

Influence of People and Places on the Identity of Ethnic Enclaves: A Visual Analysis of Little India, Penang

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Abstract : Over the past years, a lot of research has been on the ethnic enclaves from historical, sociological and economic point of view. However there exist a research gap in the built environment and spatial layout of these areas. When immigrants (People) assimilate in a different place, they struggle to preserve their original identity to maintain their heritage. Then there is the Place, which is the physical manifestation of the heritage, shown through streetscape and architecture. Together 'People and Place' form a relationship with the authenticity of the enclave. As immigrants come in the host country, they try to bring their culture into the place, but at the same time, the culture of the host country also affects the immigrants. This creates conflicts not only in the lifestyle and culture of the immigrants, but also the built characteristics of the place. In the midst of such conflicts, one may easily question the authenticity of an ethnic enclave. In Malaysia, a number of ethnic enclaves emerged due to trade during the medieval times. Little India is one among the other ethnic enclaves present in Chulia Street in Malaysia. The study investigates the factors of 'Place and People', affecting the authenticity of a little India, in the context of an evolving state of Penang in Malaysia. The study is carried through extensive literature review of existing data, followed by observations drawn by visual analysis, discussions and interviews with the stakeholders of the study area. The findings of this research suggest the contribution of 'people and places' in the process of place making in an ethnic enclave. The findings are essential for conservation and further development of ethnic enclaves.

Keywords : conservation, ethnic enclaves, heritage, identity

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