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ORGANISED BY

Landscape Architecture Seminar (LAN653)
Semester October 2023 – Feb 2024
Bachelor Degree in Landscape Architecture
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THE PERCEPTIONS OF USERS ON SENSE OF PLACE IN URBAN HERITAGE: STREET OF HARMONY, GEORGETOWN, PENANG

Nur Faiza Husna Roslan¹ & Nadiyanti Mat Nayan^{*2}
* Nadiyanti Mat Nayan

*Department of Built Environment Studies & Technology, Universiti
Teknologi MARA (Perak), Malaysia*

nurfaiza8667@gmail.com¹, nadiy028@uitm.edu.my²

ABSTRACT

Understanding 'sense of place' is key in revitalising cultural places since it symbolises a layering of histories, tangible history, and intangible heritage. This study examines the perceptions of local communities towards cultural heritage regarding sense of place in Urban Heritage Site: Street of Harmony, Georgetown, Penang Malaysia. A few surveys question was carried on with local communities, observations and digital photo analysis were also carried out. It is in the intricacies of intangible heritage practices and their authentic expression; the local communities feel attached to and claim ownership of the place. Understanding this and how it translates into the site's stewardship is critical in protecting its value, management, and ongoing revitalisation.

Keywords: *urban heritage, sense of place, perceptions*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sense of place encompasses the emotional bond that local communities develop with a specific environment and is often linked to the concept of uniqueness. This attachment is also referred to as place attachment, place identity Gospodini et al. (2004). Nowadays, urban heritage areas have gained popularity as cultural tourism destinations, driven by evolving trends in the tourism industry. These trends stem from the desire to explore diverse cultures, experience local attractions, purchase authentic products, and engage with the local community (Cahyadi and Gunawijaya, 2009). As a result, each place possesses its own distinct identity, shaped by cultural, genetic, environmental, and social factors (Qazimi, 2014). Cultural identity refers to the recognition of a person or group's distinctiveness influenced by their belongings and surroundings (Darida, 2013). Moreover, place identity is a cognitive attitude reflecting one's knowledge and awareness of a place's uniqueness, while place attachment represents an emotional connection and interest in that place. To foster a sense of place and maintain its distinct identity, urban heritage areas must actively engage with their local communities. Involving residents in decision-making processes, promoting cultural exchange programs, and supporting local artisans and businesses all contribute to the preservation of a place's unique identity. When residents take pride in their heritage, it strengthens their place attachment, and they become stewards of their cultural and historical assets.

1.1 Aim and Objectives

The study has several goals. To begin, it tries to investigate human perception and interpretation, with the goal of understanding how people see and interpret physical and cultural characteristics of a certain region. Second, the study intends to assess the emotional and psychological attachment that people make to this location, showing insights into the fundamental relationships that people form with their environment. Furthermore, the research aims to gather important input and perspectives from the local residents.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Place Identity

Proshansky et al. (1983) proposed that place identity is a crucial aspect of self-identity, encompassing an individual's thoughts and perceptions about the physical environment that surrounds them. The experience of place identity is often shaped by a series of sensations arising from interactions with tangible elements or stories

associated with a specific location. Tuan (1975) emphasized that the meaning we assign to a place is constructed through our personal experiences, and this meaning can be expressed through the arrangement of urban elements, engaging our senses and influencing our minds (Hannerz, 1992). Traditionally, the concept of the "sense of place" has emphasized direct experiences rooted in common sense. However, as material culture evolved, people gained the ability to attribute value to places, thereby creating distinctive characteristics (Tuan, 1997).

2.2 Place Attachment

In this context, place attachment is defined as the positive emotional bond that forms between an individual and their surroundings (Altman & Low, 1992, p.42). This bond encompasses feelings of relaxation, happiness, and an acknowledgment of the significance of a specific place. The value of place attachment to both the city and the community in which an individual resides has been extensively studied and has shown to bring about numerous benefits. According to the previous research has indicated that a strong sense of place attachment leads to increased engagement in social and political activities Mesch et al. (2002). Moreover, it has been found to enhance both physical and psychological well-being, while also fostering greater satisfaction with one's physical environment and social connections (Tartaglia, 2012). Conversely, individuals lacking a strong sense of place attachment tend to experience more health problems and higher levels of stress (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982).

2.3 Place Dependence

Place dependence is defined as the subjective measure of the connection between an individual and a specific location (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981, p.457). It shows the degree to which a place fulfils a person's requirements. These needs are influenced by individual interests that arise from personal backgrounds and are shaped by factors such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, race, and so on.

2.4 Sense of Place in Urban Heritage

Sense of place encompasses the processes through which individuals or groups establish connections with, rely on, and alter specific locations, along with the meanings, values, and emotions associated with those places. It is often referred to as the emotional, cognitive, and attitudinal bonds between people and their surroundings (Eaton et al., 2019). According to Hawke (2010), the attachment individuals feel towards a place varies from person to person, and the significance and worth attributed to a place by local residents may differ from the assessments made by national authorities. Cross (2015) suggests that place attachment is an active experience and identifies seven interactive processes that contribute to it: sensory perception, storytelling, historical context, spiritual connections, ideological affiliations, commodification, and material dependency. To comprehend the sense of place in tourism, it is crucial to categorize the involved elements. Geographically, a place undoubtedly possesses a physical dimension. For

instance, in a tourist shopping district, the physical aspect encompasses the architectural aspects of the shopping area, such as parking lots, buildings, signage, as well as the interior design Rahadiyanti et al. (2019). With the designation as UNESCO World Heritage Sites, tourists expect immersing themselves in the local culture, customs, architecture, arts, music, cuisine, and history.

2.5 Sensory Experience

The term "experience" encompasses numerous ways in which an individual perceives their surroundings. Some modes of sensory perception are more passive and straightforward than others. For instance, taste, smell, and touch seem to involve registering sensations triggered by external stimuli. On the other hand, hearing and, especially, seeing seem to entail an active exploration of the world around us and a more objective comprehension of it. Seeing can be regarded as a type of thinking, as it involves a discriminative and constructive process that produces reality patterns that serve human purposes. Even taste, smell, and touch are influenced by this type of thinking, as they enable us to differentiate among stimuli and describe the gustatory, olfactory, and tactile world.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The method used for this research is based on the field survey, which included semi-structured interviews and site observation. 32 respondents were selected for the semi-structured interview were conducted. The respondents selected in the survey ranged between 15 to 45 years old.

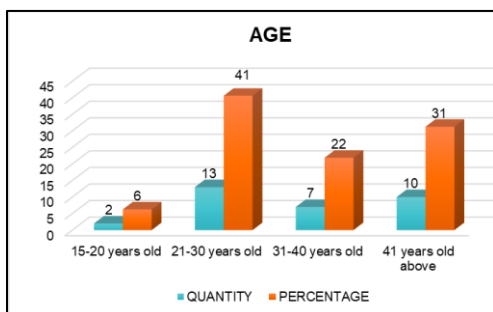


Figure 1: Age of the respondents

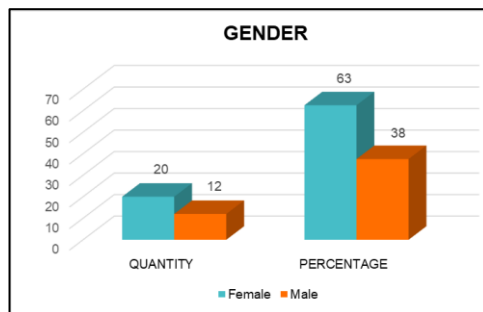


Figure 2: Gender of the respondents

3.1 Site Selection

The study areas selected for examination are the traditional streets in Penang, with a particular focus on Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling in Georgetown. This street holds great significance as it is renowned for its religious and cultural landmarks. Among its main attractions is the Kapitan Keling Mosque, a magnificent place of worship for the local Muslim community, and a historically significant site for visitors keen on delving into Penang's heritage. Georgetown, as a whole, has been designated

as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2008, primarily due to its exceptional architectural and cultural value. The traditional streets and shophouses in this region present a fascinating fusion of Chinese, Malay, Indian, and British influences, providing a vivid representation of Penang's diverse history and multicultural past.



3.2 Site Observation

Observations in the street were conducted to understand how unique and recurrent events and practices shaped a sense of place. A few photos were taken during observations and analysed. Structured site observation was the primary technique conducted to accumulate information such as forms, settings and patterns of activities.



(a)



(b)

Figure 3: St. George's Anglican Church at Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling



(a)



(b)

Figure 4: Goddess of Mercy Temple at Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling.



Figure 5: Kapitan Keling Mosque at Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling.

The observation was concentrated on the 'Street of Harmony,' formally known as Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling, which was one of four thorough fares in George Town's original grid when the British established a commercial town on Penang Island in 1786.

3.3 Questionnaires

Data was collected on 1ST June 2023 until 13TH June 2023 through survey questions that related with 32 members of local communities, as well as site observation, to investigate how they perceive and utilize the area and its cultural heritage. The instrument used was a survey using quantitative methods in a questionnaire that distributed to the respondents using a google form. The survey protocol and questions for both respondent groups were structured according to place identity, place attachment and place dependency. The respondents ranged in age from 15 to 50 years old and above, with male (37.5%) and female (62.5%) participants.

Table 2: Measured item

Factor	Item label	Item description
Place identity	ID1	I perceive this place as an integral part of my identity.
	ID2	I feel well-integrated into this place.
	ID3	I have a sense of belonging in this place.
	ID4	This place is the ideal location for my interests and preferences.
	ID5	I've been doing activities in this area which is valuable and commendable for its long unique history.
	ID6	This area is a place where people get to savor the different flavors and specialty dishes of each culture.
Place attachment	ATT1	I have a strong emotional connection to this place.
	ATT2	This place holds significant importance to me.
	ATT3	I feel a greater sense of comfort here compared to any other place.
	ATT4	I feel a sense of belonging and compatibility in this place
	ATT5	This area has it own cultural value.
Place dependence	DEP1	I have fond memories associated with this place.
	DEP2	This place evokes negative memories for me.
	DEP2	This street has a good place for what I enjoy doing.
	DEP3	This place meets my needs

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The research highlights the intricate interplay between tangible and intangible heritage and its relationship to the concept of "sense of place." While the tangible aspects of George Town have received recognition through its UNESCO World Heritage inscription, it is the intangible elements that hold deeper significance for the local communities, as noted by Harrison and Rose (2010). Our study conducted along the "Street of Harmony" revealed that it is through the delicate and personal expressions of intangible heritage practices that local communities develop a sense of attachment and ownership towards the place.

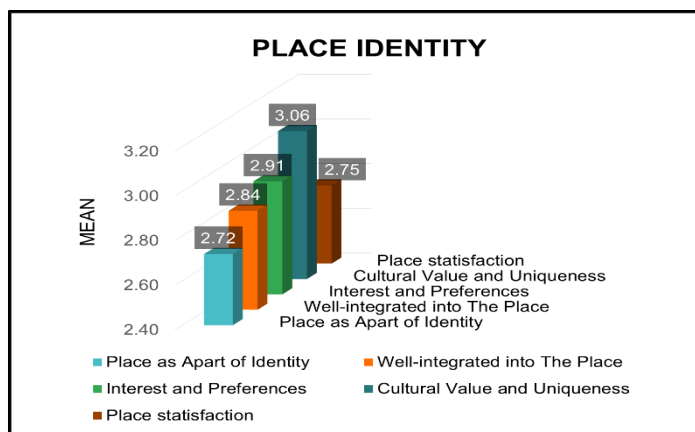


Figure 6: Mean difference value on place identity

Figure 6 explains the place identity through the people perception of the study areas. It demonstrates that respondents mostly identify the area that has high cultural value and uniqueness. The mean score for the interest and preferences is 2.91 meanwhile the place satisfaction of the area is 2.75. This dimension relates to the level of attraction and interest respondents have towards the study areas. The mean score for this dimension is 2.91, indicating that, on average, respondents showed a moderate level of interest and preferences for the areas. This dimension reflects the level of contentment or satisfaction respondents feel towards the study areas. The mean score for place satisfaction is 2.75, indicating a slightly lower satisfaction level compared to the interest and preferences dimension. it appears that respondents were more positively influenced by the cultural value and uniqueness of the areas, leading to a higher mean score for interest and preferences compared to place satisfaction.

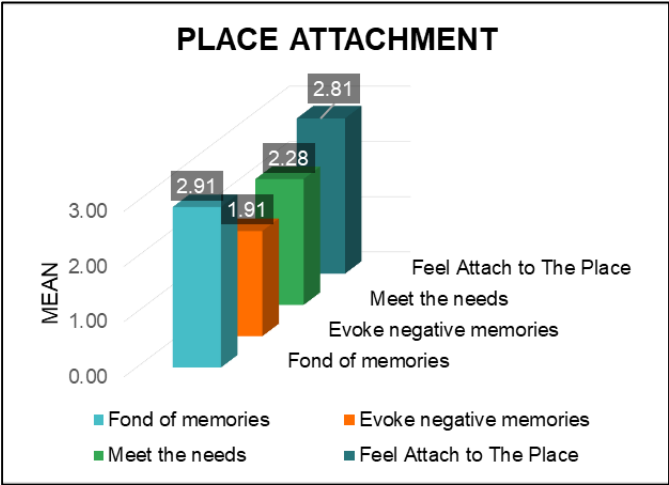


Figure 7: Mean difference value on place attachment

Figure 7 indicates the place attachment through the people perception of the study at Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling , Georgetown , Penang. This study shows a place can becomes especially meaningful to its inhabitants when they have a narrative connection, including place names, oral histories passed down through generations, and family history. The highest mean score of 2.91 for "Fond of Memories" indicates that, on average, respondents have a strong attachment to Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling based on positive and cherished memories associated with the place. These memories likely play a significant role in shaping the respondents' emotional connection to the area. The mean score of 2.81 for "Feel Attached to the Place" suggests that, on average, respondents have a sense of attachment and connection to Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling. This dimension reflects a general feeling of being emotionally tied to the place. The mean score of 2.28 for "Meet the Needs" indicates that, on average, respondents feel that Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling somewhat fulfills their needs. This dimension likely pertains to how well the place meets the practical and functional requirements of the inhabitants. The mean score of 1.91 for "Evoke Negative Memories" suggests that, on average,

respondents do not strongly associate negative memories with Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling. This is a positive finding as it indicates that the place is not significantly linked to negative experiences for most respondents. Overall, the study shows that the inhabitants of Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling feel a strong place attachment, especially driven by fond and positive memories associated with the area. This reinforces the idea that narrative connections, such as family histories and oral traditions, play a crucial role in shaping the meaningfulness of a place to its residents.

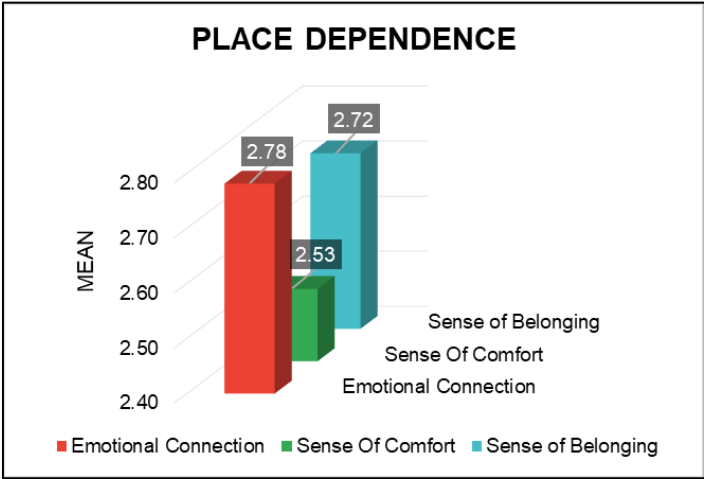


Figure 8: Mean difference value on place dependence

Figure 8 explains the place dependence through the people perception of the study areas. The mean score of 2.78 for emotional connection suggests that, on average, respondents feel a moderate level of emotional attachment and connection to Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling. This indicates that the area evokes some emotional response or significance among the respondents. The mean score of 2.72 for the sense of belonging indicates that, on average, respondents experience a moderate level of attachment and identification with Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling. They likely feel a sense of belonging to this area, suggesting a feeling of being part of the community or having some personal connection to the place. The mean score of 2.53 for the sense of comfort suggests that, on average, respondents feel a slightly lower level of comfort and ease in Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling. This could indicate that while they may have emotional connections and a sense of belonging, they might not find the area as comfortable as they would like. This study findings demonstrate that Jalan Masjid Kapitan Keling holds significant value for respondents in terms of emotional connection and a sense of belonging. However, there is some room for improvement in creating a more comfortable environment for them.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study highlights the intricate details of the relationships between tangible and intangible history, as well as how this connects to a "sense of place" by identify the perceptions of users towards sense of place in urban heritage. Harrison and Rose (2010) stated that the visible legacy of George Town has been recognised by its UNESCO World legacy listing, the intangible features, and more valuable to the people who live there. The 'Street of Harmony' evokes a complex and multifaceted emotional reaction, encompassing both tangible and intangible heritage. This aligns with the understanding that sense of place is a distinct, personal experience that is simultaneously straightforward and intricate Mcclinchey (2016). The sense of place experienced on this street can be comprehended through these 3 elements: place identity, place attachment, and place dependence. by identify the perceptions of users towards sense of place in urban heritage. By examining users' perceptions towards these three elements—place identity, place attachment, and place dependence—within the context of the 'Street of Harmony,' the study gains insight into the intricate and personal nature of the sense of place experienced in this urban heritage setting. These perceptions help shed light on how tangible and intangible heritage elements interconnect to create a profound and meaningful sense of place for the inhabitants of George Town's 'Street of Harmony.'

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