

Place attachment in relation to users' roles in the main shopping streets of Kuala Lumpur

Abstract

There are three major components of place: the physical form, activity and meaning (Canter, 1977; Montgomery, 1998). In the context of environmental design, place is predominantly defined by a physical setting. The other conception of the psychological aspects of man-environment relationship identifies that places as that which are based on three interrelated components that give places their meanings: “the physical setting, the individual’s internal psychological and social processes, as well as attributes and activities associated with the place” (Stokol and Shumaker, 1981; Relph, 1976). These authors propagate that changes in the existing physical and activity patterns may erase what is significant and meaningful to the people, particularly the established cultural group. This can be connected to the notion of placelessness. In this regard, Relph (1976) describes placelessness as an environment without significant places and the underlying attitude which does not acknowledge significance in places. However, Arefi (1999) associates such similar idea with “non-place”: the lack of connectivity of the physical landscapes with place meanings held within a broader physical, cultural and emotional context. It is implied that place meanings and attachment embedded in the existing social and cultural setting can be disintegrated as a result of unfit changes in the physical environment. As a result, the sense of belonging, as well as individual and community attachment gradually diminish. As the phenomenon affects the identity of the local urban places, identification of place meanings and attributes attached to them are needed to secure their sense of place. This is particularly applicable to places within traditional urban settings with inherent cultural stronghold and historic values such as Kuala Lumpur city centre.

According to Davenport and Anderson (2005), places are important in developing and maintaining self and group identity as well as a person’s well-being, because it reflects “a sense of belonging and purpose which give meaning to his or her life.” The loss of place meanings and attachment is associated with the inability to continue to feel, to practice and to recall experiences due to the loss of the objects (Hull et al., 1994); the loss of identity (e.g. change and transformation of buildings and spaces; change of uses and function) and the loss of association or desegregation or detachment (e.g. relocation to new housing and neighborhood). When these happen, self or group identity disintegrates as a result of the loss of elements that reflect the

people's identity. Sustaining the meanings and identity of the urban elements strongly held by a group of people is important in contributing to self-identity, sense of community and sense of place. It is therefore vital to identify how meanings are layered and its significance to the attached users who may vary in their socio-cultural characteristics, economic status and length of association with the setting.