

Developing an Image of a Place: The Case with Ajman Waterfront U.A.E

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Abstract: The physical development in one particular setting has a strong impact on the community. If the development respects the ethnic cultural assets through architectural expressions as the theme of the project, the product of the development will accentuate the newly developed areas. Considering place making as a new approach in the physical development - urban designers are seeking ways to achieve an integration between the physical elements with the environment. The phenomenology of a certain place is not entirely dependent on how good the physical aspects of the design is, however, the way the community lives and how they assimilate with the environment is the most important. The living environment of the community influenced significantly by the quality of the attributes of the place. In fact, place making in urban areas highlights the local assets and inspire the local community to foster the spirit of the place in their setting. Thus, the physical features introduce the identity of the place design and make known the local image of the place. The present of the activities are not only to sustain the economic well-being of the people, nonetheless to enhance the quality of the environment. This paper attempts to explore the elements of place making in the busy urban areas where the local culture not only exploited for tourist showbiz but to sustain the everyday life of the people in one setting. By taking an example of the city of Ajman, United Arab Emirates as a case study the author explores the theory of urban design and the integration of urban features in developing the image of the place. The findings show that the Ajman waterfront is potential to become an urban attraction along the coastal corridor as part of the urban recreational area of the city core. The development at the waterfront and the existing business area will give a strong image to the city of Ajman.

1 INTRODUCTION

Human experience is an important factor for giving life to the city by encouraging us to understand the collective urban phenomena and developed the living environment.

Place making is a new approach in physical development in creating a place in the environment. The phenomenology of a certain place is not entirely dependent on the physical aspects of the design or how beautiful the architecture is, however, the way the community lives and how their integration with the environment is the most important. The concern for the living environment of the community now lies on the community themselves especially in the developing nation. Thus, it is their duty to work together with the municipal or the policy maker in developing their living environment. Today, the quality of the environment not based on the physical development, however, the activities of the

community helped to create a “place”. This is because human experience is an important factor for giving life to the city and encourages us to understand the urban phenomena collectively and developed the living environment. From this perspective, the discussion will focus on the importance of a safe, comfortable and urban area that can provide 'life' to integrate activities that can generate the economy and develop the city. Few scholars discussed the urban phenomena. These include Relph, (1986) with the concept of 'place and placelessness', Lynch, (1981) - 'urban image', Jacobs, (1961) - 'eye on the street', Shirvani (1985) – 'design principles', Seamon, (1979) - 'space and phenomenology', Trancik, (1987) - 'lost space'. Several other scholars focusing on complexity of urban functions and human settlements that evolved in line with the development of local conditions. From this perspective, the discussion will focus on the importance of a safe, comfortable and

urban area that can provide 'life' to integrate activities into economic development and to develop the city.

The city's structural element contains roads, buildings and unused spaces. The spaces left by the building and the physical structure are the pathways for vehicles and humans. Inner space (micro) relationship with external space (macro) provides a continuous integration. However, not all these spaces can meet the needs of people or users within the city. Some of these spaces were left idle due to no integration which Trancik (1987) termed as 'lost space'. These spaces include plazas, alleys, roads, terrain, parks and undeveloped areas. Most of these unspecified spaces became an unused area. The urban environmental features designed and integrated according to the local culture. It will benefit the user and accentuating the quality of urban environment. This area will also be a crowd attraction if it enhanced by the soft and vibrant landscape so that integration with the environment can create a certain image to the city area. However, not all physical enhancements can give a 'life' to a city area. This assessment will explore through phenomenological methods.

2 PLACETHEORY AND PHENOMENOLGY

The word 'place' brings a diverse meaning to geographers, architects, city and environmental designers. The role of the place as a space is the medium of elements in human interaction with the built environment. The design of the place usually reflects the human nature to adapt itself to the environment. Human attempt to create a living space with a four walls or even more complex than that explains the role of humans with the environment. It starts with the design of the interior space to meet the needs of the daily activities until it covers the outer space. All spaces functioned as a place to meet human needs. On the other hand, a large urban area or a city will provide a more complex picture if the activities, design identity of a place as well as sustaining the neighborhood as the objective of the development.

Phenomenology is a clear rational thought and explained the adventure of an event that is difficult to explain by words. This includes a person's experience and a response to something that happens. The phenomenological emphasis depends on the number of person's observations and it determined by the wisdom of someone who values it. This approach has been dwelled by Relph (1986) and Seamon (1979) in their study of the place. Generally, the success and

failure of a place is determined by this phenomenon. Actually, there are few things difficult to explain objectively in urban design, including activities in a particular area or place. The existence of an activity that can revive the city not caused by the impulse of a physical thing but it is a link of activities as well as physical factors that can attract activity appreciation. There are two types of activities, namely primary and secondary activity, which is a major factor in determining the success of a place (Jacobs 1961). Primary activity classified as human-driven activity or human behavior is the cause of human grouping in a place. While secondary activity is a side activity that can serve the human grouping resulting from the primary activity.

Architects and planners are responsible for designing places. This designed place is space-based. In architecture practise we recognize a place based on space function, as Heidegger (1958 in Relph 1986: 19) claimed that: *"Every individual lives in a world filled with important places: for Man - he should know his Place"*. The inner city is difficult to explain objectively, but we understand it based on the dynamics of human activity. Among the pioneers who often raise questions about the phenomenon of places are Jacobs, Trancik, Relph, White and Seamon. All of these pioneers gave different views but their attention leads us to understand human roles and their interactions with these places.

For example, Jacobs (1961), considered a path or lane as the nerve of the city. The dynamics of roads and streets evidenced as a generator of secondary and primary use networks. A used lane and path is the result of human existence and present in the urban areas thus, the road in the city must have a clear definition of public and private space. The on-going roads provide a continuity to the user and activities as well as concentration of people in the area. Hence, the intended usage is the disposition of human activities found in the city street. Additionally, Seamon, (1979) stressed that a successful path is an established urban space which is active and safe features of the city. These features are only proven by intertwine of human activity.

3 PHYSICAL ELEMENTS AND CHARACTER OF URBAN OBJECT

Generally, the space and 'place' has physical properties, although it is considered 'intangible' but its existence gave us a physical character. As

compounded by Relph, (1986) that the indoor or exterior space either building or landscape can describe an image of a place. With this features the place is recognizable. However, a place is not recognized by physical features alone, it is the human activity resulted by the culture gives life to this place. This combination of activity and physical features is very meaningful for a particular area that give a sense of place to it (Schultz, 1979).

A sense of phenomenon is hard to understand unless the relationship of the 'intangible' nature of man with physical characteristics of the elements is considered. On the other hand, the interaction between humans and the environment will adjust with the environmental organization according to their behavior. To get close to the nature of the place, Lukerman (1964 in Relph 1986) featured six specific components in relation to its characteristic features:

1. The place has these locations described by the feature or context of the place.
2. The place has natural and cultural elements integration
3. The place depicts the integral integration of the elements and physical elements
4. The place is part of macro place
5. The place may change and the effects of the change explained through activity or physical element
6. The place has meaning and it influenced by human beliefs

Physical elements in an area have a profound effect not only improving the atmosphere but also providing a quality when this element works for human usage. This element is also an object or feature that becomes an unforgettable image in someone's cognitive memory. In the urban design discipline, Lynch (1981) uses the visual analytical method to evaluate the element to facilitate the understanding of the subject through cognitive understanding objectively. Among these elements are paths, boundaries, nodes, landmarks, and edges. Each of these elements has certain features and that determine image ability of a place. This element is not happen but the physical and function as desired by the user is intertwine with the principle of urban design. The besieged space resulting from the formation of squares, building walls, sculptured objects and landscape give a certain characteristic based on the texture, mass, and rhythm of the urban setting. The combination and formation of these elements will result creation of distinctive urban place.

4 METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out at the promenade of Ajman Waterfront, United Arab Emirates and it focuses on identifying the attributes and characteristics that influence the place attachment. The research applied mixed method techniques due to its multi-dimensional aspects in urban design discipline (Cresswell, 1994). Generally, the mix-method strategy is suitable in explaining the phenomenon for this study.

A random field survey conducted on site of 50 respondents during a three days exercise of different time of the week to collect various sources of data from several respondents. The question related to the accessibility, familiarity, diversity, vitality, diversity, uniqueness, safety and security and comfort were asked. The result of the survey was determined according to the frequency and mean percentage. Ajman is also the center of trades and business and booming, hence, the expatriates came from all over the world. The respondents came from various background and nationalities. The result from the interview of different nationalities will support the sources and methods triangulated. Lynch, (1988) mentioned that triangulation method is suitable for uncover each layer of phenomenon and to enhance the scope and range of the research. This technique is suitable because the relationship between people and place were rather diverse and interrelated. Thus, the dependent variable, such as physical elements, activities and images used to discover the strong attributes and characteristics that influencing user attachment to the place.

The physical characteristics of the case study area recorded and observed by using attributes of elements as in Table 1.0. Observation from the urban character assessment helped to compliment the other methods to produce a more complete representation of the actual scenario. It is useful to obtain a direct experience with the study area, recording information and to identify the aspects that are rarely seen and useful in uncovering the matters that may be uncomfortable to be discuss by the respondents (Lynch 1988). Hence, the researchers observe and document the activity pattern. With help of photographs and drawings the checklist are enrich. The urban character defined the criteria such as accessibility, familiarity, vitality, diversity comfort, transaction, uniqueness, safety and security. Indicator for each attribute constructed for the evaluation cross-examined with the literature.

4.1 The Case of Ajman Waterfront Area

Ajman, the smallest emirates only 25 minutes away from Dubai blessed with a long coastal line is facing the Persian Gulf (Figure 1.0). It is developing physically due to urban sprawl from Dubai. It is determined to become a tourist destination, where the 28-kilometre waterfront development intended to be the global landmark along with other showpieces designed buildings.



Figure 1.0: Map of Ajman Waterfront

(Source: Ajman Municipality 2017) The Urban Planning Department wishes to put the development on the tourist map and makes it a more desirable destination to work and live.

By taking the advantage of the natural resources the development are taking shape along the sea corridor by integrating commercial and entertainment areas covering an area of 240,000 square meters. The sea was a source of livelihood for the locals since the early century. Thus, the boulevard development with hotels, restaurants and cafes integrated with the cultural heritage and other local elements for Emirati identity. It is the intention of the Municipality to assure the development intended for sustainable, social and economic continuity for the community.

Table 1.0: Elements and Attributes Based on Place Components

People and Activity		Pattern/Form of Physical and Space		Image and Meaning	
Attributes	Elements	Attributes	Elements	Attributes	Elements
Comfort	Movement	Permeability	Site	Sense	Culture relationship
Access	Usage	Legibility	Building	Authentic	Landmark
Relationship	Activity	Continuity	Open space	Perception	Sense of place
	Connectivity, access		Street		Moment
Diversity	Local tradition	Beauty	Urban scape	Social relationship	Globalization
Legibility	Urban space life	Personal	Visual relationship	Legibility	Culture value
Livability	Behavior	Scale	Landmark	Safety	Social value
Choice	Public usage	Image	Material	Security	Friendly
Interest	Privat usage		Tree & vegetation	Stability	Historical value
Transaction	Community usage		Decoration		Sound & scent
	Mix-usage		Art		Sense of belonging
	Public facilities		Conservation		Pride
	Temporal event		Information		Attraction
			Beauty		Attachment
			Sign & symbol		

(Source: Wahid and Karsono 2017 after Karsono 2014)

The above table were used to refer to the element present at Ajman waterfront. In the analysis the application of the attributes is matched according to the physical and non-physical element observed on the site. These findings indicate how security and safety are concerned highly in any urban context.

4.2 Analysis of Space Function of a Place

Urban design shows the role of space within a city based on a number of specific factors. Essentially, the design of the city starts from the design of the building. The form and massing produced by this building gives a positive space within the urban area. Ultimately, space built to function as intended, no matter when space deliberately give a certain image. Accessibility to the site is significant where 85% of the respondents came to visit the waterfront every week although the remaining figures are not engaged in this area. 70 % of the respondents agreed that the area is well secured and safe to promenade during the day or night although the pathways closed to the street are under construction. Jacobs (1961) clearly explained that the “eye on the streets” are people who helped to safeguard the street itself. Based on Schultz's idea, places identified through the arrangement of things or events experienced or felt by humans. Among the factors that give an image to a place are the perceptions, experiences of a person and the physical features that are present. It shows that 90 % of the respondents familiarize with the elements on

site as a reference and significant landmark. The user could remember each landmark for each sector of the place (Tuan 1977). These images also have an insightful meaning when one wants to evaluate a place or try to remember somewhere (Lynch, 1988). The pattern and form of the physical space is shown with the attributes and elements in Table 1.0. The space formed from the interior or the exterior is the space needed to create a place. Along the boulevard of Ajman Waterfront, the continuous activities linked to the shops and café creates image and meaning. The continuation of this space creates an active atmosphere for a place. Predominantly, the integration of urban physical elements, intangible space and human activities in a specific area will develop character (Lukerman, 1964 in Relph 1986). This is evident at the Ajman waterfront where the attribute for image and meaning unable to be explained verbally instead it is comprehended spiritually and visually.

Primarily, the place is a designed for specific human activities rather than local physical features. 85 % agrees that the integration of designed objects creates a pattern of form and space for the urban users. Physical features are just one criterion that can attract the attention of aesthetic users. The production of a living place is a listing of the human activity as well as the physical criteria of the city. The phenomenon of a gathering area in a traditional market or bazaar can lead to a 'spirit of a place' that is something which the city designers expect (Schultz 1979). The combination of the new and existing development enhanced the liveliness of the waterfront. As a result, human activities can be exuberant place that create a mood of festivities in urban areas.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The urban space of the case study area is determined by the time-space and weather factors. The number of visitors increased in the early month of November until April each year. During this season, the trees accentuate the architectural elements on site. Since there are some activities of construction on the site, the continuity of pedestrian to the boulevard discontinued between the waterfront and the shops across the street due to the construction process still on the way. At present a friendly pathways needed for the continuous urban linkage in the long term for the success of the place (Trancik, 1986). The linkage should not stop at the waterfront itself, besides, the business activities on the south side has to connect to

the area. It observed that the rich urban features of the study area is an attraction to sustain the activity. Hence, the frequent maintenance from the municipality is important. In fact, it signify the image representation and develop the meaning to the user. The linear linkage along the boulevard with the daily life integrated with the local culture of the people within the city. As Schulz (1979) asserted these elements help to create a sense of place to the people who use the place and make them return after some times.

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