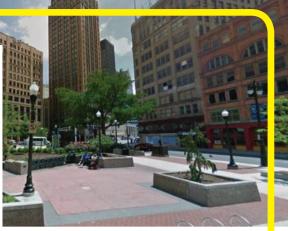# Open Space And Urban Identity

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Capitol Square Park Historic

| Lafayette Garden | Campus Maritus Park Historic District | Grand Circus Park Historic District | Greek Town Historic District |

FIGURE 1: The six significant historic areas and public open spaces in Downtown Detroit: (Google, 2014).

dentity of urban area is influenced by human perception, meaning and experiences in relation to the physical environment and space function. According to Ujang (2010 cited in Hernandez et al., 2007) urban identity is a process by which through interaction with places, where people describe themselves in terms of belonging to a specific place. In this context, identity also called as urban character or local character. Places are constructed by the physical form, activity and meaning, (Ujang, 2010 cited in Montgomery, 1998). According to Gleason (1950), identity is used to describe "the unity of the self".

The weakness of urban identity will affect the overall physical setting and context of the city. In contemporary cities, the weakening of identity is facilitated by the uniform concepts of planning and development together with the co-modification of places which have led to the loss of local identity (Ujang, 2010 cited in Mohamad, 1998). According to Ujang (2010 cited in Arefi, 1999) associating this with the notion of non-place, the lack of connectivity of physical landscapes with place meanings held within broader physical, cultural and emotional context. Sustaining the meanings and

identity of the urban elements are important because they contribute to self-identity, sense of community and sense of place (Ujang, 2010 cited in Hull, 1994). The Concept of Urban Identity The concept of urban identity has a more common term in physical planning, social culture and environment. It has been describing the "uniqueness" of the space design and function from very different perspectives and purposes such as place identity, ethnic identity and social identity. The word urban is defined as relating to the characteristics of the city.

Identified as the essence, meaning and true local character that represents the uniqueness relating to a city. According to Sert (1969) the concept of urban identity is that part of city planning which deals with the physical form of the city, and the most creative phase of city planning is in which imagination and artistic capacities plays the most important part.

The Concept of Urban Identity

The concept of urban identity is as the expression of people feeling to experience the place and also feel unique to it. Urban identity is a set of meaning and also depends on the history which is formed in a city by the first human settlement. Throughout time, the physical setting will change the social life and thinking of the city. Thus, the concept of urban identity is such changing process affects the urban identity. Identity of cities is acquired with their original characters, but with the passing time, some cities lose their original architecture and urban characters, thus the settlement fall into a confusion of identity.
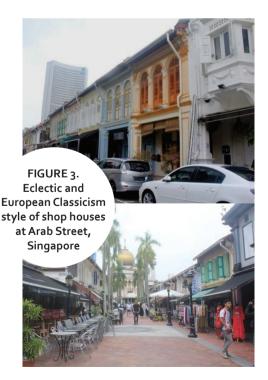
Historical cities have a high identity value that needs to be preserved. It will create an archive and reflect the memories of the urban dweller. In addition, the historical and cultural heritage creates the core values of urban identity. Therefore, cultural and historical background also will be the memory of the city that evokes the sense of belonging of the city. Cultural heritage is the most important part of urban identity. When historic town is well-preserved and articulated to

the cities development process, the city can protect the concept of urban memory and urban identity (Kutsal, 2012). Figure 1 shows the examples of historic areas in public open spaces that reflect the urban identity of Downtown Detroit.

The Important of Urban Place-Identity

Urban place identity is determined by the physical elements in which the meaning and activities are created. Place-identity can influence the people's identity and support continuity of life and socio-cultural values. Place identity is also influenced by the functional (physical) as well as the emotional aspects of environmental experience. Identity of place and sense of belonging are important in order to establish as emotional and cognitive bond with a place, which leads to the feeling of safety, comfort and sense of community. People's affective and cognitive responses to a place are occurred through experiencing the place. Experience is the key action in development of human-place bond (Kaymaz, 2013).

Place attachment is also reflected in the functional bonding between people and places, described as place dependence. Place attachment also are dimensions that can be used as the constructs for identification of the identity of a place considering the significance of place in developing and maintaining self-identity, and group identity of and the composites of its characteristic features (Ujang, 2010 cited in Relph, 1976). Examples of historic building façade/features are illustrated in Figures 2 & 3.

FIGURE 2. Historical bilding, Masjid Sultan, Singapore (1928)

FIGURE 3. Eclectic and European Classicism style of shop houses at Arab Street, Singapore

The Influence of Open Spaces Design

In urban identity context, the priority of space to be focused only in these three parts, which are open space design, effective street design, and conservation of heritage features. Open space is a primary part in designing urban identity. According to Francis (1987 cited in Gold, 1980) open space is a land or/and water in an urban area that is not covered by vehicles or buildings, in an urban area. The effective open space design has allowed and attracts people to utilize the space and create their own activities with a different experience from other places. The space also should focus on comfortability, familiarity, multi-purpose and variety of activities regardless with different ages of users.

Open space is an essential part of the urban heritage; a strong element in the architectural and aesthetic form of a city plays an important educational role. It is ecologically significant and important for social interaction and fostering community development, and supportive of economic objectives and activities (Francis, 1987). In particular, it helps reduce the inherent tension and conflict in deprived parts of urban areas. It also has an important role in providing recreational and leisure needs for the community and create an economic value. There are several aspects that can be used as a guideline in urban open space design to maintain/create an urban identity to be more effective and lively (Francis, 1987) as next info graphic.
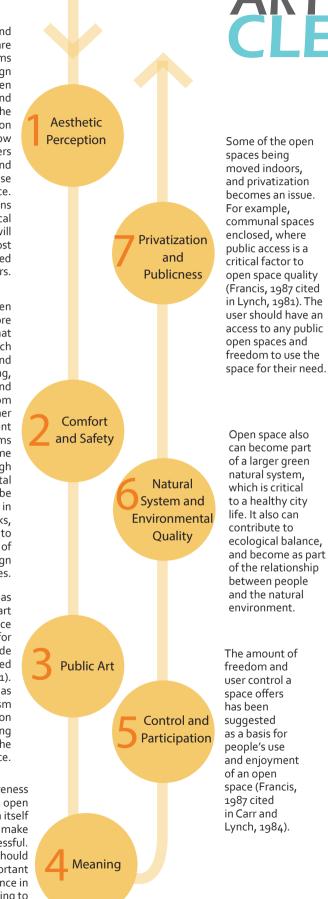
In general, a strong identity on the cities is focus on the significant value of local urban characters that will encourage the contribution of local people in urban activities. Urban identity should be emphasized on the physical environment where it can affect directly on human behaviours and in turn, make one feel the sense of belonging to that place. Indirectly, the value of urban identity can become a main attraction of the city. An urban designer must be able to produce a creative and innovative design that can display a true identity and furthermore can attract people or visitors to go to the town.

1 Aesthetic Perception

Perception and aesthetics are important in terms of quality of design to understand open space design and its benefit to the users. Perception also stresses how to attract users to perceive and make a full use of open space. The specifications of the physical environment will become the most things highly rated by users.

2 Comfort and Safety

Comfort for open space is more on facilities that they provide such as adequate and comfortable seating, accessibility and protection from rain, sun and other environment effects. In terms of safety, crime prevention through environmental design should be implemented in reducing crime risks, and as an effort to improve the sense of security in the design of open spaces.

3 Public Art

Public art has increased as a part of urban open space expenditures for the past decade (Francis, 1987 cited in Beardsley, 1981). Public art serves as an expressionism and contribution of the user feeling experience to the place.

4 Meaning

Instilling awareness on the use of an open space may not in itself be enough to make a space successful. The spaces should have an important symbol or reference in attaching meaning to the open space and its surrounding areas.

5 Control and Participation

The amount of freedom and user control a space offers has been suggested as a basis for people's use and enjoyment of an open space (Francis, 1987 cited in Carr and Lynch, 1984).

6 Natural System and Environmental Quality

Open space also can become part of a larger green natural system, which is critical to a healthy city life. It also can contribute to ecological balance, and become as part of the relationship between people and the natural environment.

7 Privatization and Publicness

Some of the open spaces being moved indoors, and privatization becomes an issue. For example, communal spaces enclosed, where public access is a critical factor to open space quality (Francis, 1987 cited in Lynch, 1981). The user should have an access to any public open spaces and freedom to use the space for their need.