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Guest Editorial

Place Attachment during Territorial Development Challenges


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ABSTRACT

Place is a holistic entity defined by meanings, spatial features, and attachments. The richness of meaning is considered in specific spatial and historical/cultural contexts and place, as the object of attachment, is a nurturing space. The articles in this Special Issue discuss how people create places through their diverse experiences, they show what theoretical and empirical information can help understand present attachments to community and places. In addition, these contributions underline that social and economic practices create meanings, validate identities and enable the construction of attachment, as they imply continuity with the past. As such, meanings and intentions, as well as people's behaviours make up place and attachment to place, especially during territorial development challenges, both in historical time and at present. Out of the two main approaches to study place attachment – one supported by Psychology, with focus on the individuals and their emotions, and the other endorsed by Geography, with focus on place and its meanings – this Special Issue explores the latter, showing that research on the meanings of places should be added to the study of the strength of bonds between people and places in order to understand place attachment and its production.

People get attached to places. That is, to what?
And why?

Emotional affiliation to place and community means identification with and attachment to place: a sense of place, of local identity and of home; feelings of pride and self-worth are often. Sense of place includes place meanings, the characteristics of the place, place attachments (Buttimer, 1980; Banini and Ilovan, 2021b). A 'progressive sense of place' (Massey, 1993) means an openness of place to the world; global and local forces intertwine, construct place and they are mutually constitutive. Attachment emerges to private

and public places (or to places that have features of these both), it supposes the existence of intimacy with place and of interactions with other people (Pellow, 1992, p. 204).

Therefore, attachment to places is a complex phenomenon (Raymond, Brown and Weber, 2010; Scannell and Gifford, 2010a; Lewicka, 2011). Researchers who investigate the issue of place attachment demonstrate that place is not only a material dimension of the space that surrounds us – it is rather a physical dimension of geographical setting with which we are emotionally related (Tuan, 1974a).

There are various and varied ins and outs of being emotionally fond of what people called “myness” (Brandenburg and Carroll, 1995; Pierce and Jussila, 2011), such as: feelings, beliefs, attitudes, tradition (Tuan, 1974b; Brown and Perkins, 1992; Low and Altman, 1992; Davidson and Milligan, 2004; Smith et al., 2009; Markuszewska, 2019a; Ilovan and Markuszewska, 2022). Interesting, however, that in most cases these are non-material characteristics of places (spiritual, sensual, and emotional) which are of a dominant importance in bonding people with a certain location (Antrop, 2000; Graybill, 2013, Markuszewska, 2022). For instance, social, cultural, religious and historical values are vital in building emotional value with a place (Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2004; Moran, 2004; Hernández, Hidalgo and Ruiz, 2014).

In addition, what draws people to a place is people: family, friends, neighbours; that constitutes civic attachment – bonds with a community in a place (Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974, Baldwin, Smith and Jacobson, 2017; Manahasa and Özsoy, 2017; Markuszewska, 2019b, 2021). This, in turn, deepens the joint effort of the local population to shape, maintain, and if necessary, to protect the place via involvement of society members in bottom-up initiatives and voluntary actions that strengthen the power of participatory planning (Devine-Wright, 2009; DiEnno and Thompson, 2013; Anton and Lawrence, 2014; Markuszewska and Ilovan, 2022).

Places (understood as territories or/and landscapes) are stable neither in terms of what is tangible and physical, nor of what is elusive and intangible. Changes are inherent features of places. These changes are a product of the attrition of natural processes and human activity, they transform places and, at the same time, people’s perception of places. Thus, transition and all the repercussions of transformation that happen over time are significant in (re)building, (re)constructing, and (re)shaping human relation with places (Markuszewska, 2017, 2022), and additionally, imply the continuity between past and present, and between present and future (Lewicka, 2011; Scannell and Gifford, 2014).

Changes can have both positive and negative effects on maintaining people-place relationships that intensify bonds with places. Nevertheless, due to the change in the properties of a place and factors that determine them, the emotional attachment with place becomes weakened (Relph 1976; Nogué and Willbrand, 2010; Oliveira, Roca and Leitão, 2010; Morse and Mudgett, 2017). Adjustment to change requires local communities to reinterpret their perception on and their attitude towards places (Scannell and Gifford, 2010b). Changes require that people (re)define place meaning and (re)develop place attachment.

What the abovementioned is about is the essence of the contributions of this Special Issue: “*Place*

Attachment during Territorial Development Challenges”. In this collection of articles, we understand attachment to place as a set of feelings (lived either currently or as part of memory) about a geographic location that emotionally binds a person to it, as well as, how community arrange the place around cultural, historical, and social aspects of place. The intention was to discuss the perception of communities and social groups of a time-varying relation to a place and process of enhancing the sustainability of communities through place attachment (Branda, 2022; Merciu, Olaru and Merciu, 2022; Tobiasz-Lis, 2022).

The goal was also to present the examples of preserving and building territorial identities and place attachment under new social, cultural and economic challenges (Preda et al., 2022). In addition, this Special Issue focuses on how multicultural and multinational integrated communities contribute to shaping common place identity and individual place attachment. Finally, it includes approaches to place attachment from a gender perspective: a study on the religious context of creating attachment to places and identity with social spaces (Puspitasar and Hanan, 2022) and another one considering a totalitarian political system (Ilovan, 2022).

Representations shape the social imaginary about and perceptions of places and actively contribute to local identity construction. F.-C. Merciu, M. Olaru and G.-L. Merciu show that the constructivist approach to place attachment explains best that people-place relations are constructed, and representations are shared within a group or community. Representations are not static, having a stable meaning, but they are a dynamic part of the identity formation processes at personal, group and spatial levels (Ilovan, 2020; Banini and Ilovan, 2021a, 2021b; Ilovan and Merciu, 2021; Ilovan and Markuszewska, 2022).

Feelings of connectedness and loss in fragile communities, undergoing disruptive changes is another vital problem analysed and the focus of the article by M. Preda and colleagues (2022). Questioning the potential for achieving active ageing in Bucharest, Romania, the aim is to search for success and failure in experiencing new development paths and discussing how people’s place attachment was affected.

Physical and socio-cultural are the categories of elements that explain people-place bonding. Feelings translate into practices and together with these they form places. Practices articulate places, deepen, and refine the bonds between people and place. Their coherence is ensured by specific cultural milieus. C. Puspitasar and H. Hanan (2022) take on the gender perspective to argue that a gendered individual and collective identity construction is a process fastened on place.

Reality is constructed socially by exchange students, studying in Poland, at the University Lodz. So are places, identities, and attachments. Both local territorial identities and place attachments are

historically and socially constructed, they are contested and negotiated through small and grand 'gestures'. Narratives connect past and present experiences. Their intersection shapes the meanings of future experiences and decisions at personal and community level and should be considered to improve urban planning, P. Tobiasz-Lis argues (2022).

Meanings of place are constructed and represented in various sources and media. O.-R. Ilovan's article (2022) shows how the meanings that people assign to places can be examined based on representations in propaganda comics from socialist Romania. The narratives and the discourses comics form about places are offering valuable insights into the relationship between the communist propaganda, children enrolled in the educational system and places. Territorial identities are internalised and embodied. They are contingent and hegemonically layered.

Place attachment is a component of identity (of the individual, of the group and of territorial identity). Historically rooted territorial identities and attachments are discussed by A. Branda (2022). She shows how place meanings are formed through human experience in the Jewish community of Cluj, Romania, at certain moments or over shorter or longer periods. Personal identity and community identities are defined through a spatial component besides other features. The materiality of place is a physical expression of the individual and/or community who contributed to shaping it. Ritualised behaviours create landscapes and attachments to these.

All contributions to this Special Issue argue that place identities and place attachments are a function of space and time, where territorial development challenges have a significant role.

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