

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, 1996). 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)

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

4. METHODOLOGY

The findings are based on field surveys conducted 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.

5. LINKING ACTIVITY WITH PLACE ATTACHMENT DIMENSIONS

The findings suggest that activity has been regarded as the most influential component influencing place attachment. The form and pattern of streets' activities define the way the users attach to the streets. The ability of the places to sustain their vitality through people and activities indicates a strong functional attachment. The following sections discuss the attributes and characteristics strongly associated with activity and its linkage with place attachment. Gathered from literature review and local issues and concern, the attributes include vitality, diversity, choice and transaction.

5.1 Vitality through liveliness and pedestrian movement

The results shown in Table 1.0 indicated that JBB has the highest level of vitality; although the streets (JMI-TAR, JP and JBB) were strongly regarded as the liveliest spots in the city centre of Kuala Lumpur. Majority of the respondents agreed that the ambiance of the places is generated by the street activities and people watching. Unlike JBB, JMI-TAR and JP lack spots for entertainment.

VITALITY (N=330)				
	Statements	Mean Value		
		JMITAR	JP	JBB
01	The most lively spot in KL [LIVELY]	3.28	3.15	3.28
02	More exciting street activities [EXCITING]	2.95	3.04	3.10
03	Place for watching people and their activities [PEOPLE]	3.12	3.28	3.15
04	A lot of spots for entertainment [ENTERTAINMENT]	2.43	2.64	2.99
	Response format Mean value 1= Strongly disagree 4= Strongly agree	2.93	3.03	3.13

Source : Field survey (2005)

Table 1.0 Characteristics Associated with the Vitality of JMI-TAR, JP and JBB Based on Mean Values

The respondents perceived JBB and JMI-TAR as having more exciting activities despite the energy and enthusiasm observed in JP. Unique to this place, the street vendors and the trading activities along JP greatly contribute to the bustling atmosphere particularly at night time. The effects of electronic and digital billboards, shop-front signage and street lightings further intensify the liveliness of the places, in particular JBB. Results from the observation indicated that the intensity of users' concentration increases around the entrance lobby of the main shopping complexes and department stores.

Movement through public space is at the heart of urban experience, an important factor in generating life and activity (Carmona et al., 2003). The active street frontages and pedestrian movement along the building corridors reinforced by the diversity of ground floor commercial uses underlined the vitality of the streets. Results from observations indicated that there was a significant difference in the energy generated by the presence of people during

weekends and public holidays and the roles of occasional events and special celebration in enhancing the streets' activities. This is evident during the weekly night market in Lorong TAR, daily bazaar in the month of Ramadhan and Chinese New Year in JP. For example, events such as musical performance are strongly associated with JBB. In the case of JP, the role of street vendors occupying the pedestrianised street contributes to the intensity of the crowd and unique atmosphere. It was also apparent that intensity of shoppers and visitors in JMI-TAR rapidly increased from morning to evening. In addition to the coming and going of visitors, the streets are enlivened by the continuous flow of pedestrian. This is because the streets function not only as shopping locations, but also as pedestrian routes linking the transport nodes (e.g. Masjid Jamek LRT station) with the shopping magnets (e.g. Sogo, Pertama Complex).

Despite lacking of comfortable pocket parks and public open spaces as a platform for people to gather, the streets sustain its vitality through business transaction and more passive activities such as observing and browsing goods. However, there has not been enough space provided for people watching despite higher level of agreement on the characteristics of the streets as such. The results shown in Table 2.0 indicate that there is a strong relationship between the functional attachment (Best place : 'This place is the best place for what I would like to do') and characteristics distinct to the streets' such as liveliness (JMI, JP), exciting streets activity (JMI) and more spots for entertainment (JP, JBB). Majority of the respondents who identified strongly with these characteristics also agreed that the places are the best locations to do as one pleases.

Place	Functional Attachment	VITALITY (N=330)			
		Lively	Exciting	People watching	Entertainment
JMI	Best place	96.3%	81.9%	86.7%	41.0%
JP	Best place	92.3	87.7	93.8	70.8
JBB	Best place	96.3	87.8	87.8	76.5

Source : Field survey (2005)

Note : 'Best place' is referred to a statement : 'This is the best place for what I would like to do'.

The percentage indicates the degree of agreement only

Table 2.0 Correlation between Vitality of JMI-TAR, JP and JBB with the Functional Attachment

5.2 Diversity of uses, activities, goods and streets' users

The shopping streets are located within prime mixed-use areas in the city centre. It is evident in all cases that the mixture of activities contribute to place diversity and choices. Results for diversity and choice shown in Table 3.0 are highly above average. The positive perception is associated with choices of products available, choices of food and eating spaces and people activities and their diverse socio-cultural background. The key uses include the street vendor (JMI-TAR, JP), textile and clothing (JMI-TAR) and restaurant/food store/café (JMI-TAR, JP, JBB). The shopping complexes and the departmental stores offer varieties of products within a single building.

DIVERSITY AND CHOICE (N=330)				
	Statements	Mean Value		
		JMITAR	JP	JBB
01	Sell almost everything that is needed [SELL]	3.34	3.12	3.24
02	More choices of food and eating places [FOOD]	3.13	3.15	3.18
03	Full of activities, day and night [FULL OF ACTIVITY]	2.94	3.25	3.14
04	A full mixture of people from all walks of life and background [MIX]	3.29	3.45	3.55
	Response format Mean value 1= Strongly disagree 4= Strongly agree	3.13	3.24	3.28

Source : Field survey (2005)

Table 3.0 Characteristics Associated with Diversity and Choice of JMI-TAR, JP and JBB

The study has discovered that activity is strongly linked with the functional attachment to the places. Results shown in Table 4.0 indicate a strong correlation between respondents who felt that the streets are the best place for what they would like to do with the diversity of the places.

Place	Functional Attachment	DIVERSITY (N=330)			
		Sell everything	Food	Day and night	Mixture of people
JMITAR	Best place	92.8%	78.3%	69.9%	89.2%
JP	Best place	84.6	87.7	86.2	92.3
JBB	Best place	90.2	84.1	79.0	91.3

Source : Field survey (2005)

Note : 'Best place' is referred to a statement : 'This is the best place for what I would like to do'.

The percentage indicates the degree of agreement only

Table 4.0 Correlation between Diversity of JMI-TAR, JP and JBB with the Functional Attachment

Jacobs (1999) reveals that the best streets are those that are physically, economically and socially diverse, the likely effects of which there are longer period of activities and liveliness, contributing to a more vital public realm. Based on the analysis of the building uses, the shopping streets are composed by the various types of functions within traditional shophouses, low rise buildings offices and departmental stores, highrise office buildings, hotels and modern shopping malls as well as residential units. Street vendors are strongly associated with the traditional streets (JMI-TAR, JP) due to their distinct methods of transaction, cheaper prices and availability of distinct products. Results from observation indicated that the ground floor levels are predominantly occupied by commercial uses including textile, traditional costumes, jewellery, bookshop, food and restaurant and communication service shop. Textile and clothing make up the majority of the shophouses. In the case of JP, it was evident that the street vending activities greatly contributed to the distinct sense of place. According to Nurhayati (2001) JP is known for its small scale and wholesale trading activities and diversity of local and traditional Chinese food. On the other hand, the ground level of JBB is dominated by hotel lobbies, shopping malls, specialized restaurants, banking centres and entertainment spots which are less accessible to the public.



Fig. 2.0 Malay shoppers in the middle of shopping activity for Malay costumes and textiles within the arcade of JMI.



Fig. 3.0 Variety of goods and choices of traditional products sold by the vendors in JMI.

Diversity has been influential in encouraging attachment and attraction to the shopping streets. It is associated with the variety of goods and specialties pertinent to the needs of the streets' users. Their needs are fulfilled because they can get almost everything that is needed for their daily lives and appropriate to their way of life and culture. For instance, JMI-TAR offers Malay, Indian Muslim and Indian traditional costumes such as *baju kurung*, *baju Melayu* and *saris* which are highly in demand particularly during festive seasons.



Fig. 4.0 Variety of products characterizes the image of JP

The choices and availability of local foods is another factor encouraging attraction to the places. They can be found both in the varieties of restaurants and food stalls selling traditional Malay, Indian and Chinese cuisines. The Saturday night market along Lorong Tunku Abdul Rahman displays the diversity of these products. The business activities are usually extended after 10 pm and this encourages further transaction and interaction. The need for specialized items demanded by the dominant ethnic group occupying and shopping in the areas is more apparent in JMI-TAR as compared to JP and JBB.

Users are the key elements in generating the liveliness and attraction for shopping. Their presence and intention create the spirit of the place. Density and diversity of users support transaction and vitality of a place which contribute to stronger attachment. Findings from the survey indicated that the mixture of people from all walks of life and their varied background as one of the strongest characteristics of the shopping streets (JMI-TAR, JP, JBB) and therefore the ability of the streets to accommodate needs and desire of the users and choices offered for different economic and socio-cultural background are vital for continued attachment. Users' varied roles and functions influence the diversity of activities in the streets. Their roles of being in the streets create diverse ways of relating themselves to others and influence the types of elements and attributes of the place that they are strongly attached to. The variety of different uses, people, activities and experiences provide a perceptual mixed where different users interpret places in different ways, thus taking on varied meanings (Bentley et al., 1985). Result from the observation indicates that the type of economic activities determines the characteristics of users who occupied the streets. JMI-TAR is strongly associated with the Indian Muslims and the Malay users while JP is strongly associated with the Chinese users. JBB reflects more of the mixture of all ethnic backgrounds as well as foreign tourists.

The function of the shopping streets as platform for trading and shopping is supported by other related activities such as cultural, educational and recreational. This explains an assumption made by other scholars that the greater the number and range of needs met by a place, the more positive a person's feelings will be toward that place (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981). It is evident from this research that the degree of economic dependency on the shopping streets is very high. This is described by the pattern of engagement based on daily association and the shoppers' frequency of visits to the areas. It is also reflected in the level of familiarity due to longer period of engagement with the streets. This situation can be linked to Moore and Graefe (1994) and Smaldone's (2005) findings that place dependence is associated with strength of association between a person and specific place and the degree to which occupants perceive themselves to be strongly associated with and dependent on a particular place.

5.3 Transaction and interaction

Transaction is the core function of the shopping streets therefore it has a significant influence in the way the places are perceived by the respondents. The roles of economic activities, prices of goods and socio-cultural bonding are vital in supporting continued attachment and repeated visits. It is evident that JMI-TAR and JP have greater advantage in terms of prices of goods sold which is supported by the presence of many street vendors and small-scaled trading activities. Despite having similar characteristics in terms of availability of products, diversification in the types and scales of businesses has contributed to greater attraction for shopping. In this case, JMI-TAR indicates more diverse uses particularly on the ground floor level. Majority of the respondents agreed that the places offer the best price, has numerous shops associated with communication and higher concentration of street vendors. It was discovered that users in JP and JMI-TAR identified strongly with bargaining and street vending activities while users of JBB were strongly associated with their attachment to the outdoor eating spaces and entertainment activities.

Beside shopping activities in modern complexes, the traditional pattern of transaction characterized the image of the places. The presence of illegal and 'informal' traders on the sidewalk adds to the diversity of the places. They have significant roles in creating unique atmosphere and heighten the vitality of the streets. The sound of people bargaining and the smell of food add to the distinct sensory of the places. Other elements of attraction are food and street entertainment from the street musicians. Another aspect that influences the intensity of the transaction is the opening hours and the duration of business hours. It was observed that JP and JBB offer at least 10 hours of opening time. Buying and selling activities until around 10.30pm (JP) and continuous street activities and entertainment until midnight (JBB) encourage longer interaction. As suggested by Montgomery (1996), transaction is encouraged if the opening hour of the businesses is extended where meeting, movement and exchange continue during day and night. Results from the in-depth interviews suggest the significance of diversity of economic activities, choices (JP, JBB) and the sense of dependence for economic sustainability (JMI). It is found that there is a strong relationship between the transaction and the functional attachment for JMI-TAR, however it is less so for JP and JBB.

Prices of good have been identified as one of the main factors that attract the respondents to shop in JMI-TAR. Despite the presence of a large number of street vendors in JP, the respondents from the surveys did not strongly associate this factor with their attachment to the street. However, shoppers who were interviewed linked their attachment with the availability of abundance of items at reasonable prices. Comparatively, JBB is known for up market goods and designers' collection. Therefore it does not reflect similar response. JMI-TAR and JP offer a greater price range therefore they become the attractions for shoppers from various income levels. For instance, the products range from the exclusive silk and textile (e.g. Euro Moda, Gulati's etc.) to typical textile and clothing shops selling lower price items for budget shoppers. Special promotions and offers during sales period are regarded as the main factor in drawing shoppers to the shopping malls and bigger stores in the areas.

It can be inferred that the shopping streets are vital in engaging people in acquiring goods and services as well as to connect them with other streets' users. Concurrently, the socio-cultural interaction is established through personal interaction, economic transaction and public events. In this regards, Montgomery (1998) stated that transaction based on economic activity is an important form of interaction. A good urban place also provides space for social and cultural transaction through friendship; events and occasions thus allow place attachment to be cultivated. Responses from the in-depth interviews have indicated that there is an established functional as well as emotional bonding between traders and street vendors due to frequent interaction and long period of engagement in the same area. The direct and indirect interactions are translated in the way that the traders recognise other fellow traders by name and sight.

The interaction of users from similar ethnic background is heightened through regular religious and cultural activities such as weekly Friday prayers and occasional cultural and religious celebrations and festivals (JMI-TAR and JP). During these events, formal and informal communities and organizations are established due to regular engagement and associations. As a result, the social and cultural attachment develops and increases the level of sociability of the places and forms a stronger community identity.

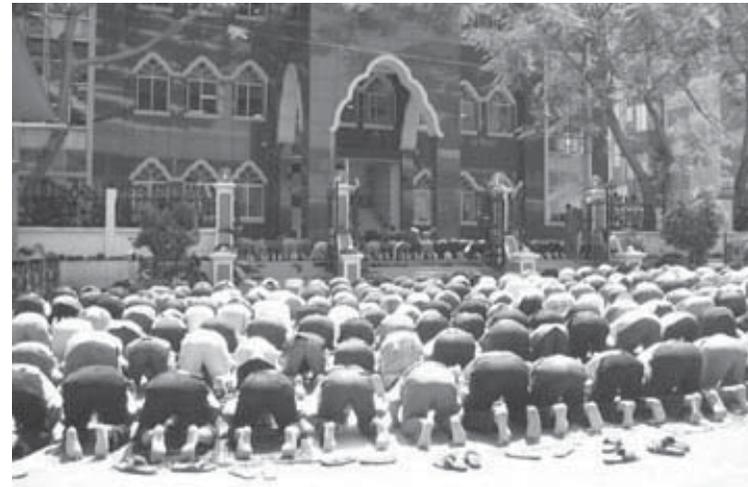


Fig. 5.0 Overflow of Muslims performing Friday prayer in the street of Masjid India

6. DISCUSSIONS

Activity as the dynamic component of the urban environment generates distinct ambience. The shopping streets are very legible in terms of activities, therefore they are regarded as a significant element in shaping the sense of place and character of the shopping districts. The ability of the streets to sustain its vibrant atmosphere through the diversity of people and activities represents the level of functional attachment between the users and the settings. In this respect, the condition can be linked to Gehl's (1987) notion that human behaviour and activity influence and shape the environment. The findings also support Jacob's theory that the best streets are those that are physically, economically and socially diverse, the likely effects of longer period of activity and liveliness contributing to a more vital and safer public realm (Jacobs, 1999). This generates the feeling of enthusiasm, familiarity and security, thus deepening the functional, emotional and social attachment to place.

The activities both produce and reflect quality in the built environment (Jacobs, 1961) and therefore the success of urban places is influenced by the ability of places to effectively accommodate human activity. The streets serve more than one primary purpose (e.g. trading) and other secondary activities

(educational and religious). This has ensured the presence of people on the streets at different times of the day. With various types of uses at different scales of transaction, the shopping streets are places for multi-types of engagement. The findings reinforce the idea that diversity is a vital attribute in urban setting through the mixture of different things providing degree of choice and the range of uses available to people (Bentley, et al., 1985; Dolbani, 2000). The high number of pedestrian encourages greater potential for buying and selling activities. In addition to that, the weekly night market receives huge crowd indicating interest towards traditional manner of transaction where bargaining is still practised.

It was discovered in this research that the users are functionally and emotionally attached to the shopping streets due to varied meanings and levels of significance. The meanings associated with the places are related to personal as well as group experiences and strongly linked to the component of place activity. The attachment is driven by the economic transaction, sequences of events, the people and local culture together with memory of past experience, history of place and streetscape elements (e.g. place markers, nodes etc.). The findings suggest that the meanings of the places are strongly associated with the economic activities and the distinct atmosphere than the physical appearance of building forms and imageability of architectural images. This can be linked to the idea that ongoing activities contribute to feelings of attachment to places (Pellow and Low, 1992). However, the physical elements are regarded as important in supporting the activities.

Users' varied roles and intention of being in the streets create diverse ways of relating themselves to others and influence the elements and attributes of the place they are strongly attached to. The role of social transaction is reflected in the sense of welcoming between the visitors and the occupiers of the streets and hence promoting community interaction that begets the sense of place.

7. CONCLUSION

The research demonstrates that place attachment is strongly linked to activities. The streets' activities have been regarded as the most influential components influencing place attachment as reflected in the users' high degree of dependence on the streets for economic sustenance and personal needs. The economic as well as the socio-cultural interactions accentuate stronger place identity and the community identity. Vitality (atmosphere, pedestrian intensity and movement), diversity and choice (uses, products and users) and transaction

(economic transaction and socio-cultural interaction) are some of the key attributes of place activity that have a strong connection to attachment. These contribute to the sense of place and sustain the meanings and attachment embraced by the users. Understanding of the linkage between place attachment and activity attributes and characteristics benefit planners and urban designers in the making and revitalising the meaningful urban places.

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