

# ACTIVITY AS AN ATTRIBUTE TO PLACE ATTACHMENT IN KUCHING RIVERFRONT PROMENADE, MALAYSIA

Bambang Karsono, Atthallah, Deni

Cluster of Integrated Design, Department of  
Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, Malikussaleh  
Universitay, Lhokseumawe - Aceh, INDONESIA

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\*Corresponding author  
bambangkarsono23@yahoo.com

## Graphical abstract



## Abstract

Place attachment is known as relationship of function and emotional features between people and place which creates meaning. Some common discussions focus on significance of physical features and activities in developing identity and quality of place. Nevertheless, place attachment in public open spaces is not only related to association of people and its physical environment, yet it also involves perceptiveness of a place, whether it is a negative or a positive impact. Allowing for this issue, the research examines the activity as an attributes which influenced place attachment in Kuching Riverfront Promenade (KRP), a popular public space among local people. By using a mixed method approach, this research covers subject of place attachment. Field survey and interviews were lead to a certain area of the promenade with an overall of 165 respondents and 18 stall operators were interviewed. The findings point out that the respondents have a strong association with the local environment and it exerts effect on the identity of the place.

**Keywords:** activity, attribute, place attachment, public space.

## Abstrak

Keterikatan tempat difahami sebagai hubungan fungsi dan emosi antara manusia dan tempat yang mewujudkan makna. Beberapa perbincangan memberi tumpuan kepada kepentingan ciri-ciri fizikal dan aktiviti dalam membangunkan identiti dan kualiti tempat. Keterikatan tempat di ruang terbuka awam secara amnya berhubung-kait antara manusia dengan persekitaran fizikal dan juga persepsi sama ada negatif atau positif. Mengikut isu ini, kajian dilakukan untuk meneliti aktiviti sebagai atribut yang mempengaruhi keterikatan tempat di Kuching Riverfront Promenade (KRP), ruang awam yang popular bagi penduduk tempatan. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kaedah campuran, kajian ini merangkumi tajuk keterikatan tempat. Kajian lapangan dan temu bual dilakukan dengan bilangan 165 responden dan temu bual khusus kepada 18 pengusaha gerai. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa responden mempunyai kaitan rapat dengan persekitaran tempatan dan ia menunjukkan kesan ke atas identiti tempat.

**Keywords:** aktiviti, atribut, keterikatan tempat, ruang awam.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Place attachment is defined by many factors, such as personal experiences, social activities, culture, geography, as well as architecture of a

place [1]. In other words, place attachment can be reduced and lost, sometimes referred to as *losses of a place*. Some scholars argued that the losses of a place and its meaning will generate a negative impact on individual and community identity and also psychological balance [1]. Some literature identified that place attachment has a strong bond of psychological elements (emotion and feeling) that functioned as part of an experience of an environment. Thus, place attachment can be considered as a variable that can be used to measure sense of place based on people feelings and emotional reactions to attributes and characteristics of a place in the city which is an important part of evaluating quality of urban design.

KRP was chosen as a case study, a popular public open space located in front of the main road of Kuching, a city in the state of Sarawak, Malaysia. By identifying activity as an attribute of place attachment, it helps us to configure an image of a place that consequently reflected image of the city itself. KRP was officially opened to public on 3rd September 1993. The development of KRP has not only introduced public open space yet it also presented recreational place, thus it has generated the development as a city landmark. Furthermore, KRP commonly known as "the people place", which is furnished with facilities for entertainment, refreshment, relaxation, cultural and art performances. KRP has become a popular place for family gathering, corporate members discussion ground, school children and organizing community events. KRP has received three awards in 1994, namely "The National Project Award in the Civic Design Category" awarded by Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture, "The Merit Award in the Overseas Category" awarded by the Royal Australian Institute of Architect and "The Excellence on the Waterfront / Waterfront Centre Annual Award" awarded by the Waterfront Centre, USA.

## 2.0 Literature Review

In understanding characteristic of a place, several scholars have revealed the importance of the attributes to establish the sense of place and place attachment [1] [2] [3]. The purpose of attribute approach is to identify layout of a place which is organized by different forms and elements of city that can help users to feel meaning of a place [1]. It is important to understand the character of place through dominant quality and we need to identify how and why the quality present. This approach explains that human emotion helps to establish bond on some of the attributes or characteristics of a place.

It is noted that in urban design several attributes that contribute to identification of urban form i.e.: activity, vitality and culture of the city [4]. The attributes of a place are revealed through shape (townscape, scale, permeability, landmark, and

public realm), activities (diversity, street life, behavior patterns, and transaction), meaning (legibility, cultural association, perceived functions, and attraction) and image (cognition, perception, information, symbolism, memory) [4]. In addition, the meaning and the image are understood as a concept that describes the process of human social, psychology and emotion [5] [6].

## 3.0 Methodology

This research is focus on identifying the activity as an attribute that influence place attachment. The research applied mixed method techniques which are survey, observation and relationship analysis. This is relevance because urban design discipline is considered as a multi-dimensional field of expertise [7] [8] [9]. Therefore, the mix-method approach is appropriate to explain the phenomenon of a place.

The survey was conducted through 165 respondents that consisted of the mobile users (82) and static users (83). The static user are the crucial users such as the shops-owner, the shops-keeper and sidewalk vendors while the mobile users are the visitors, students and local residents who came to visit the place and at the same time 18 (eighteen) in depth interview were also carried out in the study area.

Observation and urban character assessment are used in the case study as a harmonizing method to produce a more complete exemplification of the extensive physical characteristics of the case study area. In this process, the researchers acted as outside observers (outsider) while documenting the activity pattern based on photographic and written (personal notes and checklist) documents. The urban character defined the criteria such as accessibility, familiarity, vitality, diversity and choice, comfortable, transaction, uniqueness, safety and security. Indicator for each attribute constructed for the evaluation is cross examining with the literature. The format of this assessment is designed based on a 5 point scale derived from the fairness quality measurement.

The relationship analysis between the attribute and characteristic is devoted to discover their influence to place attachment. In the analysis, the result of urban character assessment evaluation is obtained through triangulation of the data, interview and observation. It is assumed that the nature of attachment is determined by the place attributes with the function of riverfront promenade.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Activity: Livability

Surveys and interviews indicate that the activity is regarded as the most influential element for user attachment. Diversity of physical appearance,

choice of activities, use of space and the people who involved was a major factor for the attraction and engagement. The ability of the place to maintain its livability is due to the existence of people and activities developed the function attachment. The result value of the survey is shown in Table 1.0. All open space KRP regarded as a lively and has a distinctive strength.

The observations found that the crowd at the entrance pulls the user to the main attraction in the open space. Respondents sensed that KRP were vibrant and has attractive open space activities. Street vendors and business activities also contributed to the festive atmosphere to this area, especially at night. Also, the atmosphere was reinforced by additional lines of hawkers (mobile stalls) located in the middle of open space. The activities began in the early afternoon until late at night. It clearly shows that atmosphere is livelier at night compare to day time. Intensity of visitors in open space increased from morning to evening and night. However, the excitement of open space continues to increase by a constant flow of pedestrians. This is due to the fact that the KRP serves not only as open space, but also as 'a pedestrian bridge'.

**Table 1:** Relationship between characteristics and livability based on average value

ELEMENT	STATEMENT		AVG VALUE	
			KRP	STD. DEV
Livability N=165	01	Most livable spot in the city ( <i>life</i> )	3.28	.385
	02	Attractive activity in public space ( <i>attractive</i> )	3.10	.417
	03	Place to observe other people and activities ( <i>people</i> )	3.15	.402
	04	Entertainment spot ( <i>entertainment</i> )	2.99	.497
Response format: 1 = strongly disagree 4 = strongly agree			Average value	3.13

KRP has enough space for people who want to relax and leisure. The night market always attracts visitors to do shopping at the open space. It is understood that the location of the open space, the presence of people and the variety of activities are the elements that contribute to the livability of open space.

Table 2.0 shows that there is a strong relationship between function attachment, and different characteristic activities in the open space. The majority of respondents (80-96%) identified the presence of people, activities in the open space and watching passers-by is also agreed that this place is the best place for them to go.

The livability of open space is significantly contributed by intensity of the visitors and pedestrians, number of activities that occur daily or according to a particular schedule. It coincides with the opinion that stated the presence of people in and around the street (pedestrian flow) at all different times of the day and night, cultural events and festivals, making facilities, activities, and feeling

the spirit of street life will affect the livability of the place [4].

**Table 2:** Relationship between livability and function attachment of KRP

PLACE	ATTACHMENT	LIVABILITY (N=165)			
		<i>lively</i>	<i>open space activity</i>	<i>people watching</i>	<i>leisure</i>
KRP	BEST PLACE	96.3%	81.9%	86.7%	84.5%

Note: Percentage indicates the level of agreement

**Table 3:** Urban character assessment: Livability

ACTIVITY			KRP	
Criteria	Performance indicator		Rating (1 - 5)	Total % average
LIVABILITY Place support functions and human needs	01	Activity of open space	5	31/45 (69%) 3.44
	02	Activity of pedestrian pathway	5	
	03	Mixed use	1	
	04	Intensity of pedestrian movement	5	
	05	Availability of public open space	4	
	06	Meeting point and gathering	4	
	07	Node and intersection	3	
	08	Leisure spot	2	
	09	Period of openings	2	
Rating scale: 5: extremely succeed - 4: succeed - 3: fairly succeed - 2: less succeed - 1: not succeed				

Table 3.0 presents the results of livability assessment of the place. It determines the ability of KRP to contribute to popularity through active pedestrian and meeting place, the availability of public open space and longer opening period. In short, the livability of open space can attribute to the ability of open space to successfully operate as a focus for activity.

**4.2 Activity: Diversity, Choice and Transaction**

KRP is located in the core area of the historic city center in Kuching. It shows a fusion of activities contribute to diversity and choice. The Diversity and choice shown in Table 4.0 is above average. This indicates that respondents could strongly identify to the diversity of places and choice. Positive perception is supported by food, activities and a variety of backgrounds.

The diversity of activities associated with the function attachment to the place. Results in Table 5.0 show a strong relationship between respondents who sensed the open space as the best place for something they want to do best with diversity.

The best open space is to have a variety of physical, economic and social activities together with longer periods of excitement as well as safe [10]. The street vendors near the historic open space with different transaction methods, cheaper prices and

the availability of different products led to the continuity of patrons.

**Table 4:** Characteristic related with diversity and choice base on average value

ELEMENT	STATEMENT		AVG. VALUE	
			KRP	STD. DEV
DIVERSITY and CHOICE N=165	01	Sell almost all kinds of stuff ( <i>sale</i> )	2.94	.501
	02	A wide range of food and places to eat ( <i>food</i> )	3.13	.386
	03	Full activity, day and night ( <i>vibrant</i> )	3.34	.351
	04	Full mix of people from different background ( <i>mixed</i> )	3.29	.369
Response format: 1 = strongly disagree 4 = strongly agree		Average Value	3.18	

**Table 5:** Relationship between diversity and function attachment

PLACE	ATTACHMENT	LIVABILITY (N=330)			
		<i>sell all of stuff</i>	<i>food</i>	<i>vibrant</i>	<i>mix of people</i>
KRP	BEST PLACE	83.3%	90.0%	95.4%	80.1%

Note: Percentage indicates the level of agreement

Users are an important element in generating liveliness and attached to a place of leisure and entertainment. The existence of commercial activities enhances the atmosphere to the area. Density and diversity of users will sustenance the transactions and livability of a place that contributes to the attraction and attachment. Results of the study showed that the existence of people from different background emerge as one of the strongest characteristics in the open space. Therefore, the ability of open space to meet user's needs and desires of and the offered choice for a range of socio-economic background and culture which is essential to the continued attachment.

Diversity of the function and user affects the diversity of activities in open space. This is consistent with the opinion that urged a variety of land uses, people, activities and experiences provide a combination of perception in which different users conjecture the place in a different way, and takes different of meanings [7][11]. It was explained that this type of activity in the open space is affected by the characteristics of users who occupy the open space. KRP is strongly associated with the Muslim Malay and Iban users by ethnic preference

Table 6.0 shows the results of urban character assessment of the place diversity. In summary, the results of this study clearly show that the diversity, the choice and various activities is an important factor in ensuring the livable of the open space.

Consequences of the survey and the interviews showed that respondents intensely identified through economic transactions in the open space. Table 7.0 suggests that the KRP has a high average value of the prices of goods sold ('the best price for shopping'), which is supported by the presence of

street hawkers that increasing the activity of buying and selling in the area. KRP has the characteristics of diversity and choice in the open space that clearly shows role of diversity and business associated to user attachment.

Another aspect that influences the intensity of transaction is the opening and the engagement period. It was found that the KRP offers at least 12 hours of transaction. Bargaining with street vendors (KRP) continued until around 11:30 pm and the entertainment continued until the mid-night these activities help to support the business transaction in an open space. Parallel with the transaction promotion the business time continued throughout the day and night [4].

**Table 6:** Urban character assessment: Diversity

ACTIVITY			KRP	
Criteria	Performance indicator		Rating (1 - 5)	Total % average
DIVERSITY Place offer diversity and choice	01	Different people and background	4	22/35 (62%) 3.14
	02	Various cultural expressions	3	
	03	A wide range of products	1	
	04	The mixture of old and new	3	
	05	Mix, artificial and natural landscape	4	
	06	Variety of taste, sound and fragrance	3	
	07	Various of food and dining place	4	
Rating scale: 5: extremely succeed - 4: succeed - 3: fairly succeed - 2: less succeed - 1: not succeed				

**Table 7:** Characteristic associated with transaction based on average value

ELEMENT	STATEMENT		AVG VALUE	
			KRP	STD. DEV
TRANSACTION N=165	01	Good price for shopping ( <i>price</i> )	3.28	.371
	02	Bank and communication center ( <i>communication</i> )	3.01	.480
	03	Street vendor ( <i>vendor</i> )	3.29	.368
Response format: 1 = strongly disagree 4 = strongly agree		Average Value	3.18	

**Table 8:** Relationship between transaction with function attachment

PLACE	ATTACHMENT	TRANSACTION (N=165)		
		<i>Price</i>	<i>Communication</i>	<i>Vendor</i>
KRP	BEST PLACE	83.3%	75.3%	95.4%

Note: Percentage indicates the level of agreement

Table 8.0 indicates that the KRP has moderate relationship between the transaction and the attachment function ('this is the best place for what I want to do'). However, 95.4% of respondents assure that the presence of many street vendors generate sense of attachment. This is expressed by the user as a shown in Table 9.0.



In short, the economic transactions contributed to generate activity in an open space that can be observed in the buying and selling activity of various foods and products. Respondent take an attachment to the place due to business and employment opportunities. Cultural and social interaction is reflected by the patrons from different ethnicity and religions background.

**Table 9:** Urban character assessment: Transaction

ACTIVITY		KRP	
Criteria	Performance indicator	Rating (1 - 5)	Total % average
TRANSACTION <i>Intensity of business, information, communication and social interaction</i>	01 Center of public services and activities	4	17/25 (68%) 3.40
	02 Street vendor/night market	5	
	03 Sales in open space and night market	3	
	04 Advertise on open space	2	
	05 Social events and cultural	3	
Rating scale: 5: extremely succeed - 4: succeed - 3: fairly succeed - 2: less succeed - 1: not succeed			



**Figure 1:** Pencak silat as cultural performance in KRP



**Figure 1:** Intensity of pedestrian movement in KRP



**Figure 3:** Street vendor in KRP

### 5.0 CONCLUSION

**Table 10:** Summary of the respondents' perception of the attribute

RESPONDENTS PERCEPTION TO PLACE ATTRIBUTE		
ELEMENTS	N= 165	Average
	Atributes	KRP
ACTIVITY	Livability	3.13
	Diversity/choice	3.28
	Transaction	2.91
Average		3.11

Respondents in KRP intensely recognize activity as an attributes that influence a robust place attachment and indicated strong function and emotional attachment. Activity as an attribute which is identified by the respondents influenced not only by the quality of the physical elements and the intensity of the activity, but also influenced by the attachment and meaning with attachment and experience to the place.

The complete results of the urban character assessment show that the KRP is considered success. KRP also received a positive perception from the respondents. Many respondents relate their engagement with activities appropriate to their role. However, the physical elements that contributes to importance of supporting activities. In this respect, concerns has been expressed by the user of KRP on the lack of sitting space and relax which will provide a more comfortable and weather protective space. The findings support the notion that the physical environment contributes significantly to the meaning of place [2] [5]. Physical appearance plays an important role in influencing the sense of place. Physical environment 'provides image' therefore topophilia (love of place) have concrete objects that affect attachment [12].

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