

# The Relationship of Place Attachment and Subjective Wellbeing: Heritage City Johor Bahru

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## ABSTRACT

Heritage cities encompass a wide array of tangible and intangible cultural resources, including historical structures, architectural styles, customs, and cultural environments. The field of place attachment has been extensively studied, and the issue persists, particularly about the erosion of local values caused by the rapid expansion in historic cities. Furthermore, recent studies have placed growing emphasis on the problem of wellbeing, particularly in relation to the built environment. This study aims to explore the role of place attachment towards local community wellbeing. In this study, a quantitative method was carried out on 173 respondents around the Johor Bahru heritage city, which includes the dimension of place attachment as well as the subjective wellbeing. Spatial and behavioural analysis revealed that respondents living within 5 km of the heritage area reported the highest visitation frequency, with 70.6% visiting daily and more than 60% visiting 2–4 times monthly. The result indicates that the longer and more frequent respondents spend time in the heritage city, the stronger the attachment that can be felt. However, the physical proximity alone does not significantly impact wellbeing. Besides that, the result shows that the Johor Bahru heritage city still has a place attachment value, but at a low and moderate level. Place identity showed the highest correlation with positive affect ( $r = .589$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while place dependence and social bonding also correlated with higher life satisfaction ( $r = .320$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $r = .315$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively). However, negative affect was weakly associated with place attachment variables, with no significant correlations found for social relations ( $r = 0.006$ ,  $p = 0.936$ ) and place dependence ( $r = 0.101$ ,  $p = 0.187$ ) with negative emotions. Personal inclination to narrate stories about one's city is identified as a powerful indicator of strong correlation between variables. This study opened that method proposed can produce a reliable data that can be statistically analysed to identify the patterns and connection between variables.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, the concept of place attachment has garnered significant attention across various disciplines, highlighting its

global relevance and impact on individual and collective wellbeing. Research has demonstrated that individuals with a deep sense of place attachment report greater life satisfaction and experience lower levels of stress, which underscores the positive impact of this

connection on overall wellbeing (Smith and Brown, 2023). People's relationship to their own living environment is a crucial in understanding their wellbeing and quality of life. The environment is such an important contextual factor that it should always be included in the studies on quality of life and wellbeing (Horelli, 2006). However, it is not the physical environment as such that is crucial, but how people perceive and experience it that key factor in explaining wellbeing (Uzzell and Moser, 2006). The importance of place attachment is increasingly recognized as a vital component in promoting mental and emotional health, particularly as individuals seek comfort and identity in familiar environments. Furthermore, the stability and continuity provided by these attachments are essential for fostering a sense of belonging, which further enhances the psychological health of individuals (Williams, 2024).

The past 50 years in particular have seen a rapid increase in rates of urbanization across the world. According to Hannah *et al.*, (2024), the world's population reached 8 billion in 2022, with over half (55 per cent) living in urban areas, a figure projected to rise to 70 per cent by 2050. Meanwhile, across most upper-middle-income countries between 50% to 80% of people do lives in urban areas (Ritchie *et al.*, 2024). Due to the rapid pace of urbanization, the urban environment in Malaysia is constantly changing with modern structures and images due to that is affecting the quality of the place's identity. Economic globalization has resulted in the erosion of place identity (Zhang *et al.*, 2023), at the same time removing the meaning and value of place or its specificity, separating cultural aspects and the local way of life. Furthermore, external influences cause more spaces to appear with global characteristics until the loss of traditional and cultural values, the charm and role of public space as a place of social interaction that can be remembered and felt by all levels of society (Zmudzinska-Nowak, 2011; Kaul, 2012; Urbaite, 2024).

The concept of place attachment was initially associated with people's home environment such as their residences or neighbourhoods (Manzo and Perkins, 2006), and then it was adopted in the historic and heritage places related research. According to Shukri *et al.* (2022), most studies focus on the contribution of physical elements (Purwanto and Harani, 2020; Mustafa and Haider, 2024; Khandani *et al.*, 2023), but the joint exploration of psychological dimensions is still underexplored. Therefore, this study considers the feelings and experiences of users towards the place and the psychological meaning of society. Studies proved that the loss of place attachment due to forced separation leads to trauma, feelings of sadness, depression, anxiety and notions that weaken self-identity (Knez *et al.*, 2018). Loyal users contribute to their actions to stay in the area for a longer period, participate more, recommend the destination and subsequently spread positive

reviews about it and have a desire to revisit the destination (Patwardhan *et al.*, 2020; Styliadis *et al.*, 2021).

Based on the issues and problems faced by both scenarios, the need to see the connection between the factors of place attachment in influencing the wellbeing of the population in improving local values in urban areas in Malaysia is important to create an effective sense of commonality among the community. In addition, researches the quality of places such as elements and physical activities has been discussed a lot in previous studies if seen from the aspect of urban design. This study was carried out with the aim of examining the role of place attachment in creating local value.

Place attachment is one of the most complex and multi-layered contexts in the social sciences. Previous studies have explained various dimensions including psychological, social and spatial in the daily life of individuals in their place (Altman and Low, 1992; Manzo and Perkins, 2006). Researchers agree that place attachment can reduce loneliness and social isolation among individuals (Zahnow, 2024; Kaplan and Kaplan, 1982) through a physical approach between people and places (Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001; Lambert *et al.*, 2013).

The term of place attachment as the development of attachment or relationship between an individual (human) and a specific place, expressed through the integration between influence and emotion, knowledge and belief, as well as community behavior and action in response to the exploration and discovery of the place (Proshansky *et al.*, 1983; Altman and Low, 1992; Fornara, 2019; Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2020; Hernández *et al.*, 2020; Mohd Fadhli Shah *et al.*, 2022b). Place attachment is also explained by functional attachment between people and place, it is described as place dependence (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981). Place attachment is developed and felt to be important by its users and can provide an environment to meet functional needs and support behavioral goals that are better than existing alternatives (Williams *et al.*, 1995). Proximity to place can be expressed through repeated visits or by electing to live in place (Scannell and Gifford, 2010).

Different dimensions of place attachment, such as place identity (Kyle *et al.*, 2004; Moore and Graefe, 1994; Vaske and Kobrin, 2001), place dependence (Vaske and Kobrin, 2001; Williams *et al.*, 1992; Wells and Baldwin, 2012; Wells, 2017) and place social bonding (Kyle *et al.*, 2005; Hammitt *et al.*, 2009; Scannell and Gifford, 2010; Eriksson *et al.*, 2022) have been identified and examined in previous literature. The emphasis in the study is on the role of place, which comprises multidimensional elements and Table 1 shows the indicator used.

**Table 1** Dimensions of place attachment (adapted from Williams and Vaske, 2003; Kyle *et al.*, 1989; Scannell and Gifford, 2010a; Raymond *et al.*, 2010; Eriksson *et al.*, 2022)

Dimensions	Description	Scale items	
Place Identity	The connection between a place and the personal identity of an individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This destination is a part of me</li> <li>• I like to tell stories about my city</li> <li>• Urban landscapes make me feel strong emotions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The best place for what I like</li> <li>• This destination is very special for me</li> <li>• No other destination can compare to this place</li> </ul>
Place Dependence	The functional attachments of individuals to a specific place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get more satisfaction from this destination</li> <li>• I am very attached to this destination</li> <li>• What I do here is more important</li> <li>• This destination says a lot about who I am</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I would not replace with another area</li> <li>• This destination means a lot to me</li> <li>• I like to do the same thing in the same destination</li> </ul>
Social Bonding	The social relationships between individuals and other individuals, communities, and cultures in a place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The people I am close to are mostly from here</li> <li>• I hope to return to friends and family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I never felt alone</li> </ul>

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) is the term used to describe how people perceive and assess their lives, including specific domains and activities. Over the past decade, interest in learning more about self-reported wellbeing, or SWB has grown. It is often used to assess mental health and happiness and is a reliable predictor of personal health, well-being, and lifespan (Table 2). Aside from providing psychologists with insights into how people perceive their life, it also provides insights that can be used to guide public health, economic, and social policies. Policymakers utilize assessments of subjective wellbeing to evaluate the state of societies and the effectiveness of social policies.

The psychologist Ed Diener presented a three-part model of subjective wellbeing in 1984. This model identifies three unique but linked characteristics of how people evaluate their own well-being. Among the heterogeneous findings on the development of SWB the findings have elicited much discussion in the literature (Kolosnitsyna *et al.*, 2017; Otterbach *et al.*, 2018; Blanchflower and Graham, 2021a; Galambos *et al.*, 2020 & 2021), encompasses more than just happiness as it involves reflection on past experiences and future expectations (Machado *et al.*, 2019).

Place attachment and wellbeing are two main core areas, namely as enabling dimensions to improve the quality of life of individuals (Rollero and De Piccoli, 2010). When Vada *et al.* (2019) studied the relationship between wellbeing and place attachment, they considered wellbeing as an antecedent to place attachment. They believe that when the users of a place can form wellbeing after having an unforgettable travel experience in a place, their level of attachment to the tourist destination will increase. Then, Theodori (2001) also confirmed that the higher their level of attachment to society, the higher their wellbeing.

The quality of the urban environment enhances place satisfaction and contributes to stronger place attachment and individual wellbeing. By evoking memories tied to specific locations, attachment fosters a sense of belonging to both the local community and the surrounding environment. Positive emotions are often a direct outcome of place attachment, while disruptions to this connection can negatively impact wellbeing (Scannell *et al.*, 2016). Studies prove that the loss of place attachment due to forced separation results in trauma, depressive, anxious and perceptions that weaken self-identity (Knez *et al.*, 2018).

**Table 2** Dimensions of subjective wellbeing (adapted from Source: Diener *et al.*, 1984,2009; Busseri and Sadava, 2011; Tov and Diener, 2013; Machado *et al.*, 2019, Buecker *et al.*, 2023)

Dimensions	Description	Scale items	
Positive Affect	The extent to which individuals feel positive emotions that enhance wellbeing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive</li> <li>• Good</li> <li>• Pleasant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Happy</li> <li>• Joyful</li> <li>• Contented</li> </ul>
Negative Affect	The subjective experience of negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, stress, sadness, worry, guilt, shame, anger, and envy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative</li> <li>• Bad</li> <li>• Unpleasant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Afraid</li> <li>• Angry</li> </ul>
Life Satisfaction	Overall evaluation of one's life rather than momentary feelings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This environment is close to ideal</li> <li>• My living conditions are very good</li> <li>• I am satisfied with this environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have achieved my main goal</li> <li>• I would not change my current plan</li> </ul>

This study examined the relationship between place attachment and subjective wellbeing in Johor Bahru City Center due to its strategic significance as a designated cultural heritage zone “Zon Warisan” as stated in Johor Bahru District Local Plan 2030 and Special Conservation Area Plan. It encompasses key heritage streets, which are recognized for their historical and socio-cultural value. Despite these recognitions, rapid urbanization has begun to alter the character of the area, potentially weakening community bonds and eroding the lived experience of place.

The definition of heritage city refers to historically significant urban spaces that officially recognized. These areas are not only physical heritage sites but also spaces of emotional and cultural meaning that contributes to wellbeing by fostering positive affect, life satisfaction and a sense of meaning in public space usage. When these spaces actively conserved and made accessible, it is found to support subjective well-being (Ateca-Amestoy *et al.*, 2021) by offering visitors a sense of continuity, identity, belonging (Bo and Abdul Rani, 2025) and visual aesthetic pleasure (Grossi *et al.*, 2019). This connection is significant in rapidly developing urban contexts where heritage areas act as counterbalances to urban alienation and placelessness (Gallou, 2022). Thus, these characteristics align closely with the constructs of place attachment and subjective well-being, making Johor Bahru’s heritage core a meaningful site to explore these relationships. The novelty lies in integrating psychological constructs with spatial behaviour (visit frequency and

residential distance) to evaluate well-being outcomes in Malaysia heritage context. This approach contributes new insights to urban heritage planning and livability research.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Study Area

Johor Bahru located in a very special and strategic position in the South of Peninsular Malaysia. It is flanked by important waters in the Southeast Asian region, the Tebrau Strait in the South that separates it from Singapore. functioning as a National Regional Centre is also the state capital of Johor. It covers an area of 19.28 hectares and is administered under the Johor Bahru City Council. The city centre is located under planning block 1, which is the Central District (Figure 1). In general, Johor Bahru City Center was chosen as the study area because it is an old urban area identified as a city with the identity of a Heritage and Cultural City, especially in Jalan Tan Hiok Nee, Jalan Dhoby, Jalan Trus and Jalan Ungku Puan which have been highlighted in MBBJ planning documents and gazetted local plans as areas with historical, cultural, and architectural value. This is in line with the area of Old Town Precinct itself which is rich in the early history of the opening of Johor Bahru. Realizing the problem of losing the city's identity and meaning, a new breath needs to be introduced based on the current development in the city centre itself.

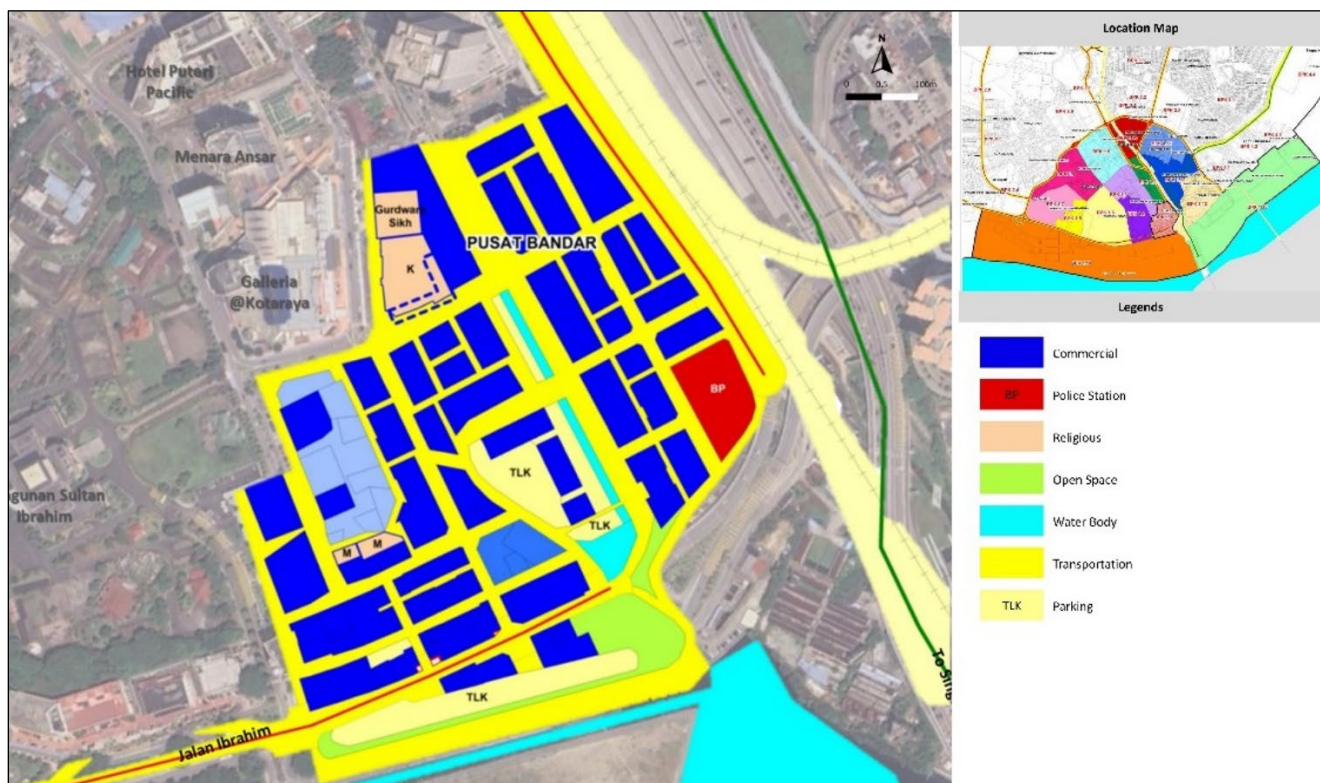


Figure 1 Study Area (adapted from Johor Bahru & Kulai District Local Plan - Revision 2025)

## 2.2 Data Collection and Sampling Method

This study uses a quantitative method through a questionnaire to users of urban space in Johor Bahru City Centre, which is a total of 173 respondents. The survey was conducted onsite during weekdays and weekends, covering both working hours and public holidays including weekends to find out the activity patterns and intensity of users to take advantage of open spaces in heritage cities. The target group was people aged  $\geq 18$  years. A random probability sampling technique was used for the study to ensure each member of the target population had an equal chance of selection (Creswell, 1994), with a confidence level of 95.0% with a confidence interval of 5%. In addition, unstructured interviews were also conducted to obtain an overview of the socio-cultural background and current conditions of the study area. The questionnaire is divided into four parts: (1) Demographics of respondents, e.g., gender, age, race, education level, occupation and income, (2) Trader and employee profiles, e.g., duration of business and work and type of business activity, (3) Level of place attachment, e.g., place identity, place, (4) Level of wellbeing; e.g., affective affect and life satisfaction.

In this study, the questionnaire was in the form of a Likert scale and then ended with an open-ended question to collect respondents' information and respondents' opinions on the study area. The measurement of the level of attachment was assessed by using the psychological place attachment (PPAS) which covers the variables of place identity, place dependency and social relationships (Table 1). A 5-point Likert scale was used to answer the following questions: 1) strongly disagree, 2) disagree, 3) neutral, 4) agree, and 5) strongly agree. While subjective wellbeing (Table 2), individual wellbeing of participants was assessed by using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). The scale is comprised of five items that range from 1 (= strongly disagree) to 7 (= strongly agree). Higher ratings indicate higher individual satisfaction with life and Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE; Diener et al., 2009) brief 12-item scale using a 5-point Likert scale for: 1) very rarely or never, 2) rarely, 3) sometimes, 4) often, and 5) very often or always.

## 3. Result and Discussion

This section details the results and discussion of the findings of the study.

### 3.1 Respondents' Profile

Respondents were taken from the Johor Bahru City area, particularly in Jalan Tan Hiok Nee, Jalan Dhoby and Jalan Ungku Puan. Respondents were concentrated on those aged 18 and above and the mean value recorded was 36.42 (SD  $\pm 8.78$ ). Men comprise half (52%) of the total number of respondents. Most respondents are Malay (50.9%). The median education level is a bachelor's degree, and 63% have a median income between RM2,500 to RM4,850. About a total of 65.3% of the sample are private sector workers.

Table 2 Respondents profile

Variables	Mean (SD)/N (%)
<b>Gender, N (%)</b>	
Male	52.0
Female	48.0
<b>Races, N (%)</b>	
Malay	50.9
Chinese	34.7
Indian	14.5
<b>Age, Mean (<math>\pm</math>SD)</b>	36.42( $\pm 8.78$ )
<b>Education Level, N (%)</b>	
Degree	39.9
STPM / STAM	0.6
Diploma	23.1
SPM	36.4
<b>Occupation, N (%)</b>	
Government	20.2
Private	65.3
Self Employed	8.7
Not Working	5.8
<b>Income, N (%)</b>	
No Income	5.8
<RM2500	15.0
RM2500-RM4850	63.0
RM4851-RM10,970	16.2

### 3.2 Distribution of Users Travel Distance and Living Radius

The results of the study show the distribution of visitors from heritage cities mostly from direction of the north and northwest (Figure 2). The percentage of population distribution within less than 5 kilometers from the heritage city is as much as 50.9%. For the distance of 5-10 kilometers, 25.6% was recorded, followed by 13.9% of respondents who lived within 11-15 kilometers. For a radius of 15-20 kilometers, a total of 29.6% were recorded.

This result indicates that most respondents concentrated near to the urban core which primarily reflects the experiences of centrally located residents. High concentration of respondents within the inner urban area responses were influenced by the accessibility, infrastructure and socio-environmental context of Johor Bahru. For example, residents who live nearer to the city center are more likely to interact frequently with physical spaces, social networks and cultural landmarks that may contribute significantly to the formation of place attachment. However, the decreasing number of respondents with increasing distance from the city center is typical in urban-based studies where populations are denser near the core. Individuals residing in the outer zones exhibit a different type or intensity of place attachment, which is influenced by suburban characteristics, reduced accessibility, or less frequent engagement with the urban core.



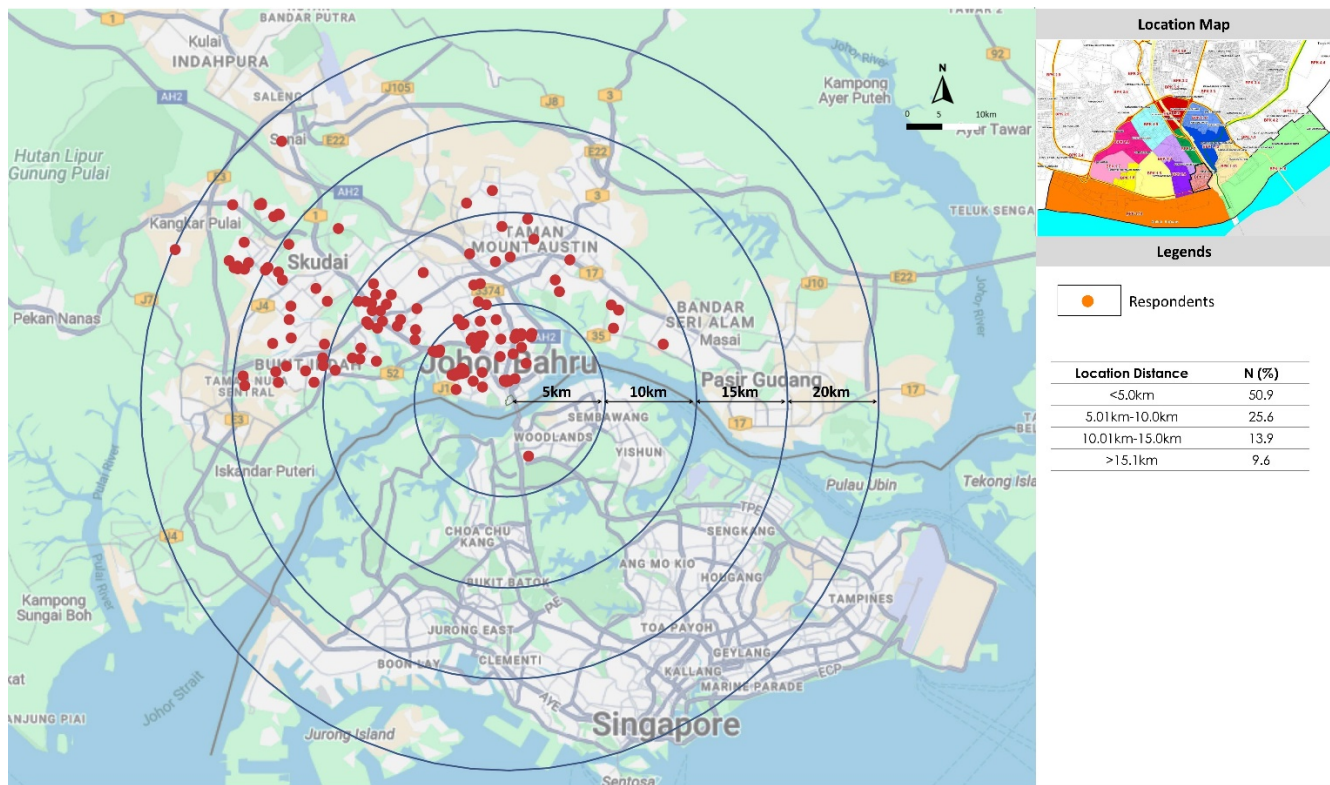


Figure 2 Residential radius distance (created by the authors)

### 3.2 Place Attachment

#### 3.2.1 Place Identity

A total of 173 respondents answered the survey. Based on Table 3, the higher mean values for the landscape element ( $\bar{x}=2.341$ ,  $SD=1.169$ ) and self-part destination ( $\bar{x}=2.306$ ,  $SD=0.973$ ) indicate that individuals generally associate a certain emotional significance towards place, with some perceiving a strong personal attachment. However, the lowest mean for incomparable ( $\bar{x}=1.486$ ) with its low standard deviation ( $SD=0.736$ ) shows that only some participants view their place as unique. The result of place identity perception among community shows that it is still low. These mean values collectively indicate that respondents in Johor Bahru Heritage City Centre highly value the historical and aesthetic aspects of the landscape, feel a strong personal connection to the heritage, are inclined to share their experiences, however, some features might respondents need help finding the elements within the heritage city center to be significantly unique or incomparable to other places which could mean that they don't feel deeply connected to the spot. It could be due to a perception that similar historical and cultural features can be found elsewhere.

The relatively consistent responses (as shown by standard deviations ranging from 0.736 to 1.169) highlight that although there is a moderate emotional connection to the place, there is some respondents may feel a stronger attachment to the destination, while others may see it as just one of many important places. The implication here is that emotional and identity-related attachments to places vary among individuals, implying that

initiatives to strengthen place identification should consider for various personal experiences and perspectives.

Table 3 Respondents level of place identity

Dimension/Indicator	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD ( $\sigma$ )
This destination is a part of me	2.306	0.973
I like to tell stories about my city	2.087	1.083
Urban landscapes make me feel strong emotions	2.341	1.169
The best place for what I like	1.780	0.969
This destination is very special for me	1.890	1.123
No other destination can compare to this place	1.486	0.736

#### 3.2.2 Place Dependence

Next, place dependence is also one of the elements of place attachment which reflects the importance of individual relationships with places in giving privileges based on specific activity or desire responses (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981). This dimension is divided into seven subcomponents and the perception shows that it is still low (Table 4). The satisfaction recorded the highest mean value ( $\bar{x}=2.416$ ,  $SD=1.025$ ), then followed by like doing the same activity ( $\bar{x}=2.249$ ,  $SD=1.112$ ). Both indicate that some individuals feel a stronger attachment or attachment to specific activities within the place, others do not place as much importance on it.

Feel Important ( $\bar{x}$ =2.139, SD=1.112), Meaningful ( $\bar{x}$ =1.919, SD=1.222), Attached ( $\bar{x}$ =1.827, SD=1.025), No replacement ( $\bar{x}$ =1.549; SD=0.845) and Express a lot who I am ( $\bar{x}$ =1.428, SD= 0.801). The lower mean for expressing who they are indicate that most participants do not see the destination as a core part of their personal identity, reinforcing the idea that place dependence is not particularly strong. These findings imply that while the destination plays a role in people's lives, they are not deeply dependent on it for their sense of identity or routine activities.

**Table 4** Respondents level of place dependency

Dimension/Indicator	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD ( $\sigma$ )
I find greater satisfaction at this destination	2.416	0.965
I feel strongly attached to this place	1.827	1.025
Activities I do here are particularly meaningful	2.139	1.112
This place reflects my identity	1.428	0.801
I would not trade this place for another	1.549	0.845
This destination means a lot to me	1.919	1.222
I prefer doing the same activities in this place	2.249	1.074

### 3.2.3 Social Bonding

As for the social relation, it refers to the feeling of membership or belonging to a group, including emotional ties based on shared history, interests or concerns (Perkins and Long 2002). According to Table 5, one of the social components which is not feeling lonely recording the highest mean value ( $\bar{x}$ =3.249, SD= 1.007) reflects majority of respondents feel socially connected in the place, with a higher level of agreement among participants, as shown by its relatively low standard deviation. Next, wanting to come back again ( $\bar{x}$ =2.671, SD=1.116) and having a close relationship ( $\bar{x}$ =1.977, SD=1.056). The result indicates a moderate level of social bonding perception due to community activities, social events, or a general atmosphere that fosters positive social interactions, reducing feelings of loneliness and resulting in shaping their attachment and willingness to return even though a more specific and deep emotional connection with someone in the place are low.

Overall, the social bonding social bonding appears to be a stronger factor in participants' connection to their environments. The stronger social bonding seen in social relations shows that the interpersonal relationships people maintain within a place are vital. Enhancing social networks, improving social spaces, and offering opportunities for communal activities could foster a greater sense of belonging and attachment to the place.

**Table 5** Community level of social bonding

Dimension/Indicator	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD ( $\sigma$ )
The people I am close to are mostly from here	1.977	1.056
I hope to return to friends and family	2.671	1.116
I never felt alone	3.249	1.007

### 3.3 Subjective Wellbeing

#### 3.3.1 Scale of Positive Affective and Negative Experience (SPANE)

Based on Table 6, positive and negative SPANE each consist of six subcomponents where the highest mean values are feeling good ( $\bar{x}$ =4.035, SD=0.527) and positive ( $\bar{x}$ =3.936, SD=0.530) indicate that respondents generally associate positive and good sentiments with the place. Meanwhile, happy ( $\bar{x}$ =3.243, SD=0.848), pleasant ( $\bar{x}$ =3.081, SD=0.852), satisfied ( $\bar{x}$ =2.803, SD=0.840) and fun ( $\bar{x}$ =2.665, SD=0.917). The positive feelings could be influenced by the presence of historic landmarks, vibrant cultural events, and friendly community interactions that might contribute to a positive overall atmosphere. However, factors such as maintenance, cleanliness, or specific features that may vary in their appeal to individuals.

In contrast, Table 6 shows that unpleasant ( $\bar{x}$ =1.538, SD=0.743) represents the highest mean value compared to other components. Then followed by feeling sad ( $\bar{x}$ =1.052, SD=0.211), bad ( $\bar{x}$ =1.046, SD=0.223), negative ( $\bar{x}$ =1.012, SD=0.107), and fear and anger, which recorded the same value ( $\bar{x}$ =1.006, SD=0.076). This indicates that negative emotion are rarely felt by the participants, and those who do experience these emotions report them to a minimal extent. Thus, it shows that the heritage city centre is not associated with adverse emotional experiences.

**Table 6** Respondents level of SPANE P and SPANE N

Dimension/Indicator	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD ( $\sigma$ )
<b>SPANE P</b>		
Positive	3.936	0.530
Good	4.035	0.527
Pleasant	3.081	0.852
Happy	3.243	0.848
Joyful	2.665	0.917
Contented	2.803	0.840
<b>SPANE N</b>		
Negative	1.012	0.107
Bad	1.046	0.223
Unpleasant	1.538	0.743
Sad	1.052	0.211
Afraid	1.006	0.076
Angry	1.006	0.076

### 3.3.2 Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

For the life satisfaction scale (SWLS) generally report high levels of satisfaction. Table 7 shows the respondents are satisfied with their life ( $\bar{x}$ =4.942,  $SD$ =0.466), then followed by the second highest value which is a good life ( $\bar{x}$ =4.809,  $SD$ =0.584), prefer to maintain current life ( $\bar{x}$ =4.780,  $SD$ =0.579), an ideal life ( $\bar{x}$ =4.289,  $SD$ =0.783) and have achieved important thing ( $\bar{x}$ =4.092,  $SD$ =0.794). The mean value depicts that respondent, on average, feel that their life in proximity to Johor Bahru Heritage City Centre is relatively close to their ideal which indicate that the environment, cultural richness, and community aspects contribute positively to the overall life satisfaction of individuals. The city centre provides a vibrant and culturally rich atmosphere, besides provides a high quality of life with accessible amenities, therefore, communities might feel that their life aligns closely with their ideal expectations.

**Table 7** Community level of SWLS

Dimension/Indicator	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD ( $\sigma$ )
In most ways of life, this environment is close to ideal	4.289	0.783
My living conditions are very good	4.809	0.584
I am satisfied with this environment	4.942	0.466
So far, I have achieved the most important thing in this journey	4.092	0.794
I will not change the plan I made for this trip	4.780	0.579

### 3.3.3 Relationship Between Place Attachment and Subjective Wellbeing

Overall, the analysis of the relationship between place attachment and subjective wellbeing reveals several meaningful patterns. While travel distance and residential radius shows no significant correlation with neither place attachment nor wellbeing. Stronger associations emerge when focusing on the emotional and psychological components of attachment. This suggests that individuals' subjective feelings toward a place such as identity, dependence and social connections are more influential on their emotional wellbeing than physical proximity alone.

Based on the Table 8, the relationship between place attachment and SPANE\_P recorded  $r$  values place identity is 0.583, place dependence (0.575) and social relations (0.530) with a  $p$ -value of 0.000 for each attachment variable. These statistics show that the positive affective shows significant positive relationship with attachment. This situation shows that the level of individual attachment affects positive emotional emotions but is still at a normal level. Next, SPANE\_N records the value of  $r$  place identity as a total of  $r$ =0.115 with a  $p$ -value of 0.132. Then, the dependence of the place shows the  $r$  value  $r$ =0.101 with a  $p$ -value of 0.187, while the aspect of social relations shows  $r$ =0.006 with a  $p$ -value of 0.936. In addition, for the SWLS variable, place identity shows  $r$ =0.302, followed by place dependence ( $r$ =0.320) and social relations ( $r$ =0.315), with a  $p$ -value of 0.000 for each attachment dimension. It explains that the individual's

level of life satisfaction has a weak but clearly significant positive relationship with wellbeing.

The results of these analysis show that the dimension of place attachment exhibits a positive and significant relationship with the individual's positive affective effects. Therefore, positive emotional enhancement is important to consider the attachment factors of the place, such as creating a strong place identity, providing a unique and meaningful experience, and building a sense of familiarity with the place. Therefore, this study supports the positive relationship between place attachment, local social identity, and relational and individual wellbeing. Paolini *et al.*, (2020) on the other hand, also showed a relationship between social identification and wellbeing. However, the analysis also indicates that negative emotions do not have a big impact but instead are more related to positive experiences and perceptions of the area. This situation can be proven by most studies that only focus on positive emotions, such as Rollero and De Piccoli (2010) found that a higher level of place attachment is associated with positive functioning and self-esteem.

The provided data presents the correlations between various variables. According to place attachment theory, individuals develop emotional bonds with places through repeated experiences, social interactions and the meanings associated with those places (Altman and Low, 1992; Nursyamsiah and Setiawan, 2022). The study's revealed that the communities place attachment affects the wellbeing of the users. Among the variables examined, significant correlations were found between the variables of positive affect and place attachment, indicating that users who experience stronger positive affects tend to have higher level of attachment and dependence on the place they are visiting. Meanwhile, the variable of place attachment indicate does not significantly affect negative emotions. These findings align with the theory that highlights the role of emotional experiences in shaping place attachment.

Firstly, place identity was positively related to SPANE P ( $r$  = .583,  $p$  < .001) and SWLS ( $r$  = .302,  $p$  < .001). It in line with the theoretical framework of place attachment, whereas individuals with a strong sense of identity towards their environment. This can be explained by the identity formation component of Place Attachment Theory, where the historical and cultural aspects of a heritage city contribute significantly to an individual's self-concept and identity. When individuals feel that their identity is intertwined with their city, they derive more joy and positive emotions from their environment. Blešić *et al.*, (2022) discuss how cultural involvement and place attachment in heritage contexts like Novi Sad, the European Capital of Culture, enhance residents' attitudes and psychological wellbeing. In the context of heritage cities, place identity plays a crucial role in enhancing residents' and visitors' subjective wellbeing.

Next, place dependence also positively correlates with SPANE P ( $r$  = .575,  $p$  < .001) and SWLS ( $r$  = .320,  $p$  < .001). It indicates that places that effectively support desired activities contribute to a sense of achievement and satisfaction, enhancing positive emotions. This finding underscores the role of place dependency in shaping emotional experiences and highlights the significance



of environmental affordances in facilitating positive emotional states (Singh, 2022). Furthermore, the correlation between social bonding is positively related to both SPANE P ( $r=0.530$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and SWLS ( $r=0.315$ ,  $p < .001$ ). It shows that stronger social ties are associated with increased positive affect especially happen the communal activities and events in heritage cities. Gallou (2022) investigates how heritage contributes to wellbeing through place attachment, highlighting the personal and social benefits derived from one's connection to heritage sites.

On the contrary, the place attachment was negatively related to SPANE N. In Lewicka (2008) discusses how place attachment, while generally associated with positive emotions, can also be linked to negative affect in specific contexts. In simpler terms, when people feel more attached to a place, especially a heritage centre with historical or cultural significance, they may experience fewer negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, or discomfort. Heritage centres are not just physical spaces but also repositories of collective memory and identity that can counteract negative emotions. This also supported by a study from Gallou *et*

*al.*, (2022) that stated the wellbeing benefits derived from self-directed visits to heritage sites.

Moreover, in the context of heritage centres, subjective wellbeing plays a crucial role in determining whether visitors intend to return. Positive emotional experiences can lead to a stronger intention to revisit, as people are naturally inclined to seek experiences that enhance their wellbeing. Visits to heritage centres often evoke nostalgia and positive memories. These positive memories can increase revisit intentions as visitors seek to relive or deepen these experiences (Kim *et al.*, 2012; Huh and Uysal, 2004; Rasoolimanesh *et al.*, 2021; Riptiono, 2022).

However, there are several limitations that have been encountered throughout this study where a few users seem to try to avoid and are not ready to answer the questionnaire. The second obstacle faced during the study being conducted is the probability of getting the right number of respondents for gender and race, hence random sampling is used. In addition, some respondents did not understand the context of the questions asked, especially Part C of the questionnaire.

**Table 8** Overall correlations between place attachment and wellbeing

Dimension/Indicator		Travel and Living Distances	SPANE P	SPANE N	SWLS
<b>Place Identity</b>	Correlation Coefficient	.033	.583	.115	.302
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.665	<b>.000**</b>	.132	<b>.000**</b>
This destination is a part of me	Correlation Coefficient	-.073	.394	.101	.214
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.339	.904	.660	.735
I like to tell stories about my city	Correlation Coefficient	.035	.629	.170	.246
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.647	<b>.000**</b>	.096	.797
Urban landscapes make me feel strong emotions	Correlation Coefficient	.045	.484	.105	.288
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.559	.429	.753	.163
The best place for what I like	Correlation Coefficient	.044	.505	.133	.266
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.565	<b>.038*</b>	.077	.368
This destination is very special for me	Correlation Coefficient	.051	.441	.058	.277
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.507	.088	.629	.287
No other destination can compare to this place	Correlation Coefficient	.064	.415	.031	.185
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.399	.104	.067	.526
<b>Place Dependency</b>	Correlation Coefficient	-.022	.575	.101	.320
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.776	<b>.000**</b>	.187	<b>.000**</b>
I find greater satisfaction at this destination	Correlation Coefficient	-.020	.509	.156	.296
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.797	<b>.009*</b>	<b>.050*</b>	.211
I feel strongly attached to this place	Correlation Coefficient	-.014	.460	.050	.274
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.856	.836	.248	.803
Activities I do here are particularly meaningful	Correlation Coefficient	.017	.490	.032	.235
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.824	.224	.181	.833
This place reflects my identity	Correlation Coefficient	-.036	.474	.052	.308
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.642	.187	.960	.069
I would not trade this place for another	Correlation Coefficient	-.039	.486	.070	.248
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.608	<b>.047*</b>	.610	.449
This destination means a lot to me	Correlation Coefficient	-.062	.451	.080	.185
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.417	.232	.956	<b>.015*</b>
I prefer doing the same activities in this place	Correlation Coefficient	.022	.496	.146	.343
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.773	.083	.161	<b>.006**</b>
<b>Social Relations</b>	Correlation Coefficient	-.057	.530	.006	.315
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.459	<b>.000**</b>	.936	<b>.000**</b>
The people I am close to are mostly from here	Correlation Coefficient	-.018	.541	.045	.365
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.814	<b>.000**</b>	.311	<b>.000**</b>

I hope to return to friends and family	Correlation Coefficient	-.055	.426	.009	.249
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.470	.651	.986	.615
I never felt alone	Correlation Coefficient	-.080	.459	.039	.234
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.294	<b>.032*</b>	.285	.901

Note \* P < 0.05 and \*\* P < 0.001

#### 4. Conclusion

This study has emphasized the place-based approach in creating the quality of places in the city in a better direction for user use. A sense of place attachment can be developed based on tangible and intangible qualities identified by users. The attachment describes the ability of the place to meet the psychological needs of the community in restoring and maintaining their positive emotions through the SWLS variable. The objective of the study is to analyse the relationship between place attachment and community wellbeing in the city of Johor Bahru. The analysis reveals that strong place attachment dimension is significantly associated with positive emotions (SPANE P) and overall life satisfaction (SWLS). Specifically, strong place identity ( $r = .583$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and place dependency ( $r = .575$ ,  $p < .001$ ) are linked to higher positive affect, while social relations within the destination also play a crucial role ( $r = .530$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Notably, sharing stories about the place and the irreplaceability of the destination further enhance these positive outcomes.

The results of the study prove that there is a significant relationship between place attachment and wellbeing. Data analysis shows the degree of place attachment affecting the wellbeing of the community in the Johor Bahru Heritage City. In the context of place identity, the community feels a strong identity with the place and is convinced that it is unique. Next, place dependency shows the level of satisfaction obtained from the destination, the inability to be replaced by another place, and the place affecting their wellbeing. The analysis of social relationships also shows that the factors of the presence of familiar acquaintances and not feeling alienated have a connection where the community does not feel lonely or homogenous when in the study location. When people feel attached to a place, their subjective wellbeing is often enhanced, as the place provides a source of comfort, identity, and happiness. This, in turn, reinforces their intention to visit or remain engaged with the place, creating a positive feedback loop where the attachment strengthens wellbeing.

Given this gap, the study offers several implications for urban planning, policy, and practice. From a policy perspective, these measures can be integrated into municipal cultural policies and urban development guidelines to ensure that heritage conservation is not only physical but also emotional and experiential. Next, enhancing the physical distinctiveness and cultural authenticity of heritage areas is vital through such as interpretative signage, storytelling installations, and preservation of traditional architectural elements can reinforce a stronger place identity. Moreover, encouraging participatory planning that includes local voices in decision-making processes can increase residents' sense of ownership and deepen their dependence on these spaces for daily activities and meaning making. Incorporating heritage education and memory-sharing initiatives, especially among younger generations also can be implement, can

further promote emotional attachment and continuity of cultural identity. Therefore, future planning efforts should prioritize people-centred approaches to sustaining cultural identity, fostering urban liveability and improving the overall quality of life in rapidly urbanizing cities in aligning historical preservation with contemporary wellbeing goals.

In conclusion, the level of place attachment in the city centre that integrated with life satisfaction is appropriate and relevant. However, the level of attachment to the city centre is still at a low level. It requires improvement to form a common feeling as well as improve the wellbeing of users, such as the addition of activities, values and unique identities that can bring meaning and attachment to the city. For example, the provision of interactive spaces in heritage cities is considered one of the actions in designing urban spaces as platforms for cultural activities and social gatherings. Therefore, further recommendations of this study can be considered in future research to help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between place attachment and wellbeing in the urban context than only in residential areas.

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#### Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper

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