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The concept of place attachment in environmental psychology

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ABSTRACT

Studying feelings and emotions that people develop towards places is getting increased attention, while the concept of place attachment lies at the heart of these studies. This concept is sited within the realm of environmental meaning and association. Place attachment usually is described as a connection that occurs between people and their meaningful settings. This paper will review and analyze the existing seminal literature in place attachment as one of the prevailing concepts among place-based researches. Considering dimensions of place attachment has always been beneficial for investigating the factors that influence people-place relationships. Therefore, in this paper first the concept of place attachment and its characteristics will be examined afterward the psychological dimensions of place attachment will be reviewed and finally methods to measure Place attachment will be described.

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Introduction

People have the ability and even the need to form emotional attachment to many things. They not only form attachments to others, also form attachment to the environment and places around them (1997). Like attachment to others, attachment to place is so essential. Due to the application of place attachment to many perspectives, many definitions have been stated for it. Most conceptualizations of the construct have attempted to describe the range of feelings humans associate with specific environments. Previous studies defined place attachment as 1) a positive emotional bond between individuals and groups and their environment (Altman and Low, 1992); 2) a state of psychological well-being resulting from accessibility to a place or a state of distress upon separation or remoteness from a place (Giuliani and Feldman, 1993); 3) an emotional investment with a place (Hummon, 1992); and 4) the extent to which an individual values and identifies with a particular environmental setting (Moore and Graefe, 1994). But generally place attachment is described as a multifaceted concept that characterizes the bonding between people and their particular places (e.g. Altman and Low, 1992, Giuliani and Feldman, 1993). Studied seminal literature reveal that the growth of human societies, development of technological advances, globalization, increased mobility, and encroaching environmental problems (Scannell and Gifford, 2010) has threaten the person-place relationships. The source of place attachment is examined a mixed-use area in order to learn what draws individuals to a place, and to better predict how users and visitors may react to place (Ednie et al., 2010). Stedman (2008) knows it an evaluative dimension of place; in other words, it describes what does this place mean to me, rather than how much does it mean? However, this paper aims to discuss about the concept of place attachment and its importance in planning and designing urban spaces.

Place Attachment

Phenomenological literatures are the first stage of studies introducing place attachment which arose by 1970th. After

years, Altman and Low (1992) published a comprehensive discussions concerning place attachment (Najafi and Sharif, 2011). This formed the theoretical foundation for supporting subsequent studies in this field. Altman and Low (1992) described place attachment as an affective link between individuals and their environments. They stated that place attachment consist of interactions between affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs and behaviours and actions regarding a setting. Hummon (1992) argued that while place focuses on the environmental setting, the main face of attachment is affect. Hernandez et al. (2007) identified Place attachment as affective bonds that people establish with specific places where they prefer to remain and where they feel comfortable and safe. Shumaker and Taylor (1983) argued that place attachment is a person-place connection that grows from characteristics of people and specifiable conditions of setting.

Reviewed seminal literatures reveal that affect, emotion, and feeling are the most commonly reported main ideas of place attachment. It can be demonstrated in the questions constructed by researchers who studying place attachment. Cognitive and behavioural aspects are the other features of place attachment. It means, in addition to the feelings that people have about a place, they hold certain beliefs or memories about it, and act certain ways in places. Tuan (1977) hints to this relationship when he discusses about attachment as the accumulation of memories and experience in place; and Manzo (2005) argued that our experiences and memories create place meaning. She explained that *“it is not simply the places themselves that are significant, but rather what can be called ‘experience-in-place’ that creates meaning”*.

In addition, place attachment is identified as a state of psychological well-being resulting from accessibility to a place or a state of distress upon separation from a place (Giuliani and Feldman, 1993). Long term interactions with place and memories that occur through the place are argued that could create attachment. While Tuan (1977) describes that it is also possible to form attachments quickly.

He calls it as a kind of love at first sight. Manzo (2005) also realized that places can be assigned meaning quickly through linking the memory of an important event occurring in a specific place. Manzo (2005) called these as pivotal or flashpoint moments, and these meanings connected to a particular place form the foundation for place attachment. Farnum et al. (2005) asserted that people-place interactions are often formed through psychological procedures rather than physical contacts. It indicates that people do not have to have physical interactions with places for making strong emotional bonds with these places. They might also integrate strong affections with mental representative places that they have never been there. In this case, they may associate strong feelings towards some environmental components and convey the same feelings to the other places with the similar elements. In other word, they make a mental representation of the places with strong emotional impacts, and judge the new places in accordance to how these places fit in their expectations of places. Consequently, the appearance of places may elicit some levels of emotion, no matter one has previously experienced it or not. However, this may not assure that outlook of places can always shape the emotional attachments to these places and it highly depends on the existing bonds formed through previous environmental experiences.

Nevertheless, place attachment plays a positive role in people's lives and in their care of the place. Shamai (1991) realized that people who feel an emotional attachment to a place may be more active to preserve that place.

Factors Influencing Place Attachment

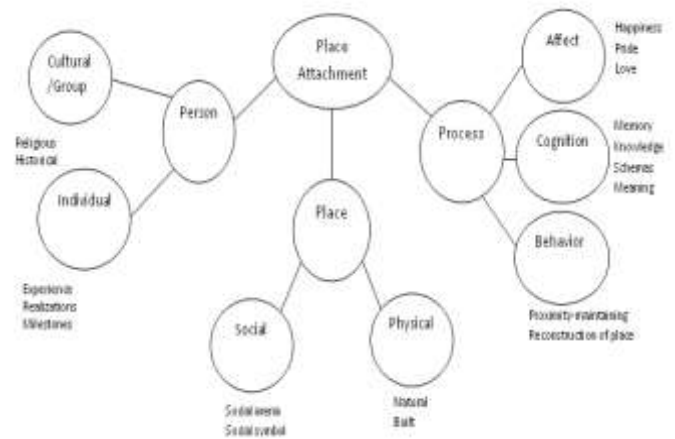
Place attachment is affected by socio-demographic characteristics of people (Williams and Roggenbuck, 1989, Altman and Low, 1992, Gustafson, 2001); environmental experiences including people's type of involvement with place, and degree of their familiarity with a place; people's expertise or knowledge about place, religion and culture, place satisfaction, and place itself. Scannell and Gifford (2010) explained that urban sociologists consider place attachment as a social procedure and it fundamentally compared to 'sense of community'. They elaborately define community based on Kasarda & Janowitz's definition in 1974 as 'a complex system of friendship and kinship networks and formal and informal associational ties rooted in family life and on-going socialization processes'. Two types of community are quoted by them from McMillan and Chavis (1986):

1. Community of interest, where members are connected through lifestyle and common interests that are not always place bound, and
2. Community of place, where members are connected through geographical location.

Scannell and Gifford (2010) in an interesting study proposed a three-dimensional structure of place attachment. As illustrated in Figure 1, the framework reveals that place attachment is a multidimensional concept. Moreover, it shows that person, psychological process, and place are its dimensions.

They explained that person is the first dimension of this framework and indicates who is attached to the setting? They clarified that place attachment may happens at both the individual and group levels. Based on the framework psychological process is the second dimension: how are affect, cognition, and behaviour manifested in the attachment? And the object of the attachment is the third dimension including place characteristics: what is the attachment to, and what is the nature

of, this place? They explained that this three dimensional framework of place attachment organizes the main definitions in the literature and, as knowledge grows about the specific levels within each of these dimensions, a comprehensive understanding of place attachment will be reached.



The tripartite model of place attachment (from Scannell and Gifford, 2010)

Psychological Dimensions of Place Attachment

Functional and emotional attachments are two types of place attachment that are identified by Williams et al. (1992). Functional attachments or place dependence indicate the opportunities that setting affords for fulfilment of specific goals or activity needs. Emotional or symbolic attachment, what Proshansky et al. (1983) refers to as place-identity, concern the importance a person attaches to the place because of what the setting symbolizes. These symbolic meanings may be very personal or shared.

Place Identity

Places play a very important role in developing and maintaining self-identity and group identity of people (Davenport and Anderson, 2005). A place is an experiential process that forms an identity and distinctive place character. To understand the process, it is important to examine the meanings that people attach to a locality in trying to create a sense of place (Shamsuddin and Ujang, 2008).

Place identity according to Proshansky (1978) is as dimensions of the self that develop in relation to the physical environment. He defines it as the cognitive connection between the self and the physical environment. He defined place identity as 'those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideals, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioural tendencies and skills relevant to this environment'. In this sense, settings offer individuals the opportunity to both express their identity as well as to affirm their identity (Proshansky, 1978). Yuen (2003) argued that identifiable places are healthy places and encourage people to dwell, to stay a little longer and connect with one another. They provide opportunities for urban life and are important to the health and well being of the people living in the city (Ujang, 2007). Identifiable places have a tangible image, we know where and when we are there. In this regard, Relph (1976) associated it with the need for identification with one's surrounding and the need to be in a recognizable place (Yuen, 2003). Therefore, it is associated with the ability of the place to evoke human senses through qualities that make it distinctive from other places (Shamsuddin and Ujang, 2008).

Proshansky et al. (1983) proposed that people's image of themselves is related to the places where this self-image developed. The place-identity allows people to maintain a cognitive, because it allows them to carry images of important places with them as they move to a different setting. Scholars attempt to measure place-identity in the context of people's attachment to their community. Lalli (1992) has studied how people's identification with their neighbourhood and city affected their attitudes toward urban planning issues. Lalli measured place-identity using civic pride, commitment (to not moving from the city), and connection between personal events and the city. Lalli realized that familiarity (in this instance, measured by place of birth) had a stronger influence on attachment than did the number of years that people had lived in a place; native-born residents had a greater attachment to their city than did non-native residents. Lalli also realized their degree of place-identity (i.e., place attachment) had a strong influence on their attitudes toward planning issues.

Feldman (1990) proposed that place-identity may be more generalisable than originally suggested by Proshansky et al. (Proshansky et al., 1983). She theorizes that people identify with a type of residential setting, such as neighbourhood, suburb, or small town, rather than with a particular place or town, as a means of coping with frequent residential moves. She illustrated this "settlement-identity" theory by conducting a large scale survey in Denver, Colorado. She found that people who identified with a particular settlement type were more likely to give these places higher ratings of desirability. They were also more likely to indicate an intention to move there in the future. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell's work on place and identity processes suggests four essential principles—distinctiveness, continuity, self-esteem and self-efficacy—at play in our relationships to place (Hay, 1998).

While research on the realm of environmental psychology mostly connect place attachment to self and community identity and distinction (Proshansky et al., 1983, Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996), identification of place attributes and characteristics associated with the attachment have not been brought to attention. The identification is important in understanding which attributes and characteristics of place strongly contribute to place attachment and place identity.

Relph (1976) differentiated the types of place-identity regarding the concepts of insiders and outsiders. The 'insiderness' reveals deeper or stronger place attachment whereby meanings, cultural values, experience and associated place quality identified by the public are reflected in the setting. According to Relph (1976) to be inside a place is to belong to it and to identify with it and the more profoundly inside a person is the stronger is the identity with the place. It is often argued that people need a sense of identity, of belonging to a specific territory and or group.

people need to state a sense of belonging to a collective entity or place, and of individual identity, which may be achieved by physical separation or distinctiveness, and sense of entering into a particular area (Carmona, 2003).

Place Dependence

The theory of place dependence proposed by Stokols and Shumaker in 1981 and indicates the person-place relationship. They suggested that one's perceptions of a place are determined by how well that place fulfils one's needs. Rather than describing attachment per se, they attempted to develop a model to explain why some individuals are more dependent on specific place than others. They suggest that attachment to a place

develops when 'the social and physical resources within a residential environment are congruent with the salient needs of the individual.' The emphasis on home and residential environment is central to this early definition of place attachment.

Stokols and Shumaker (1981) define 'place dependence' as the perceived strength of association between a person and specific places. Based on Schreyer et al. (1981) idea place dependence refers to connections based specifically on activities that take place in a setting, reflecting the importance of a place in providing conditions that support an intended use. Smaldone (2005) asserted that place dependence is related with a person's consideration of two things: (1) the quality of the current place and (2) the quality of other substitute places that are comparable to the current place. It concerns the functional and utilitarian aspects of place attachment (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981).

Measuring of Place attachment

Place attachment has received extensive theoretical examination during the last decades. Bonnes and Secchiaroli (1995) argued that place attachment conveys a positive emotional bond between public and places due to the people's satisfaction with, evaluations of, and identification with a specific place. Therefore, the quality of place is measured mostly based on the way places are perceived and evaluated by the users (Lewicka, 2010). Nowadays, scholars from different disciplines attempt to discover place based concepts empirically. In this case, most of the aforementioned empirical researches focus on measuring the strength of attachment.

Lalli (1992) divided attachment studies into phenomenological and positivistic methods. In this regard, positivistic approach is characterized by researcher-defined variables, quantitative methods, and traditional hypothesis testing. In this case, familiarity with place, length of association, place dependence, place satisfaction, place identity, sense of belonging, and place affective are the variables that are used to measure place attachment (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981, Proshansky et al., 1995, Williams and Roggenbuck, 1989, Shamai, 1991, Steadman, 2003, Raymond et al., 2010). In this case, William and Roggenbuck (1989) developed a series of Likert-scaled statements designed using strongly agree to strongly disagree response format to measure theoretical dimensions of place attachment and related construct such as place identity and place dependence. The measurement is based on individual experience and feeling toward a place.

In contrast to positivistic approaches, phenomenological methods focus on the meanings and experiences of place via a descriptive and qualitative discovery of things in their own terms (Manzo, 2003, Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001, Lalli, 1992). In this regard, Manzo (2003) argued that phenomenology in architecture explores ontological character of humankind and considers 'being-in-the-world' as an indispensable part of continuation.

In recent years many researchers focused on something more than mere measurement of public attachment by assessing: 1) people's feelings and components of the environment that absorb their attachment (Williams and Stewart, 1998, Steadman, 2003); 2) influencing factors which could form place attachment, e.g. physical components of the place, socio-cultural relationships within the environment (Kaltenborn, 1997, Steadman, 2003), and environmental behaviours (Walker and Chapman, 2003, Steadman, 2003) or activities (Bricker and Kerstetter, 2000); and 3) the impacts of place attachment on

people's environmental satisfaction, attitudes (Bogaç, 2009, Lewicka, 2005), intentions towards certain places (Stedman, 2003, Walker and Chapman, 2003). In this regard, people's environmental attitude could be evaluated through measuring their reactions in terms of environmental emotion, cognition, and activity (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001).

Conclusion

Man-environment relationship is a broad and multidimensional approach. Place attachment is one of the interesting concepts of this field of study that is investigated in many disciplines, and so has been defined in a variety of ways. Place attachment is defined as an evaluative dimension of place, it describes what does the place mean to people, rather than how much does it mean? Briefly, Place attachment describes the bonding that occurs between people and their meaningful surroundings. Review on the concepts and theories related to this topic helps to form the theoretical framework. Place attachment is influenced by a number of factors and usually research in this area integrates the perceptual, psychological, physical, and the socio-cultural dimensions of people and place. Considering dimensions of place attachment has always been beneficial for investigating the factors that influence people-place relationships. However, place attachment cooperate a positive role in individuals' lives and in their care of the place. People who feel an emotional attachment to a place are more active to preserve the place.

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