Definition

Place attachment is a key concept in understanding affective person-place relationships, and it provides an appropriate approach for the study of human behavior.

1. Introduction

The concept of place attachment has been studied in a variety of scientific disciplines, including environmental psychology, human geography, and sociology, over the past few decades. While it began in the research field of psychology, the concept has now also been established in other research fields, such as tourism, crisis management, and business. Depending on the research direction, different—and sometimes overlapping—terminologies are often used in this context. As a result, several definitions have emerged over the past decades, which can make a basic comparison difficult. Reference, for example, point out that terms, such as community attachment, sense of community, place attachment, place identity, place dependence, or sense of place, are used to describe place attachment. However, behind each term lies a different meaning, even if the meanings are not easy to differentiate and the concepts partly overlap. Common to all definitions is that place attachment refers to the relationship between individuals and their environment. Most definitions emphasize the emotional aspect that is associated with a specific place. In many cases, these are positive emotions such as familiarity, orientation, and security. The term place attachment was primarily coined in the context of environmental psychology. Studies in this research area analyze the extent to which an individual’s attachment to a place promotes environmentally conscious behavior. Since the 1980s, the term has increasingly appeared in the environmental literature in reference to neighborhoods, and since the 1990s, the focus of its use has been on the affective aspects between people and their environment. Place attachment is considered a key concept for capturing affective person-place relationships and it provides an appropriate approach for the study of human behavior. It is therefore valuable for researchers to follow the evolution of this psychological construct and gain new insight into its effects with and on specific behaviors.

2. Place Attachment and Behavioral Intentions

2.1. Business and Management

Studies in the business and management topic focus on areas that are actively managed by companies to increase their profits. In this case, these include advertising, brand management, and customers' loyalty and willingness to pay.

Three studies from the literature search can be assigned to the research area of business and management. Two of these focused on the connection between place attachment and online brand engagement. They found that place attachment has a positive influence on the online distribution of place brand advertising materials and on participation in online brand communities. The mediators between these relationships were place ad-brand congruity and self-expressiveness as well as service experience and brand engagement. Based on these results, it is recommended that brand managers include location-based cues in advertising. These should relate to social, functional, and cultural aspects and, as far as possible, represent that with which local residents identify. This approach could ensure that the positive effects of place attachment can be used to enhance intentions to promote the place as a brand online.
Another study by Reference [15] analyzed place attachment to explain customers’ loyalty to natural areas such as parks as well as their willingness to pay. They found that both affective (place affect) and functional (place dependence) components played important roles in increasing willingness to pay and loyalty. For park managers, this means that they should be aware of the wishes and needs of their target group in order to adapt their offers accordingly [15].

2.2. Risk and Crisis

Research in the area of risk and crisis deal mainly with place attachment in the context of risk perception.

In the study by Reference [3], place attachment was shown to have a negative influence on risk perception, while Reference [16] indicated that higher place attachment has a negative moderation effect on the positive relationship between risk perception and the intention to move away. Both studies revealed that attachment to a place and the social ties associated with it can lead to a lower perception of the risks of the place and to lower intentions to move away. This is often referred to as risk perception normalization [17]. In risk perception normalization, individuals perceive the risk associated with a place to be a part of that place; they may also develop strategies to deal with the risk to which they have voluntarily exposed themselves [18][19].

While these two studies investigated attachment to a place of residence, the work of Reference [20] additionally added attachment to the evacuation site. Using both types of place attachment, they aimed to explain the evacuation behavior of individuals who are exposed to natural environmental hazards, such as hurricanes or tsunamis, at their place of residence. While home place attachment was found to have no influence, evacuation site place attachment strengthened the intention to evacuate [20]. Place attachment thus does have an influence on risk perception and risk coping behavior.

2.3. Urban Planning

Urban planning is the generic term for all planning issues within a city. This includes, for example, the behavior of landowners, plans of residents to move in or out, and civic engagement intentions within a community.

Several studies investigated the relationship between place attachment and place-oriented behavioral intentions among landowners. Among the three dimensions of place attachment in the study by Reference [21], place identity was shown to have a positive and significant influence on place intention (i.e., the owner’s intention not to sell their land property). The other two dimensions—place functions/features and place social bonding—influenced intentions to engage in land practices such as maintaining important ecosystem features on the property or protecting native plants [21]. Accordingly, place attachment has been shown to play a special role in the development of place-based behavioral intentions in land management. A more recent study by Reference [22] confirmed these findings. They also found that higher place attachment led to both a lower intention to sell land and higher intention to leave a will to bequeath the land to their heirs [22].

Closely related to land management behavioral intentions, two of the studies were devoted to the intention to live in or move away from a particular place. Reference [23] used two variables to measure the intention to move away. These variables are mismatch (i.e., the degree to which individuals’ needs are not met in their current place) and opportunities elsewhere (i.e., the opportunities that are available to the individual in another place). Their results revealed that higher residential satisfaction leads to higher place attachment, which in turn negatively influences the intention to move away. While functional attachment (i.e., the functional and physical aspects of a place) negatively influences mismatch, cognitive attachment (i.e., experience, perception, and memory of the place) negatively influences both mismatch and opportunities elsewhere. Cognitive attachment relates to place identity, which implies that strong identification with a place through experience, memory, and knowledge will keep the individual from
moving away. In fact, it stands to reason that individuals who feel attached to a place are more likely to engage in and help shape the environment according to their own desires. Conversely, place dependence decreases if the place does not fulfill its function—in other words, if it cannot meet the individual’s needs. These individuals would then be more willing to give up their current place of residence [23]. Contrary to the work by Reference [23], Reference [24] did not study the current residents of a place; instead, they studied students’ intentions to return to their rural home villages after graduation. Among all of the explanatory variables, place attachment was found to be the strongest predictor. This illustrates that the affective component plays a larger role in the decision to return home than objective factors, such as expected income, that were also considered in their study. Based on this, it is recommended that efforts should be made to strengthen children’s and adolescents’ place attachment to their home village during the early years of education. This could be achieved, for example, by strengthening civic engagement among young people. Place attachment can be promoted by teaching social and community values in school and encouraging participation in civic activities [24].

Nevertheless, the direction of the effect between civic engagement and place attachment is not clear. While Reference [24] suggested that involvement in civic engagement activities can lead to higher place attachment, References [25][26] indicated that the relationship is reversed, holding that higher place attachment leads to higher civic engagement and loyalty to a place. Meanwhile, Reference [25] found that intervention (in this case, teaching local history) can lead to higher interest in local history, which in turn has a positive impact on place attachment. These findings are particularly relevant for urban development and for building new cities or neighborhoods. Urban planners should encourage teaching the history of a place to both the local population and to newcomers in order to increase local engagement, which can ultimately help to shape individuals’ perceptions of the place [25]. Mutually supportive neighborhoods and functioning social networks can be established if urban planners manage to create high place attachment among residents [26].

2.4. Environmental Psychology

The topic of environmental psychology examines the influence of human activity and underlying psychological concepts on the environment, e.g., the influence of place attachment on pro-environmental behaviors.

Most of the studies provided empirical evidence of a positive relationship between place attachment and pro-environmental behavioral intentions. References [8][10][27][28] used four subdimensions to measure place attachment: place dependence, place identity, place affect, and place social bonding. However, they obtained different results. The studies by References [10][28] found that place identity, place dependence, and place affect had a positive influence on satisfaction, whereas contrary to expectations, place social bonding had a significant negative effect. Reference [27], on the other hand, found that only place dependence and place identity had a significant positive effect on place satisfaction, which partially mediated the effects on pro-environmental behavioral intentions. In a similar vein, Reference [29] confirmed that place attachment has a direct positive influence on conservation intention, on the one hand, and an indirect influence via place satisfaction, on the other hand. Reference [30] measured place attachment as a three-dimensional construct with place identity, place dependence, and social bonding (here called “everybody’s happy”) to reveal that place identity was the only significant predictor of pro-environmental behavioral intentions. The strength of the effect of place identity became stronger when it was a behavioral intention that required a higher level of commitment [30]. Contrary to the findings of Reference [27], however, References [10][28] found that place identity and place dependence had no significant influence on pro-environmental behavioral intentions. Nevertheless, the studies agreed on the positive influence of place affect on both low-effort and high-effort pro-environmental behavioral intention [10][27][28]. Interestingly, References [10][28] also found that place social bonding positively influenced low-effort pro-environmental behavioral intention but negatively influenced high-effort pro-environmental behavioral intention. Finally, Reference [31] illustrated that the individual dimensions of place attachment may not have a separate influence on behavioral intention, but that place identity did
have a positive influence on place dependence, which in turn reinforces pro-environmental behavioral intentions.

2.5. Leisure

In the leisure category, the focus is on studying events such as sporting events or festivals. The included studies investigate, for example, to what extent visitors’ place attachment to an event affects their recommendation and revisit intentions.

Reference [32] drew an arc between environmental psychology and leisure by testing the influence of place attachment of outdoor sports participants on certain pro-environmental behaviors. The authors provided evidence that increasing visitation frequency of outdoor sports participants led to higher place identity and place dependence. Beyond that, however, place identity had no significant effect on the pro-environmental behaviors examined in this study, including the intention to actively engage in environmental protection, the intention to use something or visit somewhere less often so that the place can recover from environmental damage, and the intention to learn about pro-environmental behaviors and environmental protection. Place dependence, on the other hand, was found to have a significant positive influence on the first and third intentions. Furthermore, sports programs conducted outdoors were relevant to strengthening attachment to the place where the sports program was conducted. In addition, educational programs, for example, can help individuals remain informed about the status and importance of environmental protection in the context of the place in question [32].

Based on these findings, it is recommended to improve event quality standards [33][34]. A framework of education, entertainment, escape, and aesthetics could stimulate excellent festival experiences. Festival developers should focus on informing visitors about exciting place-related features (education), providing diverse entertainment programs (entertainment) and fun activities (escape), and creating an appropriate, harmonious physical environment (aesthetics) [33]. It is suggested that event planners should align their event attributes, programs, and values according to their target audience. For example, a balanced combination of sleeping, dining, shopping, and diverse programming has been shown to strengthen visitor attachment and encourage them to return [33]. Moreover, activities that bring different festivalgoers together and promote social exchange can be effective in fostering satisfaction with the co-creation experience [36].

2.6. Hospitality and Tourism

There is a positive direct or indirect relationship between place attachment and pro-tourism-related behaviors. Pro-tourism behavioral intention refers to behaviors that promote the destination, such as providing information to tourists or protecting resources that are significant for tourism [37].

The research of References [38][39][40] examined residents’ support for tourism at the destination. Reference [38] compared the influence of place attachment and place satisfaction on four behavioral intentions: participation in tourism development and planning, word-of-mouth, intention to participate as a representative of the destination (ambassador behavior) (i.e., to externalize the destination’s image and values), and intention to leave. Evaluative and interactive place attachment were found to have a significant positive influence on word-of-mouth and ambassador behavior, whereas in both cases, interactive place attachment had a stronger effect. Place satisfaction, on the other hand, was not significant for either behavioral intention. With regard to participation in tourism development, only interactive place attachment emerged as a significant predictor; it did not, however, have a significant effect on intention to leave. In contrast, place satisfaction and evaluative place attachment had a significant negative influence on leaving intention.

While some studies find that place dependence, unlike place identity, had no significant effect on pro-tourism behavioral intentions (e.g., [41][42][43]), others found a significant and even stronger effect than place identity (e.g., [44][45][46]). Reference [44] illustrated that all three types of destination images
(travel environment, natural attractions, and entertainment and events) had a positive influence on place dependence, while place identity was only significantly positively influenced by entertainment and events. Moreover, place dependence was found to be a significant predictor of both behavioral intentions (i.e., loyalty to a destination and pro-environmental behavior at a destination), while place identity only predicted pro-environmental behavioral intentions. Their study results are in line with other findings, which revealed that destination image and place attachment are positively related (e.g., [37][47][43]). Reference [43], for example, showed that destination image—consisting of cognitive image and affective image—had a significant positive effect on both place attachment dimensions (i.e., place identity and dependence) and that place dependence mediates the influence of the destination image on revisit intention. Others indicated that place image had a positive influence on place attachment, which in turn positively influenced attitude [47], revisit intention [48], intention to recommend the destination, and intention to support tourism in the destination [32][47]. Interestingly, the strength of the relationship varied between residents involved in tourism and other residents of the destination. For example, the relationship between destination image and place attachment and between destination image and intention to recommend was stronger for residents who do not work in tourism than for tourism employees [47].

Other antecedents of place attachment whose effects on behavioral intentions are mediated by place attachment include place brand credibility, celebrity attachment, environment, and benefits. Place brand credibility [49] and celebrity attachment [50] have a significant positive influence on place attachment, which in turn positively affects revisit and recommendation intention. Reference [51] examined the relationship between environment (i.e., infrastructure, atmosphere, and culture), place attachment (i.e., place identity, place dependence, social bonding, and affective attachment), and revisit intention within the framework of a stimulus–response model. They discovered that infrastructure environment and atmosphere environment were significant predictors of place attachment, while the cultural environment had no significant influence. All place attachment dimensions positively influenced revisit intention, with social bonding having the strongest effect [51]. According to Reference [52], place attachment also acts as a mediator between both desired and actually received benefits and future revisit intention.

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**Keywords**

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