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## Place Attachment and the Value of Place in the Life of the Users

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### Abstract

Place attachment is a form of connection between a person and the environmental setting. In the production of urban places, planners and designers mainly focus on the quality of the physical components. However, the aspects of meanings and attachment are not adequately considered in the planning and decision-making process. This study utilizes semi-structured interview method to examine place attachment dimensions in understanding the values of a place in the life of the users. Sample cases include examining attachment to streets in the city centre of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It was evident that users' roles and ethnic backgrounds influenced their responses. Attachment to the places was economically, socially and culturally oriented and prevalent in their daily experience of the places, and the place memories recalled.

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### 1. Introduction

A review of related literature suggests that there are three major components of place: the physical form, activity and meaning (Punter, 1991). In the making of urban places, researchers emphasized on

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research related to sustaining the physical elements and activities. However the important function of meaning is less explored in urban studies. Meaning relates to the perceptual and the psychological aspects of environmental experience that forms place attachment.

The objective of this paper is to understand users' attachment to places within the city of Kuala Lumpur. It discusses the way in which people value a place based on qualitative inquiries. Using place-based approach, it focuses on the emotional sense of place embedded in the feeling, emotion and behaviour. Steadman (2003) noted that the physical features do not produce a sense of place directly, but influence the symbolic meanings of the landscape, which relates to the strength of place attachment. It is important to integrate the psychology of place in assessing place distinctiveness and values.

This paper advocates place-based approach and concepts in examining an attachment to urban places. Place is a space imbued with meanings (Relph, 1976). Relph explained that space and place are interconnected, where the physical aspects of space are ascribed meaning according to the values that people give to that place (Zakariya, Mohyuddin and Yaman, 2007). The physical and cultural characteristics combined with the individual's affective perceptions and functional needs shape place attachment (Bott, 2005). Place-based approach emphasises that the experience of place is not just physical but also perceptual and psychological and users (the public), and their experience and perception are the key source of evidence in understanding place attachment and place values. 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.

## **2. The value of place attachment**

Relph (1976) described placelessness as an environment without significant places and the underlying attitude which does not acknowledge the significance in places. The globalisation of Malaysian cities is evident in the homogeneity of buildings' scales and appearances and the loss of traditional values (Shamsudin and Ujang, 2008). These transformations have influenced the way users experienced, perceived and felt about local places and their sense of psychological wellbeing. Here, the weakening of place identity could result in the loss of meaning and disrupts emotional attachment to place (Arefi, 1999). In the case of Kuala Lumpur city, the pressure from development and demands of urban tourism over the years has resulted in the physical transformations of public spaces, including historic open space (Zakariya and Harun, 2013). As a result, new developments particularly within the traditional setting transform constructed places and established place meanings embedded in the existing social and cultural setting.

Place attachment relates to the affective aspects of environmental meaning (Altman and Low, 1992). It is embedded in the affective bond or link between people or individuals and particular places (Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001). It was evident in the interplay of affects and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviors and actions (Prohansky et al., 1983). Place attachment was evident in the functional bonding between people and places described as place dependence (Stokol and Shumaker, 1981). Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) described, in the most basic form, the main characteristic of place attachment: the desire to maintain closeness to the object of attachment. It also describes the special feeling towards a particular place. This can be associated with elements of attraction, frequency of visits and level of familiarity.

Understanding on 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. Therefore, it enhances the value of a place as a social setting. Identification on elements that matter to users helps to ensure that any form of urban intervention will not discourage the users' daily engagement and threaten their sense of attachment to places they engage with. Human

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