Functional Attachment in Kuching Riverfront Promenade, Sarawak - Malaysia

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Abstract. The relationship between people and certain places can stimulate the sense of place, this process is recognized as place attachment. Place attachment also indicates the relationship between physical image and its function, through this process the sense of a place can be established. These concepts focus on the physical elements and activities together with the user-influenced meanings that will create the identity and the meaning of the place. Allowing for this issue, the research examines the functional attachment which will affect the level of attachment in Kuching Riverfront Promenade (KRP), a popular public space among local people. By using indirect method to simplify common patterns and human-specific patterns of the place, this research covers subject of place attachment. Questionnaire survey was carried out at several areas at the promenade with an overall of 165 respondents and 18 stall operators were interviewed. The findings point out that the respondents have strong association with the local environment and designate the importance of place as economics dependence and recreational place. The level of functional attachment to KRP is between level 1 to level 4. Measuring at level 4 involves a higher commitment in loyalty, goals and responsibility to the environment.

Keywords: place attachment, functional attachment, sense of place

1. Introduction
A place cannot be understood without taking into account the three components i.e. physical features or forms; activities and functions; and meanings or symbols [1]. It explains that a place consists of physical form, activity and meaning. Canter [2] has similar opinion that a place is a combination of three aspects consisting of the activities, the concept of place and the physical environment. The strong relationship that exists between emotional (affective) and functional in such space or relationship between people and certain places can stimulate the sense of place, this process is recognized as place attachment [3]. Place attachment in this study indicates the relationship between physical image and its function or relationship between the user and a particular place. Through this process the meaning of a place can be developed. This research argues that the consequences of inappropriate physical change may affect the meaning of the place and the attachment of the place will be gradually reduced. The research investigates this issue by using place-based concepts and principles. These concepts and principles focus on the physical elements and activities together with the meanings possessed by the users that will generate the identity of the city and the meaning of the place. Within this framework, the study focuses on the dimension of place attachment in examining the psychological aspects of the place and its relation to
the physical component. Therefore, this research is intended to identify the place attachment of the riverfront promenade in a city that is popular, in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia.

Kuching Riverfront Promenade (KRP) was chosen as a case study. It is a popular public open space located in front of the main road of Kuching, a city in the state of Sarawak, Malaysia. KRP was officially opened to public on 3rd September 1993. The development of KRP has not only introduced public open space, but also a recreational place, which generated the development of a city landmark. Furthermore, KRP which is commonly known as “the People Place”, is furnished with facilities for entertainment, refreshment, relaxation, cultural and art performances [4]. KRP has received three international awards in 1994. This study focuses to recognize the exact form and level of functional and emotional attachment of the user in KRP. This research is important in identifying the localities of a place within a city as a place character which is meaningful to the people.

2. Literature Review

Place attachment is the main concept in this study. Definitions of place attachment consist of positive emotional attachments between individuals within their setting and environment [5]. The psychological situation of well-being which is generated from access into places or circumstances will also affect human perceptions about the place [6]. Meanwhile Hummon [7] argues that the level of human emotional investment within the place indicates the level of successful neighbourhood to become a place. Place attachment and related concepts of sense of place have overwhelmed the theory for the past three decades [1] [2] [5]. In the last 15 years, various studies have been made to explore these concepts empirically. This empirical study focusses on measuring the intensity of attachment.

Place attachment arises through the influence of relationships between humans and places because of satisfaction, value and the experience of people to a special place [8]. The quality of a place has been measured to the way how it is perceived and valued by people. It is very important that attention should be given to the influence of place dimensions, since urban environment purposes are to be utilized by society and how they perceive it [9]. Place can be a success if it is constructed based on the perception of the users, the question whether a place has a such meaning or not for people can be explained through understanding the attachment of the place in depth.
Recent research explains the sense of place and place attachment by using quantitative method. There are several variables used to measure attachments include: familiarity, period of discourse, reliance, place of identity, sense of belonging and sense of place [1] [10] [11] [12]. Shamai [11] develops seven levels of measurement criteria as a tool to understanding the sense of place or sense to different size of territories level (refer to Table 1). According to him, not all ratings are suitable for use as all types of places. Based on measurements criteria, the level of attachment can start from the 0 (zero) to 6th level. In this research, measurements of sense of place can help researchers in identifying the form and level of functional attachment in KRP.

Table 1: Sense of place level, according to Shamai [11]

| Level | Sense of place criteria | Keywords                                                                 |
|-------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0     | Has no sense of place   | There is no attachment                                                  |
| 1     | Knowing being in place  | Knowing; understanding symbols                                           |
| 2     | Has sense of belonging to the place | Sense of belonging; togetherness; sense of same fate; respected symbols |
| 3     | Has attachment to the place | Emotion; meaning; experience; symbol; identity; personality; uniqueness; difference |
| 4     | Understand the place goals | Share goals; loyalty; obedience                                           |
| 5     | Has a place engagement  | Commitment; engagement; behaviour; investment of human resources in group activities; actively involved. |
| 6     | Sacrifice for the place | Sacrifice; good commitment                                              |

3. Methodology
The basic dimensions of place attachment are known as a perception of place as something unique or different and assessment or meaning whether it is negative or positive [13] To assess perception of the environment, scholars generally use two methods, i.e. direct and indirect assessment [14] [15]. Indirect methods include self-reports (questionnaires, interview, checklist and description) and time-sampling [16]. The direct method involves the phenomenology approach, to check and describe the human situation and the events that occur, as happens spontaneously in everyday life [17]. This approach can be generated through a critical description of what has been happened, having thrown away all the initial hypothesis about the object [18]. The goal is to understand qualitatively the uniqueness of the holistic meaning of a place.

This research used indirect methods (questionnaires, interviews, observation) to clarify common patterns and human-specific patterns of the place. The survey was conducted through 165 respondents that consisted of the mobile users (82) and static users (83). The static users are the crucial users such as the shop-owners, the shop-keepers and sidewalk vendors while the mobile users are the visitors, students and local residents who came to visit the place. At the same time eighteen (18) in depth interviews were also carried out in the study area. The respondents represent the main users of the place such as: shop owners, shop keepers, sidewalk vendors, visitors, students and locals. The age of the respondents is mainly between 18-24 and 25-49 years old, where nearly 60% of them are women. Indicator for each attribute constructed in the questionnaire for the evaluation is cross examining with the literature. The format of this assessment is planned based on a 5-point scale derived from the fairness quality measurement. In the analysis, the result of the evaluation is obtained through triangulation of the data, interview and observation. It is assumed that the nature of attachment is determined by the place attributes with the function of riverfront promenade.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Form of Functional Attachment
The response from the interview as shown in Table 2 suggests that the attachment has been expressed in terms of length of engagement, level of familiarity, level of dependency, level of satisfaction and...
sense of comfort. This shows the importance of open space in supporting economic and social activities. There is also indication that a place relies on earning fixed income and business opportunities during events or festivals. Level of satisfaction is expressed through the availability and diversity of public facilities, street access, the intensity of visitors and buyers. Physical and environmental comfort is reflected in the ease of accessibility, facilities associated with weather protection. Respondents were generally satisfied with the physical enhancement of open space and path, various and diversity of products, and attract visitors and buyers. While other respondents mentioned the significance of location and pedestrian intensity in supporting their attachment to KRP.

| Indicator       | Place                                                                 |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                 | Kuching Riverfront Promenade (KRP)                                   |
| Engagement      | − Engagement from morning to evening.                                |
|                 | − Attachment to the place is due to long periods of engagement.       |
|                 | − Attachment to the place because of long-term relationship.          |
|                 | − Continuous visit especially during holidays and new year increases familiarity. |
|                 | − Street vendors and trading activities                               |
|                 | − Leisure and entertainment                                          |
|                 | − The attraction for food and drinks                                  |
| Keywords:       | Familiarity, Street Vendor, Social, Relationships.                   |
| Familiarity     | − Very familiar with the place.                                      |
|                 | − Can describe the area very well, very imageable                    |
|                 | − Can illustrate physical changes in detail                           |
|                 | − Know most other hawkers                                            |
|                 | − Always engage with the street vendors that are visited frequently and very familiar with them |
| Keywords:       | Images, Changes, Hawkers, Events.                                   |
| Dependency      | − Place to acquire income                                            |
|                 | − The place is chosen because of its economic potential and the attachment to the place. |
|                 | − A good understanding over the space due to its length of engagement.|
|                 | − Attachment to the place because it is easy to earn money at.        |
|                 | − Attachment is due to business profits                              |
| Keywords:       | Income, Economy, Attachment, Control                               |
| Satisfaction    | − Satisfied with various transportation and convenience facilities    |
|                 | − The ideal place to maintain a living and daily necessities          |
|                 | − Satisfied with the various items of food and drinks offered at a low price |
|                 | − Satisfied with the place as it attracted many people to visit       |
|                 | − A special highlight of food and drinks                              |
| Keywords:       | Diversity, Sustainable life, Low price                              |
| Comfort         | − A comfortable place to work and visit because of its convenience facilities and cheaper price |
|                 | − Happy and comfortable with the place                                |
|                 | − Easy to get places to eat, comfort access and walking               |
| Keywords:       | Facility, Price, Access, Walk                                        |

4.2. Level of Functional Attachment

Result from questionnaire survey on the functional attachment, generally indicates a more positive answer. Respondents were asked to respond to statements showing their attachment to the place. The measurement value of 2.72 out of 4.0 (as summarized in Table 3) expresses higher than the average value. This indicates that the respondents have strong functional attachment to KRP. Respondents strongly agree that KRP is the best place for their purpose, they feel comfortable being there as compared to being at other open places in the city and are satisfied with the improvements that have been made to the area. The response to the statement 01 (No other location is better than this place) has very strong functional attachment (2.88). Results show that (shown in Figure 2) more positive responses were
collected from respondents at KRP. They felt that open spaces and street space satisfy them and function appropriately. They also felt very comfortable being there compared to other places in the city.

Table 3: The level of functional attachment to KRP based on the average value

| Component                  | Statement                                           | KRP          |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| FUNCTIONAL ATTACHMENT       |                                                     |              |
| N=165                       |                                                     |              |
| 01                          | No other location is better than this place (Best)  | 2.88         |
| 02                          | I feel more comfortable in this location (comfortable) | 2.77         |
| 03                          | This place is the best location to meet my goals (Goals) | 2.68         |
| 04                          | This location is very important to me (Important)   | 2.53         |

Response format: 1= strongly disagree, 4= strongly agree

Average Value 2.72

Figure 2: Level of functional attachment to KRP based on percentage of the response (N=165)

5. Conclusion

Based on the result, it is concluded that the respondents (static and mobile) described the importance of place as economic dependence place and recreational place. In short, the respondents felt that KRP is a suitable place because of its functional access between open space and the road. They also suggested that KRP is the best option in supporting their activities compared to other areas. This area is also very important in their lives as it becomes their place of dependence for personal needs and a major place of livelihood. It is concluded that the attributes associated with the dominant function in KRP are influenced by the form of functional attachment. According to the measurement of the sense of place developed by Shamai [11], it can be concluded that the level of functional attachment to KRP is between level 1 to level 4. Measuring at level 4 involves a higher commitment to the environment which is indicated by the loyalty to daily economic activities, loyalty to business and society, and loyalty to the place as a place to earn income and daily necessities. The results also demonstrated that there are some slight different responses between static and mobile respondents. Static respondents expressed their sense of identity and place dependency, while mobile respondents were attached to the role of function of open space in KRP. The results of this study support the assumption that the level of functional attachment will vary according to the user's role in the place.

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