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**PLACE ATTACHMENT IN TRADITIONAL URBAN
NEIGHBOURHOODS**

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Abstract:

Place attachment is a phenomenon, extensively studied by researchers from different fields, within different contexts and from different perspectives. Within the context of the traditional urban built environment, and using an explanatory narrative mechanism, this study traced the phenomenon by reilluminating its impact evidenced in the perpetual existence of traditional neighbourhoods in urban areas, despite apparent developmental neglect in some of those neighbourhoods. Consequently, place attachment to the traditional urban built environment was

shown to be higher than in new urban developments, as a result of satisfaction with the liveliness, neighbourliness and diversity of such environments.

1. Introduction:

One of the strongest manifestations of human emotional bond with the environment is in the way people cling unto their built environment. It is therefore not out of place that, just as people impact on the environment by putting up buildings, they are in turn affected by the buildings. This symbiotic relationship, generally known as place attachment, has been the subject of researches in different disciplines and from different perspectives. One of those is from the traditional urban built environment perspective, due to its continuous existence. This study, therefore, embarks on place attachment, to understand the concept behind it, and also delineating its positive impact on the traditional urban built environment.

2. Background:

It is indisputable that people develop deep affectionate feelings and emotional bonding towards the places they were born, brought up, or lived in, for a long time. In recent times, the growing interest in making the people's living conditions more sustainable has constituted strong motivation to study these feelings, affections and bond. Consequently, the motivations have extended to studying how the places, in turn, affect people's lives. The studies have been approached from a variety of perspectives and disciplines. Human geographers (Massey, 1991) studied it as a concept of "sense of place". Sociologists approach it on the premise of influence places have on social human interactions, because it was necessarily social (Scannell and Gifford, 2010; Kasarda and Janowitz, 1974). Environmental psychologists, on their part, developed arguments based on the notion of 'place attachment' (Shiotsuki et al, 2017; Ainsworth, 2015; Kyle et al, 2004). Levels and dimensions of place attachment are discussed to achieve a contextual relationship with traditional urban neighbourhoods.

3. Method:

The topic has been crafted bearing in mind, the sustainable significance of the perpetuation or sustenance of traditional built environment within the modern urban milieu. It is therefore appropriate that this study adopted a method or mechanism used by historical researchers; the mechanism of explanatory narrative. The mechanism relies primarily upon an empathetic reenactment of the reasons, historical agents acted in a particular way. Within that primary premise, such mechanism accords the creation of justified truths about the past. Furthermore, the secondary aspect, on which this method or mechanism relies on, has to do with the critical need of finding and establishing links between those historical past phenomena and its perpetuation to the present. The method is therefore appropriate since the link will ultimately lead to the creation of meaning.

4. Result and Discussion:

One significant result from this study is the corroborated submission that there is a significant lack of appreciation of the impact of place attachment concept on the perpetuation of the traditional built environment within an urban context.

4.1 Concept of Place Attachment:

Place attachment is the phenomenon involving the development of feelings, affections and bond concerning places. However, the diversity of scholars from different disciplines, in studying these phenomena, created intellectual divergence regarding its definition and the most suitable methodology to approach it (Westin, 2016). Several researchers aligned with Gerson et al's (1977) definition of the phenomenon, that was, as place attachment (for example, Ujang, 2017; Amundsen, 2015; Scannell and Gifford, 2010; Low and Altman, 1992).

Yet other researchers viewed it differently. Proshansky and Fabian (1987), and Devine-Wright et al (2015) called it 'place identity.' Stokols and Shumaker (1981) and Sunkul and Jachna (2016) referred to it as 'place dependence.' Hummon (1992) and, Ashworth and Graham (2016) described it as 'sense of place.' In many of those definitions, several other dimensions have been incorporated. For instance, the role of attachment in the development of identity (Wang & Xu, 2015) and, influence of attachment on a sense of community (Dixon et al, 2015). Hidalgo and Hernández (2001) however, argued that these aspects were not as inherent to the attachment as the tendency to stay close to the object of attachment is. It was evident that vast terminological and conceptual differences have been existing for long.

To summarize these arguments, Williams and Patterson (1999) had earlier submitted that, whenever there is a positive connection between a person and a particular place, then there exists place attachment. Giuliani (2016) however, believed that the connection or affective bond may also be negative or unpleasant, such as that between a father and the place of his son's death. It was within that context they attempted to distinguish the definitions of some of the terms. They viewed place identity as an emotional one in which the symbolic significance of a place gives meaning and purpose to life. Hence, as a component of self-identity (Heidari & Mirzaii, 2013), place identity enhances self-esteem (United States Department of Agriculture, 2009) and also sense of belonging (Sakhaeifar & Ghoddusifar, 2016). The ultimate aspect which all those perspectives had in common was that the phenomenon related to the bond between people and places (Chow & Healey, 2008).

One of the earliest supporting arguments for place attachment, and the critical need to study the concept within the context of the traditional urban core, came from Fried (1966). His research, based in environmental psychology (Giuliani, 2016), exposed the grief and distress suffered by residents in 'West End' of Boston, Massachusetts. They were forcefully relocated from their original settlement, to pave way for the neighbourhood's demolition in the late 1950s. As a result of the disregard for place attachment, rich century-old history was lost. The residents' lifelong connections were cut off (Arbesman et al, 2009). The negative implications have been captured (Figure 1 A & B), by showing one of the West End's squares, before and after the renewal respectively. To buttress how psychologically disastrous the program was, Brian Golden of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, who was not even alive when the West End was demolished, issued a formal apology on behalf of the agency (McCluskey, 2015).

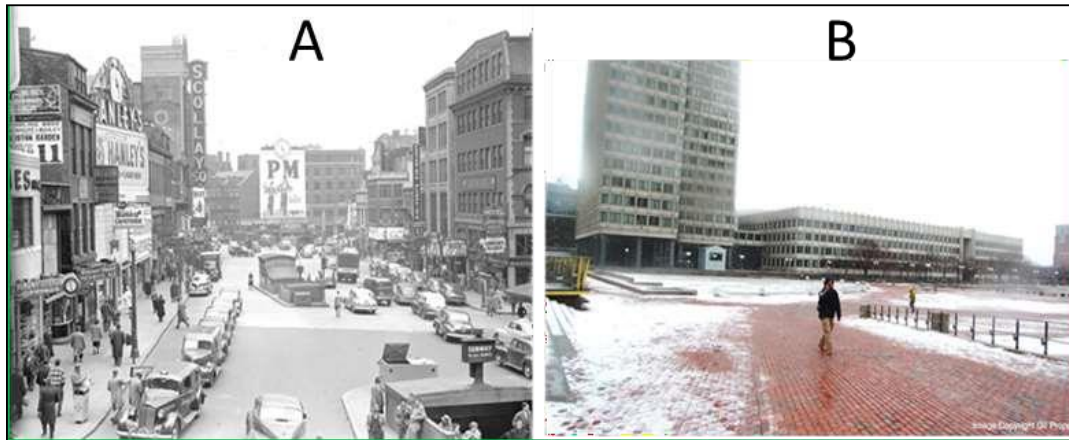


Figure 1: A West End's square, before and after neighbourhood renewal.

Source: <https://bit.ly/2TQHGya>

Another classical example pointing to the need for a concerned study of place attachment in the context of traditional urban areas was revealed by Carl LeVan and Olubowale (2014). They showed that the Gbagyi people of central Nigeria had a strong attachment to their land before the Federal Government took it over in the 1970s. The reason for the takeover was to create the Federal Capital Territory as Nigeria's new capital city. The plan to resettle and compensate them was largely unsuccessful because the relocation housing scheme restricted the Gbagyis from engaging in their cultural and economic activities such as large scale farming. Similarly, the government built a modern resettlement village for the Gbagyi natives of Wuse and Maitama areas, at another satellite town called Dei-Dei. They also rejected the project, citing that the houses provided for them were too small for their large extended families (*Abuja Technology Village Project*, 2015). Those were clear pieces of evidence pointing to the crucial need for continued studies of the connection between place attachment and traditional neighbourhoods or settlements, within the context of traditional landscapes.

A more recent example of place attachment is contained in the study undertaken by Ayoola, Fakere and Olusoga (2019). Taking Akure in Nigeria as a case study, they examined the phenomenon, between residents and the factors that predicted their attachment on three levels; houses, neighbourhoods, and city. They also looked at social and physical perspectives of the attachment. Length of residency and the number of household members were found to be the strongest predictors at all levels. A most recent pointer to this phenomenon was the empirical study of the influence of living conditions of slum dwellers on attachment to their home environments, within the inner-city of Ibadan, Nigeria (Adewale, Ibem, Amole and Adeboye, 2020). Through a survey of residents in Oke-Foko community, they revealed two things. The first was that the residents were attached to their home environment due to place dependence, and the second was that, place attachment was strong despite dilapidated housing unit features. Their study implied that place attachment can be highly enhanced by enhancing the quality of peoples housing units among others.

4.2 Levels of Place Attachment:

Place attachment is usually developed on different attachment scales or levels. People's attachment to places varies considerably, not just in scale, but also intangibility and specificity,

and even in size. Instances of the variability include; a house (Adams, 2016), children's playground (Depeau, 2017), a forest (Hashem et al, 2017), a whole nation (Lewicka, 2008), or even objects (Brown et al, 2016). People may develop an attachment to places related to their past, present or even future, and any of those periods may be on the scale of, a house, workplace, neighbourhood, town, state, country, or higher (Giuliani, 2016).

Most of the studies conducted on place attachment, up to the beginning of the last decade, concentrated on the spatial level of the community or neighbourhood environment (Giuliani, 2016; Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001). That widespread preference may be attributed to an implicit assumption, that attachment to the neighbourhood was the most preferred spatial level amongst people. Many studies have demonstrated that perspective (e.g. Westin, 2016). However, place attachment appeared to be generally stronger for residences than neighbourhoods (Scannell & Gifford, 2017). Varying strengths of the attachment for different spatial scales may relate to the psychological benefits on that scale. In the case of place attachment for residences, Fullilove (2005) showed the strength of attachment for traditional culture to be quite strong.

4.3 Place Attachment and Psychological Needs:

The environment where people live for generations, tend to become extremely familiar to them. The familiarities consequently lead to the development of innate psychological needs, which may lead to being attached to the place. By extension, when changes occur in that environment, they may lead to various negative psychological problems. These could be separation distress (Berry and Danquah, 2016; Cox and Perry, 2011), grief (Scannell and Gifford, 2017; Fried, 2000), loss of social networks (Degnen, 2016; Speller and Twigger-Ross, 2009), and even trauma (Fullilove, 1996). In that regard, place attachment is strongly associated with greater well-being in various contexts; rural communities, neighbourhoods, housing or residences.

Psychological needs, which motivate people to put the effort into achieving their goals, are numerous. However, based on the model developed by Williams (2009), and subscribed to by other researchers, there are four basic needs which have been frequently outlined in the literature. Those were; the need to belong, the need for self-esteem, the need for control, and the need for a meaningful existence (Scannell and Gifford, 2017; Greenaway et al, 2016). According to the self-determination theory (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010), the satisfaction of these needs and the consequent place attachment they foster, create social identities that exert positive outcomes on peoples' well-being. That was what Jetten et al (2012) referred to as, the 'social cure.' In addition to being a social cure, as far back as from the 1990s, attachment had been strongly connected to mental health (O'Brien et al, 1994). The connection should rather, be viewed from the cautious perspective of Schore (2001). He submitted that the positiveness or negativeness of the connection depended on its secure or traumatic nature. That was irrespective of the fact that Schore's research was interpersonal attachment-based.

4.4 Attachment to Culture and Traditional Dwellings:

The pervasive attachment to cultural roots in various parts of the world is consequently reflected in the widespread place-attachment exhibited by people in urban areas, to their traditional environments (Shamsuddin & Ujang, 2008). This is because the environments usually preserve the traditional socio-physical character which the people subscribe to. Strong attachment is also exhibited as a result of the socio-cultural, emotional attributes of the environments (Hashem et

al, 2017). Traditional, cultural, and historical backgrounds of people are factors which strongly influence their appropriation of ‘place’ (de Campos, 2017).

Various studies have shown that places, which in this regard refer to traditional ones, do preserve their significance despite the modernising pressures of processes like urbanization and economic development (Lang et al, 2016; Aguilar, 2008; Simon et al, 2006). A classical reflection of that significance was reflected in China’s positive responses to the regeneration of urbanized rural communities, where solutions were culture-driven (Lang et al, 2016; Reid and Reid, 2016). The rural communities being deep-rooted in their cultural and traditional dispositions: the significance of the traditional dwellings or environment at large was also revealed by Lovejoy et al (2010) and corroborated by Türkoğlu et al (2019) that, attachment to traditional neighbourhoods was higher than in new developments at the suburbs. The reason Lovejoy et al, (2010) found for the high attachment, was satisfaction with the liveliness, neighbourliness and diversity of the traditional neighbourhoods.

4.5 Dimensions and Dividends of Place Attachment:

Within the three-dimensional framework of place attachment as proposed by Scannell and Gifford (2010), shown in Figure 2, occupants of traditional urban family-houses exhibit psychological process or sense-of-place with their houses in five ways. Two of the ways are, ‘everyday’ and ‘ideological’ rootedness which describe the continuing existence of traditional houses in urban areas. Rootedness referred to the emotional investment a person makes in a place (Scannell and Gifford 2010; Riger and Lavrakas, 1981). They are also more characterized by the traditional form of place attachment, which is place inherited.

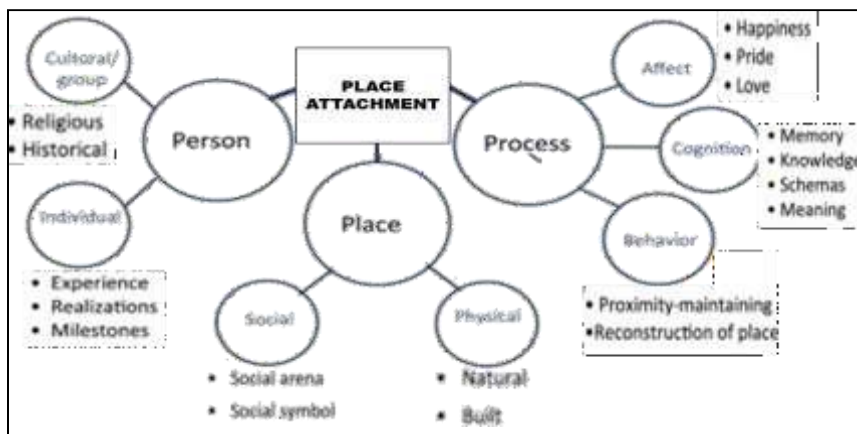


Figure 2: The tripartite model of place attachment Source: Scannell and Gifford (2010)

Rootedness defines a physical or psychological condition in which, as a result of possession and long-time habitation to a particular place, occupants of the place have no desire to move out to another alternative place. Simply put, it is the duration of residence in an area (Schellenberg et al, 2017). Hence the longer a person resides in a particular place, the more emotional investment the person makes in the place (Howes & Hammett, 2016). Consequential to the investment made by people in a particular place, is that they exhibit the stronger will to participate in the development of their investment. Hence community participation is an aspect of human nature which impacts on traditional urban neighbourhoods.

5 Conclusion:

The study was carried out to understand the concept behind place attachment, as well as its contextual impact within the mutual relationship with the traditional urban built environment. Using explanatory narrative mechanism, the study was able to establish five basic facts. Firstly, despite dimensional definitional differences, the concept is universally accepted as a phenomenon related to the bond between people and places. Secondly, the phenomenon exists in various dispositions and levels. For example, a spot, a room, a house, a neighbourhood. The strength of attachment has also been shown to be related to the innate psychological benefits on that particular scale or level. It is consequently, and strongly associated with greater well-being of the people manifesting the attachment. Thirdly, the establishment of place attachment as consequential to four basic needs of man; need to belong, need for self-esteem, need for control, and need for a meaningful existence. These needs ultimately create social identities that lead to peoples' well-being, otherwise referred to as, 'social cure.' Fourthly, people's place attachment subscribes to the preservation of the socio-physical character of their environment. Besides, their place attachment subscribes to the socio-cultural and emotional attributes of that traditional environment. Fifthly, attachment to traditional neighbourhoods was shown to be higher than in new urban developments, due to satisfaction with the liveliness, neighbourliness and diversity of traditional neighbourhoods. It is therefore conclusive that, sense of place attachment has played the key role of ensuring positive continuous sustenance of traditional built environment within urban areas.

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