The Life of Place
Spaces
Places and Narratives

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Experience of Green Spaces as Nature in the Urban Environment

Mazlina Mansor

Introduction

This chapter presents the experiences of users with various types of green spaces in Taiping, a town in the northern part of Peninsular Malaysia. It explores how the town residents feel when they view and are in contact with natural features and facilities in the green spaces. It identifies the effects from the experiences and how people are affiliated with the green spaces in their town. This study is called the experiences as experiential contact. The experiential contact with the properties and attributes of green spaces may happen through participation in active, leisure and social activities of the users. It therefore identifies particular attributes of the green spaces that may be favourable to the users or otherwise.

Experiential Contacts and Green Spaces

Places are settings and backdrops of people’s everyday actions. A place offers a variety of spaces that can have impact on people, physically, psychologically and socially. A personal bond may even develop between an individual and a place. This means that the setting becomes a meaningful place to the individual. This is why some environments are valued by people (Altman & Low, 1992). A place is given a meaning when there are physical and emotional links to the places through individuals’ experiential contacts. Experiential contacts involve the uses and familiarity of a person to his or her environment. It encompasses aspects when users give attention to physical properties and attributes that exist in the places they experience. Emotional feeling derived from aesthetic experience of the place may also be formed from the experiential contacts. This can happen when users experience a space by participating in activities, observing the green space’s environment and by developing social relationships with other users who are also engaged in activities in the green spaces. According to Pretty, Peacock, Sellens, and Griffin (2005), and Maller, Towisend, Pryor, Brown, and St Leger (2005), experiential contact involves engagements in various activities consisting of three types of behavioural actions: (a) by viewing properties and attributes of a place, (b) by being in the spaces, and (c) by actively participating in physical-kinetic activities in the environment. Thus, the environment that the users observe and involve in activities is actually a setting which action takes place to achieve their aims (Ittelson, Franck & O’Hanlon, 1976). A bond to a particular place may also grow from this interaction. This bond embraces the affective and emotional feelings of people to the environment. The feeling is accompanied by cognition (thought, knowledge, and belief) and practice through action and behaviour from users’ interaction with the settings. Altman and Low (1992), among others, describe the bonding of people to places as place attachment. This bond is defined as a strong emotional tie, temporary or long lasting between a person and a particular physical location (Sime, 1995). Thus, the bond will develop as the individuals get to know the setting and thus endow it with value (Relph, 1976).

Users’ reasons for using a green space may fall into three main voluntary activities: (i) physical and kinetic experiences, including walking activities, active enjoyment, such as sports and specific exercise activities, (ii) informal and leisure recreations, and (iii) social activities including attending events (Tanaka, Takano, Nakamura & Takeuchi, 1996; Takano, Nakamura, & Watanabe 2002; Kuo, 2003; Woolley, 2003; Bird, 2004; Shaftoe, 2008). Physical-kinetic experience involves active engagements such as walking, jogging, exercising and playing sports (e.g. badminton and football). The activities are interpreted to produce physical outcomes such as active living, a healthy feeling, and vitality, hence resulting in a feeling of bodily health. Active recreations involving