

# TRANSNATIONALISM AND PLACE ATTACHMENT: SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS PLANNING TOWARDS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL HUB

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## ABSTRACT

*Malaysia fundamentally needs to understand the adjustment problems faced by increasing international students' enrollments in its inspiration to become a premier international education hub. This can be facilitated with the right kind of support by enhancing sense of place attachment amongst the transnationals. The physical planning of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) main campus is outspread due to its large area and seems to contribute to the lack of social interactions and attachment to the university that can assist in improving their campus lifestyles. The aim of this study is investigate the international students' perception of current place attachment in UPM. A5-points Likert-scaled questionnaire survey on 146 UPM international students and data analysis using SPSS were conducted. Results demonstrate that the tangible physical planning of UPM campus influenced international students' level of place attachment towards the campus surroundings and their positive lifestyles. However, more improvements to the current planning to enhance social interactions, safety and human comfort are needed to enhance the place attachments in the planning process.*

**Keywords:** Place attachment, transnationals, campus planning, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Social Interactions

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia inspires to achieve its aim of becoming an international education hub by 2020, with a targeted 200,000 international students enrollment into the country (Aziz and Abdullah, 2012). Hence, Malaysia is progressively becoming a global hub for education as international students are constantly flocking the corridors of Malaysian universities and colleges. In this case, trans-nationalism is best understood not as fostering bounded networks, but as creating honeycombs, a structure that sustains and gives shapes to the identities of nation-states, international and local institutions, and particular social and geographic spaces (Clavin, 2005). Undoubtedly, the infrastructural development of universities must be of international standard to attract foreign students, staff and recognition; and must be environmentally safe and of high sanitary standard (Musa and Ahmad@Baharum, 2012). Subsequently, to become a major player and enjoy the benefits of having international students, Malaysia essentially needs to understand the adjustment problems faced by international students and provide the right kind of support (Malaklunthu and Selan, 2011). Many researchers have found out that when international students move to unfamiliar environments such as foreign universities they will face to various problems in this phase of their life (Oehler, 2007). These problems would be different since international students come from diverse countries with disparate opinion and culture (Ibem & Aduwo, 2013).

## 2. PLACE ATTACHMENT AND SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS PLANNING: AN OVERVIEW

In recent years, attention has focused increasingly on the relation of human beings to places. Place attachment has attracted significant interest from scholars and researchers investigating people's interactions with natural and cultural landscapes (Chung et al., 2011; and Ramkissoon et al., 2013). However, most researchers agree that place attachment is multidimensional aspect and it is not easy to discuss about relationships between a man and environment. Similarly, (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001) believe that place attachment is a multifaceted conception which include many aspects of people-place bonding involving behavior, affect and cognition. Understanding place attachment is important in sustaining the attraction and meaning of places. The aim is to avoid losing the characteristics that are familiar and meaningful to users that impact their continued attachment (Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). In fact, they believe that attachment to the places is reflected emotionally with the influence of the physical and the cultural characteristics of the people and the setting.

Place attachment is one of the most influential factors in humans' psychological health, and is therefore powerful in constructing an individual's identity (Tuan, 2007). The emotional link between the self and the place is known in psychology as 'place attachment' (Gross & Brown, 2006; Gross & Brown, 2008; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Kyle et al., 2003; and Kyle et al., 2004). Within this notion, (Shal et al., 2011) argue that secured attachment style can also reduce the homesickness and assisted by social interactions. In the course of this interaction, anonymous spaces turn into places endowed with meaning which serve as objects of attachment (Casakin & Kreitler, 2008). In this way, this emotional predisposition can be positive, negative or neutral (Guillan, 1993). Another major element is meaning. Places may denote a rich variety of meanings for individuals, for example, meanings of harmony, of peace, of home, of danger or of sanctity (Gustafson, 2001). This link produces "the sense of physically being and feeling 'in place' or 'at home'" (Yuksel et al., 2010). Scannell and Gifford (2010) proposed the three dimensional "person-process-place" framework for place attachment, which proposes that place attachment is a multidimensional concept that encompasses the person (the actor), his/her psychological process (affect, cognition, behaviour), and the related physical place dimensions (place characteristics and features).

Bonding also entails evaluation, and more identity related aspects as well as objective criteria, such as length of stay and involvement in the local area and within social networks (Moore, 2000). In other words, length of association with the place, as well as past experiences, both play a role in creating and strengthening place attachment. The social significance of long-time

associations with a place is consistent with (Hull et al., 1994) argument that place attachment typically involves a history of personally significant social interactions. Another, significant factor in place attachment is endurance and frequency. Endurance refers to the length of place association, while frequency refers to the number of times the person and place are associated (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981). Therefore, the person-place bond always encompasses a temporal element. The emotional bond to places is promoted also by the social bonding (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001). The importance of social bonds to place was reported in the environmental psychology literature by a number of investigators (Casakin & Kreitler, 2008). Place attachment is a positive element that can contribute to sustaining place identity, and the sense of place, thus promote emotional wellbeing, fulfilment and happiness to the urban users.

Sustainable development has slowly permeated in universities not only through courses. According to Velazquez (2004), education, research, outreach and partnership, and sustainability on campus are the four strategies used in higher education institutions around the world for achieving sustainability. In terms of planning, the college environment powerfully influences the social and psychological lives of students (Banning, 1989). When students visit a campus, the most influential aspect of the tour is "the buildings, the trees, the walkways, the well-kept lawns" (Boyer, 1987). The buildings, the statues, and the chimes create an atmosphere that makes the students more than machines (Parsons, 1968). As a consequence, there are many schools that try to promote their facilities and make the environments where international students could attach easily. Evidently, whether universities are organizational complex and physical locations, they are not simple places (Hossini et al., 2015).

Campus physical development plan is an effective tool to shaping campuses' life, especially among students to promote a sustainable living community (Abd-Razak et al., 2011). Unfortunately according to previous studies, the physical development planning of the Malaysian campuses are weak and not well-planned. Indeed, wide and dispersed planning approach creates a bad impact on UPM students' life. In this way, it will reduce the level of accessibility, safety and lighting. However, (Scopelliti and Giuliani, 2004) argue that international students feel attached to specific environments since such places reduce stress and enhance positive moods. In fact, faculty buildings are social environments giving opportunity to young people to socialize, share interests, have relation with each other, develop the relationship within groups and belonging feelings (Sıramkaya & Aydın, 2014). They also note that determining the needs of young people in these environments for spatial solutions contributing socialization and designing a faculty building in the direction of these needs will be helpful for identity development personality formation of young people.

It is important to note, that campus physical environment is an essential feature that influence students' attraction to a higher institution (Hanan, 2013). In this manner, many campus designs are defined to express the architecture of the buildings rather than human comfort needs. Accordingly, Kevin Lynch has focused on buildings which are more comfortable, user-friendly urban environments with regionally distinctive landscapes planning, deserves such identification and attention for the audience (Lynch, 1998). International students' attractions set the context for social and psychological interactions between them and the place (Dredge, 2010; Ramkissoon et al., 2012). For academic facilities, it is particularly important that spaces support learning environment (Matthews et al., 2011). Learning that derives from social interaction is referred to as cooperative or social learning (Loyens & Gijbels, 2008; Matthews et al., 2011). In very simple and concrete terms, the students were hoping for a place to 'talk, eat and socialize' (Matthews et al., 2011). In short, Björklund et al. (2011) found that the space has succeeded in supporting various activities, interaction, experiments, and student work.

However, the most campuses make little effort to provide areas for international student activities although that will enliven the campus life. Since successful universities not only should pay attention to build spaces but also should consider about open spaces on campus. On a serious note, (Kielhofner, 2006) believes that human control their life by choosing their activities, their path of development, and how they will adapt to the surrounding world, which in turn leads to an increased quality of life. Moreover, within urban design guidelines, proximity to public open space is frequently cited as a key principle for encouraging physical, mental, and social outcomes such as improved air quality, quality of life, community cohesion (Coombes et al., 2010). The success of public open space is in its use, and the use and popularity of a space depend greatly on the location and the details of its design. Studies on urban spaces (Ujang, 2012) suggest that systematic attempt to compile of what seems to have worked and not worked, what appears to be appreciated and not appreciated by the users of existing spaces are essential for the design of new open spaces. As a consequence, the planning of open spaces must be able to provide a healthy, creative and sustainable environment (Marzukhi et al., 2012).

The aim of this study is investigate the international students' perception of current place attachment in UPM. The main assumption of this study is that the investigation on the places where the International students feel attached to in UPM their level of attachment will open the pathway to formulating a more comprehensive and appropriate strategies that can enhance the sense of attachment and lead to the establishment of UPM as a premier global education hub. There are places where international students spend most of their time, for both leisure or academic functions that they enjoy or interact

with each other which can be considered as place of attachment in UPM campus. These places not only can be identified but also ranked according to specific criteria.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive survey designed to collect data from international student's opinions to measure the quality of physical design and facilities in Universiti Putra Malaysia (Refer to figure 1 for location and facilities planning).

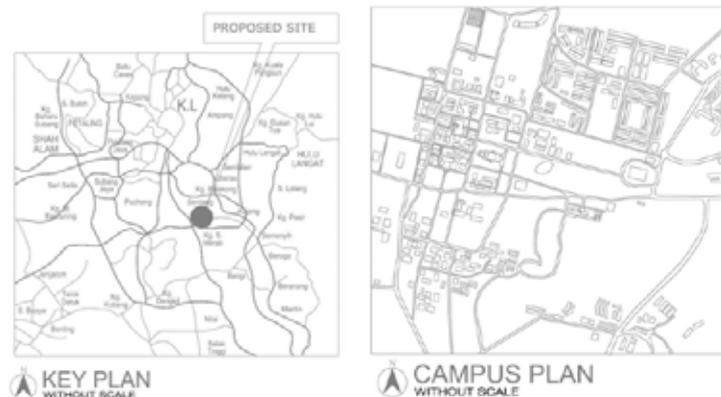


Figure 1: UPM Location and Campus plan

The questionnaire included a set of close-ended questions focusing where and how international students spend their time on campus with faculty members and friends. The favorite place was described as "that one place in which overseas students have most enjoyed spending time, or that is more valued than any other places. It can be in classes for academic activities or in public spaces around UPM campus such as the library and students center for social and cultural activities. It contains 26 parameters based on the Universiti Putra Malaysia physical design, facilities and international students' perception about UPM environments. A 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 as strongly disagrees to 5 as strongly agree is used for the measurement. For these parameters any grade of 2.50 and above was taken to agree the point while below 2.50 was disagreeing. In order to avoid biased responses, participants were told that questionnaires would be treated anonymously and that the data collected would only be used for the purposes of the study. Participants took an average of 15 min to complete the questionnaires. This research used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 22 (SPSS v.22.0) for the statistical analysis. Data were analyzed using One Sample t-test and Pearson Correlation analysis.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The research presented here was from a pilot study which carried out during the 2014/2015 academic year at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. The 146 International students (57.5% Male and 42.5% Female) with different classification (majority of 74.0% Postgrad Student) were randomly selected for the study. A distribution with the population distribution ranging between 19 and 45 years, with a mean of 28 years was accumulated (Refer to Table 1). Most are single and from the Middle East.

*Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Questionnaire Survey Participants of UPM Campus.*

Subject demographic (n= 146)			
Measure and items	Frequency	Percentage	
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	62	42.5	
Male	84	57.5	
<b>Age</b>			
19 or younger	6	4.1	
20-23	20	13.7	
24-29	48	32.9	
30-35	48	32.9	
36-45	24	16.4	
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Single	98	67.1	
Married	44	30.1	
Divorced	4	2.7	
<b>Students' Racial</b>			
Iranian	48	32.9	
Chinese	28	19.2	
Nigerian	22	15.1	
Iraqi	18	12.3	
Indian	4	2.7	
Algerian	1	1.4	
Other	24	16.4	
<b>Students' Classification</b>			
Freshman	20	13.7	
Sophomore	12	8.2	
Postgrad Student	108	74.0	
Junior	4	2.7	
Other	2	1.4	
<b>Residency</b>			
Dormitory or other Campus Housing in UPM	32	21.9	
Dormitory or other Campus Housing Outside of UPM	14	9.6	
Residence within Walking Distance of the Institution	18	12.3	
Residence with Driving	82	56.2	
<b>Credit Hours</b>			
6 or fewer	62	42.5	
7-10	34	23.3	
11-14	28	19.2	
15 or more	22	15.1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100%</b>	

This study will determine the linkage between the campuses planning as independent variable and sense of place attachment amongst the respondents which is conceived as dependent variable. The independent variable is stable and unaffected by the other variables to be measured while the dependent are expected to change as a result of an experimental manipulation of the independent variable (Cramer and Dennis, 2004). In determining the causal effect of both variables the ranking of place attachment locations and the actual level of place attachment perceived by the international students will open the pathway on understanding the actual scenario in hand.

### 4.1 Ranking Place Attachment Locations

*Table 2: Ranking of Places in Universiti Putra Malaysia (n = 146)*

Rank	Location	Frequency	Percentage
1	Room	106	72.6
2	Library	96	65.8
3	Faculty	60	41.1
4	Restaurants/ Cafeteria	56	38.4
5	Entertainment Places	44	30.1
6	Recreational Facilities	24	16.4
7	Campus Open Spaces	18	12.3
8	Other Places	18	12.3
9	Mosque	12	8.2
10	Students Center	4	2.7
<b>Total</b>		<b>146</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2 demonstrates the ranking of places where international students prefer spending their time during the days. The largest proportion of international students (72.6%) indicates that their rooms or residence are the place they spend most of their time and feel most attached to (Refer to figure 2 on Accommodations in UPM). The second and third places are the main library of Universiti Putra Malaysia (65.8%) and their faculties (41.1%) respectively. Meanwhile the places students feel less attached to include student's center (2.7%) and UPM mosque (8.2%). The attachment towards the public facilities such as restaurants and cafeteria, entertainment places and recreational facilities (12.3%) are at the medium level. Astonishingly, the data also demonstrates that the campus open spaces such as seating places and parks (12%) are not attracting as many international students to the area.

### 4.2 Level of Place Attachment Amongst Transnationals

The main aim of the study is to determine the level of sense of place attachment amongst international students on UPM campus. For this reason, we asked them "Do you feel attached to the university?" and they had three options for select (Yes, No, I am not Sure). In conclusion 38.4% of international students

did not feel attached to UPM campus. Table 3 shows the result of level of attachment of UPM campus.



Figure 2: Accommodation in UPM (Upm Holding, 2015)

Table 3: Level of Place Attachment on Campus (n = 146)

Feel attachment	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	90	61.6
No	16	11.0
I am not sure	40	27.4
Total	146	100%



Figure 3: Main Entrance as a significant UPM image (Source: Author, 2015)

As mentioned in the previous section, SPSS is used to analyze data for this research. A Correlation is used to investigate the relationship between two quantitative, continuous variables. One sample t-test is used as a statistical procedure for testing the mean value of a distribution. It can be used under the assumption that sampled distribution is normal. The Pearson's correlation was computed to assess the relationship between physical designs and feel at home, feel secured, interaction, facilities, feel happy, social/ physical attachment, UPM image, convenience campus, quality food and distance between buildings in UPM campus (see Table 4). The strongest positive correlation of this survey was between facilities which encourage international students feel attached and happy in UPM campus ( $r = 0.611$ ,  $n = 145$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Secondly, there was a positive correlation between the happy live and comfortable campus design ( $r = 0.610$ ,  $n = 145$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The result indicates that there were positive relationships between feel at home and other variables (sense of attachment, feel secured, happy to live in UPM, proud of UPM image (refer to Figure 3), comfortable campus design, social and physical attachment).

Meanwhile, the distance between buildings in the campus has an important role to enhance interaction among international students. As a result, there was a negative correlation between distances of international students' faculty to other main buildings and students interaction ( $r = -.103$ ,  $n = 145$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ).

In the final analysis (One-Sample t-Test), international students believe that the UPM campus design approach is spread and has bad impact on place attachment on campus (Mean Difference 3.890) (Refer to Table 5). The result also indicates that most international students are proud of UPM image (MD = 3.329) and are also satisfied with the level of social attachment and physical attachment amongst them ((MD = 3.110 and MD = 3.123). However, they were not satisfied with quality of food in the campus (MD = 2.247) and also they believe that UPM Campus physical design are weak and not well planned (MD = 2.164).

Table 4: Descriptive statistics, correlation, among study variables (n = 145) Variables

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
(1) Physical Design	1											
(2) Feel at home	-.005	1										
(3) Feel Secured	.156	.492**	1									
(4) UPM encourage Students' interaction	.076	.466**	.269*	1								
(5) Facilities to Encourage sense of attachment	.013	.518**	.377**	.416**	1							
(6) Happy to live in UPM	.129	.459**	.502**	.387**	.611**	1						
(7) I would be sorry if my friends moved out	-.152	.298*	.256*	.283*	.173	.187	1					
(8) I would be sorry if I moved out	-.013	.327**	.172	.271*	.189	.260*	.597**	1				
(9) Proud of UPM image	.138	.513**	.432**	.371**	.320**	.502**	.462**	.381**	1			
(10) UPM is Comfortable	.093	.487**	.372**	.508**	.501**	.610**	.268*	.412**	.591**	1		
(11) Quality Food	.077	.152	-.036	.353**	.258*	.212	.111	.082	.242*	.234*	1	
(12) Distance of your faculty to other buildings is far	-.083	.008	.015	-.103	.028	-.003	.244*	-.054	.155	-.091	.145	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
 \* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: One-Sample Test, Test value = 0

Factor	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Physical Design	36.957	145	.000	2.164	2.05	2.28
Feel at Home	22.904	145	.000	2.849	2.60	3.10
Feel Secured	21.161	145	.000	3.082	2.79	3.37
UPM Encourage Students' interaction	17.253	145	.000	2.397	2.12	2.67
Facilities to Encourage Sense of Attachment	23.564	145	.000	2.959	2.71	3.21
Happy to live in UPM	21.358	145	.000	2.959	2.68	3.24
I would be sorry if my friends move out	23.115	145	.000	3.110	2.84	3.38
I would be sorry If I moved out	25.333	145	.000	3.123	2.88	3.37
I am proud of UPM image	23.428	145	.000	3.329	3.05	3.61
UPM is Comfortable	22.493	145	.000	3.164	2.88	3.44
Quality of UPM Food is Good	17.608	145	.000	2.247	1.99	2.50
Distance of your Faculty to other Buildings is Far	27.000	145	.000	3.890	3.60	4.18

## 5. CONCLUSION

The transmigration of international students to overseas universities means they are making a transition into a completely new environment, socially and academically. Indeed, during the transition to university international students will face with various problems including bonding to the new place which is also promoted by the social interactions. Understanding on place attachment is important in sustaining the attraction and meaning of places. Attachments may not only be solely regarded as physical entities but may be primarily associated with the meanings of and experiences in place often involve relationships with other people key issue for a better understanding of their well-being and quality of life.

The survey measured the level of sense of place attachment amongst UPM international students on campus. It demonstrates the close relationship between physical design and people attachment to the UPM campus; how the physical planning play a role in fostering the social interaction's and contribute to the place attachment. In addition, this study also determines the ranking of places where international students prefer to spend their time on campus. The spread planning approach in Universiti Putra Malaysia does affect general quality of life among international student as it reduces the interaction with places and other students. There were positive correlation between feel at home in Universiti Putra Malaysia and other variables of the study (sense of attachment, feel secured, happy to live in UPM, proud of UPM image, comfortable campus design, social and physical attachment). The

result demonstrates that more improvement to the current design is needed to facilitate the attachment and make the international students feel at home in UPM campus and further attract internationals abroad.

#### notes:

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