

# “Sense of Place” and “Place Attachment”

(A Comparative Study)

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**ABSTRACT:** Today, concepts such as place attachment, sense of place, meaning of place, place identity, has devoted many studies in literature of architecture and urban design particularly in the field of environmental psychology. It is obvious that in all these concepts, various aspects of interaction between human and place and the impact that places have on people has been presented. This paper defines the concepts of sense of place and place attachment and explains the factors that affect them. Sense of place is a comprehensive concept which in it men feels places, percept them and attached meaning to them. Understanding the fundamental aspects of sense of place, can be effective in assess the level of public attachment to place and tendency of people to places. Place attachment refer to emotional and functional bonds between place and people which interpreted in different scale from a district to a country in Environmental psychology. In this regard different studies point to varied of spatial and human factors. Review the literature, this paper achieves a comprehensive definition of these concepts and then it try to compare them to find their relationship. What will come eventually is that place attachment is one of the sense of place subsets. Thus in encounter of people and place if assume people sense of place a general feeling to that place, place attachment is a positive emotion which people have about the place.

**Keywords:** *Place, Sense of place, Place attachment.*

## INTRODUCTION

Study about place and its experience circumstance has been the subject of many research in the past 20 years and in this regard researchers were looking for discovering the impact of place on people and their quality of life. In some studies prevalence of depression, grief and emotional damages caused by “placelessness” and loss of the land has been pointed which perhaps its reason is “placelessness” and lack of people in attention to management of space. In the recent years with the development of human societies and changes in their lifestyles, the attention of architects and designer and planners, has been increased and the role of design as a tool to shape the environment and respond to the human expectations has a greater importance for them. In this regard a lot of research has been done on how the built environment on human behavior and various theories have been proposed.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In recent decades the concept of sense of place has been investigated in geography, architecture and urban design. The term of sense of place have different meanings in the fields of sociological, cultural and psychological sciences. Relation between the concept of sense of place and perception issues, identity, social attachments makes its research difficult. Sense of place is a factor that converts the space into a place with special behavioral and emotional characteristics for individuals. Among other concepts which the literature of contemporary

architectural and urban design environmental psychology has pointed it, is the concept of place attachment. Before the 70<sup>th</sup>, emotional attachment to physical place wasn't subject of researches. In the last 25 years, factors such as personal space, territory, function of space for groups, meaning of place and such it were the subject of people and places relation researches (Altman and Low, 1992). Increasing attention to the impact of culture on places, growing interest in the social effects of places such as the design for the older people, children, homeless people and various social groups, due to that sense of place is axis of many researches. Many studies have been done in the area of attachment to place in which concepts such as ownership (Bondi, 1993), memories of childhood (Marcus, 1995; Marcus, 1999; Chawla, 1992), different scales of place from home to neighborhood have been studied. Given the importance of these two concepts in environmental psychology studies, this paper is followed by a comprehensive definition of this concept in architecture and urbanism literature and explains the parameters that affect them. In final, it looks for the relationship between these two concepts.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Environmental psychologists and human Geography researchers are over the decades that study the relationship between places and human emotions. Some scholars how have considered place based theories, believe that the meaning has attributed to places and that place has been created in

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emotional relationship between people and places. Some researchers modified this relationship based on the human daily life; this attitude is the origin of phenomenology of place. As Tuan believed, each geographical place has a character and spirit that is related to its natural Properties. The concept of place is attributed to humankind. Reduction of this concept to a symbolic meaning which is important for some contemporary architects, Prevented from addressing the concepts that people are experiencing in their lives. It is not just a visual experience while is associated with all our senses with places (Tuan, 1974). As Tuan believed, the structure of place without people is just only a geographical location and the concept of place is signified only with existence of human. He defined the place in tow general status: first are general symbols and tow is people’s experiences. The first definition is affected by spatial structures and second definition is affected by people routine experiences. Tuan names the second definition as place, so the meaning of place is going to be so important for him. What is significant in Tuan literature is the concept of “Topophilia”. This concept implies a strong link between person and environment in terms of mental, emotional and cognitive (Tuan, 1977). Attachment to places is one of most important concepts in relationship between place and people. Researchers name this concept in relation with place when people have a positive sense about it. In this process, when place become important for them, it lead to attachment to place (Seamon, 1993). Altman believes that attachment to place is beyond emotional or cognitive experience of place and in this relation, human cultural beliefs are affective too. He also believes that this relationship occurs in the life time and this long time experience of place can be led to such emotional bond (Altman and Low, 1992).

Place, in some studies, mentioned to the quality of place or personal valuable Judgment about physical properties of place which is used in contrast with “placelessness” (Vitterso et al, 2001). In general, place is a space which take meaning in cultural, individual and social process (Altman and Low,1992). In fact people change space to the concept of place based on their social bonds, feeling and emotions (Stedman, 2003a). Gieryn explains place in three characters as; geographical location, physical parameters and identity which is composed of meaning and value (Gieryn, 2000). According to Relph and Canter ideas, places are composed of three characters as formal characters, activities inside it and their meanings (Relph, 1976; Canter, 1977a). Nevertheless, formation of places is a social process which is derived from social

interactions and activities inside it. Places have an effective role in the promotion of social ties in urban communities. In this regard, Low and Altman mention that places are a container for cultural, social and individual relationship (Altman and Low, 1992).

#### Forms of Interaction between Humans and Places

In general, interaction between humans and places is in three dimensions: Cognitive, behavioral and emotional. Cognitive aspects of the interaction are led to spatial perception and during that, people know the environmental elements and use them to navigate their way. Behavioral aspects of the interaction are mentioned to activities and functional relationship between people and environment. Emotional interaction with place points to satisfaction and attachment to place (Altman and Low, 1992). This relevance can be so strong that create a tie between individual and components. In this regard, people experiences are the main tools of their perception. As mentioned in above table, cognition interaction pointed to formal aspects of places. In behavioral interaction, perception of the functional aspects and the types of activities on the environment are considered. Finally, in relation to emotional interaction, emotional and meaning of places are considered.

#### Different Scales of Human Interaction with Places

Shamai defines five scales for places which demonstrate sense of place in association with individual. In this regard, Place attachment points to a complex relationship between a person and place. In this scale, place have meanings for people and its differentiation with other places being felt. Coalesce with purposes of place: Represents continuity and blend of individual with places. Being in place: this scale is related to actual behavior of individuals. Sacrifice for place: This level is the highest level of sense of place and people have the deepest commitment to place. In this scale, people release their individual interests for larger interests of place (Shamai, 1991). Cross defined sense of place as a combination of relationship with place and social activities. He clustered the relationships with place in biographical, spiritual, ideological, narrative, commoditized and dependent (Cross, 2001). Hummon differentiated between a numbers of different types of senses of place in a study on community sentiment. These included rootedness, alienation, relativity, and place lessness. Hummon noted people’s satisfaction, identification, and attachment to communities caused different kinds of sense of place which vary among people (Hummon, 1992).

Table 1: Different aspects of human interaction with the environment and its association with different components of places

	Type of Relationship	Details of Relationship	Place components
interaction between humans and places	Cognitive	General perception in order to understand the geometry of space and orientation	Form
	Behavioral	Perception of space capabilities to obviate the needs	Function
	Emotional	Perception of satisfaction and attachment to place	Meaning

Table 2: Categories of approaches in relation to the places

Approach	Main considerat		Theorist
Phenomenological	The spirit of place, the concept of inside and outside,	Subjective	Norberg- Schulz, Relph
Critical	Consideration of economic and socio-cultural structures	-	Messy
Positive	Addressing to physical and functional components of place	objective	Canter

### Categorizing Different Approaches to the Concept of Place

Literature about the concept of place leads to three approaches: Phenomenological, Critical and Positivist (Lalli, 1992). The phenomenology of place is based on Husserl (1983) viewpoints. Most of research area are influenced by these approach. Subjectivism and phenomenological interpretations about places, although are expressed so strong and clear, have been accused to individual experiences and disability of generalization. Versus positive approaches, which are confirmed to environmental behavioral studies, try to generalize the place base theories from individual experiences. They are known by examination of traditional assumptions and quantitative methods.

### Sense of Place

In recent decades, the concept of sense of place has been investigated in geography and in architectural and urban design research. The term of sense of place have very broad and diverse implications in the field of scientific, sociological, cultural and psychological researches. Inter-relation of sense of place whit concepts and perception, identity, social attachments and other implications of psychology makes its study so difficult. Sense of place is a concept which is changing a typical space to place with special behavior and sensory characteristics for certain people. It meant connect to place by understanding of everyday activities and symbols associated to it. This sense can be created in an individual living place and be expanded along he/her life (Relph, 1976). Individual and collective values influence on a sense of place and also sense of place affected on individual behavior and social values and attitudes. People usually participate in social activities according to their sense of places (Canter, 1977b).

Sense of place is the relationship between man, his image and environmental characteristics. This concept on the one hand is rooted in subjective experience of people (memories, traditions, history, culture, and society) and in other hand is affected from objective and external influences of the environment (landscape, smell, sound) that these lead to various association of a place. So sense of place is a complex concept of emotion and attachment to the human environment which is created from people adoption and use of places. This means that sense of place is not predetermined phenomenon, but is created from interaction between people and places. Thus people give some preconceived images to places which live in there.

### Factors in Forming a Sense of Place

As mentioned above, sense of place is a subjective perception of people about their environment and their conscious feeling about places. So sense of place has both descriptive and emotional aspects of the environment experiences. It means that the concept of sense of place is both a psychological and physical concept. An environment is composed of a combination of physical and social parameters. Thus The relationship between people and place is mutual. People take different meanings (positive or negative) from the places and then convey some meaning to it. According to Steele, sense of place is the experience of all that things which people Induce to places. Therefore, in literature review, it is clear that the factors which create a sense of place, are divided into two categories: cognitive and perceptual factors; physical characteristic (Steele, 1981).

In this regard, Cognitive factors include the meanings which people percept from a place. So we can't call sense of place

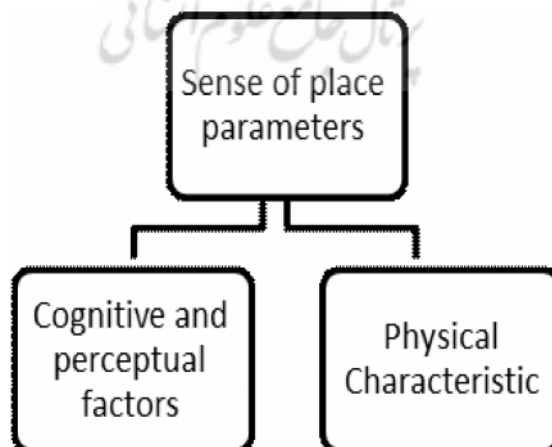


Fig. 1 : Sense of place factors  
(Source:Steele,1981)

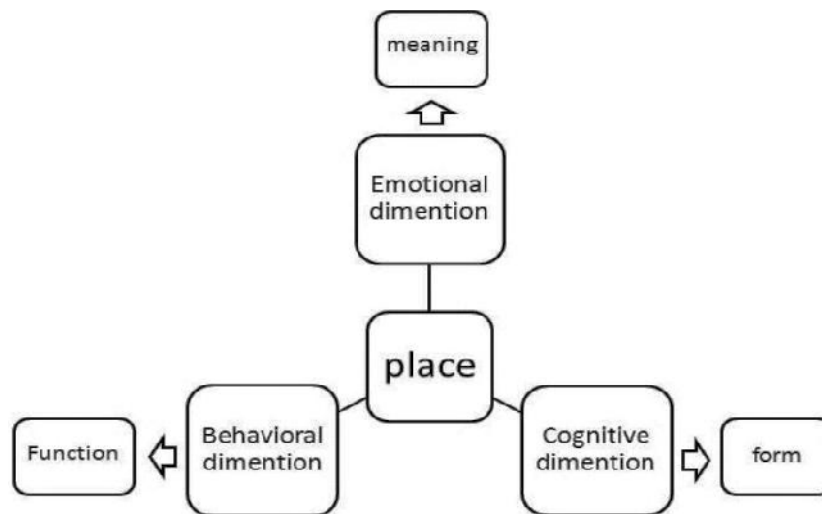


Fig. 2: Dimensions of creating places  
 (Source: Jorgensen,2001; Canter, 1977b)

just as an emotional sense about one place. It is a cognitive structure which one person can give a linkage to his/her meanings. So this definition that sense of place is an emotional connection between people and place, has been created based on this cognitive theory. As a result, it can be picked up that between different people, depending on their experiences, their motivations, their intellectual background, and physical characteristics of the environment, different senses have been created. In another research, Jorgensen (2001) in his studies on the theory of “attitude”, defines three dimensions for place. People’s feelings about place are sign of emotional dimension, their beliefs about place shape the cognitive dimension and their function in a place is a symbol of behavioral dimension of place (Jorgensen, 2001). So the creating elements of a place as form, function and meaning (Canter, 1977b) are corresponding to cognitive, behavioral and emotional dimension.

The literature review shows that physical characteristics of environment, not only are lead to differentiate between different places but also effect on the meaning which people percept from those. Steele explains the physical parameters which effect on sense of place as: Size, Scale, Components, Diversity, Texture, Decoration, Color, Odor, Noise, Temperature. He also explain that Identity, History, Fun, Mysterious, Pleasant, Wonderful, Security, Vitality and memory also has an effect on the way people communicate with places (Steele,1981). As mentioned in literature, physical parameters in addition to respond the existing functions in place, by creating meaning, cause the formation of sense of place. In this regard, legibility and people satisfaction of environmental elements are assumed as influential factors. By understanding the meanings, concepts, symbols and identity, a cognitive connection with place has been formed. Stedman believe that since the concept of sense of place is an ambiguous concept and it is very difficult to define and measure it, so suggests the concept of place attachment to measure it.

#### Different Scales of Sense of Place

Stedman described sense of place as a collection of symbolic meanings, attachment, and satisfaction with a spatial setting help by a group or individual. Reviewed literature reveal that

sense of place has different levels (Stedman, 2002). Hummon differentiated between a numbers of different types of senses of place in a study on community sentiment. These included rootedness, alienation, relativity, and placelessness. Hummon noted people’s satisfaction, identification, and attachment to communities cause different kinds of sense of place which vary among people (Hummon, 1992). In other study Cross defined sense of place as a combination of relationship with place and social activities. Cross clustered the relationships with place in biographical, spiritual, ideological, narrative, commoditized and dependent (Cross, 2001). Shamai determined three major - belonging to a place, place attachment and commitment toward a place stages. Shamai further categorized it into seven levels (Shamai,1991):

Knowledge of being located in a place: in this level people are familiar with the place; they identify the symbols of the place but they do not have any particular emotional connection to the place and its symbols. Therefore, they do not integrate themselves with the place.

Belonging to a place: in this phase, people not only are familiar with the place but they have an emotional connection with the place. In this stage, people distinguish the symbols of the place and in contrast to the previous stage those symbols are respected.

Attachment to a place: people have a strong emotional relationship with the place. The place is meaningful and significant to people. In this regard, the place has unique identity and character to the users via its beloved symbols.

Identifying with the place goals: in this level, people are integrated with the place; moreover the goals of the place are recognizable by the people. The users also are very satisfied with these goals; hence they have a deep attachment to the places.

Involvement in a place: in this level people have an active role in the place. They would like to invest their own resources such as money, time, or talent in the activities of the place. Therefore, as opposed to previous levels that were mostly based on attitude, this stage is probed mainly through the real manners of the people.

Sacrifice for a place: this level is the last and also the highest point of Sense of place. Deepest commitment to a place is the



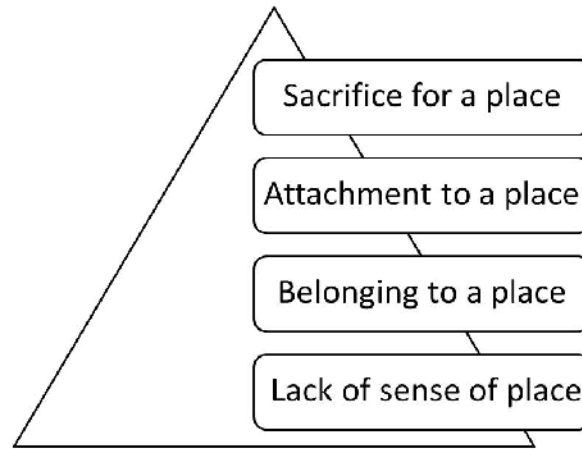


Fig. 3: Different scales of sense of Place (Source:Shamai,1991)

main aspect of this phase. People would like to sacrifice of important attributes and values such as prosperity, freedom, or, life itself.

#### Place Attachment

Place attachment mentioned to the emotional impact of one place that people are attracted to it by emotional and cultural bonds. In fact place attachment is a symbolic relationship with the place which is formed by giving the emotional meanings and common sense to a particular place or territory and that explain how people percept of places and how they relate to their (Altman and Low, 1992). Place attachment is one dimension of total place sensitivity and positive emotional attachment that develop between place and individual (Stedman, 2003b) and clarify ones sensitivity to especial geographical situation that bond individual to place sensitively. In fact a positive experience of place is the consequence of positive beliefs and emotions that individual create in interaction with place and giving meaning to it (Rubinstein, 1993). In this process, people develop their relationship with others and place. There is direct relationship between place attachment rate and his interest to place, that is when somebody attach a place, he care more about it (Mesch and Monar,1998). This is raised from activities and interaction between human-place and human-human in a special place. (Relph,1976; Altman and Low, 1992) and with bilateral interaction of feelings, knowledge, believes and behaviors with especial place (Proshansky et al.,1983).

Place attachment, at the same time is the emphasis on emotional communication with place based on itself and when interaction took place during facing with place, it is based on attachment theory and belonging to society setting than mere devotion to place (kyle et al., 2004), so that this word is equal with social attachment and place sensitivity. Shumaker et al. also express this word as positive emotional dependence between place and person in neighborhood units that social groups, physical appropriateness, individual personality and perceived position of place where people live play important role in it (Shumaker and Taylor,1983).

Place attachment was build due to individuals interest, understanding and experience to place based on various

personal, group and cultural features and social communication among them (Altman and Low, 1992). In fact, this affair formed based on behavioral, emotional and cognitive interactions among people, groups and social-physical places consciously or unconsciously (Brown and Perkins, 1992), also, it was established between individuals emotional relationship between people and place based on how people judge, prefer and understand or perceive a place (Riley, 1992). Benito also defined place attachment as emotional dependency to special place and convert person to an element of place identity and claimed that this case emerged in psychological and social process setting between person and place and its results in place sense and dependence (Sime, 1986). Jean Jacob in this case, in addition to point about place attachment as a deep human characteristic, suggest that people when face some of these places express that “ I belong to it.” And so they give it home identity (Layder, 1993).

#### Place Attachment Affective Factors

A review of literatures about place attachment might classify factors which influenced on creation or promotion of place attachment that comes in follow:

**Physical factors:** Many researches performed in place attachment field that relied on physical place. These researches attempt to answer these question; which place is more important to people? Why? Results show that both physical and social features play the same roles in creation of place attachment. Stedman (2003a) studied physical place role on place attachment and pointed to direct role of it on satisfaction and its indirect role on place attachment, at the same time, it deviate from place symbolic meaning. Other features that have been indicated includes: place setting and bed, facility and services, place status in urban setting, and its relationship to environment and other features.

**Social factors:** Basically, environment psychology is not only related to physical place but also includes social dimensions too. Positive relationship between physical place and personal satisfaction related to social communications, so that in social experiments and interaction that took place facilitate meaningfulness that place given for individuals. Therefore, two important features are: place attachment related

to home, common diary and time. Physical qualities which are formed just one dimension of it. Thus, social communication importance never must be ignored. So that some researchers believe that place attachment based on people participation, social network engagement and cultural interactions, there are equal or more importance than physical place. Place attachment develops with people positive interaction and social compatibility in place and place attachment power has direct relationship with these communication power and rate.

**Cultural factors:** Groups, families and society members and similar cultures are common in place attachment. Place attachment related to those activities that people do in their cultural requirement setting

**Personal factors:** Place attachment is different among people. People select and attach place due to their conscious tendencies that result from personal characteristics and factors. Individualism is more important factor in social orientation and how to develop intimacy of social communication that known as mental identities based on initial tendencies. "place reflect identities, differences and competitions in different groups based on gender, class, race, ethnic, and culture and indicate individual political tendencies, power, liberty, interest and social system and common interests in consumption motives".

**Memories and experiences:** Totally, place attachment took place when people experienced powerful, long period of time in that place and in this process, place serve vast meaning. Tuan (1974) pointed to a factor like root in place that is correlation and integrity of person and place. Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001) in their study of place attachment found that, place attachment deviated from development period memories and communication took place in areas not just a simple mere place. He believes that we remember a place that we experience and favorite adventures and place is part of our experiences and might be a symbol of that experience. Amongst, Marcus (1992) studied place memoires from students painting, adult remember their childhood and elders from their residential memoires. Due to his view, people build sense of identity within themselves based on social communication experience and place of events and based on them, people form their dreams. Reflection of this feeling reflected in selected residence and memories about people and places they remember because feeling took place within place and in such emotional communication with place every one experienced differently. In fact, person-place relationship is an interaction process rather cause and effect. Childress (1994, 73) in his study of place attachment in children said "place attachment might have permanent effects on children life because it contributes in child's life quality". Also, he points in his studies that in place, assessment, children never point body or physical needs but pointed to qualities like appropriate mental image of place.

**Place satisfaction:** Emotional relationship person and place depends his place satisfaction and how it assess, and its rate depends on person perceptions of place and place satisfaction and quality and security (physical, social, emotional) that such a perception are conscious, unconscious, objective, subjective, personal or social and results in security and conservation and development of place. Attachment theory showed that not only urgently but probably it took place to meet people needs and expectations about place. Therefore, one most important dimension must be explained was place satisfaction, as place need expectation met, development

probability more appropriate emotional relationship increase in fact, place satisfaction is place attachment. So that in some students, factors influenced on place attachment and place dependencies and satisfaction are equivalent, an example is Benito et al. work in 1999. Place attachment theory indicate that people place attachment developed based on their place expectation due to previous experience and their cognitive process and place satisfaction depends on the cognition. Satisfaction factor depends on factors like facilities, place adaptation, with performance and setting sustainability, visual characteristics and management, place economic values, resident's image of similar unit and place social setting and architecture and urban planning features, social communication, background features.

**Interaction and activity features:** One important factor of place that play important role in promotion of place attachment are activities and interaction between human-place and human-human interactions. In fact, these cases rooted in individual interaction with social and physical place in form of meaning, behavioral and emotional and cognitive interactions result in place attachment, in turn, place activities results in place meaning and finally place meaning cause place attachment. Studies showed that place attachment promoted even with periodical celebration and events or permanent activities dominated on places, so that, in some intercultural studies, festivals, celebrations, story activity featured as more important factors in different cultures attraction to people.

**Time factor:** As mentioned before, time factor or residency in long time increase place attachment and many researchers supported this finding. Time factor is raised as deterministic features of place attachment among children and individuals and it was studied in both process and attachment rate.

## CONCLUSION

As obtained from literature, place sense is some kind of people sense to especial place that form by place-person interaction. Also in other related research, this point is significant, physical factors, activities and related concepts with these places are complex factors that influence in place sense configuration together with place-person interaction they combined and place sense created. In other words, other literature confirms emotional place-person interaction. This case based on previous life experience, and personal, sensitive, cognitive, and behavioral structures. Because people made social, sensitive, cognitive, behavioral plan and classified and organized all their new experiences based on this plan and perceptions and also memorize all of them and conducting aspirations person behavior perceive it due to this self-plan. During self-made process, people needs and expectations were stabilized and when an entity or subject met these needs, people feel relieve and security and continue met his needs subjectively or objectively and result in aspiration and attachment of living together.

Based on above mentioned materials, in dealing with a physical place and observing its prevalent performances and knowledge about its dominant meanings, human being create sensitive relationship with place, in turn, this feeling is a basis to define person condition in place and descriptive of person behaviors in place and their interaction. It's evident that as person cognition about that place features (physical, performance and meaning) increase, place sense of person get stronger and effective. But the significant point is person

sense to that place. And in turn different factors like age, sex, knowledge degree, experiences, culture and tendencies play significant roles in forming this sense. Therefore, a set of these factors result in person different sense and reactions due to different places and in turn these senses might be positive or negative. If people have negative sense about a place he might be indifference to that place or he might avoid it, while, when people feel positive sense to a place it means that he love that place and wanted to be there and communicate with it. Therefore fate of place gets important for him and he feel responsible about that place. It is clear that, if person spent much time in that specific place and shape more communication, his emotional feeling toward that place increase too. In this case place attachment is created.

Based on what mentioned above, place attachment id subdivision of place sense. Thus, in place-person interaction, if person s place sense preserve as the whole sense toward that place, then place attachment is a positive feeling of person toward that especial place.

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