterogeneity of the cases, the study selected only 9 'contemporary' mosques out of all 17 Principal and State mosques of the

country. This study defined the term 'contemporary mosque' as a common chronological character amongst all mosques that were constructed after the independence of Malaysia in 1957.

The 9 selected mosques vary in terms of their architectural styles. Mohamad Rasdi (2007) identified eighth architectural styles for Malaysian mosques: Traditional Vernacular, Sino-Eclectic, Colonial, North Indian, Modern Vernacular, Modernistic Expressionism, Post-Modern Revivalism, and Vernacular Revivalism. According to this taxonomy, all 'contemporary' Malaysian mosques could fall in one of the following three categories only: Modernistic Expressionism, Post-Modern Revivalism, and Vernacular Revivalism. Consequently, this study just investigated the characteristics of these three styles. In other words, the study focused on the mosques from Modern, Post-Modern, and Vernacular Revivalism architectural styles as the settings of investigation in order to investigate the type and degree of users' attachment to these mosques.

As such, as the result of the applied Purposive Stratified Sampling method (Kumar, 2005) the following mosques have been selected as the sites of investigation for this study: 1) Masjid Negara in Kuala Lumpur as a representative of Modern style, 2) Masjid Negeri Sembilan in Seremban as a representative of Modern style, 3) Masjid Wilayah in Kuala Lumpur as a representative of Post-Modern style, 4) Masjid Putra as a representative of Post-Modern style, and 5) Masjid Al-Azim in Malacca as the only representative of Vernacular style.

## 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In accordance with the aforementioned objectives, the study conducted a mixed-method (Creswell, 1998) research approach (qualitative + quantitative) to design a process for investigating phenomena of place attachment and sense of place in the context of selected places. The qualitative part of this research used semi structured in-depth interview with 23 participants regarding their reasons for engagement with and being attracted to the selected places, their knowledge about the places, their

feelings regarding the place (e.g. sense of loyalty and sense of belonging), description of the place, thoughts and beliefs related to the place, the feeling of comfort and satisfaction, opinions, and suggestions. Consequently, this study followed the following criteria in selecting the respondents: a) Including Muslim participants evenly from all key ethnic populations (Malay, Chinese, and Indian); b) Ability of the participant to speak English, but to increase the reliability of the findings the interviewer asked the interviewees whenever they are not emotionally free to express their feelings in English just explain it with their own mother tongue; c) Participation convenience (their willingness to participate). Finally, in determining sample size for interviews, this study looked forward to reaching to 'saturation point' (Kumar, 2005) or the stage in which the research arrives at the saturation point of data collection.

A quantitative research (Creswell, 2003) then was conducted to infer the findings from the selected sample comprising of 288 people to the population of the study. However, 37, 54, 63, 57, and 77 are the number of respondents in Al-Azim mosque, Negeri Sembilan mosque, Putra mosque, Wilayah mosque, and Negara mosque respectively. In this regard, questionnaire survey (Kumar, 2005) was used as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire was designed based on the findings of the conducted interviews and the reviewed seminal literature.

Ultimately, the conducted statistical analysis on the results of questionnaire survey and further discussions on the interpretations provided the adequate basis for final conclusions. The conducted statistical analyses included basic descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation etc), examination of reliability scale, Regression Analysis, Variance Analysis (ANOVA), and Pearson Product Correlation Analysis.

## **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Identified Indicators through the Conducted Interviews**

The conducted semi structured in-depth interviews were analysed in order to give an understanding about how people interact with the studied places and

which features of these places could influence people's perception. The conducted in-depth interviews revealed that the participants had strong attachment to the selected mosques and concluded with the main indicators of the study (Najafi & Sharif, 2011b). During the interviews, the selected places simultaneously were described as "beautiful" and "meaningful" by the respondents (Najafi & Sharif, 2011b). In this regard, Tuan (1977) discussed the role of beauty of the sacred places in inspiration of sacredness. Tuan argued that the beauty of sacred places that is often perceived by the users could make strong impacts on their perceptions and enable them to effortlessly comprehend another and far greater glory. On the other hand, Matravets (1998) argued that architectures' aesthetic manifestation could satisfy and motivate human emotions. Consequently, physical appearance and visual impression of architectural artefacts or places not only could leverage engagement of users with the context, but also could allow them to use these physical senses to recognise the architectural function.

In this essence, the participants of the conducted interviews not only shared their knowledge regarding the studied places but also they expressed their emotions and feelings concerning the places (Najafi & Sharif, 2011b). The identified indicators from this part were ultimately classified into 4 groups: physical features, religious symbols, activities, and meanings. In this regard, structure and style, forms, spaces, size, ornaments, colours, lighting, furniture, ventilation, landscape of the courtyard and the view of the outside of the mosque, facilities, maintenance and accessibility of the mosques were the most cited features by the respondents regarding the physical features (Najafi & Sharif, 2011b). On the other hand, religious symbols including dome, Minaret (Figure 1), pulpit, Mihrab, Islamic ornaments and decorations, the gateway, and even the community of people were the other most cited elements during the interviews. In this case, the statements of participants revealed that the religious symbols could cause creation of an emotional bond between them and the mosques, hence leveraging the sense of place.



*Figure 1: Dome of Putra Mosque (Left) and Minaret of Al-Azim Mosque (Right) as two remarkable symbolic elements*

However, the meanings associated with the mosques were related to personal as well as group experiences. The conducted in-depth interviews revealed that the physical features and elements of the mosques, personal religious beliefs, past experiences, personal and group memories, familiarity, culture, identity, and religious/social motivations were the factors, which influenced the perceived meanings (Najafi & Sharif, 2011b). Impressive, beautiful, meaningful, our identity, house of God, spiritual place, peaceful, safe, comfort, calm, refreshing place, religious place, Islamic centre, and sense of pride were the common words used by the participants to describe the mosques and their own feelings regarding the selected mosques (Najafi & Sharif, 2011b). In this case, the results of interviews revealed that the beauty of the mosques is a significant factor that could contribute in making a positive impression and feeling in people.

In parallel with literature (e.g., Jones, 2000; Shampa Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004; Watson & Kucko, 2001; White & White, 1998) the conducted interviews revealed that although emotions and meanings may accrue through rites, rituals, and experiences that take place, the architectural forms per se could still enhance the level of these expressions and emotions. Finally, the results of the interviews revealed that participation in religious and social activities in mosques (e.g. repeating rites and rituals) could leverage people's place attachment. In this regard, not only religious activities but being in the community of believers could particularly influence the people's attachment (Najafi & Sharif, 2011b).

#### ***4.2 Place Attachment to Contemporary Public-Funded Mosques in Malaysia***

A total of 288 respondents participated in the conducted survey in this study. The conducted questionnaire asked people regarding their place engagement

and familiarity (purpose, intention, frequency of visit, duration); their emotional and functional place attachment (Shamai, 1991; Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989); Place Identity as a cognitive connection between the self and the physical environment (Davenport & Anderson, 2005; Proshansky, 1978; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983); place meaning and significance (Sanjoy Mazumdar, 2005; Shampa Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004; Rapoport, 1990; Tuan, 1977); perception and preferences on attributes and characteristics of place (Gieryn, 2000; Stedman, 2003); place satisfaction (Mesch & Manor, 1998; Stedman, 2002; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992); Attachment to the activities afforded by the place (Altman & Low, 1992) and finally the respondent profile (age, gender, job, educational level, and income).

For data analysis, SPSS version 15.0 was used in order to facilitate descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. A number of statistical analysis methods were employed to examine the relationships between dependent and independent variables of this research. These methods included basic descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation etc), examination of reliability scale, Regression Analysis, Variance Analysis (ANOVA), and Pearson Product Correlation Analysis.

The conducted analyses revealed that Malaysian users have strong attachment to all the selected mosques. This attachment is strongly formed by the emotional, functional and socio-cultural attributes. The emotional significance of the studied places could be linked to the importance of mosque as an Islamic sign and symbol. The functional attachment was linked to those qualities, facilities, and equipment that could facilitate some conditions as to support public religious and social activities. In this regard, the majority of the respondents of the questionnaire survey pointed that the qualities and facilities of the mosques could provide them with the conditions to better concentrate on their religious activities. The aforementioned conditions could provide a calm, comfort and tranquil place. This was aligned with Nasar's (1994) argument that the quality of calmness of a place can be achieved by high order of the place, and naturalness. This study therefore asserted that well directed functional and emotional attachments within the context of the Malaysian state mosques could

leverage public sense of place to these places that was the aim of this research.

#### ***Impacts of architectural characteristics on users' place attachment***

Sense of place includes the point where the physical features, activities and meanings are intertwined together through users' experience with a place (Jorgenson & Steadman, 2005; Najafi & Sharif, 2011a; Shamai, 1991; Steele, 1981). The findings of the conducted questionnaire survey revealed that in the context of the studied mosques there is a significant correlation between the buildings' spatial arrangements, artistic aestheticism, and furnishings with the people's feelings and perceived meanings. In other words, the physical features of the selected mosques had a significant impact on people's place attachment through creating meaning in their mind. The results showed that accessibility, proximity to transportation nodes, pleasant and remarkable location [landscape], environmental pleasantness, spatial order of physical settings, distinctiveness, facilities, comfort, and level of maintenance of the mosques leveraged the people's attachment. This study therefore asserts that the aforementioned factors contributed to making a comfortable place for people's activities and offered peace and tranquillity to the places, hence influencing people's place attachment (Najafi & Sharif, 2011c). This could support, Nasar's (1994) previous finding that the quality of pleasantness of a place can be enhanced by order, moderate complexity, and element of popular styles.

The results of the conducted survey also showed that although religion could endow religious places, the symbolic meaning which differentiates them from the ordinary physical settings, architectural design could have at least the same capability for developing place attachment, devotion, and spirituality in worshipers. In this regard, the respondents of this study showed a strong affective link to all five studied mosques; however, the results showed that the architectural styles of the selected mosques did not have any significant impact on their place attachment (Najafi & Sharif, 2011c). In other words, the conducted questionnaire survey revealed that people have strong attachment to all selected mosques from different architectural styles.

The results also revealed that there is a low but still significant relationship between people's attachment and their environmental preferences for physical attributes of the studied mosques. Nevertheless, the results showed that out of all three studied architectural styles, the significant difference only exists between the Modern and Postmodern styles and people preferred the exterior façade and interior spaces of the Postmodern style compared to those for the Modern style (Najafi & Sharif, 2011c). The findings of the survey particularly revealed that people are strongly impressed with the Islamic religious symbols used in the Postmodern mosques; as they acted as visual connections between people and these mosques so helped them to feel the sanctuary of the places (Najafi & Sharif, 2011c). Nevertheless, based on the results of the conducted survey, people often welcome any new and innovative designs for mosques as long as they can see familiar religious symbols and elements in design of these places (Najafi & Sharif, 2011b).

#### ***Meaning(s) which make people attach to the mosques***

This study acknowledges the association of meaning(s) with perceptual and psychological aspects of environmental experiences. This supports Tuan's (1977) argument that meanings are always attached to the places as places could have deep-seated meanings for people. In this regard, Tuan (1977) acknowledged places as bases for symbolic meanings which could enhance public place attachments. However, Tuan (1977) explained that meanings are often attached to places by humans over the course of time by tying the image of a place to personal experience. This is where this study advocates that meanings are those qualities of environments that people are often attached to. Therefore, this study also agrees with Altman & Low (1992) that meanings and values are connected with an individual's interaction with a place through cultural and social influences. In this regard, the role of meanings conveyed by mosques could be much highlighted in this study as it is a sacred place where Muslim people prostrate to God; the House of Allah and place where only Allah is worshipped and remembered (Najafi & Sharif, 2011b). In this essence, the conducted interviews and questionnaires revealed that the meanings associated with the mosques were related to both personal and group experiences of people. In the meantime, the findings

indicated that attachment to a mosque is something beyond a mere general environmental affection; it often forms as a result of various meanings through which one could feel the senses of spirituality, peacefulness and tranquillity.

Identity is about how individuals or groups see and define themselves, and how other individuals or groups see and define them. This study discovered that the mosques are so important places for providing sense of identity (Najafi & Sharif, 2011c). The results showed that place identity could also have a strong impact on the users' place attachment and their feelings within places. Respondents at all studied mosques from different typologies expressed their strong 'sense of identification' with those places. In this regard, the majority of the participants expressed that the mosques let them know who and what type of person they are. This study relates this finding to what Proshansky et al. (1983) and Relph (1976) referred to as the concept of 'place identity'. They explained place identity as a symbolic quality that could define the importance of a place and make the individual or groups attached to the places. Hummon (1992) further described place identity as the sense of 'who' is in the world, distilled from a lifetime of experiences. Hewitt (1989) argued that through identities people could distinguish themselves from the others.

Although the published literature advocated the importance of both physical and social elements of place identity (in general), the results of this study revealed that the physical elements have no significant influence on the place identity in the context of the studied mosques; i.e. within the studied context, place identity is a social attribute rather than physical (Najafi & Sharif, 2011c). Furthermore, the results showed that sense of identity was equally developed through people's personal and social experiences within all studied mosques regardless of their various architectural styles. This result reaffirms Shampa Mazumdar & Mazumdar's (1993) idea that religious perceptions could play a significant role in forming people's individual and group identity within the sacred places. It also coincides with Rose's (1995) findings that the sacred places are often interpreted from their particular social positions and reasons rather than their physical forms or shapes.

In terms of the impacts of sense of identity on place attachment, this study showed that people had strong attachment to the studied mosques because those places provide this opportunity to them to express their personal and group identity. In other words, the majority of the participants in the conducted survey rated the selected mosques as desirable places when they claimed that they have a strong sense of identity there. This finding was in parallel Feldman's (1990) idea that people who are identified with a particular settlement type are more likely to be emotionally attached to these places.

Spirituality is the other factor that could contribute to people's place attachment. The results of the conducted survey showed that, the studied mosques created strong magnetism on peoples' perception because of the sense of spirituality there. According to Wiseman (2006), Spiritual means 'to breathe' and spirituality is 'of or belonging to breathing or to air'; and consequently a fundamental element of life. In this case, the results of the conducted survey revealed that not only religion but architectural characteristics of the studied places e.g. design, ornaments, beauty, landscape and pleasance could foster and cultivate sense of spirituality there. This further supports Shampa Mazumdar & Mazumdar's (2004) idea that although religion could donate religious places the symbolic meaning, architectural characteristics in particular might have the same capability to develop place attachment, devotion, and spirituality in the worshippers.

Attachment to the Muslim community is another factor contributing to the formation of people's attachment to the mosques. The results revealed that sense of being in an Muslim community or having social ties fosters people's attachment to the mosques. In this case, Hummon (1992) emphasised on the role of community in formation of attachment; he noted that sense of community and local sentiments influence the sense of place and attachment. In this essence, this study exposed that the existing social ties among the community of worshippers of God have a significant factor in Malaysian users' attachment to the studied mosques. These social ties could refer to making friendship with others or the contributions to the social and religious activities in the Muslim community within the sacred places. In

this essence, Milligan (1998) ascertained that such human interactions could bestow some meanings in a place as to create place attachments.

The results lastly ascertained that culture (as the totality of a society's distinctive ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge to interpret the environment) was one of the most important drivers that could influence the users' attachment to the studied mosques. The force of culture on the people's relationship with places was explored by Tuan (1974) who described the remarkable bounds between people and the physical settings. Tuan (1974) argued that public feelings regarding places could be strong enough if the places could afford significant personal or cultural events. In this essence, Tuan (1974) argued that places could act as a symbol for more abstract ideas, which explains it. From a similar point of view, Rapoport (1977) discussed that in multicultural societies, cultural principals could play important roles in defining group identity. This study coincides with Rapoport's (1977) idea that Malaysian Islamic culture has the same significant impact on the Muslim majority's attachment to the studied mosques as they naturally try to connect to their identity and preserve it. People therefore make emotional bounds with mosques as these places fit to their cultural background (Najafi & Sharif, 2011c).

#### ***Impacts of socio-cultural and religious activities on people's attachment to Malaysian mosques***

As the places of worship for followers of the Islamic faith, mosques are the nucleuses, which have created the characteristics of the Muslim society and represented the establishment of a Muslim community. According to Islamic Sharia, performing religious activities in mosques with the other people is several times more praiseworthy than performing individually. Mosques however functions not only as a place for performing religious rites but also as a place for receiving religious education (Mohamad Rasdi, 1998), organising commemorative celebrations related to Islamic religion, facilitating Jummah (Friday) prayer, and not least conducting religious communal activities (Figure 2).



*Figure 2: Interiors of Wilayah (Left) and Negri Sembilan (Right) Mosques for supporting religious and social activities*

Consequently, religious and social activities could be considered as the significant factors in leveraging people's attachment to mosques. Results of the conducted questionnaire survey showed a significant but low correlation between the participants' activities and their place attachment (Najafi & Sharif, 2011c). However, as the studied mosques were located at non-residential areas, despite organising various religious and social activities there, only praying made a significant impact on people's place attachment. In other words, the studied mosques are used for their basic function as a place of worship. This finding is aligned with Tajuddin's (1998) idea that due to the commercial location of the state mosques, only the people who work in that vicinity are the general attendees of daily and weekly prayers there; and the other types of social and religious activities are rather weak within these contexts. The state mosques therefore are meant to be Islamic symbols at a national level and act as dominant structures in their contextual settings rather than merely affording religious and social activities. They gradually became recognised landmarks that could be recognised even from miles away to fortify Islamic identity of the area, hence serving as symbols

of religious devotion and a testimony of unity and solidarity of the Muslim community in the country. This was also acknowledged by Serageldin (1990) as the different function that state mosques often carry rather than those for all other mosques. In other words, state mosques are defined as some places under the centralised authority of the state government, not only as places to pray at, but also as monumental structures (Serageldin, 1990) to express the state's commitment to Islam (Khan & Holod, 1997).

The findings also revealed no significant relationships between frequencies of visit, duration of stay, and the type of environmental experience with level of people's attachment to the selected state mosques (Najafi & Sharif, 2011c). In other words, even the people who visit these places for the first time have the similar feeling as the more frequent visitors. It also means that the feelings of people visitors of the studied mosques were similar to the feelings of the people who came for performing religious activities. Finally, the results revealed that there was no significant difference between socio-demographic characteristics of the participants (i.e. age, gender, education,

job, and income) and their level of attachment to the studied mosques. All these findings are aligned with Mazumdar and Mazumdar's (2004) idea that religion often makes some places sacred by giving them symbolic meanings.

Figure 3 presents components of place attachment as a quality for leveraging people's environmental experience generated from this research.

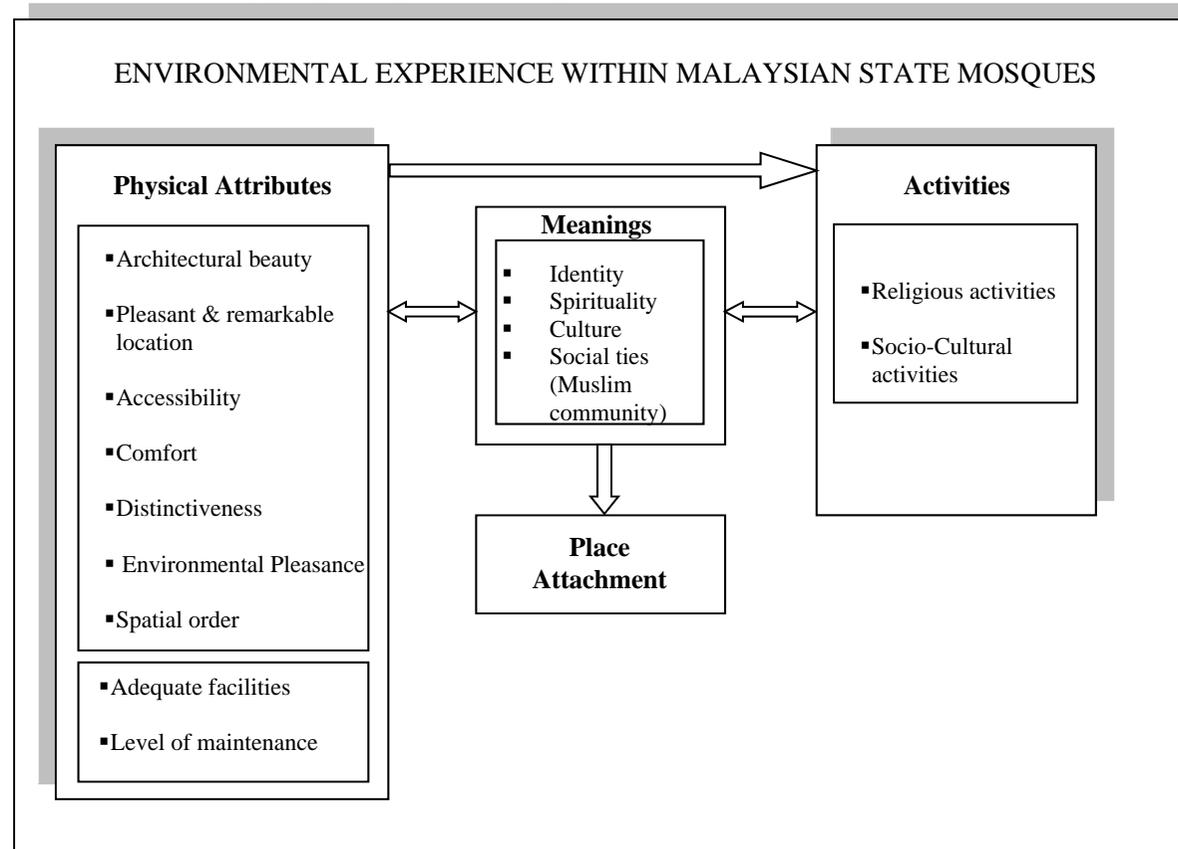


Figure 3: Components of place attachment as a quality for leveraging people's environmental experience generated from this research

## 5 CONCLUSION

This study developed comprehensive place-based guidelines and principles for designing and apprising religious spaces in the context of Malaysia as a

multicultural Islamic country. The study acknowledged Malaysian state mosques as 'places' rather than 'spaces' as it believed in some significant characteristics of mosques that are beyond mere physical body represented in outlook of façades and spatial organisations. This study therefore revealed

that place attachment is formed through those physical and conceptual attributes of the studied places that are significant for the users based on their background perceptions. In this study, place attachment was defined as a concept formed based on a thoughtful place experience generated by the sense of place and the spirituality there. In other words, place attachment in this study comprises of the emotional, conceptual, functional, and socio-cultural bonds between places and the attached users. The study also asserted that place attachment should be taken into account as an important driver in designing and developing new and existing Malaysian mosques. This research was a new attempt to expand design knowledge for filling the existing gap between meanings associated with places and the physical features of environmental satisfaction in the context of Malaysian religious spaces. The study then developed metrics, features, meanings and conceptual bonds that could define place attachment and place identity as a theoretical basis for establishing guidelines for both design practice and design research in similar contexts. This is argued that this study was a novel look to the experience of Malaysian religious places as not just physical bodies but also perceptual, conceptual and psychological qualities. This is ultimately advocated that exploring qualities related to place attachment can lead to creating some significant physical setting which can make positive environmental impacts on people and their contributions towards their society.

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