

## Attributes and Characteristics of Place Attachment

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**Abstract.** Relationship of function and emotional elements between people and place creates meaning which is known as place attachment. In this aspect some general discussion focuses on the importance of physical elements and activities in developing identity and atmosphere of place, however, place attachment in public open spaces is usually associated with the relationship of the people and its physical environment and also the perception either negative or positive of the place. Considering this issue, the research examine on the attributes and characteristics which influenced the place attachment in the Kuching Riverfront Promenade (KRP), a public space which is popular among the locals. By using a mixed method approach, this research covers two main subjects of place attachment and continuity of place identity. Field survey and interviews were conducted in a selected area of the promenade with a total of 165 respondents and 18 stall operators were interviewed. It was observed that the physical, visual urban character and users' activities have a significant implication on the attachment of place identification. In addition, the findings indicated that the respondents have a strong relationship with the local environment and it exerts influence on the identity of the place.

### Introduction

Public open space in urban areas and its relationship with the environment and people has been discussed in urban design since the polemic of high rise era of the early 90's [1]. Several researchers tried to clarify some aspects of the relationship between people and the environment that has implication on the place they lived. Thus, several scholars have generated such studies on various aspects of cognitive, affective and co native [2]. Place attachment [2], the identity of the place [3], topophilia [4], and the dependence of place [5] were among some ideas that often been raised in the literature of environmental psychology. Based on such studies human beings and their relationship with the urban environment shaped the urban fabric and gave life to the city and generate a sense of attachment that affects well-being, quality and sustenance of life [2].

Place attachment is to include positive emotional attachment between the individuals or groups and their environment [2]. Psychological well-being was affected by the accessibility to a place or situation that put pressure on the separation of the place [6] that also affects human conjecture to the place. However, the level of emotional investment to the place indicates the success of an environment to be a place [7]. The literature identified that the place attachment has a strong psychological element (emotion and feeling) that functioned as part of the experience of the environment. Thus, the place attachment can be considered as a variable that can be used to measure the sense of place based on people feelings and emotional reactions to the attributes and characteristics of place in the city which is an important part of evaluating the quality of urban design. The study examined the attributes and characteristics of place attachment for developing the people's bond with their local environment. In understanding the characteristics of a place, several scholars have revealed the importance of the attributes to establish the sense of place and place attachment [9,10,11]. It is noted that in urban design several attributes that contribute to the identification of urban form [8,12,13].

### Methodology

This research was carried out at the KRP, it is located at the main street of the city that stretches approximately 1 mile along the South side of the Sarawak River, that linked the main business district that form the main precinct of the city center. KRP was officially opened on 3rd

September 1993. The research applied mixed method techniques because urban design discipline is considered as multi-dimensional aspects [14,15,16], consequently the mix-method strategy (quantitative and qualitative) is suitable to be used in explaining the phenomenon of the place. This method was used based on the assumption that the bias that occurs will be balanced when the sources and methods is triangulated [17]. Triangulation method is suitable for investigating each layer of phenomenon, finding the meeting point of the data in providing to enhance the scope and range of the research [17]. This strategy is suitable to investigate the issues, because several potential causes and factors of the relationship between people and place were rather diverse and interrelated. Thus the physical elements i.e.: accessibility and familiarity as dependent variable were used to discover the strong attributes and characteristics that influencing user attachment to the place.

The survey was conducted with 165 respondents that include the mobile users (82) and static users (83). The static user are the primary 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 in depth interview were also carried out in the study area. Observation and urban character assessment in the case study are used as a complementary method to produce a more complete representation of how extensively the physical characteristics of the area. In the analysis, the result of urban character assessment evaluation is obtained through the triangulation of the data, interview and observation.

**Results and Discussion**

**(i) Accessibility**

Results from the survey indicated that physical environment has characteristics that influence the respondent attachment. It is shows a positive reaction to the place and its accessibility. The comments from the interview shows that the location of the promenade was close to accessibility path of various modes of movement, close to the public transport hub and well linked to other districts of the city. The strategic location strongly expressed by static users, i.e. the street vendor and hawkers strongly said that its strategic location has been corresponding to the economic activity within the area.

**Table 1.0, Urban character assessment: Accessibility**

ACCESSIBILITY			KRP	
Criteria		Performance indicator	Rating (1 – 5)	Total Average %
Easy to access and well conected pedestrian path	01	Strategic location	5	21/30 (70%) 3.33
	02	Easy to access from any direction	5	
	03	Good conected street	4	
	04	Short urban block	2	
	05	Good conected pedestrian	3	
	06	Accessible using various modes of transport	2	
Scale rating: 5: extremely succeed - 4: succeed - 3: fairly succeed - 2: less succeed - 1: not succeed				

**Table 2.0, The relationship between accessibility and functions attachment**

PLACE	ATTACHMENT	ACCESSIBILITY (N=165)	
		Strategic	Access
KRP	Best place	95.2%	92.8%

The results of urban character assessment are described in Table 1.0 with an average of 70% indicated that the KRP is successful in providing access to the site. Pedestrian paths are well-designed, therefore it is easily to access from all directions and the short urban blocks on the opposite road enhance the permeability and creates axis as a pathways. However, public transport is not diversified and most users relied on private vehicle.

The significance of accessibility can be explained from the cross tabulation in Table 2.0. It shows that respondents, who strongly identify attributes of accessibility, sensed that the open space is the vital place to fulfill and their intention to be there. This explains that the function attachment for the riverfront promenade is the best place for. At least 90% of the respondents identifying KRP has a strategic position and agree that open space is the best place for them. Good accessibility and connection to the place influence the user to determine their length of engagement in the open space. Observation indicated that street connectivity in the KRP is persisted and it creates high levels of permeability. The results showed that permeability is important in supporting the movement in the open space. Layout of physical elements of the area is integrated based on a smaller path parallel to the KRP. It also creates good pedestrian connectivity with short distance and encourages the continuous movement in open space.

## (ii) Familiarity

Urban character assessments for familiarity are described in Table 3.0. The assessment describe the survey of perceptions, KRP is easy to understand because of the diversity of buildings, road quality, clear signage and functional space. Physical elements such as walkways contributed to enhance the familiarity and image ability to promote a sense of familiarity with the place. KRP categorized as historic open space defined by buildings, shop houses and urban structures with historical value. Based on observations, the facade between the old and a new creates a continuity of urban fabrics. It ranges from the traditional shop houses to hotel, office and contemporary buildings.

**Table 3.0,** Urban character assessment: Familiarity

FAMILIARITY		KRP		
Criteria	Performance indicator		Rating (1 – 5)	Total % average
Physical images are clear and easy to understand / identified. A place that is easy to 'surf'.	01	Building layout	5	23/30 (77%) 3.83
	02	Building height and scale	4	
	03	Pedestrian colour and texture	4	
	04	Building colour and texture	2	
	05	Signage and clear direction	4	
	06	Space/building function	4	
Rating scale: 5: extremely succeed - 4: succeed - 3: fairly succeed - 2: less succeed - 1: not succeed				

Table 4.0 shows the cross tabulation between the place familiarity and function attachment. The importances of the layout as the elements that contribute to the respondent's perception clearly indicate that 70% strongly agree that the open space layout is very clear and easy to move and has functional attachment. Respondents argue that the existence of several street vendors demonstrated the place ability to create leisure attraction, attract users and visitors to visit the place.

**Table 4.0,** Relationship between familiarity and function attachment of KRP

PLACE	ATTACHMENT	FAMILIARITY (N=165)							
		Layout	signage	greenery	View	landscape	building	landmark	diversity
KRP	BEST PLACE	73.2	68.1	38.0	58.3	60.2	54.4	83.8	79.4

Interviews with respondents indicate that some elements can be connected to a physical familiarity. These include the building as place marker, historic structures, street vendor, transportation nodes, pedestrian, public facilities and restaurants. These elements highlight the attraction of open space to the visitor that will encourage recurrence visits. Observations on KRP show a strong identity of streetscape, images and integrated views. It is influenced by the pedestrian mall in KRP which has been a success in providing promenade with specific character especially the character of the street furniture. Also the presence of a few places provides activities such as eatery with shaded canopy the view, of the village opposite the river front.

## Summary

The physical elements greatly influence the user attachment. Respondents in KRP intensely recognizes all of available attributes, it can be a reason to conclude that KRP has a robust place

attachment and indicated strong function and emotional attachment. The complete results of the urban character assessment show that the KRP is considered success and received a positive perception from the respondents. Physical characteristics have a significant influence on the level of attachment. Majority of the users, who identify KRP as strategic and very accessible, agreed that the promenade is the best place to satisfy their need. The accessibility and familiarity plays an important role in enhancing the ability of the promenade as a place for work and leisure. The characteristics of the promenade were identified as a strategic location due to have good access, good accessibility, near to transportation nodes (bus, taxi, and boat), good relationships, permeability, image, clear direction and well-known node and place signage. Findings support the notion that the physical environment contributes significantly to the meaning of place [8,10]. Physical appearance plays an important role in influencing the sense of place. Physical environment 'provides image' therefore topophilia (love of the place) have concrete objects that affect attachment [4].

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