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Place attachment, place identity and aesthetic appraisal of urban landscape

Abstract: *As the aesthetic of the Polish cities became a topic of wider discussions, it is important to detect the potential role of human-place relations. Two studies ($N = 185$ & $N = 196$) were conducted to explore the relationship between place attachment, place identity and appraisal of urban landscape. Satisfaction with urban aesthetic was predicted by two dimensions of place attachment (place inherited and place discovered), local identity (on the trend level) and national-conservative identity. Place discovered and European identity were also predictors of visual pollution sensitivity. Place discovered is considered as more active type of attachment that permits both a positive bias concerning the aesthetics of one's city, and a stronger criticism of the elements that can potentially violate the place's landscape.*

Key words: *place attachment, place identity, urban landscape, aesthetic*

Introduction

As the public space can be considered to be a vital part of everyday urban life, its quality and esthetics deserve special attention. Despite different opinions on the level of endangerment and advancement of the processes that degrade the public space, it seems to be undisputable that an access to good-quality, well-maintained public spaces can help improve our physical and mental health (Francis, Wood, Knuiman & Giles-Corti, 2012; Sugiyama et al., 2014). The public space is a part of an urban landscape, which is crucial for both identity as well as for well-being. The character of the urban landscape can cause both positive and negative emotions, it can cause stress but it can also help dealing with it (Fornara, 2011; Galindo & Rodriguez, 2000).

The issues of the quality of public spaces and the aesthetics of cities only recently became in Poland a subject of a wider debate. After the year 1989, together with the development of a market economy we witnessed an expansion of outdoor advertising media which intensified a sense of a visual chaos. As a result of this process the number of outdoor advertising in, for example, Warsaw reached over 21 thousand (Wojtczuk, 2014). Those who attempt to reduce this practice are faced with legislative issues which limit intervention possibilities, for example in cases when the outdoor advertisement is placed on private land. Recently in some cities, in the interest of the visual environment, attempts have been made to diagnose the status quo and to study the concept of city's aesthetic

regulations. The ideas include setting up a limit for the number of outdoor media allowed in the city limits or banning signs on fences as this issue remains unregulated.

Although the objective data on the number of billboards in Poland seems to show that there is a problem with the aesthetics of the public space, the issue does not seem too important and noticeable to the general public. Filip Springer (2013), an author of numerous reports concerning the public space in Poland, suggests that the reason for this state of affairs is a low quality of art education in Poland. He points out that an average Polish pupil attends a relatively small number of hours of arts classes in his or her education years. However, this factor does not explain the diversity of aesthetic judgments. Despite the fact that empirical research indicates universality in landscape preference, I suspect that perception of landscape quality derives both from the attributes of the landscape and from the attributes of the observer.

The aesthetics of public space is an important element in assessing its overall quality, influencing how people feel in it, and how it is perceived. However, the visual aesthetic appraisal of the urban environment itself is quite a complex process, which includes perception, interpretation and appraisal (Nasar, 1994). These processes are inseparably linked to how we feel in a given environment and what meaning we give to it, which indicates the existence of significant personal component. The aim of the presented studies was to analyze, in the Polish context, the relationship between aesthetic appraisal and a number of

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measures of the relationship between a person and a place, as those seem to be important personal components of visual-aesthetic appraisal.

Place attachment and place identity

Place attachment is understood as a positive affective relationship between a person and a place, and it often translates into being proud of one's residential area and its appearance (Lewicka, 2012). Any physical attributes of the environment may be filtered through an emotional bond with the place. Literature concerning both social categorization as well as place and identity processes, clearly shows that strong identification with a social group or with a place is linked to more positive attitudes towards this group and place. Moreover, the bond with a local area impacts positively the self-esteem of the attached residents (Twigger-Roos & Uzzell, 1996). One's emotional bond to a place makes that place a part of one's conceptual and extended selves. In the field of environmental psychology, Felonneau (2004) showed that people with strong topological identity were less sensitive to urban incivilities. Research conducted by Lewicka (2012), indicated that attachment to one's surroundings correlated with perceiving them as relaxing. Furthermore, studies showed a positive relationship between the evaluation of a place and the mechanisms involved in place attachment (Brown, Perkins & Brown, 2003) and place identification (Marcouyeux & Fleury-Bahi, 2011).

On the other hand, research shows (Kyle, 2004; Vorkinn & Riese, 2001) that people who are more attached to a place, are also most likely to be its worst critics and can be more sensitive to negative changes occurring in that place. Kyle et al. (2004) found that respondents identifying with the place were more critical of the social and environmental conditions encountered along the Appalachian trail. For those respondents, disruptions in the place were viewed negatively. In a similar vein, people who are more attached are also more resistant to change in the environment and tend to prefer the status quo. Vorkinn and Riese (2011) found that attachment predicted negative attitudes towards a hydroelectric plant. The degree to which the planned change is perceived as destroying the place's identity seems to be a mediator between attachment and reactions (Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010).

Lack of clarity regarding the relationship between the concepts of place attachment and place identity requires some explanations. Many attempts were made to describe the relation between the two concepts (cf. Lewicka, 2012, for more details). Place identity is sometimes considered to be a component of place attachment (Kyle, Graffé, & Manning, 2005; Raymond, Brown, & Weber, 2010), another idea is that place attachment and place identity are two different factors of a multidimensional construct: a sense of a place (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001). Other authors treat place identity and place attachment as separate constructs (Lewicka 2012; Hernandez et al., 2007). Following this approach, place attachment refers mainly to the emotional bond to a place, whereas place identity is defined as a contribution

of place's attributes to one's self concept. Personal identity is defined in relation to the physical environment. The contributions to one's self concept come from the meanings and values symbolized by the features of a place. Hernandez et al. (2007) found that place attachment and place identity depend on one's place of origin and the length of residence. In the case of non-natives, whose place of origin is different than the place assessed, place attachment developed before place identity. Similar idea was presented in a pioneer work of Proshansky (1978, Proshansky et al., 1983) where identity was defined much wider and attachment was only a part of it. In the presented study, place identity and place attachment are also considered to be separate variables. This study uses measures developed by Lewicka (2012) and the two scales differ significantly in terms of their content. The Place identity scale was designed to measure the contribution of different levels of place category (European, national, local) when answering the question: "who am I?". The Place attachment scale was designed to measure the affective link with specific settings but it also contains behavioral and cognitive aspects. The affective link is possibly more rooted in a family context and intergenerationally transmitted (place attachment inherited) or it might be derived in a more active way through processing information, gathering knowledge and experiencing one's setting (place attachment discovered).

Lewicka's (2012) conceptualization of place attachment is derived from Hummon's (1992) types of people-place relationships. Place attachment inherited corresponds to Hummon's everyday rootedness – a characteristic of people who tend to be satisfied with the place in which they were born and raised. In contrast, place attachment discovered is the equivalent of ideological rootedness – a characteristic of people who deliberately chose their place of residence. Place attachment inherited is rather traditional and unselfconscious, whereas place attachment discovered is rather active and mobility-related. Those two forms of place attachment are linked to the two modalities of human existence – communion (place inherited) and agency (place discovered; Lewicka, 2013).

As a consequence, the role of place attachment as well as place identity in assessing the aesthetics of a place can be ambiguous. On one hand, in accordance with the theories showing that a place can be considered to be a social category and can be subjected to the same rules (for example: positive bias) as social identification (Hogg & Abrams, 1988), we can expect that both attachment and local identity should be linked to a positive appraisal of place aesthetics. On the other hand, those who are more attached to a place could be also more sensitive to visual pollution and to signs of visual chaos that affect urban landscape (such as billboards, or badly maintained buildings), because those objects may cast a negative light on the aesthetic of the city in which they live.

In the case of place identity, it was expected that local and national identity would predict a higher aesthetic appraisal of one's city. However, because strong identifications are usually linked to more favorable bias in perceiving one's place of residence (cf. Felonneau, 2004), it was assumed here that local as well as national identity

would not be linked to sensitivity to visual pollution of one's place of residence. The same predictions can be made for place attachment inherited which reflects the unselfconscious and traditional model of an affective bond to a place. Local identity, national identity and place inherited are also a part of the same cluster of psychological variables that correspond to the communion modality.

Different predictions can be made with regard to place attachment discovered which is the more active type and located in the agency cluster with variables such as cultural capital and interest in city history. I hypothesized that place attachment discovered will be linked to more ambivalent perception of one's place of residence: higher aesthetic appraisal and more sensitivity to visual pollution at the same time. Probably being a more active participant of the urban life means also being more conscious of the public space's aesthetic problems. An issue that was raised recently in numerous discussions in Poland.

Additionally, living in gated community was introduced as a potential predictor of aesthetic appraisal. An attractive architectural design of a building is emphasized by developers as one of the means to achieve a better quality of life (Gąsior-Niemiec, Glasze, Lippok and Putz, 2007). Gated communities promise to provide a high quality, secure, clean and aesthetic existence for their inhabitants. In Poland, guarded residential complexes are emerging rapidly since the year 2000 and have become a status symbol. Living in gated communities is linked to perception of the area around one's building as better maintained (Lewicka, 2012) and reflects one's aspirations for a better quality of space (Gąsior-Niemiec et al., 2007). As a consequence, I hypothesized that living in gated communities will affect the aesthetic appraisal of one's city and sensitivity to visual pollution.

The aim of the presented studies was to analyze the relationship between place attachment, place identity and aesthetic appraisal of the urban landscape. I hypothesized that aesthetic appraisal of one's city will be predicted by living in the gated community (Hypothesis 1), place attachment inherited (Hypothesis 2a), place attachment discovered (Hypothesis 2b), local identity (Hypothesis 3a), and national-conservative identity (Hypothesis 3b). In turn, discomfort at the sight of visual pollution will be predicted by living in the gated community (inversely – Hypothesis 4), and place attachment discovered (Hypothesis 5). Hypothesis 1–3 were tested in Study 1, whereas Hypothesis 4 and 5 were tested in Study 2.

Method

Study 1

Participants

The sample included 185 (119 women) participants living in the Tricity agglomeration. The study was conducted online. The University of Gdansk's students were asked to take part in the study and additionally to recruit one adult in exchange for credit points. Mean age of the participants was 24.49 ($SD = 6.61$). 32 participants lived in the gated communities.

Measures

Next to other questionnaires used for additional studies, I placed the following measures on the online platform:

- (1) Place Identity Scale (Lewicka, 2012). The scale consists of 13 identity categories, that group into 4 identity dimensions: local, national-conservative, European and nonterritorial. The participants evaluate how important, from the perspective of who they are and who they feel they are, they find such things as: the city, the region, the country or their occupation. They answer on a 5-point scale, where (1) means: not important at all, and (5) extremely important.
- (2) Place Attachment Scale (Lewicka, 2012). The scale consists of 18 items, and measures three dimensions: place inherited, place discovered and non-attachment. Sample items include: "I like to track changes that happen in my city", "This city is permanently connected to my family". Participants respond on 5-point scale anchored (1) definitely not true to (5) definitely true.
- (3) For the purpose of this study, Satisfaction with the Urban Aesthetic Scale was created (Cronbach's alpha = 0.76). The scale consists of four items: public space, the aesthetics of the city center landscape, the aesthetics of the landscape outside the city center, appearance and condition of the buildings. The participants used a 5-point scale with (0) meaning "not satisfied" and "satisfied".

Study 2

Participants

The second study included 196 (120 women) participants living in the Tricity agglomeration. The procedure resembled the one used in Study 1: the study was carried out online; the University of Gdansk's students were asked to take part in the study and to recruit one adult in exchange for credit points. Mean age of the participants was 24.62 ($SD = 7.13$). 27 of them lived in the gated communities.

Measures

Next to a number of measures used for other studies, as in Study 1, the participants filled out the Place Identity Scale (Lewicka, 2012) and Place Attachment Scale (Lewicka, 2012). For the purpose of this study, Visual Pollution Sensitivity Scale was created. Based on literature analysis (Yilmaz & Sagsoz, 2011) the elements considered to be responsible for the visual chaos was isolated. The final scale consisted of 11 items (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.90): power distribution unit, multicolored building facades, PCV banners, billboards, satellite dishes, bus/tram stops covered with advertisements, electric cables, gas stations, garages, advertisement placed on storefronts, wheelie bin stores. The participants responded to a question: to what degree does it bother you that the following items are present in your vicinity? on a 7-point scale where (0) meant "[this] does not bother me at all" and (6) "[this] bothers me very much". The descriptive statistics from Study 1 and Study 2 are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of variables

	M	SD	Number of items	Response format
PA: Place inherited	15.78	4.02	6	1–5
PA: Place discovered	19.29	4.39	6	1–5
PA: Non attachment	18.25	4.22	6	1–5
Local identity	7.09	2.70	3	0–4
Nat-conserv. identity	9.90	2.97	4	0–4
European identity	4.59	1.78	2	0–4
Non-territorial identity	8.68	1.87	3	0–4
Satisfaction with urban aesthetic	9.94	3.25	4	0–4
Sensitivity to visual pollution	28.51	14.65	11	0–6

Note: Data for Place Attachment and Place Identity Scale are aggregated from Study 1 and 2 (N = 381); PA = Place attachment, Nat-conserv = National-conservative.

Results

In Study 1, a stepwise multiple regression analysis with Satisfaction with Urban Aesthetic as a dependent variable was conducted. Demographic variables and living in gated community were entered in the first step, and the psychological variables (place attachment and place identity) – in the second one. As expected (Hypothesis 1, 2a, and 2b), living in gated community ($B = 19, p = .005$), place attachment inherited ($B = 17, p = .036$) and place attachment discovered ($B = 15, p = .041$) were significant predictors of Satisfaction with Urban Aesthetic. The significance of Local Identity (Hypothesis 3a) was on a trend level ($B = 15, p = .056$). Additionally, the National-

Conservative Identity (Hypothesis 3b) proved to also be a significant predictor ($B = 19, p = .013$) – see Table 2.

In Study 2, a stepwise multiple regression analysis with Visual Pollution Sensitivity Scale as a dependent variable was conducted. Similar to Study 1, demographic variables and living in gated community were entered in the first step, whereas psychological variables in the second. As expected (Hypothesis 5), the analysis revealed that Place Attachment Inherited ($B = 17, p = .031$), was a significant predictor of negative response to visual pollution. Contrary to Hypothesis 4, living in a gated community was not a significant predictor. Additionally, European Identity ($B = 20, p = .024$) proved to also be linked to negative reactions to sights of visual pollution – see Table 3.

Table 2. Summary of stepwise multiple regression for the prediction: satisfaction with urban aesthetic

	Step 1		Step 2	
	β	t	β	t
Age	.09	1.34	.01	.18
Sex	.10	1.46	.05	.74
Gated community	.17	2.42*	.19	2.81**
PA: inherited			.17	2.11*
PA: discovered			.15	2.05*
PA: non-attachment			.02	.30
Local identity			.15	1.92^
National-conservative identity			.19	2.50**
European identity			-.02	-.29
Non-territorial			.04	.52
Adj R ²	.033		.183	

Note: PA = Place Attachment, ^ $p < .06$; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 3. Summary of stepwise multiple regression for the prediction: sensitivity to visual pollution

	Step 1		Step 2	
	β	t	β	t
Age	.09	1.26	.11	1.48
Sex	.12	1.77	.11	1.50
Gated community	.05	.81	.02	.39
PA: inherited			-.10	-1.21
PA: discovered			.17	2.17*
PA: non-attachment			-.04	-.46
Local identity			-.02	-.23
National-conservative identity			-.02	-.33
European identity			.20	2.27*
Non-territorial			.00	.08
Adj R ²	.014		.045	

Note: PA = Place Attachment, *p < .05.

Discussion

The presented results show that despite the publicly discussed issues concerning the quality and aesthetics of the public space in Poland, the participants turned out to be relatively satisfied: mean result for the satisfaction with the city aesthetics is above the midpoint, while the mean result for the visual chaos discomfort is below the midpoint. According to prediction, living in the gated communities was a predictor of satisfaction with the urban aesthetic. This may be due to several factors as better aesthetic of this kind of neighborhood or rationalization of choosing the suburban life. Another possibility is that living in the gated communities that are situated usually in the suburbs, requires more frequent car using. For those inhabitants experiencing of the urban landscape could be limited to travel between well maintained "islands": separated zones of work, living and shopping. Therefore, they may be less affected by bad maintained buildings or neglected public space.

In the presented analysis, satisfaction with the aesthetics of the city was also predicted by affective ties with the city on two dimensions described by Lewicka (2012, 2013); place attachment inherited and place attachment discovered. Place inherited refers to more conservative ties with a place, where the fact of being rooted or grown into a place is crucial and can be inherited from previous generations. As such, the place is a part of the self, and thus it is rarely the subject of a conscious reflection or of deliberations concerning its quality; the place is given and accepted as it is, and the possibility of change is not often considered. In the context of the presented study, a higher appraisal of the aesthetics of the city can result from an implicit egotism and a positive bias towards everything that is in any way related to the self (Pelham, 2004) or that takes on an individual affective

meaning. A similar distortion was observed by Felloneau (2004) where people with high scores on topological identity underestimated any incivilities.

A more positive appraisal of the aesthetics of a city was also linked to a higher score on the scales of local (on the trend level) and national-conservative identities. It can be suspect that in both cases a place is an important part of one's identity, and it can be considered to be an element of self-categorization grounded in the local context or, in more broad terms, in the sense of belonging to the nation.

An interesting pattern of results was found for place attachment discovered. On one hand it was related to a higher appraisal of the city aesthetics, on the other with a higher sensitivity to the signs of visual pollution. Thus, an active type of attachment permits both a positive bias concerning the aesthetics of one's city, and a stronger criticism of the elements that can potentially violate the place's landscape. In this regard, a low quality of the visual landscape can be particularly unpleasant to those who are actively attached to a place, as they are more aware of the processes taking place in the city, they are more engaged in looking for and handling of information about the place, and at the same time, the place is still a significant element used to define oneself, and to categorize others.

Out of all three aspects of the place attachment, it is also the place discovered that seems to be linked to the most critical appraisal of the aesthetics of the place, however being aware of the place's weaknesses is not linked to the process of disidentification from the city. Among those with higher scores on the place discovered dimension, being aware of the negative aspects of the city and, at the same time, strongly identifying with it can lead to more active forms of reduction of discomfort caused by this discrepancy. A more detailed analysis of this relationship may be undertaken in future research.



Moreover, higher sensitivity to the signs of visual pollution was also predicted by European identity. Possibly, those for whom Europe is an important aspect of who they are and who they feel to be, are also more aware of the processes that influence the quality of public space, as this issue is widely discussed in Europe. Furthermore, in most European countries, there is a long tradition of caring about the state of the public space, thus for those who have a stronger European identity, the solutions implemented in other countries (for example the regulations concerning the number of outdoor advertising in a city) can be seen as a standard of perfection that for now remains unattainable.

Conclusions

The presented studies have some limitations due to the form used to carry them out and the sample that included only young people. However, the presented relationship between the city aesthetic appraisal and the place attachment seems promising and worthy of further exploration. The results can also be considered as a rationale to analyze the mechanisms of development of relationships with a place among city activists. If we assume that the first step to finding a solution to a problem is noticing that the problem exists, then people who are actively attached to a place, as described by the concept of the place discovered, will be more likely to work in order to improve the aesthetic of this place.

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