

The Effect Of Landmarks On Visitors' Attachment Towards The Historic City Of Banda Hilir, Melaka

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Landmarks are strongly associated with tourism activities as they are regarded as the main attraction of a city. Due to the increase in new development, the attraction of landmarks is diluted. A similar threat is observed in Banda Hilir, Melaka, whereby new commercial buildings have dominated the overall structure of the historic city. As a result, its sense of place is diminishing, which may affect the visitors' sense of attachment and belonging. This paper discusses the visitors' attachment to the landmarks in Banda Hilir. Face-to-face interviews are conducted with visitors to understand their sense of attachment to the landmarks identified in the study. The results indicate that the visitors' attachment differs and is influenced by the physical characteristics of the historical landmarks, the length of engagement and familiarity with the places. They are more attached to landmarks with dominating physical appearance that make them more memorable. The findings indicate the importance of visitors' attachment in enhancing the attraction of landmarks within tourism attraction sites and as a guide when managing the redevelopment project for a historic town or city.

Key words: place attachment, landmarks, tourism attraction

Introduction

A landmark is one of the key elements in establishing a city's image and identity (Lynch, 1960). It identifies the structure of a city in the eyes of pedestrians (Lynch, 1960), influences their perception towards the city as well as giving meanings to places. Landmarks are also strongly recognizable, both visually and symbolically. They blend with aesthetic and social significance. In most cases, landmarks become the attraction of a city, especially among visitors. A similar situation is observed in the historic Banda Hilir, Melaka, where many of its landmarks attract visitors from all over the world. St. Paul Church, A. Famosa and Stadhuys are a few significant buildings that exist since the colonial era. On the other hand, Menara Taming Sari and Muzium Samudera are built during the recent development projects. They continue to become the attractions in Banda Hilir, especially after the city was crowned the 'World Heritage City' in 2008.

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There has been a continuous effort by local authorities to improve the image of the city and to sustain the 'World Heritage City' title. This effort includes programs, advertisements and campaigns to ensure that the landmarks are promoted for tourism. The landmarks become popular destinations for visitors. However, popularity does not ensure that the attachment among visitors towards these places is strong enough to encourage repeated visits and longer stays in the city. The characteristics of landmarks are argued to influence attachment towards a city.

In the recent years, new public spaces and commercial buildings have been developed in the central section of Banda Hilir. Dataran Pahlawan, Mahkota Parade, Menara Taming Sari and Muzium Samudera are a few of the new attractions that provide comfort and attractive facilities to visitors. However, these structures are observed as being unsympathetic to the existing city structure and the historical character of Banda Hilir. In this case, the landmarks should be built to strengthen the historical values of the surroundings as well as the sense of place and attachment imbued in the visitors' experience of the places. This paper examines the influence of landmarks on visitors' attachment towards the historic city of Banda Hilir, Melaka.

Literature Review

Lynch (1960) defines landmarks as elements in a vertical form that are visible from far by an observer and are used as a guide in wayfinding (Figure 1). These landmarks can be any three-dimensional objects that are prominent or conspicuous to the observer in an area as opposed to nodes, which are areas that an observer can enter and experience within. In contrast from its background, clear form and prominence of spatial location, a landmark can become more identifiable (Shuhana, 2011).



Figure 1: Landmark is visible from far and could function as a reference point.

In contrast with Lynch's definition, Hasanudin (2003) defines landmark as any urban landscape feature that is different from its contextual characteristics, with manifested or inherent attributes, which are physically or spiritually unique, influential and impressive. This means that a landmark must not necessarily be a vertical or three-dimensional object. Based on previous studies, landmark has been categorized into four groups, namely natural landmarks, constructed landmarks (Moughtin et al., 1999), distant landmarks and local landmarks (Lynch, 1960). Hasanudin (2003) includes constructed open-spaces as an additional category of landmark (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Open spaces that are distinguishable from its immediate context could become a landmark

In addition, place markers can also be considered as local landmarks. According to Shuhana (2011), place markers are physical irrespective of their size and height, which are used to help visitors to identify places. This is due to their function as reference points for visitors upon their arrival in a place although they are not visible from far. Landmarks are often used interchangeably with focal points as elements that attract the eye when a place is viewed at street level. Hence, a focal point can also become a place marker that becomes a landmark as long as it is distinct from its immediate context.

In this study, combinations of these definitions are used. Landmarks are visible and recognizable elements, either from far or in a space within in an area or a place as long as they are distinctive from their surroundings and their spatial locations are remarkable. Elements, such as buildings, open spaces, structures, features and natural elements are considered as landmarks. Open spaces are often doubted as landmarks; however, in this study, they are regarded as place markers that mainly function as nodes or focal points at street level.

Place attachment is associated with people and their feelings as a result of their experience being in a place. It may develop meanings and memories that vary according to the frequency of visits and length of engagement. Visitors may translate their feelings into the feeling of being comfortable, bonding or being attached to the place.

Place attachment is defined as the development of affective bond or link between people or individuals and specific places (Norsidah & Shuhana S., 2008 from Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001) as well as their dependence on the places. Place attachment is also reflected in the functional connection between people and places (Stokol and Shumaker, 1981). Norsidah (2012), states that place attachment is strongly associated with familiarity and length of engagement once the user starts to feel comfortable with the place. This study supports the findings of Moore & Graefe (1994), which states that the more frequently people visit a place, the stronger their attachment is to the places. Hence this indicates that familiarity gains from a place will influences emotional or functional attachment to a place.

A positive affective relationship between people and places can generate attachment because of people's satisfaction with, evaluation of, and identification with a specific place (Bonnes and Secchiaroli, 1995). Attachment of a person may vary since it depends on his or her personal experience. Hence, there is a need to collectively examine the form of place attachment among the visitors. This study explores the qualitative attachment among visitors through face-to-face interviews on random samples. Qualitative measures are used to offer insights into meanings that

the places entail, which consist of verbal measures with their content analysed later (Maria, 2011 from Van Patten & Williams, 2008).

In this study, several variables are identified to determine the attachment, which include physical characteristics of the landmarks, the length of engagement and familiarity to the historical places. This is also supported by previous research, which states that the variables used to measure place attachment include familiarity, length of association, place identity, sense of belonging and sense of place (Relph, 1976; Stokols and Shumaker 1981; Proshansky et al., 1995; Shamai 1991; Steadman, 2003).

Shamai (1991) develops a seven-level scale to determine the attachment and sense of place or feelings towards different scales of places (country, province and metropolitan area). Relevant to this study, the measurement scales include those who do not have any sense of place as Level 0, knowledge of being located in a place as Level 1, a sense of belonging to a place as Level 2, a sense of attachment to a place as Level 3 and the ability to identify with the goal of a place as Level 4. These levels are used to indicate the attachment among the visitors towards Bandar Hilir through the landmarks. Level 5 and 6 indicate higher levels of a sense of place which are involvement in the place and sacrifice for the place.

The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people who are "travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes". Visitors, in this study, refer to people who come to Banda Hilir for short vacation, work and/or leisure. This is relevant because landmarks may not function, for example, for wayfinding, if people become too familiar with a place and the surrounding, as in the case of the local people.

Landmarks assist in visitors' wayfinding that may contribute to the development of a sense of familiarity and attachment. This paper discusses the way landmarks influence visitors' attachment towards Banda Hilir and how the attributes and characteristics of these landmarks attract the visitors.

Methodology

In this study, face-to-face interviews are conducted to determine the form and level of the attachment among the visitors of Banda Hilir, Melaka. Respondents are allowed to respond to the questions without restriction, which can increase their tendency to provide detailed answers. Qualitative method is adopted to understand the respondents' behaviour, feeling and attachment instead of forcing them to answer objectively.

The results are based on preliminary interviews, which are conducted with ten respondents. These respondents are randomly selected among the visitors of Banda Hilir, Melaka. This method allows all visitors to have equal opportunity of being selected as a sample which later leads to have more holistic answers. The random samples are later group into three groups: (a) visitors who come to visit Banda Hilir for the first time, (b) visitors who come to visit Banda Hilir several times and (c) frequent visitors.

The purpose of their visits, such as for holiday, work or leisure, are considered as well. This means that both local people and foreigners, who are either tourists (people who travel and stay in Bandar Hilir) or workers (who do not live in Banda Hilir for a longer period as long as they are not from Banda Hilir), can be the respondents. Furthermore, the sample chosen are not necessarily interviewed while they are in town but the interview can also be done among frequent visitors who are

out of town. This is because anyone who has visited the town before may still have the memories or attachments to the landmarks and, therefore, they are relevant to be examined since they have the experience of being there. Hasanudin (2003) states that, in order to identify the influence that familiarity has on perception, it is also necessary to include a sample from those who live outside the central area and those who used to live or work there but have migrated away. Other than that, the respondents' age, types of work and genders are also noted.

Shamai's (1991) Sense of Place Measurements introduces the criteria to indicate levels of visitors' attachment. At Level 1, visitors are considered having the lowest level of attachment to the place. However, the form of attachment may vary, depending on other influencing factors such as familiarity to the places.

Respondents are asked about their understanding on the landmarks, their familiarity with the surrounding context of Banda Hilir, the physical or spatial characteristics of the landmarks, meanings of the landmarks, their awareness of the goals and issues of the city and also their willingness to contribute to this city if they were given opportunities.

Apart from the problem in terms of English command and the difficulty to find suitable samples that are willing to cooperate, the researcher manages to obtain answers after continuous effort and attempts. The outputs from this interview are analyzed after transcribing the data from the interview and categorize them into related themes.

Results and Discussion

The preliminary results are based on 10 respondents, who are six men and four women. They are both local and foreign visitors with the age range of twenty four to sixty nine years old. Four of them represent those who visit Bandar Hilir for the first time. On the other hand another four are visitors who visit Banda Hilir a few times while the remaining two are frequent visitors. They have different working backgrounds, which include government servants, engineers, students and pensioners.

In terms of the definition of a landmark, 5 out of 10 respondents agree that a landmark is a potentially iconic significant element, which people can relate to, a site or item that makes a place special, as well as something that differentiates places and acts as a reference point. These responses do not differ much from the definitions given by the scholars mentioned earlier. Four respondents are unable to define a landmark although they understand what a landmark is. They are unable to give correct examples of elements that they consider as landmarks. One of the respondents do not even understand landmark until examples are given by the interviewer. This might happened because they are not familiar with the term of landmark.

When asked to identify the landmarks of Banda Hilir, all of the respondents are able to identify elements that are considered as landmarks. The elements include St. Paul Church (including the hill area), Santiago Port, the red building (including its surrounding areas), Stadhuy's and St. Xavier Church, A. Famosa, Menara Taming Sari, Muzium Samudera, Jonker Street (including the buildings therein), Dataran Pahlawan and Mahkota Parade.

Physical Characteristics of Landmark

In the opinion of the respondents, the landmarks are visually attractive. They associate their attraction with various physical and spatial characteristics of the landmarks. The

characteristics include colours, architectural styles and façades of building they consider as landmarks (see Figure 3). The following responses indicate the respondents' identification of landmarks and their characteristics:

“When people talk about Christ Church Melaka, they recognize them as the red building.” (Respondent 1: Foreign visitor, who has visited Malacca a few times, considers the red buildings as a landmark).

“The appearance and the façade are interesting. The materials as well [sic].” (Respondent 6: Foreign visitor, who is on his first day in Banda Hilir, considers Jonker Street and A.Famosa as landmarks).



Figure 3: The red building is always referred as landmark due to its colour and architectural styles which is contrast from the surrounding.

Location and size are also used to describe the landmarks. This refers to big and tall landmarks, which are emphasized by their look, scale and proportion (Figure 4). The characteristics are found to suit the definitions of landmarks as discussed earlier in this paper. Their descriptions are reflected in the responses below:

“It’s high up, it’s big and it’s old.” (Respondent 5: Foreign visitor, who is on his first day in Banda Hilir, regards St. Paul Church and the surrounding hills as well as the Malacca River area as landmarks).

“The Taming Sari Tower is significant to be a landmark because it is very high” (Respondent 9: Local visitor, who visits Malacca frequently, considers Menara Taming Sari as a landmark).

“I am not very familiar with the area outside of the [sic] Jonker Street but it is not hard to find the places because it is just a straight road.” (Respondent 7: Local visitor, who has visited Malacca a few times, considers the Dragon sculpture at the entrance of the Jonker Street including the street itself as a landmark).



Figure 4: Menara Taming Sari (left) and St. Paul Church (right) as landmarks to visitors for its distinctive characteristics such as tall and physically dominant.

One of the respondents mentions that the landmarks' historical character attracts him the most. The well-known history of Malacca helps in promoting its urban features, including landmarks, such as A.Famosa and St. Paul Church (Figure 5). This response is probably influenced by his knowledge on the history of the city. In this regard, a local visitor, who visits Malacca frequently, expresses his familiarity with the history of the historical buildings.

“It gives historical values. Ever since we were in school time we learned [sic] that A. Famosa is a historical building...” (Respondent 10: Local visitor, who visits Banda Hilir frequently, regards A. Famosa as a historical landmark).



Figure 5: A. Famosa often associates with historical values.

The above responses indicate that visitors are more likely to identify with landmarks that have dominating physical and spatial appearances. These characteristics contribute to the attractiveness of the landmarks, which may influence how the visitors feel when visiting the city. In measuring the meaning of an environment, there is a need to identify the attributes of the physical environment that may influence thoughts, feelings, attitudes or behaviour (Hasanudin, 2003 from Hershberger, 1972). He, further, categorizes the attributes of landmarks into scale, proportion and size, colours, singularity/unique/different/contrasting, location/strategic position, symbolism and architectural value. The landmark may be characterized by one or more of these attributes. Hence, this explains the responses of the visitors' identification on the characteristics of landmarks in Banda Hilir, Melaka.

Familiarity and Place Attachment

Familiarity may be obtained from frequent association or engagement with a place. The visitors' repeated mentions about landmarks that they are attracted to or engaged with indicate place attachment due to their familiarity with the places. Their identifications on memorable characteristics help them to familiarize with the places and the city as a whole. Based on the study, being familiar to a place is influenced by the length of engagement to that particular place. The longer visitors stay or engage with a place, the more familiar they are. This emphasizes the importance of the length of stay or duration of a visit.

As mentioned earlier, the visitors in this study are able to identify significant items that can be considered as landmarks. Referring to Shamai (1991), the recognition of the symbols of a place can be categorized as Level 1: Knowledge of being located in a place. The results show that all of the respondents are able to distinguish and understand the landmarks and their attributes although some may not have feelings that bind them to the places or the city.

It is obvious that visitors, who are in Malacca for the first time or for a short period, are less familiar with the places. Therefore, the attachment to the landmarks is considered low. However, despite being unfamiliar with the places, they are still able to identify the historical elements and the history of the city. This can be seen from the response below:

“I'm not sure about the landmark, we just arrived today... I think the history is a good point. The central of the city are [sic] good too.”(Respondent 8: Foreign visitor, who is in Malacca for the first time on his first day).

However, among the first timers, familiarity can be obtained as well but may depend on their duration of stay or length of engagement in the city. Visitors who are interviewed on the second day of their visits are quite familiar with the places. This is reflected in the response below:

“This is my first time coming here and this is my second day here... I think so now [sic] (referring to the question whether he is familiar with the city and the city's landmarks).” (Respondent 4: First-time foreign visitor, on his second day, regards Stadhuy's and St. Paul Church as landmarks).

The result proves that the landmarks mentioned above have strong characteristics that make them easily recognizable and identifiable. This supports the development of place familiarity to a place within a very short period of time. The landmarks are observed as strongly legible and memorable.

When asked for idea and feedback for the betterment of Banda Hilir, including the landmarks, majority of the respondents responded positively. Some of them share their expectations on the places and suggest ideas for the improvement of the city. Other than knowing the names of places and their symbols for the place, they start to have feelings of concern as first-time visitors. It is doubted that first-time visitors would express concerns but it is possible with the knowledge of the place and non-physical association with the place prior to the visit. This is reflected in the following response of a first-time visitor when asked about his familiarity with the surrounding context of Banda Hilir:

“Yes, I am quite familiar. I have done some study and collected detail [sic], so we know what are places that we going [sic] to see and visit.” (Respondent 2: Foreign visitor, who visits Malacca for the first time on his second day, considers Dataran Pahlawan and the red buildings as landmarks).

The knowledge on landmarks makes it easier for the visitors to be familiar with the urban structure and understand the issues in a place. The longer they stay, the more they are exposed to the actual condition of a place. This supports in the development of place attachment. At this stage, they are said to have a sense of togetherness or belonging to the place (Shamai, 1991). This situation is mainly expressed not only by visitors who have visited the places for a few times but also those who are there for the first time. This is evident in the following responses:

“As a visitor, I can contribute within that few days of visit in some kind of program [sic] where visitors are invited and can do [sic] some welfare activities [sic] for this place.” (Respondent 2: Foreign visitor, who visits Malacca for the first time on his second day).

“Well I would [sic] obviously share my opinions.” (Respondent 4: Foreign visitor, who visits Malacca for the first time on his second day).

“If there is a form maybe I can write my recommendation and maybe to have [sic] Facebook to specifically collect feedback.” (Respondent 7: Local visitor, who visits Malacca for the first time).

From the interview, five of the respondents agree that the landmarks have strong historical values. They express their appreciation towards the people who preserve the historical landmarks to be as they are today. According to Shamai's (1991) when a person experiences a place that gives meaning and symbols to create a 'personality' to them, they are considered to have attachment to the place. This is categorized as Level three. At this level, the sense of place involves an emotional attachment to a place. Their responses are stated as below:

“It is just about the history of the place, the heritage. It reflects the world heritage city. So that's the kind of significant of the heritage or public heritage of the city[sic].” (Respondent 5: Foreign visitor, who visits Malacca for the first time on his first day, regards St. Paul Church including the surroundings hills area and the Melaka river area as landmarks).

“They give historical values.” (Respondent 1: Foreign visitor, who has been in Banda Hilir for a few times, considers the red buildings as a landmark).

However, there are contradictory statements from three respondents although they are familiar and aware of the issues relating to the city. This leads to an idea that there may be cases where the length of engagement may not ensure a visitor's sense of attachment to develop accordingly. This situation may occur due to the lack of concern and actual knowledge of the place. It may also as a result of the lack of familiarity and engagement with the place once they experience it. This can be a potential topic for future research in the area.

Majority of the respondents are not aware about the goal of this city. According to Shamai (1991), Level four of the sense of place measurement is where people are able to identify with the goals of a place. The sense of attachment of the visitors is reflected in the following themes:

- a) Familiarity: Knowledge about a place and the degree of legibility
- b) Emotional attachment: Feelings about a place, meaning of a place, description of a place
- c) Functional attachment: Attractive activities, feeling of comfort and satisfaction, opinion on changes, suggestion for improvement and engagement

The respondents share not only their knowledge and familiarity, but also their opinions on the characteristics of landmarks, which have influenced their sense of attachment.

Conclusion

The study found that landmarks influence visitors' attachment. The visitors' identification on landmarks is strongly associated with the physical and spatial characteristics of landmarks as well as their locational factors. Familiarity contributes to a stronger attachment towards a city. This study denotes the importance of attachment in making historical cities more meaningful and memorable for visitors. The findings also indicate the importance of attachment that needs to be considered in enhancing the development of historic city. This is to preserve the 'World Heritage City' title that been given to this town. Hence, there is a need to ensure that any forms of intervention within the city will not threaten place attachment. These findings can benefit those who are involved in the planning, designing, conservation and tourism in redeveloping historic cities in Malaysia.

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