

TRANSNATIONAL STUDENTS' ATTACHMENT TO PLACE IN CAMPUS: TOWARDS THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

¹Mohammad Yazah Mat Raschid, ¹Ezaz Fatemi, ¹Roslina Sharif, ²Abdul Halim Ismail

¹ Department of Architecture,
Faculty of Design and Architecture,
Universiti Putra Malaysia 43400 Serdang,
Selangor, Malaysia
mym67@gmail.com

² Department of Architecture,
Faculty of Engineering and Built
Environment,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600
Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

In many universities around the world internationalization is promoted as a top priority to attract lucrative international student markets. To achieve this goal, it is essential to facilitate a sense of place amongst transnational students to eradicate social and psychological problems in the new educational environment. Despite this, there seems to be insufficient records on the actual manner of transnational students' securitizing the issue and how it has impacted their educational lifestyles. Therefore, the challenge now is to ascertain the actual level of attachment in campus before embarking into a more related complex and multidisciplinary social and physical studies. The aim of this study to investigate the level of emotional attachment of place of international students and the manner it affects their educational experiences in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) main campus. For this reason, a 5-point Likert-Scaled questionnaire survey on 336 UPM international students and data analysis using SPSS were conducted. Results demonstrate that the international students have a low emotional place attachment towards the campus design which also affects their social well-being and psychological health. Recognizing the main indicators of emotional attachment also assist in improving the physical design of the campus to support the international students' sense of place attachment.

Keywords: *Place Attachment, Second Home, Transnational Student, University Campus Design*

INTRODUCTION

Developing countries host a significant number of international students and constantly attract them to improve the quality and cultural composition of the student body, gain prestige, and earn income. India and the Philippines, for example, are significant host countries for students from other developing countries. India hosts more than 8,000 students from abroad, 95% from developing countries (Bhalla, 2005). China, Malaysia, and India are developing strategies to attract students and to export educational programs and institutions. With the internationalization of universities, students face a lot of problems when arriving to a new campus, such as finding accommodation, and adjusting to challenges of getting familiar with a new living and studying environment [1]. Despite the cultural diversity international students bring, this group faces a variety of challenges in adjustment. [2] Misra et al. identified three major areas of challenges that international students encounter psychological, emotional and social difficulties.

Despite various university efforts intended to support transnational students, many students still reported emotional, psychological, social and academic challenges to their integration into the university culture. Left unaddressed, these challenges may lead to

isolation, reduced retention and cultural shock; It also contributes to affective, behavioral, and cognitive disorientation that sojourners experience when in an unfamiliar culture [3] and miscommunication which can lead to lack of social support: these are the big challenges that international students experience in a new environment [4]. Places can facilitate restoration by helping people forget the personal or social pressures encountered in daily life and can take the form of a positive change in mood, a renewal of directed attention capacity, or a reduction of stress, which regulates the self [5].

For transnational students, university life is a new experience and they also embark on a trip to community [6]. [7] Hechanova found that international students experienced less social support than domestic students, most likely because their family and friends were not closely living with them and visiting them was difficult and infrequent. Place attachment is one of the most influential factors in humans' psychological health, and is therefore powerful in constructing an individual's identity [8] and may reduce the emotional, sociocultural and psychological problems among international students [9].

LINKING UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONALIZATION AND CAMPUS DESIGN

The number of students who further their studies at universities is increasing every year. Thus, universities must have a long-term development plans for their campuses. Times Higher Education (2016) reported last year on a British survey of over 2,000 students which found that more students (67%) were influenced by a university's facilities than by its reputation (47%) when deciding where to study. Only the university's course offerings (79%) were significantly more important to students than facilities; location was important at 69%, just two percentage points above facilities.

There are many benefits that can be achieved through the development of a sustainable campus [10] when there is a balance of the three aspects of social and environment. The campus environment powerfully influences the social and psychological lives of students [11]. When prospective students visit a campus, the most influential aspect of the tour is "the buildings, the trees, the walkways, the well-kept lawns" [12]. The buildings, the statues, and the fountains create an atmosphere that makes the students more than machines [13]. At the serious point [14] Brown pointed out that a well-designed campus could result in students' being proud.

Interestingly, not only classrooms, but the whole university campus can potentially be an effective learning space [15]. Therefore, university campus is an artwork and a place for experience and experiment [16]; however, many campus designs are defined to express the architecture of the buildings and built spaces rather than students comfort needs [17]. Students also have a need for spaces where they feel at home and can easily return each day to meet friends or just to relax [18]. The quality of campus spaces supports the relationship between students and increase the quality of urban or university life [19].

IS EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT IMPORTANT

In recent years, attention has focused increasingly on the relation of human beings to places, environments or geographic locations in general. Most researchers agree that place attachment is multidimensional and it is not easy to discuss about relationships between man and environment [20]. By interacting with their environments, individuals create bonds and links [21]. In the course of this interaction, anonymous spaces are converted into places endowed with meaning, which serve as objects of attachment [22]. Correspondingly, attachment is defined as a construct representing mainly the emotional bond to a location, but includes also cognition and meaning, and is related to personality tendencies of the individual.

People often develop an affective-memory and memory-achievement familiarity; a sense of belonging, identity, dependence, and even possessiveness toward places, to the extent that these places may become 'their place', 'a favourite place', or the 'only place' for various types of leisure pursuits [23]. In actual fact, place is a space imbued with meanings [24]. In similar term, a space and place are interconnected, where the physical aspects of space are ascribed meaning according to the values that people give to that place [25]. Place attachment globally affects social well-being among individuals [5]. In general, place attachment bonds, while intact, are positively associated with quality of life, life satisfaction and various other dimensions of well-being [21].

METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive survey designed to collect data from transnational student's feelings to measure the emotional attachment level and its effects in Universiti Putra Malaysia. The research presented here carried out during the 2016/2017 academic year at the Universiti Putra Malaysia. The participants took an average of 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire online. The link was randomly sent to international students to understand individual perceptions. The link was sent on 14 November 2016 to UPM foreign students and the link was opened for 60 days to collect data from transnational students.

A 5-point Likert-scale ranging from 1 as strongly disagree to 5 as strongly agree is used for the measurement. For these parameters any grade of 2.50 and above was taken to agree the point while below 2.50 was disagreeing. In order to avoid biased responses,

participants were stated that questionnaires would be treated anonymously and that the data collected would only be used for the purposes of the study.

The study utilizes Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 22 (SPSS v.22.0) for statistical analysis. Data were analyzed using Frequencies, Descriptive, Means, Pearson and Correlation analysis.



Figure 1: Welcoming point of entrance for place attachment in UPM (Source: Author)



Figure 2: Administrative Center of UPM (Source: Author)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Demographic Findings

The 336 transnational students (67.3% Male and 32.7% Female) with different classifications (majority of 98.2% were postgraduate students) were randomly selected

for the study. The population ranged between 18 and 36 and above years. Most are married (57.7%) and from the Middle East (Iran and Iraq). Because of a weak-designed campus accommodation, only 14.6% of international students who participated in the survey were living on-campus with 85.4% preferring to stay off-campus.

Level of Emotional Attachment

The emotional attachment which can turn campus spaces to attachment places was examined. The items of comfort and relaxation, safety, fee at home, happiness in UPM, sense of pride, expectations of campus and loneliness at UPM were examined for overall emotional attachment.

The following questions were asked to find the overall emotional attachment in UPM.

- I feel at home here.
- I feel happy when I am in UPM.
- I feel secure when I am in UPM.
- I am proud of UPM.
- I feel lost in UPM environment.
- I sometimes feel like I do not belong in UPM.
- I feel lonely at UPM.
- I am very attached to the campus.
- I would recommend for other international students to study here.
- I feel more comfortable living outside UPM?

Table 1: Report of the Overall Emotional Attachment in UPM

Mean	N	Std. Deviation
3.2359	336	.47073

The overall mean of emotional attachment is 3.24; Std. Deviation is 0.47073 which is higher compared to physical attachment in UPM. These items play an important role in enhancing the meaning of campus environment. Without a doubt, the identity of the campus is affected by emotional items. In fact, place attachment is a bond that international students develop towards the campus that embodies emotional content. It should be mentioned that emotional attachment is higher among men compared to female students (Refers to tables 2 and 3).

Table 2: Emotional Attachment among Female and Male

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Female	3.1561	110	.45743	1.75	4.42
Male	3.2747	226	.47321	1.67	4.67
Total	3.2359	336	.47073	1.67	4.67

Table 3: Transnational Students' Perception/ Experiences

Gender		Feel at Home	Feel Happy	Feel Secure	Proud of UPM	Feel lost	Not Belong	Feel Lonely
Female	Mean	2.86	3.15	3.45	3.54	2.81	2.94	2.96
	N	110	110	110	110	110	110	110
	Std. Deviation	1.238	1.180	1.146	1.089	1.161	1.191	1.203
Male	Mean	3.23	3.54	3.79	4.03	2.65	2.57	2.88
	N	226	226	226	226	226	226	226
	Std. Deviation	1.178	1.091	1.061	1.028	1.213	1.271	1.290
Total	Mean	3.11	3.41	3.68	3.87	2.71	2.69	2.90
	N	336	336	336	336	336	336	336
	Std. Deviation	1.208	1.135	1.100	1.072	1.197	1.256	1.261

The results demonstrate that international students do not feel at home when in campus. Meanwhile, they do not feel very happy when they are on-campus. However, the secure feeling and sense of pride are the highest variables of the emotional attachment among transnational students. Unfortunately, most of the students do not feel the campus belong to them, so it can cause more depression and homesickness among them. It has been proven that sense of attachment can reduce emotional, socio-cultural and demographical problems among international students.

The results demonstrate that meaning of a campus is associated with an individual's psychological, emotional and social processes and these generate perception. It is can be said that the meaning of places can influence physical attachment, so activities and usage of buildings and open spaces of the campus should not be ignored.

Correlation Analysis

A correlation is used to investigate the relationship between two quantitative, continuous variables. The Pearson's correlation was computed to assess the relationship between place attachments and feel at home, feel happy, feel secure, feel proud, feel lost, and not belonging. The strongest positive correlation of this study was between feel at home which encouraged international students to feel attached and happy in the UPM campus ($r = 0.792$, $n = 336$, $p = 0.000$). Secondly, there was a positive correlation between feel happy and feel proud ($r = 0.671$, $n = 336$, $p = 0.000$). The result indicates that there were positive relationships between feel at home and other variables (feel secure, and feel attached). At the same time, there was a positive correlation between the feel secure and feel happy ($r = 0.554$, $n = 336$, $P = 0.000$) (Refer to table 4).

Meanwhile, the safe feeling in campus has an important role in enhancing the feeling at home among international students. As a result, there is a negative correlation between feel attached to the UPM campus environments and not belonging to campus areas and places ($r = -0.294$, $n = 336$, $p = 0.000$).

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

		Feel at Home	Feel Happy	Feel Secure	Proud of UPM	Feel Lost	Not Belong	Attached to the Campus
Feel at Home	Pearson Correlation	1						

	Sig. (2-tailed)	336						
	N							
Feel	Pearson	.792**	1					
Happy	Correlation	.000						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	336	336					
	N							
Feel	Pearson	.539**	.554**	1				
Secured	Correlation	.000	.000					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	336	336	336				
	N							
Proud of	Pearson	.578**	.671**	.530**	1			
UPM	Correlation	.000	.000	.000				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	336	336	336	336			
	N							
Feel Lost	Pearson	-.205**	-.167**	-.176**	-.201**	1		
	Correlation	.000	.000	.000	.000			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	336	336	336	336	336		
	N							
Not	Pearson	-.408**	-.424**	-.237**	-.355**	.411**	1	
Belong	Correlation	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	336	336	336	336	336	336	
	N							
Attached	Pearson	.606**	.582**	.412**	.532**	-.193**	-.294**	1
to the	Correlation	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
Campus	Sig. (2-tailed)	336	336	336	336	336	336	336
	N							

CONCLUSION

The survey measures the level of emotional attachment amongst UPM international students in campus. It demonstrates the close relationship between two important variables in emotional attachments: the students' attachment to the campus and the role of campus design in fostering place attachment. In general, the students feel less emotionally attached to the UPM campus. The place attachment is weak among international students since they do not feel the campus is their second home. Most importantly, they do not have the sense of belonging to the campus.

The results enlighten the overall concept of person-place bond in place attachment. On one hand, in terms of 'person', the emotional attachment is associated with individuals' psychological, emotional and social processes that generate perception. On the other hand, in terms of 'place', the campus design which includes the planning, program activities and usage of buildings and open spaces of the campus supports the manner of place attachment is facilitated. The result indicates that campus environment affects social well-being and quality of campus life among international students. It may create belonging by symbolically connecting international students to the campus thus providing a number of psychological and emotional benefits to the students.

The results demonstrate that more improvements to current campus design is needed to support emotional attachment and educational experience of the campus. The educational experience includes expected social and psychological experience within the temporary time they are enrolled in their studies. Enrolling in a University is not just an academic experience per se; but is also about adapting to a comfortable lifestyle that will encourage and assist their academic achievement.

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