

# Developing a Model for the Relation between Heritage and Place Identity

A. Arjomand Kermani, N. Charbgoo, M. Alalhesabi

**Abstract**—In the situation of great acceleration of changes and the need for new developments in the cities on one hand and conservation and regeneration approaches on the other hand, place identity and its relation with heritage context have taken on new importance. This relation is generally mutual and complex one. The significant point in this relation is that the process of identifying something as heritage rather than just historical phenomena, brings that which may be inherited into the realm of identity. In planning and urban design as well as environmental psychology and phenomenology domain, place identity and its attributes and components were studied and discussed. However, the relation between physical environment (especially heritage) and identity has been neglected in the planning literature. This article aims to review the knowledge on this field and develop a model on the influence and relation of these two major concepts (heritage and identity). To build this conceptual model, we draw on available literature in environmental psychology as well as planning on place identity and heritage environment using a descriptive-analytical methodology to understand how they can inform the planning strategies and governance policies. A cross-disciplinary analysis is essential to understand the nature of place identity and heritage context and develop a more holistic model of their relationship in order to be employed in planning process and decision making. Moreover, this broader and more holistic perspective would enable both social scientists and planners to learn from one another's expertise for a fuller understanding of community dynamics. The result indicates that a combination of these perspectives can provide a richer understanding—not only of how planning impacts our experience of place, but also how place identity can impact community planning and development.

**Keywords**—Heritage, Inter-disciplinary study, Place identity, planning

## I. INTRODUCTION

**I**N extremely mobile and changing society, in which social networks and flow of information span the globe, identity of place become significant than any time. Place identity would improve a sense of security and continuity in a transient, rapidly evolving society. This sense needs some symbols of continuity and some signs of past, which usually are called heritage. All categories of heritage have mutual, complex relation with identity. What is clear is proximity of these two concepts, specifically intangible heritage and identity.

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According to the UNESCO convention of 2003 on safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage and historic urban landscape recommendation, heritage is divided into two major categories: tangible and intangible. Tangible heritage consists of the structure of built environment, their arrangement, form and design which can be either formally planned or organically developed. Activities that are happening in the urban environment such as traditions and festivals are counted as intangible heritage. Moreover, shared sense of place or place identity as well as collective memory are also placed in this category [1].

The concept of place identity represents the connection of physical environment with its conceptual and functional dimensions. "Place identity" is created and maintained by the physical form of the built environment and its ensemble of symbols, icons and embodied values which lend meaning to a place because of the connections with layers of history. Indeed, evolving responsively to their environment, intangible cultural heritage is an intergenerational subject. Through relating our past, present and future, heritage provide with sense of identity and stability. This type of cultural heritage does not care about cultural or national inclusion. Indeed, social cohesion, identity and responsibility are issues intangible cultural heritage contribute to. Therefore, having a critical understanding of the two common but not precisely used concepts of heritage and identity and how they interact and effect on each other is vital. So, the total aim of this research is to review the knowledge on the body of place identity and heritage, then forming a conceptual model represent interrelations of these two difficult and vague however significant concepts, heritage and identity, in order to make the knowledge about their relation more operational. However, this article is a primary step in planning science, it reveals complex, multi facet relationship of both categories of tangible and intangible heritage with identity components. These complexities are around the dualities such as traditional vs. contemporary and local vs. global in both of these concepts which need more concentrated studies.

## II. IDENTITY

### A. Environmental Psychology

Identity and specifically place identity is still one of the most important issues in many branches of science. (1) social identity theory, (2) place-identity theory, and (3) identity process theory are major theories commonly used for explaining the influence of architecture as built environment, natural environment and person's identity on each other in the domain environmental psychology [2].

Within the social psychology, there are theories about social identity, however, "there is little theorizing about the role of place in identity. Overall, there are two ways in which place has been related to identity. The first is what we will call place identifications. This refers to a person's expressed identification with a place, e.g. a person from London may refer to themselves as a Londoner. In this sense, place can be considered to be a social category and will be subject to the same rules as a social identification within social identity theory" [3, p. 205].

Place identity is the second way through which place and identity are related. Proshansky proposes that "place identity is another aspect of identity comparable to social identity that describes the person's socialization with the physical world" [3, p. 206].

Proshansky, as an Environmental psychologist, tried to modify identity if place and identify the role of personal experiences in shaping it. His starting point in Theorization was Erik Erikson's (1959) "reflected appraisal" mechanism—he explained that in this mechanism a child forms his identity by differentiating himself from others—then he extends this mechanism and explains it as inclusive for places, objects and other concepts related to places. Therefore, constant, and often unconscious but permanent dialogue of individuals and their experiences, of different objects, and places they have met [3]. Finally, in his work, Proshansky noticed the important role of place in formation of individual identity. He also suggests that due to this fact that places are shared subject for different groups and people, identity of place is related to social identity then. He in a classic article mentioned a much used definition of place identity as a complex cognitive structure that group of values, attitudes, thoughts, beliefs, meanings and attachment to specific places shape its characteristics. To be more descriptive it can be stated that as a cognitive sub-structure of self-identity, place-identity include an endless variety of cognitions. These variety is consisted of cognition related to different time spans such as the past and the present. In addition, anticipated material environment that describe the daily being of the person [4]. For improving this subject, Proshansky and his contributors identify various different subsets: 'Recognition function' which means recognition related to self-identity; 'meaning function' means ways of defining behavior by place); 'expressive-requirement function' equal to peoples different manner and priorities in selecting special places, 'mediating-change function' which refer to the points where disagreement appears and the last subset is 'anxiety and defense function' as an equivalent for the way people learn what to avoid and how they understand when they are in or out of a particular place [4]. However, Proshansky never made clear how these two types of identity are connected [3].

The third theory which has mentioned before in the theories defining relation of place and identity, is Breakwell's identity process model. Breakwell's proposes four principles of identity for his model, these principles counted as self-esteem, self-efficacy, distinctiveness and continuity [5]. Further short explanation of these concepts are presented:

- Distinctiveness: people use place identification to make themselves different from others;
- Continuity: the place provides a sense of continuity of the self, in situation that a person has lived at the specific place for a long period of time, or in a case that person choose the same type of place as previous one for living;
- Self-esteem: when people feel pride because of the place where they live;
- Self-efficacy: this refers to characteristics and ways by which a place facilitates people's daily life.

According to Twigger-Ross and Uzzell analysis, these principles of identity originated in social psychology should be modified and developed in environmental context [3].

There is also a point which Amundsen declares about the process of perception of identity in psychology domain. He explained that identity is a production of dynamic system based on simultaneous complementary and contradictory process. First stage of contradictory means this place is different with other places, however stage of complementary means positioning of place in a network of places. Therefore, this process includes shaping of inner common dimensions which cause coherence in place besides shaping of outer different dimensions that distinguish place from other places [6].

#### *B. Phenomenology*

Although the shared emphasis of psychologists is on cognitive structure of place identity, phenomenologists think these dimensions are insufficient.

Norbert-Schulz (1979) -as a pioneer in this domain – explained place as a comprehensive whole shaped by nature. He further added that each place due to its local characteristics has a specific identity. "spirit" is the concept he often uses to refer to identity. In his theory, Genius Loci is a mediate between place identity and physical setting [7].

For Seamon, a generative phenomenology of place grounded in six interconnected processes. Each of these process is linked with one specific lived mode by which place effect on human life. Place interaction, place identity, place creation, place intensification, place realization, and place release are these six modes. However, in understanding the nature of place, place identity is significant but it is also noticeable that each of these modes are complemented by other modes of relationship and this is very helpful in clarifying the place complexity and enrichment also its experience. The first two processes of place interaction and place identity might be called the generative foundations of place and place experience, since they point to the everyday actions, events, significances, and attachments that ground robust places. He states that place identity relates to the process whereby people associated with a place and engage with that place as a significant part of who they are [8], [9].

#### *C. Urban Planning*

Specifically, in urban planning, there are different perspectives in defining place identity.

Kevin Lynch with his imageability theory and its resulting

normative framework of nodes, edges, paths, districts and landmarks express that identity is important in increasing the imageability. Identity is a domain in which one can recall and recognize a place with its clear unique and specific characteristics and different from others [10]. In other words, place identity is dependent on the ability to be distinguishable from similar cases.

After Lynch published his work on the city image [10], Melvin Webber brought up his theory of a non-place society in which interest-based communities not tied to place. According to his theory, urban form needed to go far beyond its spatial qualities to include flows of information, money, people and goods, as well as activity patterns. He concluded that facing with this huge amount of flows planners must make themselves free from place based planning. They should think about urban communities as systems that are spatially extensive in which urbanites interact with others wherever they may be. For him, not place is the essence of the city and of city life [11].

Donald Appleyard, a contemporary of Webber, had completely opposed views on the essence of city, he thought that place is the essence. For him, places as an equivalent for spatial locations in all of their social and sensory variety, were the framework for life and could not be replaced by non-place communication. His many studies with human subjects on image development and the meanings of place verify his hypothesis. One of the result that his research clarifies is that people seeing and valuing of different places are differently, dependent to factors such as their experience, culture, and class [12].

Appleyard believes that designers and planners determine insiders in a place who have key role in enriching or fading meaning of place. Due to this for him access to shared meanings is political, and that designers and planners have the most influence. "By suggesting that identity means more than just legibility and that it is essentially socially constructed, Appleyard showed the limitations of physical imageability as a proxy for place identity" [11, p. 500].

There are also approaches which seek to establish international brand identity for places and cities in order to get distinction, identification and consequent advantage in the global marketplace. Achievement of such branding is dependent to attracting attentions in a global market space which become possible by conscious avoiding of vernacular, cultural and local references and considering global values and distinctiveness.

In contrast to the aforementioned approach, for Hester there are much meaning and values which are inherited in the place, specifically place of everyday life which should be revealed. Matching his career his researches focused on investigating on human based design rather than imposing normative design models on towns. His design approach was engaging community members in surveying the places they know and love, and then uses them as the foundation for future development. Another significant subject he pointed out is that all places that have identity and meaning for people do not need to be imageable. For instance, a humble Laundromats,

cafes, post offices, sidewalks, a park bench, or even one's workplace environment may have identity for special groups due to their experiences [11]. Hester's realization raises the issue of the conflict that exists between high design approach and everyday vernacular urbanism.

As a result of review on place identity, Southworth & Ruggeri explain in their work that place identity should be considered more than common dualities, it should be observed as complex concept as the procedure of its formation in each particular place [11]. Identity also should be considered as multi dimension which account for physical aesthetic and imageability simultaneously social considerations such as shared experiences and meanings. They thought that identity as should care about vernacular and local issues, it should also consider reduction of place dependency as a result of improvement in technology and flow of information to include geographies once impossible to connect. Also it should consider classic forms and their values but also should be based on its time, should be on this believe that past is not possible to occur. It should also include considerations of process, valuing community involvement over the interests of a few, and vernacular and self-built landscapes over those designed by star architects and their wealthy clients.

Finally, for facing the issue of place identity truly, planners should experience different context and situations to find most appropriate research methods of studying of meaning and the ways they have been provided, shared and perpetuated. Therefore, as urban designers and planners in this era of great physical and cultural changes and every second needs and preferences shifts, we should be aware of place identities as multiple and constantly shifting. Clarifying the meaning which are hidden and embed in place instead of giving just an official definition is our mission.

### III. MODEL PROPOSED

It seems that most of scientists which their theories on identity has been reviewed, perceive dualities about place identity; places either have identity or they do not, they are either high design or vernacular. Here, we try to see identity as multi-level and gradient concept due to this claim every place has some levels of identity.

Table I shows the main theme and elements of identity extracted from literature and also introduce framework of this article. Framework represents identity as multi-level concept which its perception primarily begins from cognitive levels base on the distinctiveness from outer phenomena. At the next level which is conceptual based on relation with place and interaction with people, other aspects of identity reveals. This stage is shaping around inner continuity our similarities with past or other the same phenomena. More descriptively these three elements in identity framework; distinctiveness, continuity and relation are significant at different levels of perception of identity but they are complemented by each other. Distinctiveness refers to primary difference human perceive from mostly visual and physical aspects of place. Continuity means balance between persistent and change [13]. This can occur in persistence of elements in new whole or

change of elements in old relation, which the second case is richer. Additionally, Hall explained that what should be persistent is position and characteristics [14]. Interaction is

related to relation with others and also with place which form shared perceptual basis for identity.

TABLE I  
IDENTITY ELEMENTS IN DIFFERENT DOMAINS

SCIENCE	SCIENTIST	MAIN THEME	MAIN IDENTITY ELEMENTS		
Environmental psychology	Proshansky	Cognitive	belief	attitude	Values
	Amundsen	Cognitive	complementary	contradictory	
<i>phenomenology</i>	Breakwell	continuity	distinctiveness	Self-esteem	Self-efficiency
	Schultz	spirit	Genius loci		
<i>Urban planning</i>	Seamon	interaction	association	experience	events
	Lynch	imageability	nodes	ways	landmarks
	Webber	Non-placeness	flows	internet	
	Appleyard	political	experience	culture	Values
<i>framework</i>	High designers	Global branding	High design	Global elements	
	Hester	vernacular	vernacular landscapes	Every day landscapes	
	Southworth	Multi dimension	Global / vernacular	Physical/social	...
		Multi-level/multi facet	Continuity	Distinctiveness	Relation

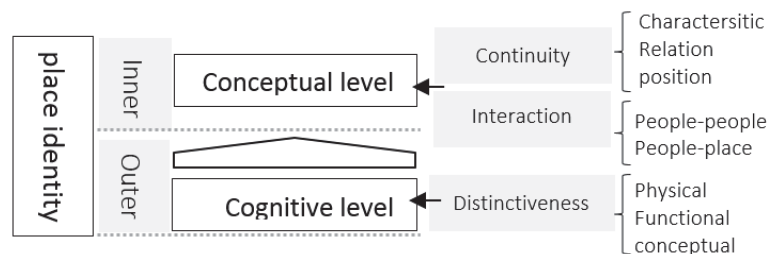


Fig. 1 Mapping identity as multi-level concept

#### IV. HERITAGE

The cultural and natural heritage is among the priceless and irreplaceable assets, not only of each nation, but of humanity as a whole. The loss through deterioration or disappearance of any of these most prized assets constitutes an impoverishment of the heritage of all the peoples of the world.

Since the adoption of the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage 1972, the international community has embraced the concept of "sustainable development". The protection and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage are a significant contribution to sustainable development.

Generally, the content of heritage is commonly seen as consist of both the material or tangible and the intangible. Tangible heritage could be counted as natural landscapes and the settlements, buildings, monuments and the like of the built environment [15]. And according to article 2.1 of the International Convention for the Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, intangible heritage means are the practice, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills as well as the instruments, objects, artistic handmade and cultural spaces linked with that specific communities and groups [1].

Intangible heritage as intergeneration subject, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides sense of identity and persistence for them [16].

The value of intangible cultural heritage is knowledge and

skills that is transmitted intergeneration not the cultural manifestation. The social and economic value of this transmission are significant for both developed and developing societies which are related to minority groups or to the mainstream social groups within a State.

UNESCO gives more precise definition on what intangible cultural heritage is:

- Traditional, contemporary and living at the same time;
- This type of heritage includes contemporary activities and practices as the same as inherited traditions from the past;
- Inclusive: expressions of intangible cultural heritage should be shared between people. Whether between two neighboring village or two far point on the opposite side of the globe.
- Representative: intangible cultural heritage doesn't get it values just because of its unique characteristic or distinction. But it grows in communities and it is dependent to one whose knowledge of them-traditions, skills and customs- are passed on to the rest in the community- intergeneration-, or to other communities;
- Community-based: it is noticeable that they are insiders who decide what would be heritage. Insiders are such as communities, groups or individuals that create, maintain and transmit it [17].

Conformity of description and a justification with the criteria laid down in the World Heritage Convention 1972, and the Operational Guidelines for its implementation determines

its significance. One of these criteria establishes in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2015 is outstanding universal value which means cultural and/or natural significance that is so exceptional as to transcend national boundaries [18]. In other words, values and symbols of a World Heritage site must be universal and beyond regional, national, or purely political, religious or economic significance [19].

Outstanding universal value is a central term in the World "Heritage Convention. Apart from the statement of significance, the justification of outstanding universal value is based on the overall criteria of authenticity and integrity" [19, p. 15].

"Consequently, it is now largely agreed that most heritage has little intrinsic worth. Rather, values are

placed upon artefacts or activities by people who, when they view heritage, do so through a whole series of lenses, the most obvious of which are: nationality; religion; ethnicity; class; wealth; gender; personal history; and that strange lens known as 'insiderness'" [15, p. 2].

No heritage value is fully tangible; even the "tangible can only be interpreted through the intangible" [15, p. 2] Deacon stated. Indeed, without the ideas and values represented in materials, tangible- heritage sites may comprise no more than empty shells of dubious authenticity [15].

All these explanation and definition presented could shape criteria for framework of heritage concept in this article as Table II.

TABLE II  
CRITERIA FOR FRAMEWORK OF HERITAGE BASED ON UNESCO DATA

Traditional/ contemporary	Inclusive	Representative	Community-based	Outstanding universal value
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#### V. MODEL OF THE RELATION OF TWO CONCEPTS

The literature on components of both heritage and identity, reveals that the relation of these two concept is multi-dimensional and both spatially and temporally variable. Besides clarifying this relation there are some special points in this relation, worth mentioning. The relation of these two concept is mutual, even though identity is some kind of intangible heritage, it can (re)produce other forms of (in)tangible heritage and mutually heritage is important in reproduction and representation of identity. Heritage often expected to be a knowledge, simultaneously a cultural product and a political resource. If they are dependent to particular society and intellectual circumstances, they are time-specific and thus their meanings can be changed due to changing times, preferences and choices of people or generally insiders in reading the text of city [15]. In this situation the significance of intangible heritage which pass through generations and accept changes reveals. This best fit the criteria of simultaneously being traditional and contemporary that expressed by UNESCO for intangible heritage. Here one shared point of these two subjects appears. Continuity as a component of identity exactly means acceptance of changes and persistence at the same time. Therefore, for preserving intangible heritage that match the criterion of contemporary/traditional, subsets of continuity such as persistence in characteristics or position and change in relation or elements should be regarded.

Additionally, as interaction of people with each other and their relation with place is important factor in identity so their subsets such as stories, narrations, festivals are also significant which are kind of intangible heritage and match the criteria of community based for intangible heritage.

Other overlap point is in the physical forms, activities and functions which are distinctive and cause perception of

identity on the basis of contradictory process. This element with outstanding universal values match tangible heritage, which for Ashworth are selected by the lens of "insiderness" [15]. This, means that in the perception of heritage the procedure of contradictory and complementary is true. Fig. 2 represent a conceptual model for the relation of these two concepts and their elements and attributes.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

In presenting a conceptual model of identity and heritage relationship using analytical descriptive method after reviewing literature on both concepts with focus on identity, overlaps have been revealed between identity components and heritage criteria and elements. The major three overlaps are; Conformity of criteria of "simultaneously being traditional and contemporary" with continuity in identity model. In addition, interaction and its subset as an identity elements are close to the intangible heritage and finally the model represents that lens of insiderness by which people select a phenomenon to be heritage is as much like the process of contradictory and complementary which is basic in Identity perception. It is also noticeable that this relation is mutual and complex. Mutuality of this relationship is that identity is some kind of intangible heritage which can form tangible heritage too and mutually heritage is important in reproduction of identity. Complexity of this relation almost appears in dualities these two concept are faced with in contemporary domain of planning.

Even though the overlaps and dualities between these two concepts have been remarked and pointed out in this article, the results are counted as the first steps in understanding their relations and impacts on each other.

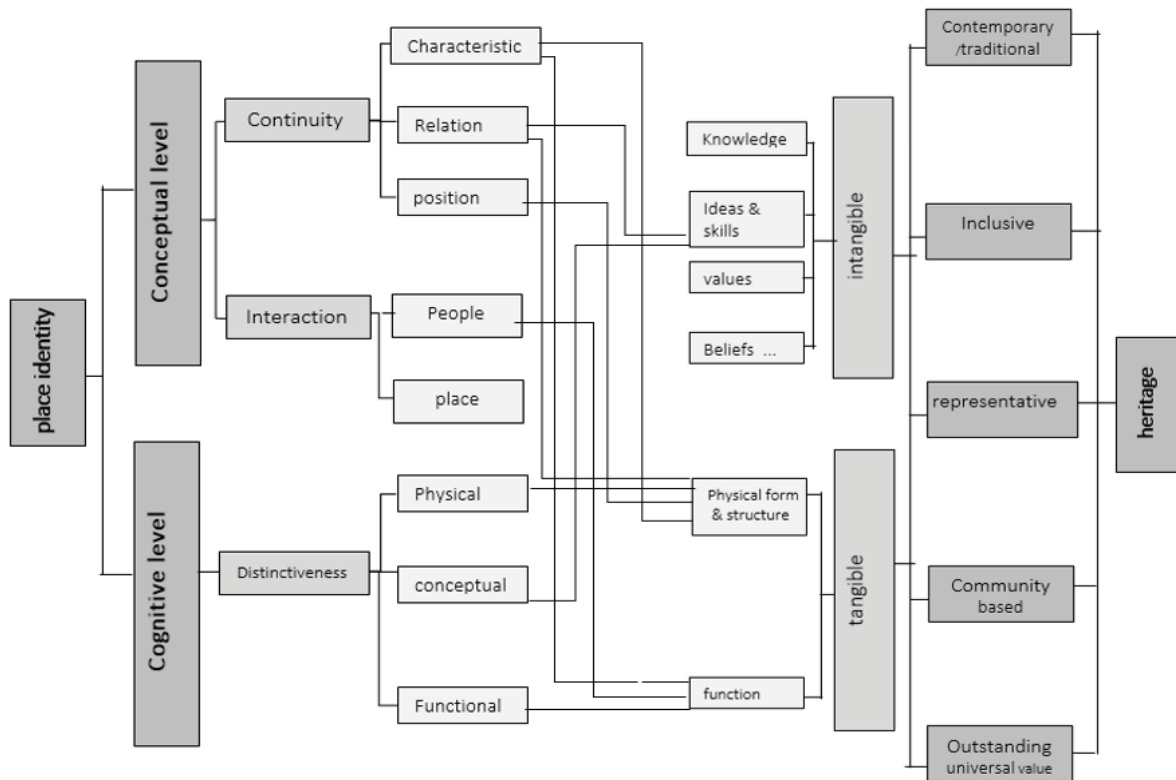


Fig. 2 Conceptual model of identity and heritage relation

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