

Linking Activity and Place Attachment Dimensions in Enhancing the Sense of Place

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ABSTRACT

Sense of place definition includes the point where the physical form, activity and meaning are intertwined in the people experience of a place. In urban design and place quality research, much has been discussed on the influence of the physical form and activity on the sense of place. However, the linkage between these components with place meaning and attachment has not been adequately explored, in particular on urban streets. This paper highlights the role of activity in supporting attachment to shopping streets in the city centre of Kuala Lumpur. Surveys and face-to-face interviews with users of Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman (JTAR), Jalan Masjid India (JMI), Jalan Petaling (JP) and Jalan Bukit Bintang (JBB) were conducted to examine their perception of the streets' activities and its significance to their association with the places. The research demonstrates that activity has strongly influenced place attachment as reflected in the users' identification of and dependence on the shopping streets. The attachment is the result of constant and long term engagement with the activities, mainly shopping, trading and socio-cultural interaction.

Keywords : Place Attachment, Activity, Shopping Streets,
Kuala Lumpur City Centre

1. INTRODUCTION

In the production of distinctive urban places, a lot of attention is given to enhance the physical elements and activities; however, the significant function of meaning and attachment in securing the sense of place is not adequately examined in the process. Meaning is associated with the perceptual and the psychological aspects of environmental experience and within this realm place attachment is viewed as a form of connection or relationship between a person

and the setting (Montgomery, 1998). Therefore, place attachment is constructed mainly as a result of people's interaction with a place and its attached meaning(s). It is argued that the loss of place meanings and place significance disrupts emotional attachment (Arefi, 1999). Since meaning and attachment construct place identity, Gieryn (2000) further accentuated that the loss of meaning and attachment to places has negative implications for individuals' psychological well-being and their bonding with places as a venue of collective identity, memory and history. With consideration that activity is one of the basic components of place, this paper examines the linkage between attributes of activity and place attachment dimensions in the context of Kuala Lumpur city centre.

2. PLACE ATTACHMENT DIMENSIONS

Place attachment concept is closely linked with the affective aspects of environmental meaning (Altman and Low, 1992; Lobo, 2004). Hidalgo and Hernandez, (2001) associated place attachment with the affective bond or link between people or individuals and specific places. Moore and Graefe (1994) and Smaldone et al. (2005) relate place attachment with the degree to which occupants perceive themselves to be strongly associated with and dependent on a particular place. The attachment is expressed through interplay of affects and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviours and actions (Altman and Low, 1992). These components are embedded in the functional (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981) and emotional attachment that influence how people perceive their identity and identified with the character of the place. The key dimensions of place attachment relevant to this study are place dependence and place identity. Place dependence reflects the functional type of attachment. It is developed when a place is felt significant by the users and

able to provide condition to fulfil their functional needs and support their behavioural goals better than a known alternative (Williams, et al., 1992). This is reflected in the desire to maintain closeness to the object of attachment and having special feeling towards a particular place (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001).

Place identity is strongly associated with the emotional type of attachment formed as a result of users' engagement and identification with places through activities and people that they associated with. Therefore, places play a vital role in defining and developing self and group identity of the people (Davenport and Anderson, 2005; Proshansky et al., 1995). Place identity is also referred to the composites of place characteristic and features (Relph, 1976). Here, place identity is reflected in the attributes of physical form and activity of place as well as the users' perception of the corresponding characteristics. In defining place identity, urban design research mainly focused on appearance and imageability of the physical elements and activity but falls short in understanding how these components intertwine with place meaning and attachment. Therefore the linkage between these aspects reveals the sense of place embedded in a specific locality.

3. THE STUDY CONTEXT

The study involved three shopping districts located in the city centre of Kuala Lumpur. The first place comprises of Jalan Masjid India (JMI) and Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman (JTAR). The streets have been synonymous to Indian Muslim, Indian and Malay population. The second place known as "Chinatown" is defined by Jalan Petaling (JP) and important as the early urban streets inhabited by the Chinese trading community. The third place, Bukit Bintang shopping district is defined by Jalan Bukit Bintang (JBB) characterized by its modern and international image, attracts predominantly tourists from abroad as well as the locals. These places are the locus of human activities in the city centre of Kuala Lumpur.



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

Figure. 1.0 General views of JMI (a), JTAR (b), JP (c), and JBB (d)

4. METHODOLOGY

The findings are based on field surveys conducted in 2005 with 330 respondents using probability sampling strategy. 36 purposely composed samples were participated in the in-depth interview. Systematic field observation was carried out to gather evidence on the form and pattern of activities at the actual scene of the streets. The street users are varied in their social, cultural and functional characteristics. Hence, the respondents are clustered according to their roles. They are represented by shoppers, visitors, shopowners, shopkeepers, vendors, office workers, residents and students. Quantitative and qualitative approaches are used in analyzing the data.

