

The Concept of Place and Sense of Place In Architectural Studies

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Abstract—Place is a where dimension formed by people's relationship with physical settings, individual and group activities, and meanings. 'Place Attachment', 'Place Identity' and 'Sense of Place' are some concepts that could describe the quality of people's relationships with a place. The concept of Sense of place is used in studying human-place bonding, attachment and place meaning. Sense of Place usually is defined as an overarching impression encompassing the general ways in which people feel about places, senses it, and assign concepts and values to it. Sense of place is highlighted in this article as one of the prevailing concepts among place-based researches. Considering dimensions of sense of place has always been beneficial for investigating public place attachment and pro-environmental attitudes towards these places. The creation or preservation of Sense of place is important in maintaining the quality of the environment as well as the integrity of human life within it. While many scholars argued that sense of place is a vague concept, this paper will summarize and analyze the existing seminal literature. Therefore, in this paper first the concept of Sense of place and its characteristics will be examined afterward the scales of Sense of place will be reviewed and the factors that contribute to form Sense of place will be evaluated and finally Place Attachment as an objective dimension for measuring the sense of place will be described.

Keywords—Place, Place Attachment, Sense of place

I. INTRODUCTION

MANY definitions have been stated for place, but generally the term 'place', as opposed to space, expresses a strong affective bond between a person and a particular setting [31]. In other words, place is mixed with human values and principles. As a result, place is a particular space which is covered with meanings and values by the users. Places play an essential and vital role in human life. Each place has its own unique character that is an important issue in social science [8]. The reviewed studies reveal that places not only are important elements in developing and maintaining self and group identity but they play a significant role in human behavior and their mental health. Rapoport [24] argued that places in addition to physical features include messages and meanings that people perceive and decode based on their roles, experiences, expectation and motivations. Therefore, Sense of place is referred to the particular experience of a person in a particular setting. It is a general way someone feels about a place. Sense of place is an important factor in maintaining the quality of the environment.

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It is also an important aspect in integrating user and place. It contributes to better use, satisfaction and attachment to places. Reviewed seminal literature reveal that in contemporary societies due to the growth of human societies, changes in people's lifestyles and also development of technological advances places convey no meanings anymore and people suffer from a sense of 'placelessness'. Relph [26] explained that 'placelessness' refers to the settings which do not have any distinctive personality or sense of place. Relph [26] claimed that when places cannot be culturally recognized, they suffer from lacking a sense of place; in this case people are faced with placelessness. Therefore, Placelessness can be explained as the physical characteristics of nonplace, which is culturally unidentifiable environments that are similar anywhere [31]. In this regard, Relph argued that designers who are ignoring the meanings that places bring to people's mind, they try to destroy authentic places and make inauthentic ones [8]. In the meantime, scholars discuss that since one of the main goals of urban design is creating a sense of place; architects, designers and planners should pay more attention to the quality of places and built environments. Therefore, nowadays the role of design as a tool to answer human needs and expectations is more significant. However, this paper aims to discuss about the concept of Sense of place and its importance in planning and designing urban spaces.

II. THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF PLACE AND SENSE OF PLACE

The phenomenological literature is the earliest stage for exploring the nature of people's relationships with places. In this realm, phenomenological discussions are an important starting since provide a rich theoretical base for study [15]. In contrast to abstractions and mental construction, phenomenology is defined as a return to things [10]. In architectural studies, Manzo [15] argued that using a descriptive and qualitative discovery phenomenology focuses on the meanings and experiences of place. Afterwards, Manzo [15] explained that in phenomenology of place experience is the most important element in perception. In this regard, Allen Gussow also asserted that experience is a factor that can change every environment to a place. Phenomenology in architecture explores ontological character of humankind and considers 'being-in-the-world' as an indispensable part of continuation [15]. At this point, the setting is an integral ontological structure essential for human psychological existence and well-being [40]. Therefore, phenomenologists argue that the concept of 'existential space' is of central importance to architecture [31]. In parallel, Norberg-Schulz [20] defined a place as a result of space in addition to character; he explained that changing a space to place is the

existential purpose of architecture. Therefore, there should be a conscious effort to discover the meanings that present in the environment. Norberg-Schulz [20] also hinted to the significant role of the architecture as providing physical attributes to space which facilitate habitation of the users as well as their mental and physical well being. Therefore, architecture not only should note to the meanings but it should pay close attention to the physical attributes of the setting [31]. Relph [26] as a phenomenologist defined place as ‘fusions of human and natural order’ he explained that ‘places are the significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world’. Sime [31] argued that for Relph, the important role of place is its power to order and to focus on human intentions, experience, and behavior spatially. Relph [26] described that place is an interaction of three components i.e. ‘physical setting’, ‘activity’ and ‘meaning’. Relph [26] also explained that place has different sizes; it can be a small room or a big continent. In dealing with the concept of sense of place, phenomenologists attempted to emphasize the difficulties of this phenomenon. In this regard, Relph [26] argued that the concept of sense of place is not very clear; he explained that we can describe our personal understandings about this concept but we cannot give a precise definition for it. In parallel, Barker [2] defined the sense of place as one of the most intangible concepts and explained that discovering what makes a factual sense of place is a multifaceted study. Reviewed seminal literature revealed that sense of place for phenomenologists is an emotional connection with place via understanding its symbols and meanings. They explained that one place is a part of an environment that has been experienced via our senses. Phenomenologists used some similar concepts such as ‘Topophilia’, ‘character of place’ and ‘spirit of place’ to explain the concept of sense of place. The term of Topophilia which means ‘love of place’ for the first time was used by Tuan [39] to describe the existing remarkable bounds between people and the physical settings. Tuan [41] defined Topophilia as a strong and impressive relationship between people and places. Spirit of place relates to the exclusive aspects of a place. Relph [26] explained that sense of place, which is the ability to recognize places and their identities can be created and develop through long-time connections between users and places. Sense of place is an important issue that can strengthen the relationship between human and place. It can be influenced by personal and collective’s values, beliefs, and behaviors. Canter [3] argued that in fact people’s willingness to contribute to social activities have been attributed to the strength of the sense of place. In parallel, Steele [35] advocated the significant role of sense of place in people’s relationships with place and asserted that it endows to place the feeling of security and pleasure and causes the attachment to place. Reviewed literature reveal that people are interested to care those places which have strong sense of place for them. Relph [26] asserted that symbols, traditions, myths, and ritual assist in reinforcement the sense of place. Peterson and Saarinen [21] also claimed that local symbols reflect and enhance Sense of place. In parallel, Dattel and Dingemans defined Sense of place as “the complex bundle

of meanings, symbols, and qualities that a person or group consciously and unconsciously associates with a particular locality or region” [30]. Shamai [29] argued that sense of place can be much more than one’s own personal experience. Most likely it is developed among different generational groups. It means that the long-term relationship between place and people establishes identities and meanings with physical environments that create sense of place. While some scholars (e.g. Relph, Pred) argued that long term interaction with place contributes to create sense of place, Tuan [41] explained that it is also possible to create meaning quickly, kind of like love at first sight. Gussow in Relph [26] argued that sense of place has different stages. Gussow explained that the first level of sense of place is familiarity with place. This includes being in the place without realizing its meanings. Many people experience places at this level and their relationships with some places are only via activities. These people do not pay particular attention to the place itself and their experience of place is only superficial. Furthermore, they do not feel that they belong to the place and make no attempt at developing the attachment to place. The second level of sense of place is described as an ordinary familiarity with place. This level of experience is perceived unconsciously. It is more collective and cultural rather than personal. In this level of sense of place, people have deep and strong participation with place. They will contribute to social activities but pay close attention to symbols of place. This level of familiarity is usually experienced in familiar and sacred places. The third level of sense of place is profound familiarity with place. It involves the ‘existential insideness’ of a person and is unconsciously experienced. In this level a person is integrated with place.

III. SENSE OF PLACE IN ENVIRONMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Environmental psychology appeared as a distinctive research area during the last decades [37]. Environmental psychologists argue that physical settings play a significant role in facilitating the goals and aspirations of their users [37]. They claim that physical environment have very real, immediate or long term impacts on human behavior and their mental and physical health [17]. According to environmental psychologists, architects and designers should consider both emotional and functional qualities of places. In this regard, they elaborated that the purpose of designing places not only is facilitating of everyday activities but providing symbolic and affective qualities are very important to attract more people to places. The overall quality of environments is measured in terms of the richness of their psychological and socio-cultural meaning as well as in relation to physical comfort, safety, and performance criteria [38]. Environmental psychologists also argue that the experience of place is one of the most important factors in sense of place. In this case, Steele [35] defines sense of place as a particular experience of a person in a particular setting. He argued that feelings like stimulated, excited, joyous and expansive are examples of this experience. Steele [35] asserted that the spirit of a place or personality of place make up the sense of place. A place is not just an object, but part of a larger whole that is being felt

through the actual experience of meaningful events. The experience is felt through all the senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch), and the place experience is in fact a total sensual experience [29]. Thus, a relationship is formed between person and place that is messages interact between person and place inside a particular locality. In parallel, Lynch [14] suggested that sense of place makes a good relationship between human and place. He reasoned that a place must be recognizable and should have an identity to create the sense of place leading to place attachment [14]. Sense of place also is defined as a combination of three elements i.e. location, landscape, and personal involvement [30]. To create a sense of place all three components should interact together. He noted that the sameness of our buildings and the digital age diminishes a sense of place. Rogan et al. [28] defined sense of place as a factor that makes an environment psychologically comfortable. They determined the three variables of Sense of place as legibility, the perception of and preference for the visual environment and the compatibility of the setting with human purposes. Shamai [29] argued that Sense of place comprised of three levels. Belonging to a place is the first level, the second stage is attachment to a place, and the third is commitment to a place which also is the highest phase. Shamai [29] also express that for having a better life individuals need to be connected emotionally and spiritually to their living places. They satisfy their needs through emotional relationships and identification with their living place. This remarkable emotional connection is called sense of place.

IV. THE DIFFERENT SCALES OF SENSE OF PLACE

Stedman [33] described sense of place as a collection of symbolic meanings, attachment, and satisfaction with a spatial setting help by a group or individual. Reviewed literature reveal that sense of place has different levels. Hummon [9] differentiated between a numbers of different types of senses of place in a study on community sentiment. These included rootedness, alienation, relativity, and placelessness. Hummon [9] noted people's satisfaction, identification, and attachment to communities cause different kinds of sense of place which vary among people. In other study Cross [4] defined sense of place as a combination of relationship with place and social activities. Cross [4] clustered the relationships with place in biographical, spiritual, ideological, narrative, commoditized and dependent. Shamai [29] determined three major - belonging to a place, place attachment and commitment toward a place stages. Shamai [29] further categorized it into seven levels:

Not having any Sense of place

1. Knowledge of being located in a place: in this level people are familiar with the place; they identify the symbols of the place but they do not have any particular emotional connection to the place and its symbols. Therefore, they do not integrate themselves with the place.

2. Belonging to a place: in this phase, people not only are familiar with the place but they have an emotional connection with the place. In this stage, people distinguish the symbols of the place and in contrast to the previous stage those symbols

are respected.

3. Attachment to a place: people have a strong emotional relationship with the place. The place is meaningful and significant to people. In this regard, the place has unique identity and character to the users via its beloved symbols.

4. Identifying with the place goals: in this level, people are integrated with the place; moreover the goals of the place are recognizable by the people. The users also are very satisfied with these goals; hence they have a deep attachment to the places.

5. Involvement in a place: in this level people have an active role in the place. They would like to invest their own resources such as money, time, or talent in the activities of the place. Therefore, as opposed to previous levels that were mostly based on attitude, this stage is probed mainly through the real manners of the people.

6. Sacrifice for a place: this level is the last and also the highest point of Sense of place. Deepest commitment to a place is the main aspect of this phase. People would like to sacrifice of important attributes and values such as prosperity, freedom, or, life itself.

V. THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FORM THE SENSE OF PLACE

According to the above discussions, sense of place is people's subjective perception of their environments and their more or less conscious feelings about those places. Therefore, sense of place is both interpretive and emotional aspects of environmental experience. It means the concept of sense of place is psychological or interactional and physical. The combination of physical and social attributes creates an environment; in this regard, the relationship between people and environment is transactional: people take something (positive or negative) from a place and give or do things to the environment. Steel [35] explained that the Sense of place is an experience created by the setting combined with what a person brings to it. There are certain settings that have such a strong 'spirit of place' that they will tend to have a similar impact on many different people [35]. Therefore, the reviewed literature revealed that the contributed factors to form the sense of place can be broadly divided into two groups; the cognitive and perceptual factors and the physical characteristics of a physical setting.

In this regard, the cognitive factors refer to the meanings and concepts that are understood by people in a place. Therefore, sense of place not only is a sense of affection with a place, but also it has a cognitive structure where an individual attach himself/herself to concepts and meanings of a place. In this case, sense of place as an emotional bonding between people and places is created after cognition. As a result, there are varied senses between different people and their experiences, motivations, their backgrounds, and also the characteristics of physical setting influence the sense of place. The reviewed seminal literature revealed that the physical characteristics and attributes of an environment not only define the kind of a setting but also they contribute to the

perceived meanings. Steel [35] mentioned the significant elements of a setting that contribute to the sense of place as the size of setting, scale, proportion, diversity, distance, texture, ornaments, color, smell, sound, temperature and visual variety. He also argued that identity, history, fantasy, mystery, pleasure, surprise, safety, vitality, live ability and memory influence people's relationships with place. Therefore reviewed seminal literature revealed that the physical features of place with creating meanings, conceptions and also safeguard of their function contribute to make Sense of place. In this regard, the legibility of place and people's satisfaction with environmental characteristics are the main influencing factors. With understanding meanings, concepts, symbols and identity of place cognitive and affective relationships with place is created.

Stedman [32] argued that since the concept of sense of place is vague and its definition is very difficult to define and also to measure, he recognized place attachment as an objective dimension for measuring the sense of place.

VI. THE CONCEPT OF PLACE ATTACHMENT

People have the need to form attachment to many things. They not only form attachments to others but they also form attachment to the environment and places around them [13], [18]. Just as attachments to others are important parts of being human, so are the attachments that people form to places. In this regard, studies on place attachment present insight on the diversity of meanings humans associate with the physical environment [12], [18], [25]. 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. Stedman [34] knows it an evaluative dimension of place; in other words, it describes how much place means to us.

Commencing by 1970th, phenomenological studies are the earliest sorts of literature introducing place attachment. Yet, they matured in 1992 when Altman and Low published their comprehensive discussions regarding place attachment. This formed the theoretical foundation for supporting subsequent studies in this field. Low & Altman [1] defined place attachment as an emotional connection between people and their surroundings. They asserted that place attachment comprises of interactions between affect and emotions, knowledge and beliefs and behaviors and actions regarding a place. Hummon [9] argued that whilst place focuses on the environmental setting, the focal point of attachment is affect. The seminal literatures revealed that affect, emotion, and feeling are the most frequently reported central ideas of place attachment, and the questions constructed by researchers who studying place attachment demonstrated it. In addition to affective aspects, attachment includes cognitive and behavioral aspects. In other words, besides the feelings people have about a place, they hold certain beliefs or memories about it, and act certain ways in places, Tuan [41] hints to this relationship when he discusses about attachment as the accumulation of memories and experience in place, and

Proshansky et al. [22] talk about the interplay of affective, cognitive and conative clusters in their work with place identity. Place attachment also is defined as a state of psychological well-being resulting from accessibility to a place or a state of distress upon separation or remoteness from a place [7].

Some scholars argue that long term interaction with place and memories that occur through could create attachment. While Tuan [41] explains that it is also possible to form attachments quickly i.e. kind of love at first sight. Manzo [16] also found that places can be assigned meaning quickly through linking the memory of an important event occurring in a specific place. Manzo [16] called these pivotal or flashpoint moments, and these meanings connected to a particular place form the foundation for place attachment.

Farnum et al. [5] asserted that people-place interactions are often formed through psychological procedures rather than physical contacts. It means 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.

Altman and Low [1] illustrate how place attachments involve culturally shared affective meanings and activities associated with place that derive from sociopolitical, historic, and cultural sources. The six processes of culturally based place attachment [1] are as below:

1. Genealogical bonding through history or family: genealogical place attachment refers to the linkage of people and land through the historical identification of place and family or community. This type of place attachment commonly occurs in traditional peasant communities where the relationship of the inhabitants and their village has been established for centuries. For instance, in village cultures of Spanish, the identification of place and community is clearly revealed in the language. The word for town or village is *el pueblo* and this word means both the place and also the people who belong to the place.

2. Linkage through loss of land or destruction: The breakdown of genealogical bonding creates another kind of place attachment based on the loss or destruction of place.

3. Economic bonding through spiritual or mythological relationship: economic place attachment while retaining temporally based aspects of attachment generally refers to a more utilitarian relationship between people and land, such as the kind of attachment produced by ownership of or working

in a particular place.

4. Cosmological bonding through spiritual or mythological relationship: cosmological place attachment refers to a culture's religious and mythological conceptions of the world and the structural correspondence of these ideas with the landscape.

5. Linkage through religious and secular pilgrimage, and participation in celebratory cultural events: pilgrimage to a place, the desire to visit a place, and participation in a celebratory event such as a parade or festival is a special kind of place attachment, in that the experience of the place, although intense, is usually transient, but the idea of the place and its religious, spiritual, or sociopolitical importance lingers on for years.

6. Narrative ties through storytelling and place naming: narrative, the telling of stories, usually origin myths, but also family histories and political accounts, can function as a type of cultural place attachment in that people's linkage to the land is through the vehicle of the story and identified through place naming and language.

VII. FACTORS INFLUENCING PLACE ATTACHMENT

Place attachment describes the emotion and feeling that people have for a place. In this regard, reviewed literatures explained that place attachment is affected by several factors as follows:

Place attachment describes the emotion and feeling that people have for a place. In this regard, reviewed literatures explained that place attachment is affected by several factors as follows:

- Socio-demographic characteristics [1], [8], [13], and [43]
- Environmental experiences including:
 - People's type of involvement with place [43]
 - Degree of familiarity with a place [6]: Fried described that familiarity plays an important role in attachment. He shows that through more frequent and intensive encounters, attachment is expected to develop and deepen [6]. But the findings from other researchers show that familiarity does not always predict place attachment [38]. Familiarity may contribute to attachment, but may not be sufficient alone to produce it. Furthermore familiarity is not limited to familiarity with a place; it includes learning more about a particular place and recognizing it and also includes familiarity with a body of knowledge about the type of place. A familiar environment usually means it is similar to some place in our memory (typicality), so typicality is discussed with familiarity in some studies [19], [23].
 - People's expertise or knowledge about place: having expertise or knowledge about environment and place causes people to look at it differently.
- Culture; the phenomenon of culture is a key to understand the nature of human interactions with built environments. Culture feeds a society's worldview and

perceptions. In this regard, literatures have emphasized the force of culture on people's relationship with places. Tuan [39] used a new term "topophilia" to describe "an affective bond between people and place". In his theory people's feelings for places are not strong emotions unless the place has been the site of significant personal or cultural event [39]. In this way, places can act as symbols for more abstract ideas.

- Place satisfaction; One of the significant reasons that have an important role in formation of place attachment is satisfaction with a place. Reviewed literatures reveal that the level of people's place satisfaction also can affect on place attachment [32], [33], and [42]. Stedman [32] asserted that one of the constructs of sense of place and place attachment is satisfaction with a spatial setting held by an individual or group. In this case, he defines it as satisfaction with place elements and overall satisfaction with place [32]. Other scenario argues that if people are satisfied with a place they will likely come back to that place. Therefore, repeated visits build meanings and values associated with the place. However, people can also be attached to a place and not be satisfied with it.

- Preference and attachment; Reviewed literature expose that there are other factors beyond personal experience or cultural influences that affect attachment. In this case, they argue that people's preferences may influence they develop an attachment for a place. In this regard, Kaplan and Kaplan [11] in the field of landscape studies demonstrated that landscape preference is strongly related to landscape configuration and features. In parallel Riley [27] defines preference as the degree to which one like a particular type of scene, while attachment is a deeper emotional connection Therefore, it seems reasonable to consider whether some factors that influence preference may also influence attachment.

- Activity; as discussed earlier, activity is one of the major components of place. Places are associated with people's works, actions or leisure activities. Therefore, activities connect human to places but may or may not influence people's attachment. An interesting study [1] Pellow focused on the compound in a neighborhood of the West African city of Accra and showed that ongoing activities could contribute to the feelings of attachment to the places.

- Place itself; Physical setting is one of the main elements of a place. Historically the focus for most of the research associated with place has been on its social dimension, and the literature is replete with references to the importance of this aspect of place attachment. Some scholars have gone so far as to declare that all place attachment is based on social relationships. For instance, Proshansky et al. declared, there is no physical environmental that is not also a social environment [22]. In this regard, the role of physical features that inspire meaning to the place is ignored. People often judge physical features and attributes of a place before anything else. Therefore, physical setting with its characteristics and attributes may influence whether people develop an attachment for it or not. Steadman [32] claimed that the physical environment and its characteristics contribute to the construction of sense of place. He has found that the

physical characteristics strengthen both place attachment and satisfaction [32].

VIII.CONCLUSION

Sense of place can be defined as an emotional relationship between people and places. Previous studies indicated that physical attributes, activities and meanings associated with places contribute to make sense of place. Physical elements could refer to the attributes and characteristics of a setting; these features not only define the kind of a place but also could contribute to creation of meanings. Every place was built for supporting a particular action, so an activity could refers to actions afforded by the place. However, meanings could refer to perceptual and psychological aspects of an environmental experience perceived by people. People's past experiences, backgrounds, memories, personality, knowledge, culture, attitude, motivations, beliefs, age and gender influence the perceived sense of place. Therefore, sense of place is a result of the interaction of human and his living space. Although long-term familiarity with place could influence the sense of place, physical attributes that encourage suitable activities and create identity can fortify the concept.

However, places have different levels of sense of place and people usually will contribute to social activities based on their strength of emotional bonds with places. Some places have a high level of sense of place. These places encourage people to dwell, stay a little longer and to connect with one another. They provide opportunities for social interactions in urban areas and are important to the health and well being of people. Places and the meanings associated with them are important current issues in the built environment. Due to modernity, post modernity, globalization and the information society, the role of space and places in contemporary society is currently undergoing fundamental changes. Modernity and globalization will continue to contribute towards what Relph described as 'Placelessness'. This problem needs to be checked by understanding users. This can be done by learning more about the full spectrum of people's experiences of places including the complex and multi-faceted phenomena that comprise our emotional relationships to places. The seminal literature discussed that since the concept of sense of place is vague, its definition is very difficult to define, and also to measure, some concepts such as place attachment usually are used to describe and measure sense of place. In this regard, Place Attachment describes person and place bonding and their interdependence that is influenced by the attributes and characteristics of the settings and the users. Study on place attachment integrates the physical, perceptual, psychological and the socio-cultural dimension of place. Therefore place attachment may be affected by several factors related to experience and place. Environmental experience includes people's type of involvement and degree of familiarity with a place, and also their expertise or knowledge about place could influence attachment. The people's preferences for environmental attributes, activities and the physical attributes and characteristics of a place may also affect attachment. Understanding of place attachment that brings the physical

setting into account would provide some insight into what about place matters to people. Therefore, as Stedman [34] explained place attachment is an evaluative dimension of place, it describes how much place means to people. Place attachment plays a positive role in human lives and also in their care of the place. It is expected that there is difference in environmental attitudes between those who feel an attachment to a particular place and those who do not.

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