

PRIMARY RESEARCH

Visitors' attachment to tourist places in Manama, Bahrain. Towards urban tourism regeneration

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Abstract

The role of urban tourism to enhance the growth of tourism in cities received a disproportionately small amount of attention by the related parties. Hence, under the crucial strategy to preserve the long-term growth potential of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and within the context of urban regeneration, the present research aims to investigate visitors' attachment to historical tourist places in the capital city of Bahrain, Manama. Indeed, although the city of Manama plays a pivotal role in the development and growth of the national tourism industry, further efforts are needed to enhance the tourism growth in the city. The research findings are based on a questionnaire survey and conducted with 391 visitors randomly selected in tourist attraction areas in the city of Manama. Results indicate that both domestic and international visitors have a fairly strong emotional and functional attachment to the historical sites. However, in term of urban regeneration, domestic visitors highlighted the lack of social and cultural events around the historical sites, while international visitors pointed out the lack of pedestrian and cycling facilities around the sites which decrease their attractiveness. The findings highlight the crucial role of place attachment attributes to inform responsive and inclusive urban regeneration for enhanced urban tourism. Furthermore, it helps to encourage the provision of a conducive environment, enabling the tourism sector to grow. The central idea is that successful urban tourism regeneration should transcend the physical aspect of place to the psychological aspect through the place attachment concept.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become one of the key activities in major cities of the Kingdom of Bahrain. The Vision 2030 is supported by the Millenium Development Goals 2015 to encourage the provision of conducive environment enabling the tourism sector to grow. A crucial strategy to preserve the long-term growth potential and sustainable development of the Kingdom, and to reduce the economy's reliance on the oil sector. In this regard, although the capital city of Bahrain, Manama plays a pivotal role in the development and growth of the national tourism industry, much more needs to be done to enhance the growth of tourism in the city, especially with the full implementation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Free Trade Area (EFTA) (Bariscil, 2017; Business Friendly, 2016). From an urban design perspective, this crucial sector could be enhanced through strengthening urban tourism (Popescu & Corbos, 2010; Weng & Yang, 2016),

which has received a disproportionately small amount of attention by the related parties. This concept encompasses the activities of international and domestic visitors as well as local residents in urban areas, contextualized by built and natural landscapes, amenities and infrastructure. Manama is a city of multi-culture with colonial historical influence. The city center attractions sustain through years with little development on improving the attraction's physical and functional qualities. Urban regeneration and retrofitting has not been planned and structured in a comprehensive manner and as a results, some of the potential attractions remain inaccessible and unknown to visitors. Thus, this research explores urban regeneration as an efficient tool to promote development in urban communities through revitalization and retrofitting of potential attraction areas in the city. The aim is to examine the influence of the functions of public places on visitors' and tourists' attachment

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to tourism places in Manama. The findings provide a beneficial urban design guidelines for planners and urban designers in making places more conducive for tourists and visitors. A stronger attachment to attractive tourism places encourages frequent visits and longer time spending. It will help to attract more visitors to experience places, encouraging the urban economy and forming positive image of the city.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The tourism and travel industry is considered as a crucial worldwide growing economic sector, that keeps on being among the three industries leading the world economy in the twenty-first century (Tatiyanantakul, 2017; United Nations, 2015). Thus, many developing countries recognise tourism as the engine of growth in their effort to economically develop their countries, where the case in Bahrain is of no exception, considering tourism sector as a real wealth generator (Nakibullah, 2018). With the flow decline of the oil income, Bahrain has turned its attention to the vital process of diversifying its economy, giving further emphasize to developing the sector of tourism (Karolak, 2012). Concerning the heritage and the cultural aspect of Bahrain, the country offers a prosperous history of Ottoman, Roman, Greek, and religious sites. In this regard, Bahrain's capital Manama was awarded the title of the 2013 Capital of Arab Tourism, as part of UNESCO's programme to support the human cultural heritage over the world (Samadi & Yunus, 2018). In this regards, the government of Bahrain is increasingly encouraging investment in the tourism sector (Karolak, 2012; Knowles, Diamantis, & El-Mourhabi, 2004). Diversifying non-oil sectors such as the tourism sector will allow every Bahraini family doubling its disposable income in real terms by 2030 (Economic Vision, 2019).

Nonetheless, Bahrain will not achieve its ambitious tourism targets without a significant increase in contribution from its primary city. Manama has long been the pillar and driving force of Bahrain's tourism industry. However, according to the Economic Vision of Bahrain (Economic Vision, 2019), which aims to nearly double tourism sector by 2028 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018), although Manama offers a diverse range of products for tourists and has successfully promoted itself as a major tourist destination, much more needs to be done to foster the accelerated growth of Manama's tourism industry. In that regards, enhancing the relation between tourism and urban areas through the concept of "urban tourism" (Ruetsche, 2016) is crucial in order to achieve the goal of transforming the Bahraini capital into a world-class tourist destination.

Although different forms of tourism experienced rapid growth in the '60s and 70s, where the tourism sector was linked to the movement of residents from urban areas into touristic spots, the concept of urban tourism has expanded only since the 80s. This emerging sector of tourism is witnessing a spectacular growth where almost 80% of visits in cities represent purely urban tourism (Stefania, Florin, & Daniela, 2009). It covers three elements, the cities, tourists, and the tourism industry (Craggs & Schofield, 2011). Also, it is made up of first, attractive spots within the urban areas to seduce and captivate tourists, and second, the necessary infrastructure that ease the displacement of tourists between the different touristic spots (Robinson, 2012). The concept of urban tourism reflects the activity of traveling inside cities with a high level of population density. It refers both to the movement of tourists in urban agglomerations of at least 20,000 people outside their main residence, and subject to remaining at least one night at the destination (Roman & Roman, 2014). Urban tourism has several benefits to urban communities such as, stimulating local production of goods and services, increasing population revenues and improving the living standards, providing arguments for the construction or improvement of the basic infrastructure (public places, water works, roads, power systems, and electricity), improving environment quality, and forming the needed reputation for developing business location (Stefania et al., 2009).

On the other hand, one of the main issues of urban tourism is that those studying tourism neglected cities while those studying cities neglected tourism (Ashworth & Page, 2011), hence, the concern to rehabilitate and renew the relationships between the city and its users (Ashworth & Page, 2011). In the modern cities, implementing the process of urban regeneration is an efficient tool to solve a wide range of urban problems and to sustain solutions for environmental, economic, social, and physical concerns (Alpopi & Manole, 2013). It is defined as the renewal, revival, revitalisation or transformation of a place or community. It can have physical, economic and social dimensions, and the three commonly coexist (Omar, Sakip, & Akhir, 2016). Also, Leary and McCarthy (2013) proposed further definition of urban regeneration concept: "area-based intervention which is public sector initiated, funded, supported or inspired, aimed at producing significant sustainable improvements in the conditions of local people, communities and places suffering from aspects of deprivation, often multiple in nature". In contrast, few studies evaluated the real environmental effectiveness and outcomes of implementing regeneration programmes in terms of physical, social,

and psychological aspects of places (Devine-Wright, 2011; La Rosa, Privitera, Barbarossa, & La Greca, 2017). Thus, this study aims to investigate the influence of public places regeneration on tourists' attachment and its impact on urban tourism. To fulfil this aim, the concept of place attachment is crucial for this study.

Place Attachment and Tourism Experience

Place attachment is defined by "the development of affective bond or link between people or individuals and specific places" (Lewicka, 2011; Moore & Graefe, 1994). It is expressed through "interplay of affects and emotions, knowledge and beliefs, and behaviours and actions" (Altman & Low, 2012). One aspect of place attachment is the functional bonding between people and places which reflects the place dependence. It is related to the functional quality of the activities and physical elements that are different from other places, which is crucial to improve the quality of place. Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) relate place attachment to the desire to be close to a particular place, as it fulfils the individual's needs and expectations. In the context of this study, it can be associated with elements of attraction, the frequency of visits and the emotional reactions towards the place (Ramlee, Omar, Mohd Yunus, & Samadi, 2018). Thus, the degree to which a person feels attached to, or dependent on a place is a function of how well the needs, goals, or motivations are satisfied and the extent to which the experience with place is positive (Ujang & Zakariya, 2015).

According to Smaldone, Harris, and Sanyal (2005), the functional bonding takes place when two conditions are fulfilled.

First, the good quality of the current place, and second, the quality of other substitute places that are comparable to the current place. It reflects the utilitarian and functional aspects of place attachment (Bonnes, 2017; Stokols, 1981). It can be related to the functional quality of the physical elements and activities that is distinct from other places, which is central to the quality of urban design, the assessment of successful places, and tourism places.

Place attachment constructs have been discussed in the context of tourism places (Moore & Graefe, 1994) on attachment to recreational setting and respondents' attitudes towards tourism experiences (Gross, Brien, & Brown, 2008). It can be measured regarding the relationship between tourists' involvement, place attachment and the level of satisfaction (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005). The relevant question is how place attachment relates to future changes of historic places and the users' views on the future image of the places. This paper examines the place attachment dimensions in relation to the idea of regeneration of places in the city of Manama. It is about identifying if place attachment dimensions contribute to the tourists' preference for urban regeneration ideas.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on a survey questionnaire conducted with 391 visitors in tourist attraction areas in Manama. The areas are Bab Al-Bahrain, Manama Souq Shopping, Al Khamis Mosque, and Qul'at Al-Bahrain, which are regarded as the cultural tourism places that sustain the image and identity of the city in the midst of its progress and development.



FIGURE 1. Locations of Bab Al-Bahrain, Manama Souq shopping, Al Khamis Mosque, and Qul'at Al-Bahrain

The inquiry consists of the respondents' profile, engagement pattern (frequency of visits, purpose of visit and place attraction), place attachment (functional attachment, emotional attachment, future engagement), elements of regeneration and future image of the places (business tourism, leisure and cultural tourism). The respondents were randomly selected from the foreign and local visitors, who were in the sites/locations at the time of the survey and willing to participate. The sample size drawn for this survey is generated based on the calculation using 5.5% sampling error at 95% confidence level (De Vaus, 2001). The size indicates that a total of 378 respondents should participate in the survey. Descriptive analyses are used to provide a simple summary of the data as well as analysing the demographic profile using frequency and means. Data from the open-ended questions will be presented based on the respondents' opinions on the types of development fitting their expectations if the area were to be undergoing regeneration. Cronbach Alpha coefficient was used to measure the reliability of the instruments. In the current study, the variable that has Cronbach Alpha coefficient value equal or more than 0.7 was regarded as reliable instrument (Pallant, 2013). The results showed all the variables were above 0.7.

DATA ANALYSIS

Respondents' Profiles

The main subjects in the study are visitors. The proportion of local and foreign visitor were 68.0 and 32.0 per cent, respectively. Almost half of them (44 per cent) aged between 26 to 35 years old, followed by 30 per cent aged between 18 to 25 years old. The remaining respondents were aged between 36 to 45 years old (8 per cent), and 46 to 55 years old (10 per cent). Most of them are Male (68 per cent), and 32 per cent were female. More than half (62 per cent) of the respondents were married, and 36 per cent were single. 54 per cent of the respondents have income less than BD 700 (1900USD) and 46.0 per cent income between BD 700 (1900USD) to BD 2000 (5300USD). Most of the respondents (64 per cent) have a bachelor degree, 16 per cent diploma, 16 master and above, and 4 per cent secondary school. Regarding residency, about 70 per cent of the respondents lived in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, 30 per cent from other overseas.

Pattern of Engagement

Almost half of the respondents (44 per cent) visited the places as the first timer while others visited the places several times (32 per cent). 12 percent of the respondents visit

the places once a year, 8 per cent visit monthly and only 4 per cent of the respondents visited the place weekly. 38 per cent visited the place more than once, and 18 per cent of them visited the places frequently. Most of the respondents (78 per cent) found the places attractive for leisure activities. More than half (52 per cent) of the respondents stated that they would make sure they visit all the attractions in the city during their stay in that place. 42 per cent of the respondents indicated that their main purpose to visit the places is for leisure activities while 39 per cent of them visit the place for general sightseeing. The remaining of the respondents stated that they came to the places for business (8 per cent), shopping (6 per cent) and eating (5 per cent). More than half of the respondents (61 per cent) spend a short trip in Manama, 32 per cent of them for transit and only 8 per cent was for a long trip. Most of the respondent (80 per cent) travelled in a group of fewer than five persons, 12 per cent travel individually and the rest 8 per cent travelled in a group of more than five persons. They were visiting with friends, partners and families.

Place Attachment

This survey uses 5 points Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). The results on place attachment are shown in Table 1. The mean score of the functional attachment was 3.53 which indicate the respondents have a fairly strong functional attachment to the places they visited. The respondents agree that walking around the place is the best thing to do ($m = 3.77$) and this place is very important for me to visit while in the city ($m = 3.67$). The lowest mean score was 3.04 whereby the respondents slightly agree that the place offers good resting opportunities.

Regarding emotional attachment, the mean score was 3.67 which indicates a fairly strong emotional attachment to the places. The highest mean score was 3.89 indicating the respondents' agreement that the image of the place is memorable to them. The respondents also agreed that staying in that place makes them happy ($m = 3.77$). The respondents slightly agree that the place is meaningful to them ($m = 3.59$). For the items to indicate future engagement of the places, this survey uses 5 points Likert scale (very unlikely to very likely). The mean score of the place attachment regarding use was 3.69. The results indicated the highest mean score was 3.94. The respondents were very likely to return to the place in the near future. The respondents also expressed their willing to recommend this place to others ($m = 3.90$).

TABLE 1. Place attachment

| Category | Items | Mean | Std Dev |
|---|---|------|---------|
| Functional attachment Mean = 3.53 SD = .675 | Walking around this place is the best thing to do | 3.77 | 0.738 |
| | This place provide me with what I want as a tourist | 3.58 | 0.688 |
| | I feel the need to visit this place every time I come to the city | 3.52 | 0.791 |
| | This place is very important for me to visit while in the city | 3.67 | 0.599 |
| Emotional attachment Mean = 3.67 SD = .653 | This place offers good resting opportunities | 3.11 | 0.759 |
| | The image of this place is memorable to me | 3.89 | 0.687 |
| | Staying in in this place makes me happy | 3.77 | 0.456 |
| | I appreciate the beauty of the landscape here | 3.44 | 0.899 |
| Future Engagement Mean = 3.69 SD = .563 | I enjoy being here more than any other place | 3.67 | 0.822 |
| | This place is meaningful to me | 3.59 | 0.912 |
| | I will return to this place in the near future | 3.94 | .652 |
| | I will recommend this place to others | 3.90 | .505 |
| | I will explore this place further | 3.86 | .629 |
| | I will spend more time in this place | 3.32 | .794 |

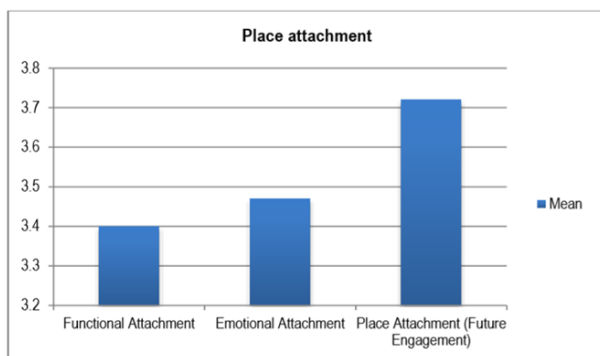


FIGURE 2. Place attachment to tourism places

Place Regeneration

The results on the type of development that the respondents preferred to have if the place were to change due to urban regeneration are presented in Table 2. This survey uses 5 points Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree and strongly agree). The types of regeneration ideas were categorised as business tourism, social events, historic attractions, retail activities and leisure and culture. The respondents strongly identified historic attractions ($m = 3.81$) and leisure and culture ($m = 3.78$) as their preferred types of tourism development. The respondents were very much interested to see historic attraction and marketplaces in that place in the future. However, they were less interested in religious buildings. The respondents were very interested to see parks and open spaces develop in that place for staying and relaxing in the future. The respondents also would like to see traditional and cultural centres. The respondents did not feel that conference places should be part of the place. The respondents agreed that the cultural events are the events they would like to see in that place in the future. However, they did not prefer sporting events as part of the future elements in the city. The mean score of the retails activities was 3.72. The respondents strongly agreed that the place should have traditional markets and street vendors as

the elements of attraction. In this regards, the respondents were less interested in sales promotions, megamalls and hypermarkets.

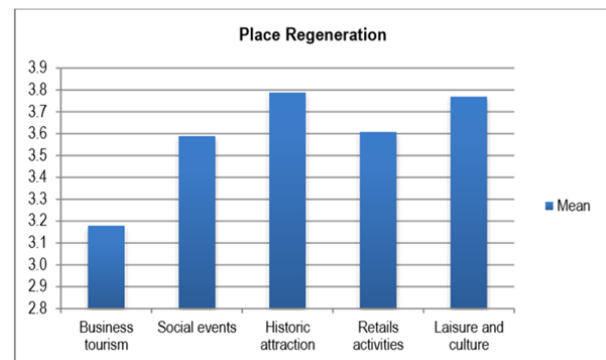


FIGURE 3. Place regeneration preference

TABLE 2. Place regeneration preference

| Category | Items | Mean | Std Dev |
|--|----------------------------|------|---------|
| Business Mean = 3.24 SD = .673 | Trade fairs | 3.61 | 0.821 |
| | Areas for exhibition halls | 3.16 | 0.809 |
| | Health and medical hub | 3.28 | 0.878 |
| | Educational hub | 3.33 | 0.908 |
| | Conference venues | 2.84 | 0.976 |
| Social Event Mean=3.66 SD = .652 | Cultural events | 3.78 | 0.761 |
| | Artistic events | 3.91 | 0.769 |
| | Sporting events | 3.28 | 0.977 |
| Historic Attractions Mean=3.76 SD = .653 | Historic attraction | 3.81 | 0.91 |
| | Market places | 3.79 | 0.821 |
| | Museums and art galleries | 3.99 | 0.709 |
| Retails Activities Mean =3.72 SD = .781 | Religious buildings | 3.47 | 0.989 |
| | Traditional market | 3.91 | 0.899 |
| | Street vendors | 3.85 | 0.912 |
| | Shopping stores | 3.49 | 0.998 |
| | Sales promotions | 3.66 | 0.988 |
| | Megamalls and Hypermarkets | 3.71 | 0.977 |

Place Improvement

Results shown in Table 3 indicate the respondents' feedback on place improvement. About 28.6 per cent suggested that there should be more greenery and parks. Others mentioned the need to increase parking spaces and pedestrian facilities. About 10.7 per cent stated that the place is good enough and does not require changes. The respondents also suggested that the walkways, security, sales, food junctions, tourist attractions spots should be increased.

TABLE 3. Place improvement

| Themes | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Greenery and parks | 25 | 26.9 |
| Parking spaces | 22 | 16.1 |
| Pedestrian facilities | 18 | 15.2 |
| No need to change | 12 | 11.5 |
| Walkways | 11 | 6.9 |
| Security | 10 | 6.2 |
| Artistic events | 8 | 4.1 |
| Sales and promotions | 7 | 4 |
| Halal food | 4 | 3.7 |
| Tourist attraction spots | 2 | 2.8 |
| Too many buildings | 2 | 2.6 |
| TOTAL | 121 | 100 |

DISCUSSION

Visitors are one of the main stakeholders in a city. Their perspectives on places they visited matter in making the city meaningful to their experience. The attachment could be sensed through their intention of revisiting the places and their positive feeling that make them wanted to recommend the places to other people. This reaction, however, has not strongly linked to their satisfaction with the places as tourist attractions. A lot of changes needed to improve the place were mentioned covering the physical qualities, the image and the facilities provided. The strong image of Bab Al-Bahrain, Manama Souq Shopping, Al Khamis Mosque, and Qul'at Al-Bahrain captured the visitors' perception of the distinctiveness of the places. This response concurs with the findings by [Smaldone et al. \(2005\)](#) that place dependence is influenced by the qualities associated with the current place. However, in the context of tourism experience, the outcome could be linked to the comparison made to similar historic sites in other parts of Bahrain or worldwide that the tourists had visited or had known previously. Dependence here can be linked to the need to be in a place to fulfil visual and psychological needs. Despite having the unique traditional image and culture of multi-ethnicity (Presence of lots of foreigners), there were concerns about the lack of greenery in the city, lack of parking and tourist facilities. The plan to regenerate the places for tourism purpose has not been regarded as adequate

since the places are mostly tourist-unfriendly places in its present condition. Safety and security, as well as walkability, has been an ongoing issue for Manama city centre. A stronger attachment to attractive tourism places encourages frequent visits and longer time spending. It will help to attract more visitors to experience places, encouraging the urban economy and forming a positive image of the city. It is evident that the traditional image and identity were identified as the strength of the places and they should be preserved and sustained. The mixed cultural expressions correlate with the melting pot of the population which continues to define the uniqueness of tourism places in the city alongside the modern and global image of new commercial centres that is attractive to foreign countries.

The tourists were coming mainly for short trips, and transit, thus, could influence the way the places were perceived and experienced and their fair level of attachment. However, repeated mentioned regarding the need to have more greenery and parks or open spaces for relaxation and leisure indicate the concern over the comfort and image of the places in supporting tourists' activities. People's movement in the city should be balanced by having spaces to sit and relax. The car-oriented [less pedestrian-oriented] places contribute to the feeling of discomfort and insecurity among the visitors.

The idea of the future regeneration of tourism places was linked to the need to shape the places based on the existing nature of the places (historical and cultural attractions), eg traditional market, street vendors, food junction, traditional cultural centers, museum and art galleries, and historic attraction to support cultural and artistic events. Regardless of the inclination of Manama as business tourism, e.g. shopping, trading and health (medical), the choices of having these cultural related urban tourism is highlighted more strongly. The effort to regenerate the Manama riverfront at present should support these functions considering the vital role of culture in shaping the identity of Manama from the beginning of its development. Therefore the concept of regeneration should be addressed in the context of sustainability and continuity of place image and identity together with comfortability and accessibility of the places to the users.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Place regeneration is a vital process in making places and to stay relevant in the midst of urban transformation. Attachment to places functions as a supporting element to sustain place attraction. The feedback from visitors' who have a certain level of attachment with the places could be referred

to as relevant points in regenerating places. Any physical intervention should consider the characteristics that are unique to the place [that the visitors' attached to and identified with] to be preserved and protected. The comfort of experiencing the place either by vehicles or on foot need to be ensured by providing complete and up to date tourist facilities; integrating more softscape, trees and greenery along the visitor's movement and destinations. The accessibility along the pedestrian network will support more tourist-friendly environment that connects the visitors with other attractions in the city centre. This study highlights the fact

that despite the harsh climate of the country of Bahrain, tourists' attachment to touristic spots in Manama is still related to outdoor activities and providing more walkable areas around the touristic spots.

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