

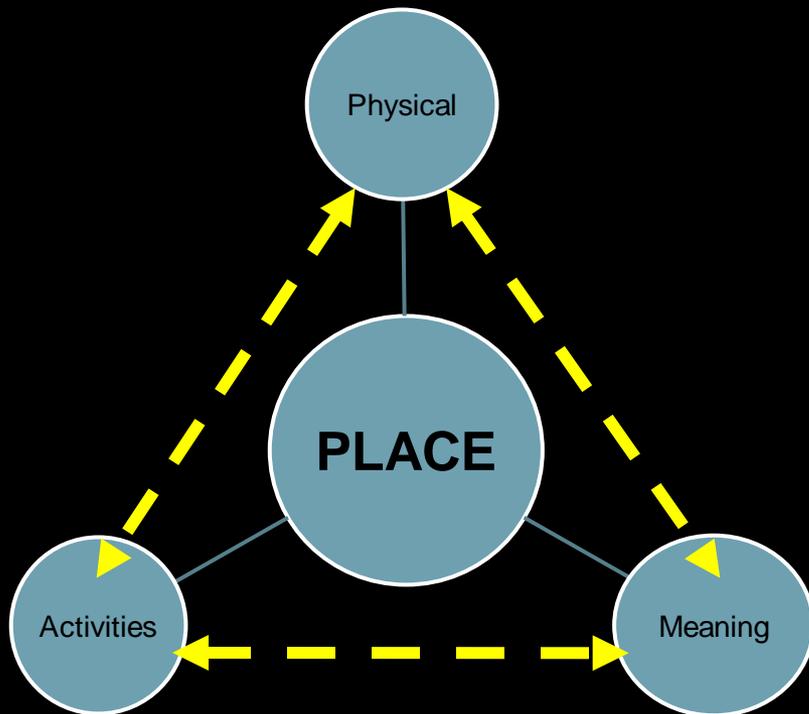
# PLACE MAKING AND MEANING OF *PADANG* AS A PUBLIC PLACE IN HISTORIC CITIES OF MALAYSIA



Nor Zalina Harun (PB073042)

PhD Candidate, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

# Introduction



- As suggested in previous research, 'place-based' study is one of the essential aspects of people-environment relationship and has important implications to the task of place creation which lies at the heart of architect, landscape architect and urban planner works.
- Based on past research, a tripartite components of place is proposed, that a place can never be understood without understanding its three interrelated components; 1) physical features, 2) activities, and 3) meaning.
- By considering this tripartite components in the context of public place, this research specifically underlines the essential roles and meanings of *padang* one of a cityscape components in historical city in Malaysia. In essence, this research was designed to determine the preservation of *padang* as people's place.

# Introduction:

Public spaces are integral part of the built environment. The benefits and opportunities that urban public spaces can provide have been widely documented in literature. Among the benefits are:

- Environmental benefits (Jellicoe, 1975; Ward Thompson, 1990; Antrop, 2005; Scazzosi, 2007)
- Socio cultural benefits (Bentley et.al, 1985; Jacobs and Appleyard, 1987; Tibbalds, 1988; Gehl, 1996; Banerjee, 1998; Carmona et.al, 2003; Child, 2004; Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007)
- Economic benefits (Geoghegan, 2002; Moranche 2003)

# The Padang

- Large turfed field with an area bigger than a football pitch. The development of *padang* begun as esplanade in British India and extended to South East Asia (Hoyt, 1993; Lim and Wong, 2000; Nordin, 2004).
- In the Malay town, *padang* played similar role as the royal courts or *maidan*. The *padang* often located in front of the mosque and sultan's palace; the hub of the Malay society. The most common one was usually wide, turfed and surrounded by huge shady trees. The indigenous population considered this space as a central point and described the larger account as an open space of the field.



# Research Background:

In landscape architecture and urban planning, understanding of the contribution of public space to the city have been developed as early as early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Broad changes and ultimate effect of mass development in the city centre started in 1960s has extended greater respect into a research on the uniqueness of urban space, its history and continuity of local pattern and typologies. These processes show how urban design studies evolved into a dominant platform for making place for people and the city.

Besides place making, the research on urban public space has further drawn in other various disciplines including environmental psychology and environment and behaviour. The research seek to describe some aspect of human-environment relationship constituting sense of attachment that affect well being and quality of life.

The interest centering around the study on public space has not stop here, in more recent years there has been a strong interest in reading and assessing public space which are of historical and cultural significance. This approach stressed the need for a more democratic and enriching environment in which all parties involved in urban development are urged to have the humility to learn from the past by respecting the place history, culture and surrounding context. The study identified preservation as fundamental for maintaining and nurturing social identity.

# Research Gap

But amid the resurgence of interest in such researches, literature review indicates that:

1. Very little, attempts at bringing public space contribution to the identity of place and people. Attention was often concentrated on single or dual component of place (physical and activities) with not much is done to integrate whole components (physical+activities+meaning) ; the interdisciplinary nature between urban design and environmental psychology.
2. Although research on both disciplines is recorded in the western countries, it is still minimal in developing countries including Malaysia.
3. Lack of theoretical discussion on the process of place meaning beyond the widely acknowledged three levels of meaning; low, moderate and high levels.
4. The roles of place attachment as a component that give place meanings has not been adequately explored.
5. Even though place literature suggests that place attachment may imply a deep concern about place however there is not much is known about how changes on favorite places affects or disrupts people.

# Issues on public space: Global Concern

- In a global perspective the general condition of public space in many cities are usually assigned with low priority and is far from satisfying.
- The rising movement on demand for space for new industrial and associated commercial uses has become the generator for such large uncontrolled structures development.
- Conflicting desires between public as the users of public space and developer as the agent of change in urban area have been prolonged since 1960s. Despite of such fight, streets, squares, parks and natural features were continuously succumbed to new development.
- An appearance of placelessness, inauthentic physical environment, anonymous, repetitive urban fabric, polarized social environment and pseudo place has become a representative of urban spaces in many developing countries and developed cities are among the results of this movement.



# Issues on public space: Local Concern

- The overzealous effort to promote urban heritage has been exploited over aspiring sensation for tourist attraction. Visualisation of urban histories in highly aesthetic way yet narrowly conceived have become the concept of many new development in historical cities in Malaysia. These have led to a major effect on the loss of traditional urban form, localised identity, diversity, coherence and identity .
- Urban conservation effort is still unable to deal with less tangible physical properties of the historic urban areas including public spaces, natural environment and people's activities within the old city centre. Consequently, all features that give a city its unique character are continuously disappeared.
- The pressure for development and inability to preserve urban heritage has taken its toll on the sustenance of public spaces in many historical cities (i.e Bukit Nanas, Bukit Aman, Stadium Merdeka)
- The problem was made worse by the failure in appreciating and maintaining of *padang*, which is of historical and cultural significances in many Malaysian cities. Being an open space in the core area of many historical cities nevertheless has made it a desirable space for tourism, commercial and structural development.



# Research underpinning

- Place making: The process of making good place by reviewing substantive dimension in urban design such as urban design, social, visual and functional (Carr et al., 1992; Tibbalds, 1992; Carmona, 2003; Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007).
- Place meaning: A key to the importance of place subjected to knowledge and experience people have within it (Relph, 1976; Green, 1999; Gustafson, 2001; Manzo, 2005).
- Place attachment: Affective bond or link between people with particular setting (Low and Altman, 1992; Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001; Walker and Ryan, 2008).

# Aim of Research

To justify the validity and maximise the value of padang in historic city, research is needed that may inform practitioners and decision-makers its various benefits and meanings:

To determine the significance of *padang* as a public space which contributes to the evocation of place making and meaning in Malaysian historical urban area.

# RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the role played by *padang* as public place in a city scape;
2. To investigate the evolution of *padang* in historic city;
3. To recognize meanings amongst residents suggesting their place attachment for *padang* as a public place; and
4. To distinguish meaning of *padang* with residents whose *padang* had been replaced with a new place.

# Research Questions

## RESEARCH ASSUMPTION:

Being located in the heart of city centre and act as a platform for the residents to conduct social and cultural activities, have signifying the role and function of the long existed *padang* in historic city. The change of it physical layout and the loss of *padang* may significantly affects the life and feeling of the residents.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTION	SUB-RESEARCH QUESTION
Why <i>padang</i> in historic city is significant and deserve for preservation?	<b>PART 1: URBAN DESIGN</b>
	1. How does <i>padang</i> play its role in contributing to the formation of good city image?
	2. What is the current condition of <i>padang</i> in historic cities in Malaysia?
	<b>PART 2: PERCEPTUAL ASPECT</b>
	3. What are the meanings of <i>padang</i> to residents?
4. How do residents interact with the <i>padang</i> result to place attachment?	
5. How does the loss of <i>padang</i> as a public place affected the residents?	

# Research Parameters

Parameters of the study are classified into six determinants that are subordinated into parameters and dimensions as follows:

Determinants	Parameters	Dimensions
1. Evolution of <i>padang</i>	a) Development and change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Spatial layout and configuration of streets, buildings, open spaces, the building fabric, and the pattern of land and building utilisation</li> <li>Urban landscape character. The relationship between form and function</li> </ul>
2. Properties and attributes	a) Landscape and environmental properties b) Architectural properties c) Social and cultural properties d) Accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Openness/Greeneries/Huge old trees</li> <li>Scenic views</li> <li>Historical buildings and landscape amenities</li> <li>Its historical values/Its name/Games and sports held on <i>padang</i>/Special events and ceremonies/Cultural events/Annual events/Togetherness/Music played on <i>padang</i> (traditional song, music band)/ religious ceremony</li> <li>Strategically located/Easily access/The environment is to read, understand and remember/Can cater large crowd with many activities</li> </ul>
3. Experiential Contacts	a) Opportunities at <i>padang</i> b) Visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use; Activities</li> <li>Frequency</li> </ul>
4. Perceptual response	a) Meaning of <i>padang</i> b) Sense of place attachment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Denotative meaning/connotative meaning/abstract meaning</li> <li>Place familiarity/place dependence/ place belongingness/place identity/ place rootedness</li> </ul>
5. Psychological effects	a) Factors of placelessness b) Effects from placelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change and discontinuity</li> <li>Place disruption</li> </ul>
6. Characteristics of Residents	a) Gender b) Ethnicity c) Age group d) Residency e) Years of residence f) Distant from residence to <i>padang</i> g) Occupation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Male/Female</li> <li>Malay/Chinese/Indian/Others</li> <li>Young adult (18-21 yrs old)/Adult (22-55 yrs)/Elderly (55 years and above)</li> <li>Native/ non-native</li> <li>1-10 years/11-30 years/31-50 years/50-70 years</li> <li>Less than 1km/ 1-10 km/11-20 km/21-30 km/31-40 km/&gt; 40 km</li> <li>Student/Housewife/Self employed/Clerical/supervisory/Executive/ Professional/Retired/Others</li> </ul>

# The Study Site

To further establish the significance of *padang* in historical city, a comparison of roles and meanings between *padang* which still remain in the city and *padang* which had loss most of its original character were mapped out.

The research argues that since the development and planning took place in both cities are different in maintaining their original urban spatial characteristics, different spatial impact might be shown. Moreover, comparing the meanings elicited by residents from both sites may imply different prioritisation which could strengthen the requirements of upholding *padang* as urban component and heritage as to avoid more changes and similar type of demolition occurs.

This research is exploratory and semiotic in nature applying a mixed method with five phases of data collection preceded by a pilot study.



1. Padang Kota Lama, Georgetown



2. Dataran Pahlawan formerly known as Padang Pahlawan, Bandar Melaka

# Research Methods

Research objectives	Strategies of inquiry
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="104 682 672 805">1. To explore the role played by <i>padang</i> as public place in a city scape</li><li data-bbox="104 905 672 982">2. To investigate the evolution of <i>padang</i> in historic city</li></ol>	<p data-bbox="710 548 1027 582"><u>Historical review :</u></p> <ul data-bbox="710 605 1727 691" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="710 605 1727 691">□ Historical review on archival document analysis (old maps, old photographs, literature resources)</li></ul> <p data-bbox="710 711 1105 745"><u>Morphological study :</u></p> <ul data-bbox="710 768 1843 905" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="710 768 1843 905">□ Detail analysis of site plan: streets, buildings, open spaces, (the building fabric, and the pattern of land and building utilisation)</li></ul> <p data-bbox="710 925 1039 959"><u>Field observation :</u></p> <ul data-bbox="710 982 1823 1276" style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="710 982 1823 1119">□ Analysis of urban landscape character. The relationship between form and function had become the integral part of the method of the study.</li><li data-bbox="710 1139 1727 1225">□ Identification of components: districts, paths, nodes, edges and landmarks.</li><li data-bbox="710 1245 1340 1276">□ Townscape elements appraisal</li></ul>

# Research Methods

Research objectives	Strategies of inquiry
<p>3. To recognize meanings amongst residents suggesting their place attachment for <i>padang</i> as a public place</p> <p>4. To distinguish meaning of <i>padang</i> with residents whose <i>padang</i> had been replaced with a new place.</p>	<p><u>Questionnaire survey:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Public intercept</li><li>□ Door to door ( PKL n= 209 , PP n= 165)</li></ul> <p><u>Semi structured interview:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Face-to- face ( PKL n= 30 , PP n= 40)</li></ul>

# Results

Dimension	Place meaning			
	PKL	N=30	PP	N=40
Diversity	A place for relaxing A social place A place for trading	24	A cultural place A place for hawking A place for recreation	24
Distinctiveness	A historic place Spacious A beautiful place	18	A place for important events A historic place A place for interpersonal relationship	38
Valuation	A good place A must destination Important place	9	Best place in town A unique place Enjoyable place	34
Symbolic	A place that bring back childhood memories It is part of the town	9	A place called home It was the soul of the country	6

# Research Findings

1. *Padang* and its surrounding area convey various roles and architectural meanings.
2. The distinctiveness and diversity of *padang*'s properties and attributes makes it a special place in a city.
3. Series of fortunate and unique events has led to the success of *padang* as public place of historical cities in Malaysia. As a result, people place a proliferation of meanings towards *padang* suggesting their strong sense of place attachment.
4. The changes and the loss of *padang* as a memorable public place has weakened place identity and affecting the people who live in the area. The study also shows that the disturbance of one urban component in some way affecting all others.
5. The meaning of a place is changed due to three main attributes identified as change of physical character, discontinuity of experiences and insecurity. The study demonstrates how such attributes had badly affected residents' positive feelings and perceptions toward *padang* and its surrounding area.

# Theoretical Implications: Place meaning process and relationship to place attachment

1. The findings from this study show that there are three levels of meanings constructed by residents on *padang* as a public space; denotative (low), connotative (medium) and abstract (high).
2. The study has revealed four dimensions identified as distinctiveness, diversity, and valuation and symbolic as significant in mapping meaning of place. These meanings encompassed of five repeatedly mentioned constituents namely the physical properties, culture, history, activities as well as communal and personal interactions.
3. Each of the meaning explicated has distinct characteristic that make it salient in comparison to the others. This finding suggests that place meaning is not easily analysed in formal and conceptual terms. Viewing the findings in light of the connection between meaning and place attachment, this study subsequently shows that different type of attachment was conceptualised in different level of meanings; denotative=cognitive attachment , connotative= affective attachment and abstract=symbolic attachment .

# Theoretical Implication

Denotative meaning

Distinctiveness

Diversity

Connotative meaning

Valuation

Abstract meaning

Symbolical /  
analogical

Place familiarity  
Place dependence

Place  
belongingness  
Place identity

Place rootedness  
Place identity

Cognitive attachment

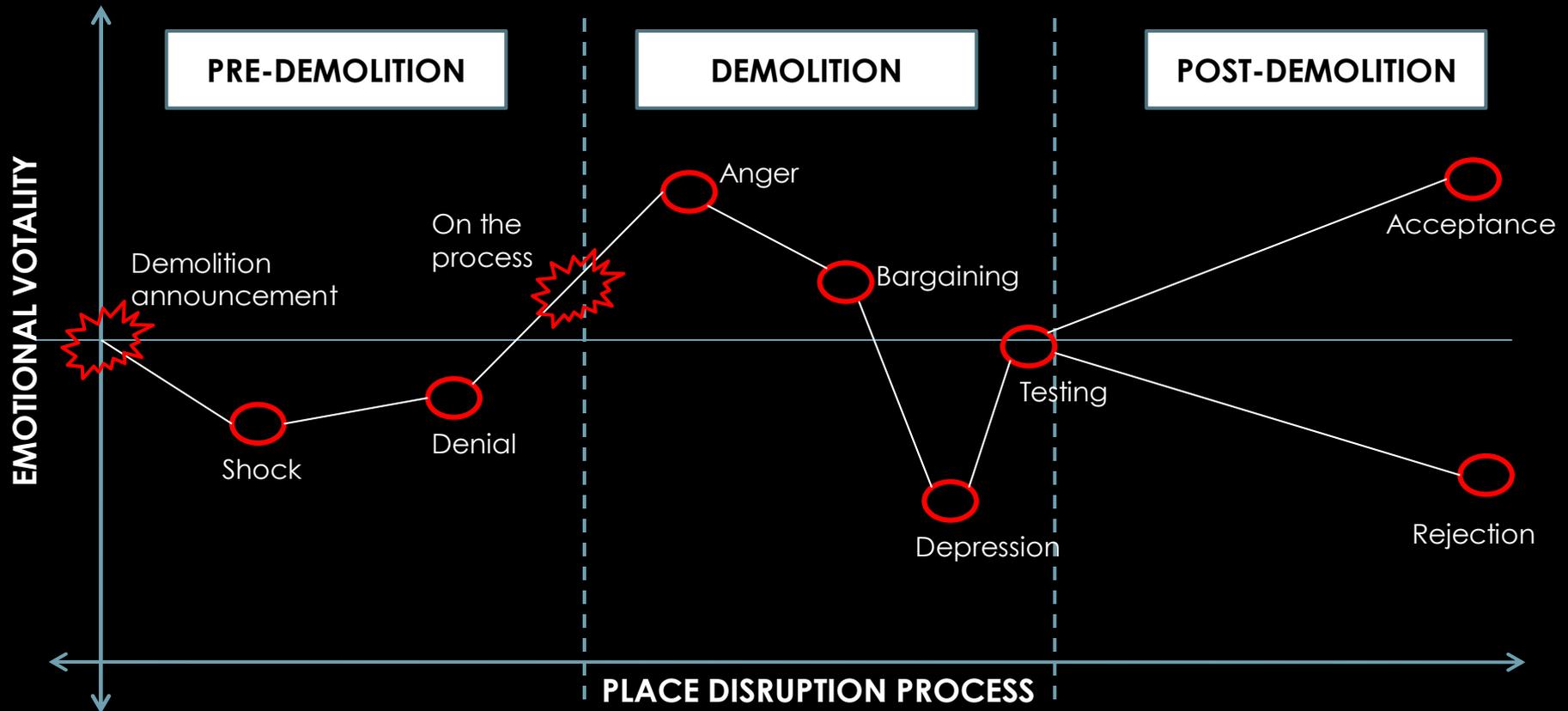
Affective attachment

Symbolic attachment



# Theoretical Implication: Place disruption process

There are three main stages identified in the emotional process that the residents have gone through in dealing with the changes and demolition of Padang Pahlawan. The process can be chronologically observed starting from pre-demolition, followed by demolition itself and ending with post-demolition.



# Urban Design Implications



1. Encourage preservation of structural and natural properties in *padang*
2. Encourage rehabilitation of the landscape and natural properties in urban area
3. Encourage preservation of social and cultural attributes in *padang* area
4. Recommendation and promotion of public participation to protect public interests in public place

# Research Significances

- The findings of this study is hoped to develop a survey technique that lays the groundwork for an assessment tool that local authorities can use under their supervision that could assist them to determine the value of public space in historical city.
- Understand that the intimate relationship between place, histories and social interactions is critical to successful design and planning in any historical urban context. Understanding people's perception of place is important in planning for adaptable places because the adjustment of their expectations is a key to their satisfaction with urban change.
- This study could provide a useful professional tool to give a voice to communities in response to such concerns. Better understanding of the above underpinnings would be useful to guide conservation, enhancement or creation of features that are perceived to be compatible with local character whilst minimizing those features perceived to be out of character.



THANK YOU