FACTORS INFLUENCING PUBLIC ATTACHMENT TO MOSQUES IN MALAYSIA

Mina Najafi and Mustafa Kamal Bin Mohd Shariff

Abstract
Place is formed by people’s relationship with the physical environment, individual and group activities, and meanings. Sense of Place, Place Identity, and Place Attachment are some concepts that could describe the quality of the people’s relationship with a place. Place attachment is described as an affective bond that develops between people and their environment or setting. In recent years, there has been a revival of interest in the studying of people’s attachment to places, including the religious places as of the most important and attended places in human lives. In this realm the published literature shows that not only the religious concepts but the architectural features and attributes of these places could play an important role in forming people’s attachment. This research investigated Malaysian people’s attachment to the contemporary Malaysian state mosques focusing on the three predominant architectural styles, namely Modern, Post Modern, and Vernacular. This paper reports on a conducted qualitative study to identify the indicators that could be used in evaluating people’s perception to the aforementioned mosques. To accomplish this, in-depth interviews were conducted with 23 participants in the 5 selected mosques. The study revealed that Malaysian people have strong emotional attachment to all studied mosques. The research showed that this attachment was due to the studied mosques’ significance as religious and cultural symbols. Finally, the research identified the key indicators to investigate Malaysian public’s perception to the contemporary Malaysian state mosques.

Keywords
Place; sense of place, Place Identity; Place Attachment; Malaysian state mosques.

Introduction
Malaysia has a large population of Muslims. Thus, mosques, being the main place of worship in Islam is a common building found in most urban and rural areas. Malaysian mosques adopt varying architectural styles influenced by its various ethnic sub-cultures as well as foreign influences. Stedman (2003) indicated that the existing physical features and attributes of places could affect people’s place attachment to them in different ways. Place attachment is defined as the emotional bond established between people and places. It is reflected in the users’ identity and dependence with their settings. This paper attempts to investigate public place attachment to mosques using a qualitative approach. The adapted approach investigated Malaysian attachment to mosques focusing on the three...
predominant contemporary architectural styles, namely Modern, Post Modern, and Vernacular.

Current literature regarding mosques' studies shows only the typological investigations that examine the various types of mosques architecture. However, not going beyond the merely describing the places does not provide a sufficient theoretical basis for the academic investigations of the environmental qualities of those places. This research attempts to investigate the actual parameters influencing the environmental quality of these places from the public point of view as well as the psychological perspective.

**Background of Studying Place and Sense of Place in Context of Malaysian Mosques**

Places derive their meaning from three major interrelated components; the physical setting, the individual's internal psychological and social mindsets, and activities afforded by the places (Canter, 1977; Relph, 1976). Places play remarkable roles in human lives (Gustafson, 2001) and in developing and maintaining self and group identities (Davenport & Anderson, 2005). What constitutes human relationships with their settings has attracted a number of researchers. The seminal literature in the field indicates that places convey important messages and meanings that people perceive and decode based on the their roles, experiences, expectation, and motivations (Rapoport, 1990; Steele, 1981).

In experiencing a place, the physical attributes, activities and meanings are combined together to form the sense of place and its character (Montgomery, 1998; Steele, 1981). Sense of place is associated with the feelings and perceptions that people have through experiencing a place (e.g. Hay, 1998; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). It is a general way in which an individual feels about a place and assigns meaning or values to it. Sense of place is an important factor in maintaining the quality of the environment and an essential aspect in integrating the users with the places as to contribute to better use, satisfaction and attachment to the places (Kaltenbom, 1998; Manzo, 2003). Relph (1976) noted this quality in association with the need for identification with one's surrounding and the need to be in a recognisable place. Briefly, the factors, which contribute to the formation of sense of place, could be broadly related to two groups, namely cognitive perceptual factors and features of the physical settings. Research on the sense of place focus on three constructs: place attachment, place dependence and place identity (Jorgenson & Steadman, 2005). Finally, from a more objective perspective, Stedman (2003) categorised place attachment as one of the measurable dimensions of sense of place, based on his argument, the sense of place dimension is very difficult to measure due to the ambiguity of its definition.

**Dimensions of Place Attachment**

People often have the ability and even the need to form attachment to the tangible and intangible objects of the environment and places around them. It is defined as a positive emotional bond between individuals, groups, the environment (Altman & Low, 1992), and the extent to which an individual values and identifies with a particular environmental setting (Moore & Graefe, 1994). Some studies defined place attachment as a state of psychological well-being resulted from accessibility to a
Factors Influencing Public Attachment to Mosques in Malaysia

MINA NAJAFI AND MUSTAFA KAMAL BIN MOHD SHARRIF

place or a state of distress upon separation or remoteness from a place (Giuliani & Feldman, 1993). It also involves interplay of affections with emotions, knowledge with beliefs and behaviours with actions in reference to a place (Altman & Low, 1992). Thereby, place attachment is affected by several factors as follows: socio-demographic characteristics (Altman & Low, 1992; Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989), environmental experiences including people’s type of involvement with place (Williams & Stewart, 1998), and degree of familiarity with a place (Fried, 1963), place satisfaction, culture, and the place itself.

The physical characteristics of a setting may also determine whether people could develop an attachment to the places. In this regard, Steadman (2003) asserted that the physical environment and its characteristics could contribute to the construction of sense of place. Steadman ascertained that the physical characteristics might strengthen both place attachment and satisfaction. From a similar perspective, Steele (1981) argued that physical features of place with creating meanings, conceptions, and safeguard of their function, could contribute to the people’s place attachment. Therefore, identifying main physical feature of a place is crucial prior to studying place attachment.

**Typology and Physical Features of Malaysian Mosques**

The most iconic buildings within the realm of the history and geography of the Islamic world are the mosques. The mosque is an important physical symbol of Islam and the centre of Muslim activity. For Muslims, the mosque is a central place for learning about Islam and it acts as a school and hence helping bind the community together. As a spiritual place, it helps to refine the souls and awakens their minds and hearts.

Malaysia as an Islamic country has many government-sponsored and managed mosques and the government still tries to build new ones. Among all aforementioned mosques, state mosques are some large scaled buildings as the main mosques of every state of Malaysia that are constructed and managed completely by the government. Many mosque architectural styles are evident in this country. In this regard, Tajuddin (2007), one of the well-known scholars in the realm of Islamic architecture in Malaysia, argued that there are seven architectural styles of mosque in Malaysia. These are the Traditional Vernacular, the Sino-Eclectic, the Colonial, the North Indian, the Modern Vernacular, the Modernistic Expressionism, and the Post-Modern Revivalism. Since this research aims to investigate contemporary state mosques it focuses on Modern, Post-Modern and Vernacular style.

**Modern Architecture**

Modern architecture is a wide expression in architecture which firstly arose around 1900. This term is given to a number of building styles with similar characteristics; primarily the simplification of form and the elimination of ornament. These methods of architecture which are also called International Style or architectural styles of 20th century. Modern architecture is usually characterised by (Curtis, 1996): as a rejection of historical styles as a source of architectural form; an adoption of the principle that the materials and functional requirements determine the result; an adoption of the machine aesthetic; a rejection of ornament; a simplification of
form and elimination of unnecessary detail; an adoption of expressed structure. There are some distinctive samples of modernistic style among state mosques of Malaysia, e.g. Masjid Negeri (see figure 1) Sembilan, Masjid Negara (see figure 2), Penang State Mosque, and the Kota Samarahan Mosque (Tajuddin, 2007).

**Postmodern Architecture**

Postmodern architecture is characterized as incorporation of historical details in a hybrid rather than a pure style, use of decorative elements, more personal and exaggerated style, references to popular modes of building

figure 1: Masjid Negeri Sembilan (Source: Authors).

figure 2: Masjid Negara (Source: Authors).
(Jencks, 2002). Borrowing elements, references, colour, and symbolism from the past, Postmodernism attempts to create architecture of meaning for the general public rather than the elite few. Putra Mosque (see figure 3), the Shah Alam Mosque, Masjid Wilayah (Figure 4), the Sarawak State Mosque and many others are the examples of Postmodern Revivalism Architecture in Malaysia. Tajuddin (2007) explained the vocabulary of this style as the use of an eclectic array of: a) Iranian or Turkish domes, b) Egyptian or Turkish Minarets, c) Persian Iwan gateways, d) lavish courtyards surrounded by the Sahn, e) an Arabian hypostyle planning composition, f) and pointed or semi circular arches bathed in sumptuous classical ‘Islamic’ decorations.

Figure 3: Masjid Putra (Source: Authors).
Vernacular Revivalism
According to Tajuddin (2007), the Vernacular Revivalism attempts to revival vernacular architecture of Malaysia; this style calls for a slightly less monumental approach with its use of the three tiered pyramidal roof form built either of concrete or timber. The Melaka State Mosque (see figure 5) is an example which represents this style.

Research Methodology
This study applied qualitative approach in order to identify the indicators that could be used in evaluating people’s perception to the selected mosques. In this regard, in-depth interview is used as the tool for data collection. This section reports the components of the adapted qualitative research methodology.

Selection of the samples mosques for this study in order to investigate the type and degree of people’s attachment to different architectural styles of contemporary Malaysian mosques five state mosques were chosen as the setting for investigation. To increase the homogeneity of samples, they were selected from Malaysian state mosques. These are government built and administered main mosques. The selection criteria are based on a State mosque and representative of Modern, Post modern, and Vernacular styles from each state in Malaysia. Based on the established criteria the selected...
mosques are (a) Masjid Negara in Kuala Lumpur (Modern style), (b) Masjid Negeri Sembilan in Seremban (Modern style), (c) Masjid Wilayah in Kuala Lumpur (Post modern style), (d) Masjid Putra in Putrajaya (Post modern style), and Masjid Al-Azim in Melaka (Vernacular style).

**In-depth and semi-structured interview**

Interview is a common instrument for data collection. It is particular kind of a conversation with a specific aim (Creswell, 1998). In-depth interview is one type of interview that examines the subject deeper than common interview by asking more and deeper questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This technique is appropriate for investigating layers of issues expressed by the respondents, help informing the survey findings, opening up for new perspectives or contradictions and adding scope and breadth to a study (Creswell, 2003). In this research, in-depth interview is conducted with people to understand 1) their subjective and spontaneous feeling and impressions about the places, 2) the meanings and significance of the place for them, 3) their motivation of being in the place, and 4) any other potential emerging related issues of concern during the interview.

**Structure of the conducted in-depth interview**

A semi-structured interview with somehow predetermined questions has been adopted. This method helps interviewer to ask more questions based on interviewees' answers for gathering additional and deeper data. This method can bring the researcher to get clear explanation of specific response that can
reveal the actual factors influencing type and degree of attachment towards particular place attributes and characteristics. Consequently, the questions are open-ended and the interview is adopted via face-to-face interaction. The interviews have been conducted inside the mosques; the utilised style, interested listening (Smaldone, et al., 2005), made the interviewer acknowledge and motivate the interviewees for responding, however, remain neutral regarding to correctness or flaws of their responses. In the meantime, each interview was tape-recorded with the permission of participants. The data collected through this part were utilised to identify appropriate indicators which influence people’s perception. Basically, the subjects of the conducted semi-structured interview were as the following: Engagement, Familiarity, Emotional attachment, Functional attachment, Socio-cultural attachment.

**Sampling and sample size for in-depth interview**

Creswell (1998) argues that to increase the validity of interviews all respondents should experience the studied phenomenon. Yin (1994) stated that a small but carefully chosen interview sample can be used in order to represent the selected user group. In determining the sample size for the data collection procedure of interview, if the research arrives to saturation point of data the sample size is good enough (Kumar, 2005). Kumar (2005) defines this saturation point as the stage in which the researcher does not receive any new data when changing the interviewees. Based on the nature of the problem, this study used Purposive Sample Selection Method (Kumar, 2005) for selecting the total of 23 purposive interviewees.

**Results and Analyses**

In-depth interviews were analysed in order to give understanding that how people interact with the studied mosques. Following the theoretical framework developed, the study articulated the collected data into three categories namely, physical feature, activities, and meanings. The three categories were further divided into codes and subcategories, respectively. The study then assigned respective codes to every statement by the interviewees based on the similarity in implication when compared against the developed subcategories. Therefore, the conducted interviews sought for development of the categories and their subcategories into key indicators in order to analyse Malaysian people’s perception to contemporary Malaysian state mosques. During data analysis, the clustered three categories of place elements represented the people’s feelings, motivations, opinions, and preferences about the selected area. Following subsections respectively report the extracted key indicators for physical features, activities, and meanings.

**Physical Attributes**

Throughout the interviews, participants described a broad range of feelings about architectural and physical features of the selected mosques. In this part, the study sought for 13 major subcategories of physical features of place identified by the theoretical framework of the study. The investigated 13 subcategories in this section are as follows: structure and style, forms, spaces, size, ornaments, colours, lighting, furniture, ventilation, landscape of the courtyard and the view of the outside of the mosque, facilities, maintenance and accessibility of the mosques. In reporting the findings of the
interview, this study integrated some samples of the transcribed data in order to show how the interviewees expressed their feelings regarding the formal characteristics of the places.

**Structure and Style**

Findings showed that in most cases, respondents were aware of the styles of the mosques. They had knowledge about the historical background and the sources of the respective mosques in details that show the level of their familiarity with the places. Results also showed that the style of a mosque is an important factor that influences people’s attention. In most cases, it was the first thing that participants discussed with different preferences. Some participants suggested use of vernacular Malay architecture in designing Malaysian mosques in order to promote Malay culture and identity, hence leveraging tourism industry of the country. Some others proposed Middle Eastern architecture as a more similar style to core Islamic culture. They argued that as an Islamic country, Malaysia should apply universal Islamic identity in architecture.

Many participants would like to see new structures and designs in Malaysian state mosques. They suggested not repeating previous styles, so constructing unique mosques for Malaysia. To accomplish this, they suggested...
maintaining basic elements (e.g. dome) to preserve the core identity of mosque, whilst being innovative in designing the other parts, e.g. design of Iron mosque (see figure 6). However, some others advocated following avant-garde Islamic architectural styles to inspire integrated Islamic identity across the Islamic countries. In this essence, they admired architectural style of Wilayah and Putra mosques as two successful samples of this idea.

**Form**
The results showed that beauty, meaningfulness, and general atmosphere of places had strong impact on respondents’ preferences on places. However, in a more extreme range, many participants described deep emotional relationships with symbolic meanings of some forms of mosques, e.g. dome, minaret, entrance, Mihrab, Islamic decorations and ornaments (see figure 7). They recognised those elements as main items of identity of the mosques which connect to Islam. However, the familiarity and symbolic meaning of Islamic elements per-se was of much greater importance for people rather than their physical shape or order affected by their architectural style.

**Spaces**
The main praying area (Shabestan), courtyard (Sahn), Mihrab and ablution spaces were the places that many participants expressed. They paid more attention to size, ornaments, furniture and upkeep of praying area. They also expressed their preference on an open area for Shabestan so that they could see the community and ‘assembly’ of people. The proper size, decorations, good landscape and suitable places to sit were also of a high degree of importance for people in evaluating courtyard (Sahn). However, adequate size, cleanness and suitable facilities were the mentioned requirements for ablution spaces, as important parts of mosques.

**Decorations, Ornaments and Color**
The interviewees mentioned that they are impressed with arabesques, Quran calligraphy, harmonic colors, wood carvings, and Islamic geometrical patterns. The majority of participants mentioned that the ornaments remind them that this place is a spiritual place and make them calm. For instance, an interviewee at Putra mosque pointed out that the colored stained glass windows near the interior dome is so beautiful and spiritual when daylight penetrates through, showing presence of God (see figure 8). However, the findings showed that people note the appearance or color of ornaments as a whole rather than focusing on every small part of them or color of every element separately.

**Ventilation**
Due to the hot weather of Malaysia most of the participants emphasised on the need for a good ventilation at mosques; however, natural ventilation was the most desired ventilation system for them. They expressed that a good architecture of a mosque with having open areas could utilise wind as the natural sources of ventilation. They explained that good ventilation of mosques could provide this opportunity for them to stay longer and perform their religious activities. For instance, an interviewee asserted that contrary to Masjid Putra that is located at a corner of an enclosed square, 3 sides of the Iron Mosque are completely surrounded by a lake providing the mosque with very strong natural ventilation during day and night. The interviewee argued that although she likes
Masjid Putra due to its beauty and similarity to a mosque, she prefers to pray at Iron Mosque only because of its thermal comfort.

**Accessibility, Facilities, Furniture, and Upkeep**

Accessibility refers to proximity of mosque to home or work place, availability of public transport nodes, and availability of car parking spaces. In many cases, participants expressed that the mosque is near to their home or work place so they can more frequently go there. However, most interviewees complained about poor transportation system and explained that they would like to go and experience different mosques but they cannot. The participants also asserted that the facilities, equipments,
furniture, and the maintenance of the mosques are important for them as they could make mosques comfortable and usable, hence supporting their activities.

Activities
Prevailing religious activities at mosques are 5 times daily praying and the once a week congressional Friday praying. Social activities, on the other hand, comprise of religious classes, Quran review meetings, religious ceremonies, welfare activities, cultural activities, etc. The results of interviews showed that social and religious activities are the most important factors influencing people’s attachment to the mosques. The interview revealed that the quality of activities at the mosque is much more appreciated by the worshipers rather than the physical structure of the mosque per se. For example an interviewee asserted that she prefers her hometown mosque because of more interesting activities there and a stronger sense of social and religious community. The respondents associated their attachment with various activities. However, majority of the participants asserted that the most important issue for them at mosque is praying. They explained that participation in other religious and social activities is a motivation for them that foster their spirituality. Participation in religious classes and sermons is another important factor that could influence people’s attachment to mosques.

The results of interviews also showed that Friday’s congregational prayer (Jumma prayer) is one of the most important motivations in attaching Malaysian Muslim men to the state mosques. In many cases, participants mentioned that mosques should be big enough to gather more people for doing religious and social activities, such as Jumma pray as a significant activity for Muslims’ community that shows unity of the Muslims. In the interviews they usually compare mosques based on the capacity for Jumma prayer. In some cases, appearing at a mosque
was not just for performing an activity but also to be a part of Muslim’s life, which can contribute to one’s identity.

Meaning(s)
Participants described a ‘deep affection’ for the studied mosques and described them as ‘important’ and ‘meaningful’ places. They described their feelings with some words such as impressive, beautiful, meaningful, our identity, house of God, spiritual place, peaceful, safe, comfort, calm, refreshing, religious place, Islamic centre etc. Respondents shared not only their knowledge of the mosques but also positive impression, sense of pride, religious duty, and sense of happiness.

Results signify that both physical features of the studied mosques and the meaning(s) that people associated with the places make positive impression in people. In this regard, the beauty of the mosques was a factor that contributes in making a positive impression in people. In many cases the participants mentioned that because of its spirituality, being within an Islamic place makes a positive impression in them. In some other cases, the interviewees expressed that tranquillity, calmness, and convenient facilities of the mosques have the same positive influences on them. In some cases, the place of mosque recalled past memories of people and impressed them. One interviewee asserted that the atmosphere of Masjid Putra trigger the memories of her pilgrimage to Mecca. Results also indicated that having Islamic identity is another reason for having positive feeling at mosques. According to some participants, by coming to mosques, they could discover themselves and explore who they really are.

Many participants also had a great sense of pride of being in a popular, unique and distinctive mosque. They were also proud when foreign tourists appreciated the mosques of their country. In many cases, they mentioned that seeing many tourists from all over the world visiting Malaysian mosques make them delighted with a sense of pride.

The participants also expressed that coming to mosques is recommended by Islam and they must go to these religious places. Praying was of much higher importance for them rather than the physical body of the mosques. They argued that since praying is the most important activity at mosques, the government should not be overspending as long as the constructed mosques are good enough to support this function. They expressed that the mosques of the early stages of Islam were only built to gather Muslims for religious and social activities. Being in such a holy place that is the symbol of social life in Islam makes them happy; it satisfies them and addresses their needs. They also explained that seeing community of people and worshipers in mosques could contribute to their happiness.

Discussion and Conclusion
The aim of this paper is to determine the main factors influencing public place attachment to mosques in Malaysia. In order to interpret the data, the researcher looked for elements that inspire feelings and the importance of the elements that have been referenced in the interviews. The number of times an element was referenced determined the importance of the element and if it could be categorised as a theme. The minor categories within the major
themes have been eliminated in order to see the essence of the study. The study revealed that Malaysian people have strong emotional attachment to the studied mosques. The results showed that this attachment was due to the studied mosques’ significance as religious and cultural symbols. The explored indicators could be classified in three groups. These are physical features and attributes of the place, religious symbols (this can be placed under the first group), activities and meanings associated with the places.

**Physical Attributes**
The study found that physical features and attributes of the mosques play an important role in people’s religious experience. In the people’s experiences with the mosques, the architecture is the first thing that they see and pay close attention to them. Most respondents in this study indicated beautifulness and meaningfulness to describe their emotions. In this regard Jones (2000) explains the impact of ‘sacred’ art and architecture on the individual. Jones asserted that if built properly, religious art and architecture could leave very strong impression on people (Jones, 2000). The conducted interviews also showed that although the emotion accrues to the architecture from the rites, rituals, and experiences taking place at the place, the architectural characteristics can still leverage the expression of emotion by its form and features. This is parallel with other findings that the architectural characteristics and forms of sacred places can increase worshippers’ emotional relationships with those places (Watson and Kucko 2001; White and White 1998). This study also revealed that the style, forms, spaces, size, colour, lighting, furniture, ventilation, landscape, facilities, accessibility, and upkeep are the aspects most participants paid close attention to. This finding is supported by Steel (1981) who argued the significant factors in experiencing sense of place to be the size of place, scale, proportion, ornaments, colour, smell, sound, temperature, visual variety and accessibility. In a similar approach, Barrie (1996) found that in the more successful built examples of religious architecture, the corporeal qualities of the space—its tactility, lighting, aural qualities, etc—are aspects which orchestrate a predetermined meaning that edifies the spirit of the believer. Tuan (1974) also argued that physical environment has important role in providing imaged so that topophilia, the love of a place, that has a concrete object of attachment. The results also indicate that the architectural characteristics of the mosques are important factors in supporting and facilitating the religious and social activities.

**Religious Symbols**
Results from interviews revealed that religious symbols aid people to identify a mosque. These symbols create an emotional bond between them and the mosques. This is in agreement with Eliade (1957) who states that religious symbols can awaken individual experiences and transform them into spiritual act. Religious symbols play an important and integral part in the perception of the meanings of the mosques. Religious symbols include the dome, the Minaret, the pulpit, the Mihrab, the Islamic ornaments and decorations, the gateway, and the community of people (Serageldin, 1990). These symbols are very important for many participants in this study. Participants find deep meanings in the symbolic and religious elements. The religious symbols create an emotional bond with the participants and help to create a
Factors Influencing Public Attachment to Mosques in Malaysia

MINA NAJAFI AND MUSTAFA KAMAL BIN MOHD SHARIFF

sense of place. In this regard Serageldin (1990) also argued that those elements speak to all people both Muslims and non-Muslims with a powerful symbolism that transcends space and time. These elements and ornaments due to their repetition in the history of architecture became a visual sign and icon in people's mind. The results of this part therefore exposed that the use of religious symbols in the mosques' architecture adds depth of dimension to the feelings of meaning and inspiration.

Religious and Social Activities
The results of interviews showed that repeated rites and rituals in a mosque help in creating people’s attachment to mosques. In this case the results revealed that not only religious activities but the community of people is the other important factor that influences the people’s attachment. In this case many participants referenced the community of people that they are connected to in the mosque and expressed it as a valuable and meaningful aspect in their place experience. This also helps people to create place attachment. In this case Sopher (1967) argued that sacred structures can also foster communal bonds. He expressed that places of worship in some religions, most notably Judaism and Islam, are significant primarily as places of assembly (Sopher, 1967). The results revealed that participation in religious and social activities in mosques assists in creating place attachment. The participants expressed that the religious and socio-cultural factors are significant elements in shaping the sense of place. This group of people shares the experience of the worship as well as the other events that take place in the mosques. In this regard religion plays an important role in creating the sense of place and attachment.

In this case Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2004) discovered that religion and religious activities have a profound influence on people’s relations to place.

Meanings and Conceptions
The results showed that the meanings perceived by the participants are different from each other. This is due to their varied backgrounds and experiences. Nevertheless, certain patterns were able to be identified. The meanings associated with the mosques were related to personal as well as group experiences. These meanings were very important factors in people’s perception of the mosques. The findings showed that physical features and elements, religious beliefs, past experiences, memories, familiarity, culture, identity, and religious/social motivations are the factors that influence the perceived meanings. This is in agreement with the findings of Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977) who argued that the meanings associated with the place are significant component of place experience. They expressed that the experiences of the users deals with the physical, visual and symbolic aspects of place (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). Participants from all selected mosques experienced feelings of peacefulness, safety, refreshing, relaxation, spiritual, tranquillity, comfort, calmness, presence of God, and worship. These perceived feelings are due to the architectural features and also being in a religious place. Between these feelings spirituality and comfort were easily the most referenced feelings that were experienced. They also expressed that they are so proud of the mosques and enjoy from being in a place that reflect their identity.

The interviews revealed that in the context of
the state mosques the emotional, functional, and social meanings are found to be profound reasons that a place continued to be loved and felt significant. The findings suggest that despite the influence of physical features in construction of meanings, human intention, social and religious relationships, emotions and beliefs were important aspects influencing how meaning develop. Therefore these aspects play an important role in producing the sense of place (Relph, 1976; Stedman, 2003).

Employing techniques from the field of environmental psychology, this research provided theoretical guidelines to reveal the essential components of the significance of Islamic built environments in the context of Malaysia as a fast growing Islamic country, hence rehabilitating the environmental meaningfulness. Exploring people’s perception can lead to the creation of space which could make positive environmental impacts on people as individuals and in groups.

References


Stedman, R. C. (2003). Is it really just a social construction: The contribution of the physical environment to sense of place. Society and Natural Resources. 16, 671-685.


Mina Najafi
Mina Najafi is a PhD Candidate at Faculty of Design and Architecture, University Putra Malaysia (UPM) whose thesis is now under evaluation by the School of Graduate Studies. She received her Bachelor in fine arts from Sahand University of Tabriz, Iran in 2004. Afterward she obtained her Master of Art in 2007 from Islamic Art University of Tabriz, Iran. Upon master graduation until the year of 2007, she was a part time academic lecturer in the Department of applied Art, Payame Noor University of Tabriz, Iran. She also worked as a research team member in conducting a few
research projects and organising several conferences in Tabriz. She now is acting as the Quality Assurance Editor of Journal of Construction Innovation, Emerald, UK. Mian has special interest in the issues regarding perception and environmental preference studies. She can be contacted at mina_artistic@yahoo.com

-----------------------------------------------------

**Mustafa Kamal Bin Mohd Shariff**

Mustafa Kamal Bin Mohd Shariff is a professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture, Universiti Putra Malaysia. He has written numerous academic and technical papers for conference proceedings, journals, and professional magazines. He has also written several books on horticulture and landscape architecture. He was a Regional Treasurer for the International Federation of Landscape Architects, Asia-Pacific Region (IFLA APR) and a past president of the Institute of Landscape Architects, Malaysia (ILAM). He currently sits as a Panel of Experts for Landscape Malaysia – an NGO promoting Malaysian landscapes. His current research interest is human behavior in the landscape including public perception of the natural environment, the psychological health benefits of parks, crime and anti-social behavior in public parks as well as place attachment. He can be contacted at muskamal2008@gmail.com