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“Sustaining the  
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for a Better Quality of Life”

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## ASSESSING THE KINTA RIVERWALK AS A SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC SPACE USING THE PLACE DIAGRAM

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### *Abstract*

The Kinta Riverwalk in Perak has been promised by the state administration that it will not become a "white elephant" project. As specified in the RKK and Ipoh Walkable City and the Ipoh Local Plan 2035, planning for the Old Town Tourism Area will benefit from this development. However, to develop a fulfilling and functional public space, it is critical to understand the needs of space as well as the interaction between its users. Therefore, this study is aimed to assess the quality of the site as a successful public space. According to the Project for Public Space, successful public spaces share four characteristics: they are easily accessible, bustling with activity, welcoming and well-maintained, and sociable, allowing locals and visitors to meet and socialise. This study applies the Place Diagram by the Project for Public Space as a theoretical framework to assess the quality of the site. A digital form has been used via Google Form and distributed to 85 second-year architecture students. The questionnaires are divided into 4 sections; access and linkages, comfort, and image, uses and activities, and sociability. The data is analysed with a quantitative approach using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) v.28 on frequency analysis were to rank the variables. From the findings, the Kinta Riverwalk is a potential successful public space in Ipoh offering variety of uses and activities. Even though the uses and activities are the strongest variables that make the place highly potential, SPSS analysis shows that it needs to improve in terms of comfort and image. This can be amended by increasing public surveillance and offering more facilities to ensure that the public always feels safe. Furthermore, based on the results of this study, it is highly recommended that future researchers and professionals explore placemaking strategies using the Place Diagram.

**Keywords:** *Accessibility, Place Diagram, Placemaking, Public Space, Sociability*

### INTRODUCTION

Public spaces play a vital role in the functioning of a city. Generally, public space is open and accessible to people. In other words, at the public spaces, the people, exclusively the local community, will have access to all things interrelated to the built and the natural environment. Due to the diverse elements and component in built and natural environment, the configuration of public spaces may vary as it can be in a form of the city's public squares or

even as an ordinary passage. The public space also generally acts as place of encounter, a connector to nearby places and serve as a functional area that facilitate social interaction and other activities (Sulaiman, et al., 2016). Malaysia has incorporated good neighbour principles into its planning plans, promoting diversity and accessibility in public spaces. According to Razali et al. (2019), Malaysia's master planning structure currently demonstrates that the government is acting as an agent involved in establishing development. Presently, Malaysia is developing based on a five-year transformation development strategy to ensure socioeconomic and infrastructure progress for the benefit of the community. The top-down approach was used in three stages: federal, state, and local governments. The federal agency is collaborating with the state and local governments in the implementation of development plans, as well as the management of such places.

As stated by Sulaiman et al. (2016), the ability to comprehend issues and relate them to the purpose of space is required for public space management. It is a collection of processes and practises that, in addition to managing the interaction between the space and its users, ensure that the public space is fulfilling and functional. It is critical to understand the various types and needs of public space. However, organizationally led perspectives on place in general, have been criticised for being overly managerial and rooted in neoliberal narratives of urban entrepreneurship. Such approaches appear to lack a deeper understanding of how people and communities go about their daily lives make places, which appear to have aided in the development of a different intervention that claims to be more community driven and bottom-up in its orientation (Platt et al., 2020). Plus, since the introduction of sustainability goals, community participation in planning has been identified as critical to achieving the goal of sustainability. Misconceptions about such implementation in planning arise because all development ideas are obtained from professionals without community involvement. As a result, from a physical standpoint, this provides a negative perspective and becomes unsustainable due to the lack of community involvement or input (Razali et al., 2019). Fincher et al., (2016) suggests that planning a public space is a process that must be engaged with from the beginning, not just through organisational intervention or the facilitation of community-led approaches. Platt et al., (2020) also emphasises the need for relevant organisations and stakeholders such as planners and local authorities along with the local communities, to reconfigure or reorient their engagement in planning the public space.

Therefore, this study is aimed to assess the quality of the Kinta Riverwalk located at Ipoh, Perak as a successful place for public activities based on the public point of view and to learn the criteria of successful public space in placemaking. The results from this study will contribute to a better understanding of a suitable application and modification, thereby strengthening the legal framework related to the Kinta Riverwalk and other local public spaces in Malaysia that influences the quality of public space including its management for future development. This development will benefit planning for the Old Town Tourism Area, as specified in the RKK and Ipoh Walkable City and the Ipoh Local Plan 2035. The state administration has promised that the Kinta Riverwalk in Perak will not become a "white elephant" project. The relation of public spaces toward tourism is supported by Vodanovic, (2021) stated that a quality public spaces able to fosters the development of a sense of place, boosts social cohesion, and promotes the long-term regeneration of public spaces, all of which contribute to the attractiveness of tourism. To achieve the aim of this study, this paper is divided into four sections. The following sections contain the literature review of the study. Followed by the methodology, then the findings are presented in the third section. The conclusion of the findings is presented in the final section.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Placemaking

Urban prosperity, cohesiveness, and sustainability are jeopardised by a growing urban population, heightened social dynamics, and rapidly changing urban surroundings, as well as a lack of urban planning. According to Beretic, et al. (2022) stated that this requires rethinking the city's administration. The study provides new methods to comprehend and interpret the city by analysing literary connections to the multiple cities. Many aspects of an inclusive city from the standpoint of urban design in the plural city due its variety and variability in urban matrix and social tissue. In multiscale, he established the city's components, connections, and viewpoints. Public art tactics may be utilised to begin spatial shifts and give numerous ways of perceiving the urban environment, based on 18 years of experience from the public art & public space initiative. However, there is an expanding corpus of work on the subject, although the concepts "plural" and "plurality" remain vague and open to interpretation. While reimagining the modern idea of citizenship, some writers cast doubt on long-held political notions and rights (Purcell 2003). Several other authors view urban segregation as a multifaceted mechanism that contributes to inequalities in many aspects of city life, from inadequate access to services and infrastructure to social isolation, safety concerns, and the absence of economic opportunity (Rawls, 1971/1999; Espino, 2015; Blanco and Nelo, 2020). Their starting idea revolves around a plural society that encourages tolerance for variety and makes diversity itself a public benefit. There is an expanding corpus of work about urban segregation. While reimagining the modern idea of citizenship, some writers cast doubt on long-held political notions and rights. Urban segregation is a system with many parts that makes life in cities unequal in many ways. Global tourism affects host communities' environmental and social sustainability and is pandemic prone. Proximity tourism is more sustainable in every way, particularly when people can co-create the experience and generate place attachment in urban contexts via placemaking techniques respecting neglected urban assets. Urban placemaking cannot be initiated by organisational intervention or community-led initiatives but must be engaged with from the middle (Platt & Medway, 2022). The event's cultural placemaking involves residents (Kadar & Klaniczay, 2022). As visitors captured the festival and architectural history and submitted hundreds of images on Instagram, they contributed to the event's branding and placemaking. At last, returning visitors help maintain the event and brand the physical environment.

Community-based urban festivals are a sustainable kind of proximity tourism, robust even to COVID-19. Urban festivals that concentrate on the local architectural heritage help reduce the burden on tourist-historic communities coping with over tourism. In fact, the urban festival should be organised by the local community and will focusing on the architectural history of the area. Urban festivals ease the strain that over tourism places like historic districts and other tourist destinations are feeling. Repeat guests help keep the venue and its surroundings in attractive shape. They also help the event's branding and placemaking efforts. Finally, it examines communal approaches for increasing city ecology in underprivileged communities. The collective received ambivalent bureaucratic support (Knibbe & Jorstman, 2022); the open nature of space commons enabled collective responsibility and democratic publics, but also made them vulnerable; and the collective restrained itself in providing informal security to avoid stigma and retaliation.

### Challenges in Placemaking

Placemaking is a sophisticated and multifaceted approach to the planning, design, and administration of public areas, which differs from making places. According to Beretic, et al. (2022) within the context of the Public Art and Public Space programme, placemaking is the process of transforming public space into a vibrant environment by means of creative place design and acknowledgement of experiences that have a variety of effects on everyday life. It

is the art of life, a process of creating place and behaving in it. Placemaking creates real spaces with a feeling of place. Consequently, in the context of applying the plural approach to the city, and because of understanding urban design as both a process and a product of placemaking, it will conclude that the plural city is a potential response to the need for developing a new way of understanding, imagining, and governing the city. A "tragedy of urban commons" affects many green spaces in poor city neighbourhoods. This is not caused by overuse and depletion, but by lack of use and abandonment. Placemaking began as a social justice-focused activist movement, but some forms of it have become more neoliberal, making places more focused on consumption and less socially inclusive (Knibbe, 2022). The union of placemaking and urban communing helps to preserve the sometimes-forgotten legacy of activism and participation with concerns of social justice. Despite the open and loosely woven nature of many metropolitan communities, urban communing enables city people to share and grow a shared benefit.

### **Past Studies in Placemaking**

Many studies have been done to investigate the public space in placemaking. The study by Platt and Medway (2020) placemaking has become an oft-used word in contemporary urban planning and development rhetoric. At best, it's referred to attempts to provide a consultants-informed and facilitated toolkit of principles or steps for citizens to make or remake those places, in which they are already deeply embedded, from the bottom up. The any consultant led, organizational, or institutional intervention in placemaking needs to adopt a more immersive stance, being less about making place or starting something afresh, and more geared towards placemaking as a transversal process. The studies are about the argues for a new approach to thinking about interventionist modes of urban placemaking, which privileges neither the top-down perspective nor the bottom-up, community-based approach.

Next the study by (Mohamad et al., 2019) placemaking towards community sustainability. The federal agency is collaborating with the state government in the implementation of what was planned for the development, as well as the management of such places. Three stages of the top to down approach were used; the federal, state, and local government (Razali et al., 2016). The case study approach was chosen of the study of placemaking in Malaysia. Articles were selected as a sample from the WOS, SCOPUS, and Google Scholar. The finding of the study indicated that the social science field of studies such as tourism, public policy, information technology, geography and political science are the dominant research on place making compared the built environment field of study such as urban planning environmental landscaping and architecture.

### **The Place-Diagram**

This study examines existing theoretical/empirical research on how pedestrian comfort levels can be addressed through public space design to improve urban design guidelines. The goal is to incorporate these qualitative and quantitative inquiries into the "Place Diagram." Six intangible and measurable criteria are investigated and structured to introduce new design considerations that can contribute to the responsiveness of urban outdoor spaces.

Place-Diagram derived by Project for Public Space (2016) is considered a tool to assist designer in identify the key qualities what make a place successful. As described by Wyckoff (2014), 'Placemaking is an inherently people-centred approach to the planning, designing and management of public spaces in cities, as it emphasizes the relationships between individuals, communities, and urban spaces. Defined by the PPS, these key qualities are Sociability—a place for various interactions, Uses & Activities—a place where people can engage in meaningful activities, Comfort & Image—a place for easy and comfortable use, and Access & Linkages—a place accessible to all. These qualities are considered important to ensure that



people who is the primary focus, can acquire essential qualities that can enrich their physical, mental, and social well-being whilst living in the place.

Placemaking, on the other hand, frequently lacks an ecological approach and has limited long-term benefits, remaining at a superficial beautification or place-masking level (Fincher et al., 2016). Hes et al. (2020) argues that although the connection with nature is evidently strongly related to well-being, non-human elements and ecological systems are not considered equal parts or users of space in the traditional conceptualization of placemaking. As a result, placemaking practise must recognise the value of ecological systems in and of themselves, as well as embrace the interconnectedness of these dimensions through an integrated re-conceptualization of long-term desired benefits that include "input-output-outcome-legacy aspects."

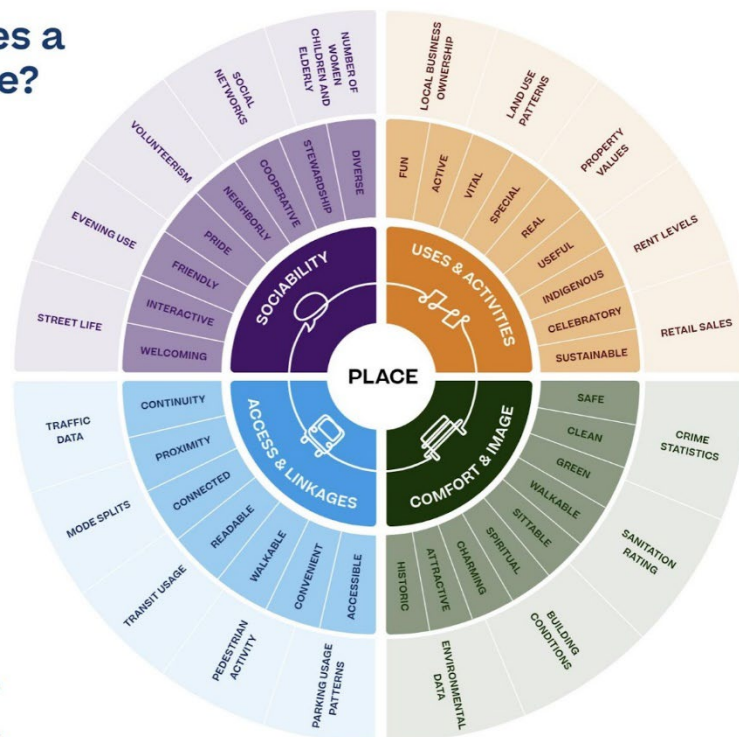
From an ecological perspective, placemaking has been studied in the context of climate change adaptation (Nouri & Costa, 2017) and as green placemaking (Gulrsud et al., 2018). According to Nouri (2017), although most of the international research community believes that climate change adaptation is critical, there is little information on how it can be integrated into contemporary placemaking. The effects of urban climatology are constantly coercing the need for concrete action to increase the climatic responsiveness of urban environments, as the adaptation agenda emerges.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework of the study, Place Diagram by Project for Public Space (2016)*

## What Makes a Great Place?

**Project  
for Public  
Spaces**



## METHODOLOGY

This study is adapted from the Place Diagram framework by Project for Public Space (PPS) on how to create a successful public space as a tool to assess the quality of the Kinta Riverwalk. The quantitative approach has been deployed in this study. A digital form has been used via Google Form and distributed to 85 second-year architecture students as the respondents of the study, consisting of 42 males and 43 females from the Bachelor of Science

in Architecture, UiTM Perak Branch. The students have been introduced to site analysis and public space in the semester. Therefore, their perceived value on public space is critical and significant in the study as visitors with minimal knowledge. They visited the place twice, once on weekends and another on weekdays. The questionnaires are divided into 4 sections; access and linkages (ACC), comfort and image (IMG), uses and activities (ACT), and sociability (SOC).

**Figure 2**  
*Location of Kinta Riverwalk*

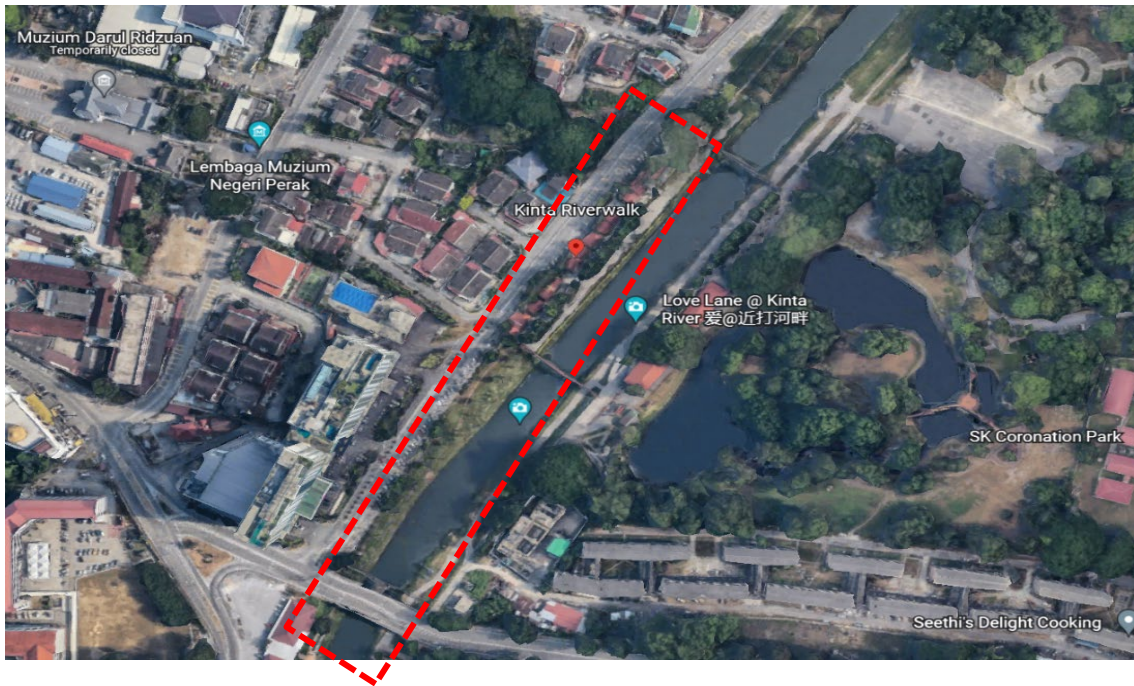


Figure 2 above shows the location of the study have been taken. The site study is stretch approximately 500m consisting of several public activities such as commercial, food & beverages, recreation, and scenic park. The site is residing exactly in between of Kinta Riverfront Hotel and Taman Dr Seenivasagam.

Since the study has been approached from the perceived value of undergraduate architecture students, the data is not representing the local public visitors. Thus, it is a challenge for the students to empathize both academically and as a public visitor with the site assessment.

## **FINDINGS**

The data is analysed with a quantitative approach using SPSS v.28 on frequency analysis were to rank the variables by the mean score, which deduced the quality of Kinta Riverwalk as a successful public space.

**Table 1**  
*Reliability Statistics*

<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items</b>	<b>N of Items</b>
.838	.869	30

Concerning Table 1, the SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach analysis of Kinta Riverwalk as a successful public space showing high internal reliability for the instrument. The data with descriptive statistics included frequency distribution and the results in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Frequency of Variables for the Kinta Riverwalk as a Successful Public Space by Gender*

<b>Gender</b>		<b>ACC</b>	<b>IMG</b>	<b>ACT</b>	<b>SOC</b>
Male	Mean	3.7460	3.6224	3.9603	3.7024
	N	42	42	42	42
	Std. Deviation	.53218	.57040	.77548	.71937
Female	Mean	3.5142	3.4983	4.0194	3.5233
	N	43	43	43	43
	Std. Deviation	.46829	.40331	.72211	.50463
Total	Mean	3.6288	3.5597	3.9902	3.6118
	N	85	85	85	85
	Std. Deviation	.51135	.49399	.74507	.62292

The successful assessment of Kinta Riverwalk as a public space using The Place Diagram has good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .838, as referred to in Table 1. Ideally, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale should be above .7 (DeVellis, 2012).

From the data presented above, the Kinta Riverwalk can be deduced as a potential public space with some variables shown to be an opportunity to improve the place by the local authority. The place's perception also is slightly different between the gender. As shown in Table 2, students from both gender all agree that uses and activities (ACT) in the Kinta Riverwalk are the significant variables that made the place successful, with a mean score of 3.96 for the males and 4.02 for females. Overall, uses and activities (ACT) is the successful variable, followed by accessibility and linkages (ACC), sociability (SOC) and comfort and image (IMG). On the other hand, the order is different when the perception of gender is taken. From the male perception, ACT is the top rank followed by ACC, SOC, and IMG. Then, the female perception is ACT, SOC, ACC, and IMG.

**Table 3**

*Frequency of Variables for the Kinta Riverwalk as a Successful Public Space by Each Elements*

Variables	Elements	N		Mean	Std. Deviation
		Valid	Missing		
Access & Linkages	ACC1	85	0	3.64	0.937
	ACC2	85	0	3.69	0.951
	ACC3	85	0	3.25	1.045
	ACC4	85	0	3.68	0.954
	ACC5	85	0	3.94	0.807
	ACC6	85	0	3.29	1.223
	ACC7	85	0	3.86	0.902
	ACC8	85	0	3.94	1.062
	ACC9	85	0	3.36	0.937
Comfort & Image	IMG1	85	0	3.88	0.837
	IMG2	85	0	3.12	0.793
	IMG3	85	0	3.93	0.997
	IMG4	85	0	3.66	1.007
	IMG5	85	0	2.78	0.968
	IMG6	85	0	4.40	0.640
	IMG7	85	0	3.15	1.041
Uses & Activities	ACT1	85	0	3.39	0.977
	ACT2	85	0	4.25	0.844
	ACT3	85	0	3.74	0.953
	ACT4	85	0	5.42	2.766
	ACT5	85	0	3.84	1.010
	ACT6	85	0	3.31	1.155
Sociability	SOC1	85	0	3.78	0.968
	SOC2	85	0	4.01	0.982
	SOC3	85	0	3.11	1.047
	SOC4	85	0	3.82	0.889
	SOC5	85	0	3.79	0.888
	SOC6	85	0	3.61	0.901
	SOC7	85	0	3.73	0.944
	SOC8	85	0	3.05	1.143

Furthermore, Table 3 shows the mean score for each element in the variables. Firstly, the uses and activities (ACT) variable. ACT4 indicates the mean of activities found at Kinta Riverwalk with 5 uses and activities. Ramlee et al. (2016) stated that the user's impression of public space impacts the use and activity in generating effective places from the public's point of view. A wide range of activities occurring in numerous public locations imply that a city still has plenty to offer in terms of spontaneity, vitality, inventiveness, and liveability as according to Efroymson et. al. (2009). The place has also extensively been used by a different range of ages. It can be inferred from the ACT2, the variable's second-highest mean score. For a public area to be thriving, it must have many people in it (Carmona et.al, 2003). People of all ages can watch and participate in numerous activities in public spaces, from youngsters to the elderly, regardless of their ability to pay. Despite that, the management presence is the lowest mean score of the variable with 3.31, as seen in ACT6. Their presence is vital to ensure the

visitors' security and safety because several infrastructures are quite alarming such as a cable-stayed bridge and an abandoned mine.

For the accessibility and linkages (ACC) variable, the criteria for high-quality public space in the physical dimension include obvious and straightforward access and movement (Nasution et al., 2012). The assessment shows that the sidewalks lead to and from the adjacent areas, and the place can also be accessed by a variety of transportation options which are by a mean score of 3.94. Moving to the sociability (SOC) variable, Kinta Riverwalk is significantly an excellent social urban place. It can be referred to as SOC2, where the people are seen actively communicating. Hence, the SOC4 shows that people come to this place in a group with their friends and relatives where the commercial premises may influence the elements.

Furthermore, according to Rad et al. (2013), "when people interact with others, they feel a stronger bond with their society and space." This factor can be measured and evaluated by the presence of various social groups, social networks, and life in a day." Unfortunately, SOC8 shows people pick up litter moderately when they see it. According to Project for Public Space (2000), comfort and image are emphasised in public spaces, which determines whether facilities in public spaces such as benches, gazebos, walkways, lighting, water fountains, and shading are attractive to encourage more visitors to visit the public space. Furthermore, safety and comfort are essential components of public space, impacting public space usage and satisfaction (Namin et al., 2013). This place offers scenic and visually appealing photography activities. The inference is deduced from the IMG6 where the mean score is the highest element of the variable. Ironically, the IMG5 is the lowest mean score of all the elements that have been assessed. The place is perceived unsafe where the security presence is low and where the ACT6 also supports it.

From the findings above, the Kinta Riverwalk needs to improve in terms of comfort and image. It is a challenge for the local authority to maintain the place as strategic and vibrant public place. It may be the facility offered and increasing the public surveillance to ensure the public feels safe day and night. The place is nicely seated in the perimeter of Ipoh urban context and semi-urban neighbourhood. It is a flawless transition for people to access from both areas. Neglecting the maintenance of the place could sabotage the other variables of successful public space.

## CONCLUSION

Using the key and intangible attributes of the public place, the place diagram was utilized as a tool to assess the quality of the Kinta Riverwalk as a successful place for public activities based on the public point of view. The assessment includes evaluating both the physical condition and the user experience of the Kinta Riverwalk. This study reveals the potentials of public space while focusing on the end users. Based on the findings of the study, we concluded that the Kinta Riverwalk can be inferred as a potential public space by referring to the intangible qualities of the place diagram which addresses the relation of people, public space, and its management. A dynamic collaborative effort by all is required to manage existing public space. The understanding of the relationship between management and the public is fundamental to public spaces design, where human behaviour is actively influenced by the physical environment provided. It can be viewed as a mutual process of creating and modifying spaces while also being influenced by those spaces. The variables shown from the study also can be an opportunity for the local authority to improve Kinta Riverwalk as public spaces exclusively in terms of comfort and image to always ensure the public to feels safe and attracted to the place. Furthermore, based on the results of this study, it is highly recommended that researchers and professionals to further explore the placemaking strategies using the place diagram in the future.

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Tarikh : 20 Januari 2023

Prof. Madya Dr. Nur Hisham Ibrahim  
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Tuan,

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Kelulusan daripada pihak tuan dalam perkara ini amat dihargai.

Sekian, terima kasih.

“BERKHIDMAT UNTUK NEGARA”

Saya yang menjalankan amanah,

**SITI BASRIYAH SHAIK BAHARUDIN**  
Timbalan Ketua Pustakawan

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*Setuju.*

*27.1.2023*

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