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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 91 (2013) 632 – 639

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

PSU-USM International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences

Place Attachment and Place Identity: Undergraduate Students' Place Bonding On Campus

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Abstract

University is considered as a bridge between home and society for the undergraduate students. Campus life is a unique place experience which is very important on their journey to adulthood. Although numerous studies explored the students performance on campus, little discussion has addressed the undergraduate students' place bonding on campus from the perspectives of place attachment and place identity. To fill such a gap, this paper explores the influence and intensity of campus environment on the development of place attachment and place identity in undergraduate students at University Sains Malaysia (USM). The main instrument involved in this study is questionnaire that is proposed with five scales: demographic information, physical environment, social environment, cultural and academic environment, and place attachment and place identity. The results of this study showed a current and holistic student-place relationship to campus. Generally, it illustrated that the students in USM showed relatively strong attachment and identity to the campus, while the extent of place identity was comparatively weaker than place attachment. Specifically, first, students in different study level showed different extent of place attachment and place identity to campus. Both students' extent of place attachment and place identity followed the same order (from high to low): juniors, seniors, sophomores, and freshmen. Second, national students showed higher attachment and identity to campus than international students. Third, through bivariate correlations analysis, the results also showed some most influential variables to affect students' place attachment and place identity.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Universiti Sains Malaysia.

Keywords: Place attachment; Place identity; Campus; Undergraduate Students

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1. Introduction

Every year tens of thousands of students begin to step into university life while a similar number graduate to step into society. For the student, the life in university is a bridge for leaving the comfort and security of home and embarking on the journey to society. Traditionally, the transition to university is regarded as a positive experience which involves new opportunities for personal and self-development (Chow & Healey, 2008). By reviewing the literature on withdrawal, Pitkethly and Prosser (2001, p. 185) concluded that “each university must understand the experiences of its own students”, for their experiences in university have great influence on their performance on campus and in the future society.

University is a magic place which will change the adolescent to a young adult. For the undergraduates, the campus provides them an arena for gradual adjustment, coping, adaptation, exploitation and integration to the college life. It also combines some complicate feelings, attachments and emotions that are deeply bonded with the campus, and which are indicated as place attachment and place identity from the academic perspectives of human geography and environment psychology.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Place attachment and place identity*

Place played a large role throughout human and individual history. It has been a significant factor in people's day-to-day experience. Discourses exploring people-place relationships were full of various key concepts including sense of place (Relph, 1976; Steele, 1981; Tuan, 1977), place attachment (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001), place identity (Proshansky, 1978; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996), place dependence (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001) and community attachment (Trentelman, 2009) to name a few. Among these concepts, place attachment and place identity were the most general ones that a large number of scholars have made lots of endeavors.

Place attachment was a multifaceted conception which included many aspects of people-place bonding involving behavior, affect and cognition. It was an interplay of affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviors and actions which was in relation to a place (Altman & Low, 1992; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). Altman and Low (1992, p. 7) proposed that: “... attachments may not only be to landscapes solely as physical entities, but may be primarily associated with the meanings of and experiences in place—which often involve relationships with other people”.

Identity referred to “some way of describing or conceptualizing the self, which may incorporate personal roles and attributes, membership in social groups or categories, and connections to geographical locations” (Devine-Wright & Clayton, 2010, p. 267). Stemming from Proshansky's work (Proshansky, 1978; Proshansky et al., 1983), the concept of place identity was considered as an individual's strong emotional attachment to a particular place or environment setting. Proshansky et al. (1983, p. 57) describe the place identity as “physical world socialization of the self”, or the self-definitions that were derived from places. Place identity was supported by the physical dimensions of the place, but also the social environment associated with it (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996).

2.2. *Undergraduate students on campus*

During the campus life, students would confront sets of social and intellectual challenges that may raise questions about who they were and how they see themselves (Cassidy & Trew, 2004). When students failed to make a satisfactory to the academic and social demands of university life, they might be in the form of drop-out and under-achievement and, perhaps, lack of fulfillment (Lowe & Cook, 2003). There was a general consensus

that a high proportion of students either withdraw or fail because of adjustment or environmental factors, rather than because of intellectual difficulties (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2001).

Like the neighborhood, the campus must be envisioned as a life space which can contribute to the students' well-being, or to the contrary, can generate dissatisfaction and stress. As a life place, the campus also conducted to the construction of individual identity through the interactions on campus.

Hence, based on the discussion above, this paper seeks to understand the undergraduate students' place bonding to campus. Specifically, it aims to explore the most influential variables that affect students' place attachment and place identity to campus; to confirm if there are different place bonding between students of national and international; and if the students in different study level have different extent of place bonding.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The sample was composed of 114 undergraduate students in different study levels (from freshman to senior) in University Sains Malaysia, and including local students and international students.

3.2. Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of 5 scales (40 items) with a summary and explanation at the beginning. The first scale including 8 items was about the participants' demographic specifications. The two to five scales were agreement scales, in each of which, there were 8 items to express the participants' perceptions to the campus physical environment, social environment, cultural and academic environment, and place attachment and place identity to campus. The Likert-type response scale consisted of five steps, from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree".

3.2.1. Demographic specifications

The first part of the questionnaire allowed the author to collect data on the participants' demographic information including gender, age, race, nationality, major, school, study level, and accommodation.

3.2.2. Perceptions to physical environment on campus

The scale was used to evaluate students' perceptions to campus physical environment. It comprised eight items concerning their basic necessities of life on campus which included the living conditions, shopping, transportations, dining hall options for diverse races and religious and views on campus.

3.2.3. Perceptions to social environment on campus

This scale contained the items that expressed the undergraduate students' social contact, security and privacy on campus, perceptions to the rule and regulation on campus.

3.2.4. Perceptions to cultural and academic environment on campus

The scale in this part referred eight items to evaluate students' attitudes to the facilities for study, sports and entertainment, the frequencies of cultural events on campus, students clubs, and library resources etc.

3.2.5. Place attachment and place identity to campus

There were eight items in this scale which was used to directly predict students' place attachment and place identity to campus. The first half items expressed the student's place attachment, and the second half expressed their place identity. Most of the items were inspired by Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) who used the scales of place attachment and place identity to measure the lakeshore owners' sense of place. Nonetheless, the original items of Jorgensen and Stedman could not be adapted satisfactorily to the specifics of campus environment. That was why most of the original items had been constructed to complete this measurement. For exam, the original item, "I really miss my lake property when I'm away from it for too long", was improved as "I will really miss USM when I graduate". This item was similar with the one that "I would be sorry to move out ..." which had been used previously by other authors such as Hidalgo and Hernández (2001) who selected the item to measure place attachment. The item supposed the participant to imagine a break or distancing situation that could reveal their place attachment to campus. when investigating the determinants of place attachment, Mesch and Manor (1998) also used some similar items, i.e., "sorry to move out" and "proud to live in the neighbourhood".

3.3. Procedure and measures

The questionnaires were distributed to voluntary participants in the library of USM and the date was collected individually. PASW statistics, 18.0 versions, was used for statistical analysis.

4. Results and Analysis

Results demonstrate the richness and complexities of students' relationship to campus. Table 1 indicated frequencies and percentages of demographic information. The age of the participants concentrated in the range of 20 – 23 years old, about 76.3%. The race distributions were Malay 25.4%, Chinese 53.5%, Indian 7.0% and others 14.0%. The national students occupied 68.4%, while the international students were 31.6%. Participants were from different study level including freshman 21.9%, sophomore 18.4%, junior 24.6% and senior 35.1%. Because it was divided into two parts on the main campus of USM, therefore, the items of the students' dormitories were arranged into three parts which were the hostels in dormitory area such as Restu, Saujana or Tekun 42.1%, hostels in teaching area such as Aman Damai, Bakti Permai etc. 31.6%, and outside of the campus 26.3%.

Table 1: Frequency table for participants' demographic information

Demographic	Variables	Percentage
Gender	Male	43.0
	Female	57.0
Age	Under 20 years old	11.4
	20 – 23 years old	76.3
	24 – 26 years old	9.6
	27 – 29 years old	0.9
	Above 30 years	1.8
Race	Malay	25.4
	Chinese	53.5
	Indians	7.0

	others	14.0
Nationality	Malaysia	68.4
	International	31.6
Study level	Freshman	21.9
	Sophomore	18.4
	Junior	24.6
	Senior	35.1
Accommodation	Restu, Saujana or Tekun	42.1
	Aman Damai, Bakti Permai, Cahaya Gemilang,	31.6
	Fajar Harapan, Indah Kembara, International House	
	Accommodation outside the campus	26.3

The internal reliability among the total items was calculated using Cronbach’s alpha, and the score was 0.934.

Among the items to evaluate students’ place bonding on campus, the mean value for students’ place attachment to campus was 3.8925, while the score for place identity was 3.6908. It could be concluded that the students mainly had deep attachment to campus. They could also set self identity through campus, although the mean score for place identity was not too high. Comparing the values, it could be concluded that it was easier to generate attachment to campus for students than to set up their self identity in accordance with campus. It corresponded to the previous research that people may attached to a place but it takes more than liking or attachment to incorporate the place as part of one’s self (Maria, 2008).

A bivariate correlation was performed to assess the relationship between each testing item to place attachment and place identity (see table 2 and table 3).

Table 2: The analysis of Spearman correlation between place attachment and other items

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Correlation Coefficient	.476**	.289**	.492**	.237*	.121	.359**	.601**	.340**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.000	.011	.199	.000	.000	.000
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Correlation Coefficient	.436**	.254**	.366**	.325**	.299**	.533**	.526**	.434**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.006	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000
	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6	CA7	CA8
Correlation Coefficient	.707**	.489**	.212*	.463**	.335**	.525**	.331**	.521**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.024	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 demonstrated the extent of correlation between place attachment and the tested items. The item with the highest correlation to place attachment was CA1 (study in USM is happy). Then the higher correlated items in turn were P7 (feel pleasant to see campus landscape), S6 (pace of life in USM), S7 (comparing life with other university), CA6 (library resources), CA8 (students clubs),

P3 (campus shopping), CA2 (cultural events), P1 (campus scenery), CA4 (study facilities), etc.

Table 3: The analysis of Spearman correlation between place identity and other items

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
Correlation Coefficient	.348**	.198*	.349**	.184*	.172	.365**	.435**	.192*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.035	.000	.050	.067	.000	.000	.040
	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Correlation Coefficient	.415**	.412**	.305**	.447**	.323**	.470**	.426**	.436**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	CA1	CA2	CA3	CA4	CA5	CA6	CA7	CA8
Correlation Coefficient	.664**	.497**	.178	.379**	.274**	.394**	.319**	.487**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.058	.000	.003	.000	.001	.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 indicated the extent of correlation between place identity and other tested items. The highest correlation item was also CA1. Then other high correlated items in turn were CA2 (cultural events), CA8 (students clubs), S6 (pace of life in USM), S4 (behave freely), S8 (privacy), P7 (feel pleasant to see campus landscape), S7 (comparing life with other university), S1 (friends), S2 (feel lonely), etc.

Almost in all literature about people-place relations, residence length was considered “the most consistent positive predictor of attachment to residence places” (Lewicka, 2011, p. 216). For the undergraduate students, it could be hypothesized that the students in higher study level would generate deeper attachment and identity to campus. Basically, the data in table 4 was consistent with the argument above. The students in the first year in USM got the lowest mean values of place attachment and place identity. The scores of the sophomore were higher than the freshman, while the junior had the deepest place bonding to campus. The senior got lower marks than the junior, but higher than the sophomore and the freshman.

Table 4: Place attachment and place identity in different study levels

Study Level		Place Attachment	Place Identity
Freshman	Mean	3.6400	3.4300
	N	25	25
	Std. Deviation	.81675	.61033
Sophomore	Mean	3.7143	3.5357
	N	21	21
	Std. Deviation	.53201	.62892
Junior	Mean	4.1518	3.9732
	N	28	28
	Std. Deviation	.62115	.46815
Senior	Mean	3.9625	3.7375
	N	40	40

	Std. Deviation	.76282	.71151
Total	Mean	3.8925	3.6908
	N	114	114
	Std. Deviation	.72332	.64519

There were a large proportion of international students in USM. Their place bonding on campus was different with the national students (see table 5). For the international students, they should experience much more changes in the physical, social and cultural environments than the local students. That might be the reason why they got lower scores on place attachment and place identity. When comparing different values between national and international students, the maximum mean difference in the items was S2 (I have never felt lonely in USM) which got the D-value as 0.7564. Then the differences showed in the items of concerning students clubs, pace of life in USM, library resources, etc. which were mainly focused on the campus social environment, and cultural and academic environment.

Table 5: National and international students' place attachment and place identity

Nationality		Place Attachment	Place Identity
Malaysia	Mean	3.9744	3.8077
	N	78	78
	Std. Deviation	.69037	.58792
International	Mean	3.7153	3.4375
	N	36	36
	Std. Deviation	.77033	.69789

5. Conclusion

The relationships between people and place are seemingly complex and evolve both through space and time (Chow & Healey, 2008). University, as a transition from home to society, is an important place during the students' life experience. Exploring their place bonding to campus is quite significant to the students themselves and to the university. This study has filled such a gap that probe students' place attachment and place identity to campus.

The result illustrated that the students in USM showed relatively strong attachment and identity to the campus, while the extent of place identity is comparatively weaker than place attachment. It corresponded to the previous research that people may attached to a place but it takes more than liking or attachment to incorporate the place as part of one's self (Maria, 2008). But students, in different grades, at home or abroad, showed relatively different extent of place bonding to campus. The reasons are complicated and the future research is needed to clarify them.

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