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ABSTRACT PROCEEDINGS

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PLACE ATTACHMENT FOR TRADITIONAL STREETS IN HERITAGE TOWN

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ABSTRACT

Place attachment is a symbolic engagement with a place produced by emotional meaning and common sense, impacted by personal experience. It is believed that 'place' highlights the environment to which individuals are culturally and psychologically linked, whereas 'attachment' focuses on its effect on people. Traditional streets have significant cultural values and meaning to locals, unlike characterless streets. Southeast Asian cities, notably Malaysian cities, are rapidly urbanising. Many cities are shifting from traditional to modern, affecting sociocultural activities, economy, and lifestyles. Heritage town shows a masterpiece of human creativity or a significant interchange of human values over a long period of time. Heritage town where humans inhabited and used the land in a way that depicts their culture can also be a cultural heritage site, especially if the area is affected by change that cannot be reversed. This study aims to evaluate factors influencing place attachment in revitalised traditional streets in towards preserving local culture and identity in George Town, Penang. This study is sought to determine which factors influence the character of revitalised traditional streets through systematic observation with behaviour mapping is the primary research method for this study, supported by semi structured interview and questionnaires survey.

Keywords: Place attachment, traditional streets, heritage town

INTRODUCTION

Places are important for people's self- and group-identity (Davenport & Anderson, 2005). Every place with attributes includes significance, physical features, cultural values, and experiences creates a place attachment, making the place stronger and more prominent. This paper reviews the functional attachment regarding visitors' activity patterns and physical features towards the characters of study areas and emotional attachment regarding their meaning of the place, experiences and feeling towards revitalised traditional streets, and to find out how the streets related to them.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Place attachments are emotional, behavioural, and cognitive connections between people and their environments. It is a symbolic link with a place created by emotional connotations, common sense, and personal experience (Ujang and Zakariya, 2015). Place emphasises the environment to which people are culturally and psychologically attached, whereas attachment concentrates on its effect on people. The traditional street has cultural significance for the locals. Shollilah (2017)

agrees that the traditional street is one of the earliest streets and cannot be separated from the traditional settlement and city concept. The word traditional refers to time and heritage of an area to develop a physical and spiritual personality (Samadi, 2012). Shamsuddin and Ujang (2008) describe typical street elements. Traditional streets have rows of pre-War II shophouses. These shophouses were built with a "five-foot walkway" that acted as a pedestrian walkway and extended shop space. Considering the above concepts, traditional streets should reflect history and time. Traditional streets' values, settings, features, and functions provide a feeling of belonging to the place where functional and emotional bonding occurred. George Town has the largest collection of shophouses constructed before the Second World War (known as pre-war shophouses) in the Southeast Asia (Tan, 2013).

The existence of modern structures in Malaysia is having an impact on the traditional street, where everyone now prefers to do indoor shopping rather than outdoor shopping. According to Ujang (2008), the development of large-scale shopping complexes in the city centre has resulted in the disappearance of numerous smaller and independent shophouses. As a result of the appeal to one-stop commercial centres for shopping and leisure activities, the diversity of street activities has been diminishing (Shuhana et. al., 2004). In relation to the above-mentioned issue, Ching (2013) brings our attention to the fact that residents of George Town struggle to cope with the high costs and stress associated with property restoration. Instead of restoring their properties, they chose to relocate, resulting in the loss of the original community. The rapid loss of the original community is believed to result in a loss of identity for George Town. Shuhana (2007) claiming that the renovation of the 'five-foot walkway' element of the structure to a new development method are introduced has had an impact on conventional streets. This problem has arisen in Georgetown, where the five-foot portion has been eliminated from certain revitalised traditional streets. As a result, many traditional shophouses have been altered or demolished and rebuilt as shopping malls with a different style and size from the surrounding structures (Sholliah, 2017). This growth jeopardises the continuity of the existing townscape; even modern shopping mall designs, do not fit well physically with their historic settings. It fit in Georgetown, where 1st Avenue Mall, Prangin Mall, and Komtar Walk have been built near traditional streets. As a result, this research will ensure that the richness of revitalised traditional streets in George Town will preserve with the presence of attachment between people, place, and emotions.

PLACE ATTACHMENT

Place attachment consists of emotional and functional attachments formed between a person and a setting. It is the creation of an emotional relationship or link between individuals or individuals and specific places (Ujang and Samsuddin, 2008 from Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001). Attachment can also be observed in the functional bonding of people and places, known as place dependence (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981). This point of view is shared by Low and Altman (1992), who claim that the word place emphasises the environmental surroundings to which people are culturally and psychologically linked, whereas the word attachment emphasises the influence on people. When these two elements are met, people gravitate to the streets in terms of familiarity and participation.

PLACE ATTACHMENT DIMENSIONAL CONCEPT

There are various points of view on the place attachment dimensional concept. In tourism, place attachment is viewed as a multidimensional construct made up of two or more sub-constructs (Piera, 2017). First, place identity- a location informs a person's or persons' identity as well as the composites of its distinguishing characteristics (Proshansky, 1995). Second, place dependency which is the individual's attachment to a physical setting. Dependence on regular

income, economic prospects, and other factors all influence continuing attachment. Finally, the most familiar areas are those that are often used or visited.

PLACE ATTACHMENT FACTORS

Functional attachments are primarily concerned with how effectively a location is attached or responds to the user's expectations. While emotional attachment refers to bonding those results in significant emotional responses, meanings, and a sense of belonging as expressed by respondents (Shollilah, 2017). These findings indicate that the functional and emotional experience of the environment has the greatest impact on the development of a sense of place and place identity.

PLACE ATTACHMENT ATTRIBUTES

Places are made up of three major interconnected components that give places meaning: the physical setting, the individual's internal psychological and social processes and qualities, and the activities performed at the location (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). According to Zulkifli, A., and Aminuddin, A. (2020) from Montgomery, when people experience a place, it is the physical form, activities, and meanings linked with the site that combine to establish place attachment (1998). This emphasises the importance of observers in the development of streetscapes. People, for example, instantly recognise and remember building facades. Commercial activity, whether official (store) or informal (street vendor, street café), adds to the street's vitality and bustle. The image or meaning of place refers to the visual and psychological features of an environmental experience as perceived by humans. Functional and emotional links with place attachment arise as a result of adopting their meanings, symbols, and identities.

METHODOLOGY

The primary research approach for this study is systematic observation using behaviour mapping, which is supported by semi-structured interviews and questionnaire surveys. The observations in this study are employed to document the behaviour activities that occur along the street. In the pilot tests, activity checklists with appropriate observation symbols and a coding system were used to record the activities performed by participants. This coding system enables researchers and assistants to collect more accurate real-time data on location. Since coloured and alphabetical symbols are easier to memorise, they can speed up the mapping process. According to Kvale (2007), interviews in the context of qualitative research are one of the most powerful methods for capturing the experiences and meanings that individuals encounter in their daily lives. There are two target groups for semi-structured interviews: (1) shop owners and (2) professionals. The owners of historic shophouses are initially approached to understand their feelings and experiences. While three representatives, Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang, George Town World Heritage Trust, and Registered Landscape Architect, were chosen based on their skills and experience in their respective fields. This interview is vital for validating data analysis from systematic behaviour mapping and questionnaire survey, as well as providing their perspective on relevant design strategy recommendations to enhance the character of revitalised traditional streets in George Town, Pulau Pinang. The research on the factors influencing place attachment in revitalised traditional streets appeared to be qualitative in terms of people's preferences, feelings, ideas, and experiences. However, the obtained data can be made quantitative and easily analysed by counting the frequency of a set of replies. Questionnaire sets were distributed to locals and visitors who have visited these three streets. Several constant variables are chosen to assure the validity of the data collected and the study findings. The distribution of questionnaire surveys is critical to assess the user's emotional attachment to the area, experiences, and feelings toward revitalised traditional streets, and to discover how the streets related to them.

CASE STUDY AREAS

To choose the area of the research study, it is necessary to adhere to several traditional street requirements that are included in the definition of a revitalised traditional street. The listing of traditional streets organised by state, with prominence given to traditional streets that are particularly notable in that state. The selection criteria were based on the meaning of the traditional streets itself such as pre-world war II shophouses, presence of ‘five-foot’ walkway, used as transition space, narrowed streets and consist of tourism, cultural and communal activities and lastly, recognised by UNESCO World Heritage. There are several lists of traditional streets in Malaysia which are, Jalan Tuanku Abdul Rahman, Jalan Petaling, Jalan Masjid India, Jalan Tan Hiok Nee, Lebuah Armenian, Lebuah Acheh, Lebuah Cannon, Lebuah Campbell, Jonker Walk and Concubine Lane. From the list of traditional streets three streets have been selected: Lebuah Armenian, Lebuah Acheh and Lebuah Cannon.



Source: Author

Figure 1: Map of Lebuah Armenian, Lebuah Acheh and Lebuah Cannon

Lebuah Armenian, Lebuah Acheh and Lebuah Cannon (Figure 1) can be found within the core zone of George Town World Heritage site and linked to each other. It is surrounded by Chinese Temples and Clan Houses, in addition to the nearby mosques of Acheen Street and Kapitan Keling. Lebuah Armenian is famous for its street uniqueness. The 300m-long street is host to the several residential shophouses, bicycle shop, museums, mosques and temples, the George Town World Heritage Office. While Lebuah Acheh and Lebuah Cannon linked to Lebuah Armenian are known to some of the best of street art in all of Penang. There are various social activities took place in these streets such as trading, busking, walking, sightseeing, performing arts and entertainment, street vendor activities. These activities create a vibrant and lively environment

towards the traditional streets itself. However, some issue has been mentioned above need to be resolved. Therefore, these streets have been chosen for this study and they have all the criteria.

CONCLUSION

Literature review helps to identify the factors and elements of place attachment that can be the key indicator for this study. It is crucial to indicate the elements of place attachment to highlight the factors influence place attachment in traditional streets. Systematic observation with behaviour mapping helps to evaluate the user's functional attachment regarding their activity patterns and physical features towards the characters of traditional streets. However, for the second objective, it requires visitors' opinions and preferences regarding their emotions, meaning of the place, and experiences towards revitalised traditional streets and how they depend on the streets. Thus, a semi-structured interview to the shophouses owner is required to provide their opinions and recommendations. Lastly, a good recommendation for suitable design is needed in order to enhance and sustain the character of the revitalised traditional streets in heritage town.

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DECLARATION

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