



Global Journal of Scientific Researches

Available online at gjsr.blue-ap.org

©2017 GJSR Journal. Vol. 5(4), pp. 75-81, 30 July, 2017

E-ISSN: 2311-732X

Investigating place attachment in residential areas

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Received: 20 June, 2017

Accepted: 1 July, 2017

Published: 30 July, 2017

ABSTRACT

We all have experienced emotional bonds with some places that could have been positive or negative, pleasant or unpleasant; a place that is in relation to our present, past or even future experiences, a place where we desire to live in, where we would like to go or get back. In fact, we confirm not only the existence of such emotional bonds with places but also their significance in the quality of our lives. Environmental psychologists have studied this bond between individuals and place as "place attachment", and they desire to enhance the sense of belonging, security, identity and environmental perception in individuals, in addition to the sense of satisfaction with their residence. The research method was analytical-descriptive, and data was collected through documents, records and field observation. The findings of this research show that the factors affecting place attachment in residential areas in both physical and social dimensions (ordered according to their significance and priority of impact) are physical desirability and climate comfort, facilities and amenities, readability and orientation in the environment, aesthetics values and environmental attractiveness, privacy, personalization and space attachment, place recognition and perception, place's sociability and space activity. Therefore, achieving design criteria to enhance the mentioned factors and deploying them for improving the quality of architectural environments will lead to place attachment in residential areas.

Keywords: *Sense of place, Residential areas, Place perception, Environment.*

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INTRODUCTION

Although life is mobile and unstable, regardless of living conditions, human's bond with place has an effective role in his life. Not only is the existence of emotional bonds between person and place obvious; but also, its importance in improving the quality of human life, whether positive or negative, is highly considerable. This emotional bond affects both personal and individual life and whole human community. Perhaps the feeling of dependence, community and unity or disagreement, hatred and hostility between humans is rooted in places (Giuliani, 2003).

We all have experienced emotional bonds with some places that could have been positive or negative, pleasant or unpleasant; a place that is in relation to our present, past or even future experiences (a place where we desire to live in, where we would like to go or get back), and of course, it is enclosed in a certain scale, like the house in which we live or have been lived, a special room in a house, the area around a house, neighborhood, town or country.

Each of us is familiar with the particular aspects of this emotional world which can possess a bit discrepancy. In fact, we affirm not only the existence of such emotional bonds with the places, but also their impacts (whether positive or negative) on the quality of our lives. This is reflected in our personal and private lives and also in our interactions with all human groups.

Thereupon feelings and emotions are somehow related to places and can be considered as a part of the nature of places. Although, this relationship is not fully defined and is definitely distinct from other emotional systems (regarding feelings toward objects, individuals, etc.), but this is known as one of the important factors in maintaining our physical and mental balance. This deeply explains choosing this topic as a scientific research and makes it vital to investigating into the existence of such emotional bonds with places and gaining scientific knowledge about this phenomenon.

Problem statement

The physical environment in which we live is of paramount importance to give a meaning and sustainability to our lives. Typically, people find a lot of emotional attachment to their living place (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983). Attachment to places also affects social relationships. In fact, as suggested by Altman and Low (1992), the place should be considered as a container in which interpersonal, social and cultural relationships occur, and these relationships give rise to human attachment to these places.

The purpose of each design project or any change in surroundings is to achieve a desirable environment. As the desirability of an environment is a relative, subjective and dynamic concept rooted in the ideals, attitudes, and perceptions of the user and formed by the interaction between individuals and the environment (in other words, it is created by comparing the human perception of the environment with his ideals); Hence, the positive connection between man and place is the source of human satisfaction from the environment and guarantees the promotion of the quality of human life (Bonaiuto et al., 2003). Environmental psychology has studied this emotional interaction between individuals and place as "place attachment", and they desire to enhance the sense of belonging, security, identity and environmental perception in individuals, in addition to the sense of satisfaction with their residence.

Research questions or hypothesis

- What are the factors affecting the attachment of an individual to a place?
- What are the physical components that affect the formation and promotion of the attachment to a place in residential areas? What is the significance and priority of these components?

Place attachment

This is the result of emotional, cognitive and behavioral interaction of people with a place. The emotional interaction is related to the individual's feelings and excitements and also their psychological situations. The cognitive interaction depends on the perception and recognition of a place by an individual, and the activity-behavioral component in the place reflects the various choices that individuals are facing in order to achieving their goals (Low & Altman, 1992:6). Based on these interactions between individuals, groups, and socio-physical locations (consciously and unconsciously and over time), a relationship is created between a person and a particular place; this emotional relationship is influenced by the judgments and preferences of individuals based on their past experiences (Brown & Perkins, 1992:280).

Bonaiuto and his colleagues define the attachment to the place as an emotional attachment to a particular place that turns the person into a part of the place identity. They claim that this occurs in a framework of a socio-psychological process between an individual and a place, and as a result, a feeling and interest in the place will be created (Bonaiuto et al, 1999:322). In this regard, Jacobs, while referring to place attachment as a profound human characteristic, states that people in the face of some places express "I belong to it" and thus give it the concept of a home (Jacobs, 1995:109).

In summary, the concept of place attachment can be interpreted as the conscious- evaluative emotional bond between a person and a place, and then with its associated community, culture, natural and human-made environment. In this way, attachment will be the result of emotional, cognitive, social, cultural, and behavioral factors, which are grounded with positive and negative evaluative attitudes to a place and the increased awareness of a particular situation. This attachment is reinforced through sequential interaction with that place and is promoted by the physical qualities of it, and ultimately prompts the person to act in a sympathetic and caring way with the place.

Research progress on emotional bonds with places

Since the 1980s, the concept of place attachment has traditionally been used in environmental literature, especially with reference to the home and the neighborhood, although it still was a marginal role. It was not until 1990s that the emotional dimensions of the relationship between an individual and an environment was discussed as the main issue.

- Attachment and environmental quality (Satisfaction)

One part of the research in which the concept of attachment was considerably introduced in the 80's was the assessment of the residential environments quality. Attention to the concept of attachment comes from agreeing on two fields of research. On one hand, in sociology and socio-psychology, as already mentioned, one accepted emotional dimension is the local community (Unger and Wandersman, 1985). As a result, a large number of studies has been devoted to identifying the relationship between individual characteristics, socio-physical context and behavioral responses in relation to the development of emotional bonds.

On the other hand, the main issue in environmental psychology is the search for environmental quality indicators that are sensitive to the needs of "residents", and this accepts the psychological complexity of the relationship between the individual and the environment. Considering that the satisfaction index leads to individuals having more tendency to a residential environment (Weideman and Anderson, 1985; Francescato et al., 1989), but attachment provides a more comprehensive indicator with the ability to deal with emotional and behavioral dimensions beyond a mere emotional response, and this is ranked above satisfaction. This relationship affects people in a profound and lasting way and is not interchangeable with another one having the same functional quality; and it also plays a determining role in the enjoyment and continuity of human presence in the place.

Attachment and territoriality

As explained before, in identity and satisfaction models, emotional connections are formed from an assessment of the agreement between the physical and mental needs and the characteristics of the environment. The emotional dimension plays a more central role in the human territoriality model described by Altman (1975). Territorial behavior or territory control is not an instinctive behavior in this model, but a tangible behavior in relation to social laws whose main function is to regulate social interactions. Brower¹ (1980) defines human territoriality as the relationship between a person or a group and a particular physical condition that is determined by the sense of ownership and efforts to control space (Brower, 1980: 180). Attachment is included in this definition with the two factors of "defense" and "residence". In fact, attachment is defined as a sense of ownership that residents have towards a certain territory, because it is connected to their social identity (Brower, 1980: 192).

A closer look at the emotional dimensions of human territoriality can be found in Brown's studies (1987). The main function of this territoriality, in addition to regulating the social system, is the expression of individual and group identity, which is not so much in the form of occupancy and control behaviors but in the personalization of space, which results in the formation or intensification of emotional bonds between occupants and the territory. In fact, territorial behavior is a mechanism for regulating the privacy between oneself and others that is expressed by personalizing a place and its belonging to an individual or group. Territories are classified as primary, secondary and public in terms of both occupancy and defense, as well as of psychological centrality.

The primary, secondary and general realms are categorized according to their type of habitation and how they are defended, as well as psychological orientation: the primary realms are capable of expressing individual identity and are characterized by a deeper attachment feeling, while the secondary realms of social or group identity are expressed. Primary territories are able to express individual identity and are characterized by stronger sense of attachment, while secondary territories tend to express a social or group identity.

Attachment and the meaning of place

The study of meaning from different perspectives suggests that this concept is the all subjectivities creating a stimulus for an observer when he compares it with his own experiences, goals, and purposes (Rapoport, 1990). Therefore, the meaning of a place is an outcome of different factors resulting from the interaction of man and place.

One of the categories in regards to the different levels of interaction between man and the environment is presented by James Gibson, which has six levels of meaning and the hierarchy of increasing levels, and it includes the meaning of the environment from the stages of perception to the relationship with non-spatial values and concepts. Levels of meaning, based on his belief, include immediate and elementary meanings (reflecting obvious physical characteristics), functional meanings (reflecting the function and usefulness of the phenomenon), instrumental means (responsive to special intentions and uses), value and emotional meaning (reflecting emotional understandable aspects of phenomena), sign meaning (reflecting symbolic aspect of the phenomenon) and symbolic meaning (Gibson, 1950).

Here, it is possible to address a correspondence between Gibson's levels of meaning and the stages of forming the environment meaning based on the Lynch's theory. Thus, the perception of immediate-elementary meanings can be considered corresponding to the identification, recognition, differentiation and linkage between the components and elements of the environment which, according to Lynch, are mainly related to the understanding of the physical characteristics of the environment. Likewise, the perception of functional-instrumental meanings can be considered corresponding to the stage of communication and the link between the environment and its related activities. It also seems that the perception of value and emotional meanings, as well as sign and symbolic meanings, are consistent with the stage of linking with events, place and time, and relation to non-spatial concepts and values.

To conclude from the discussion, it can be suggested that there are two kinds of meaning; the first one consists of "the meaning in the human's mind" and is influenced by the values and socio-cultural factors, and the second one includes "the meaning of the place" and is related to the environmental and physical characteristics. Therefore, the latter is somehow influenced by values too, because although natural places have hidden meanings from the beginning, human-made places are highly influenced by the values of the society.

The models presented in the theoretical field of place attachment

Below are the most important models of place attachment that have had the greatest impact on the field of this research. They have been selected based on the aspect of time to be used in the formulation of a suitable conceptual framework for this research.

• **The model of Low and Altman (1992)**

Low and Altman are among the earliest and the most important thinkers in the field of environmental psychology about place attachment. According to them, attachment to the place has two main components: physical attachment and social attachment. The physical attachment refers to the sense of having roots with the emphasis on the place's age and the time of familiarity with it, and the social attachment is related to the relationship and interaction with individuals and groups that are present in the place. This bond is realized in the context of emotional and cultural attachment. Although Rogers and Lavaroks (1981) had already identified these two dimensions of attachment to residential places, and later, other researchers such as Taylor (1985) also confirmed these two indexes of attachment to the places.

This model refers to the formation of attachment, based on the type of person-place interaction (emotional, cognitive and behavioral), place (scale, specificity and tangibility), different attachment belongings (individual, group and cultural), different social relationships (individual, group, and cultural) and the aspect of time (linear and distant).

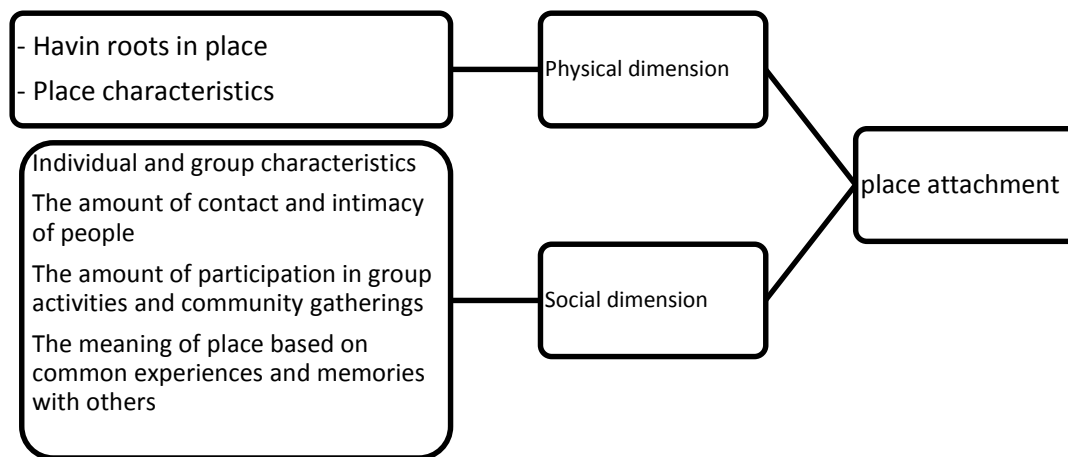


Figure 1. Altman and Low's model for place attachment (Altman &Low,1992)

• **The model of Williams (1992)**

In the field of sociology, Williams presented a two-dimensional model, including place identity and place dependence. According to him and his colleagues, place attachment has two main components. Functional or purpose-oriented dimension referring to place dependence, and then the symbolic or emotional dimension that leads to place identity. Place identity is defined by referring to the individual himself as a combination of a particular physical body and symbolic relationships with a place that reveals to the individual "who he is" and, accordingly, the person sees himself as a part of the place; therefore, the place identity is considered as a kind of emotional and symbolic attachment to a place. Place dependence also refers to the functional relationships of a setting indicating its physical capabilities to provide conditions and support for specific uses and activities. The place dependence is defined by the three following dimensions:

- 1- The ability to respond to the needs of an individual, or in other words, the opportunities that a place provides to meet the needs and goals of an individual (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981: 441-88), which also suggests the existence or possibility of participating in specific activities in the place (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2001; Hammitt et al, 2004).
- 2- Sensual impacts of a place: positive or negative feelings related to a place (Rosenburg & Hovland, 1960).
- 3- The amount of the previous experiences of an individual from a location based on:
 - The number of previous experiences from similar places
 - The frequency of attendance at the place
 - The amount of stops in the place.

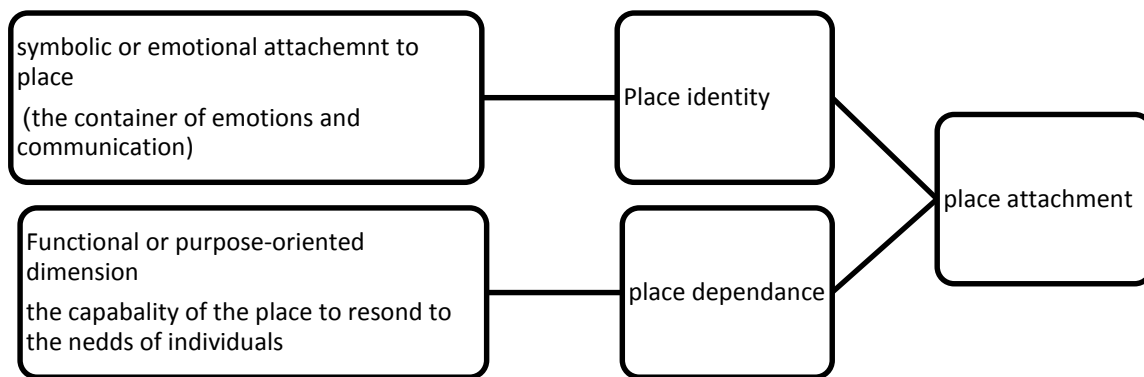


Figure 2. The model of Williams for place attachment (Williams et al ,1992)

• **The model of Kyle (2005)**

Kyle and his colleagues deployed William's idea (1992) and his two-dimensional pattern of identity and place dependence in Tourism Studies, and for measuring place attachment in their research, they added the third dimension of social bonds. In this model, each of the constructive components of place attachment are:

Place identity: it includes components of "sense of distinction" (keeping individual distinction and uniqueness), "sense of continuity" (the relationship between past, present and future for the individual), "sense of self-esteem" (positive self-evaluation of himself regarding social values) and "self-efficacy" (belief in individual abilities and capabilities).

Place dependence: it is assessed by factors such as sense of satisfaction, sense of ownership, long-term residence, and social interaction. place dependence is related to individuals' perception of their ability to behave in a specific place. This concept focuses on how and how much a physical environment makes it possible for a person to perform a range of actions.

Social bond: It refers to individual characteristics in shaping social interactions.

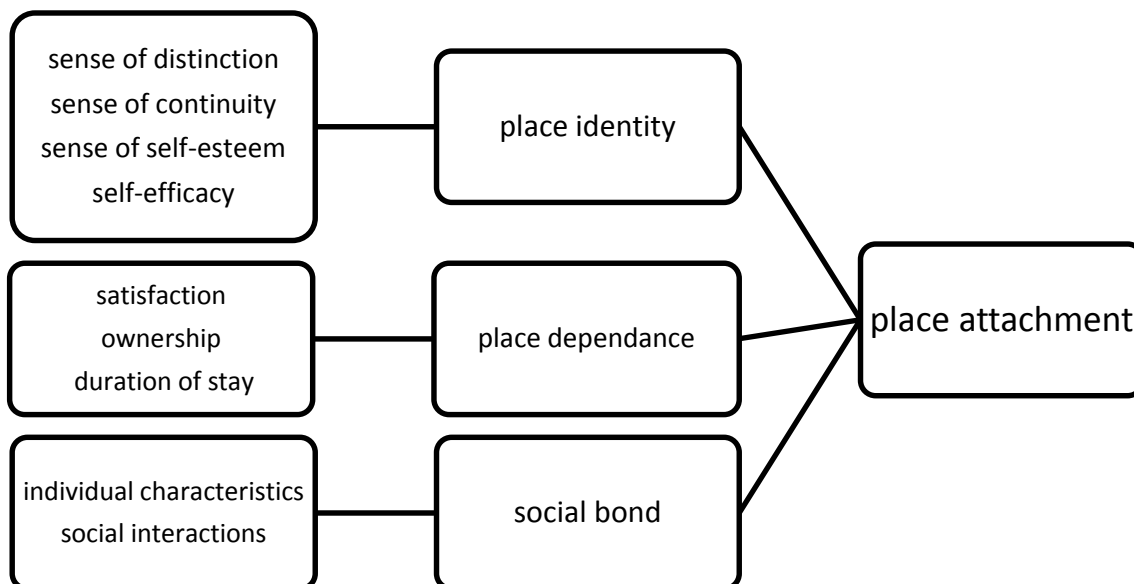


Figure 3. The model of Kyle for place attachment (Kyle et al, 2005)

Recognizing and investigating human factors in the formation of place attachment Individual / Cultural / Social Characteristics

The degree of attachment to the place varies from person to person (Tuan, 1977; Riley, 1992). Individuals choose and attach to places based on the intentional preferences that stem from their individual characteristics. Individuality is also important in the social orientation and the development of intimate social communication (Low & McDonogh, 2001,5); these mental characteristics are derived from early tendencies (Lansing, 1970). In explaining the individual characteristics and their role in interacting with the place, various factors has been pointed out such as age, gender, income, marital status, education, social class, and occupation (Cohen & Shinar 1985; Bonaiuto et al., 1999; Pretty Et al 2003). In this regard, even a person's diet, smoking, exercise, and physical activity have also been evaluated (Ellaway & Macintyre, 1997). The mental and physical abilities of individuals can be added to the mentioned factors (Halpern, 1995).

Robert Hee (1990), in completing the previous views, points out to three factors regarding the development of place attachment:

- Marital status (couples usually have stronger feeling to their place)
- The situation of residence in the place (the temporary, individual, ancestral, cultural sense of place), in modern societies, especially due to the large number of displacements and the fluidity of habitat, the sense of place is not exceeded individually and temporarily.
- Age group, sense of place increases with age. The sense of primitive place (from childhood to maturity), commitment (youth to middle-aged), and excellent (from middle-aged to aging); older people usually have stronger connections with places (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001).

Past experiences

It means shared group experiences creating a favorable context for connecting people and places of great importance to them, including culture, religion, traditions and customs. Dovey (1999) states: "Places reflect identities, differences and competitions in different groups based on gender, class, religion, ethnic groups, culture, and they represent the political tendencies of individuals, power, freedom, social system and interests." (Dovey, 1999, 1). Shared group features play an important role for members in giving significance to specific places. culture is one of the main and important features in people-environment bond. Lynch (1960), Lanteal (1961), Tuan (1974) and Porthius (1977) are among those who have discussed the relationship between culture, worldview and the perception of people of place (Lang, 2004).

Phenomenology of the concept of habitation and settlement

"Residence" is equal with the words "stay", "dwelling", "dignity" and "tranquility" in the Persian-language dictionary and Dehkoda's dictionary. "Residence" was originated from the Arabic root "Sakan" which means become "calm" and "stay" after movement (anxiety), tranquility (inner and outer), and familiarity.

Some of the vocabularies having the same word origin as "residence" in Persian language are "accommodation: relaxation", "relief: comfort, relaxation", "settlement: dwelling" and "housing: home, lodging". In other words, residence brings the meaning of resting and relaxation to the mind; in addition to the physical concept of stopping. So, it seems that the habitation or tranquility of human are related to something or somewhere; to put it another way, the habitation means anything that leads man becoming calm and relaxed with that. The term "calm and fit" also implies a conceptual relationship between two aspects of habitation. A place that is perceived by double opposition as sacred or unholy, inside or outside, private or public, and secure or unsafe.

Heidegger explained the place and the earth as part of the universe in the world and preferred it to technical matters. In this way, in his particular philosophical insight, residence goes beyond a shelter or putting a ceiling on several square meters of land and establishes a meaningful link with a given space that can fit into each of the different levels of the environment. This link has stem from an attempt to adopt an identify or having feeling of belonging and attachment to a place. According to him, settling means to have a sense of belonging to a particular place, which could be a green field or a gray street, and also it means occupying a house in which the heart is flourishing and the brain is meditating. Therefore, a person can only understand himself when he has settled down and, as a result, has established himself in the world. On the other hand, humans choose their place and a reliable companion to other human beings as well (Norberg Schulz, 2008).

Identifying and investigating the social factors affecting the formation of place attachment in the context of residential areas

Basically, environmental psychology is concerned not only with the physical dimension of a place but also with the social dimension of it (Bonnes & Secchiaroli, 1995). The positive relationship between an individual and his physical location and sense of mental satisfaction is related to the social connections existing in the place (Chavis & Pretty, 1999, 635). So that the acquisition of experiences and the establishment of social interactions that happen to a person in the place allows him to make sense of it. Two factors are important in this regard: place identity, which is dependent on the region, common memories and time, and the attachment to it. Therefore, physical qualities are only one dimension of the experience of the place (Chawla, 1992, 63-86). Likewise, the importance of social communication that happens in places should not be neglected. As some researchers

point out, place attachment is based on the participation of people in the place, the rate of their involvement in social networks and cultural interactions, which have an equal or even more important role than the physical dimension (Marcus, 1992). The place attachment develops with the growth of people's positive interaction and their social adaptation in a place, the power of place attachment is directly related to the extent and power of these communications (Mesch & Manor, 1998, 504). Accordingly, the place attachment is expressed by three factors:

- Group and Individuals characteristics
- The amount of contact and intimacy of the users in the place
- Participation in group activities and mass gatherings (Brown & Werner, 1985, 535)

In general, people create their place attachment to a place on the basis of their attachment to the people (Marris, 1996). In other words, they formulate social communications based on their own profits and involve in them based on their expectations, norms and roles; and on this basis, they challenge their presence in the place and assess their social communication. Therefore, how a person is in a place along with others is a strong factor in the person's decision to stay in it. In this regard, individuals may even seek places occupied by people with similar characteristics in terms of class, ethnicity, religion, economic group, lifestyle, education, income, children upbringing, and race. Although, homogeneous and similar people encourages visits, enhances interaction with physical and social places and, as a result, increases place attachment, non-homogeneous social places are also an opportunity for individuals to be together and to experience rich and free social interactions. (Marcus & Sarkissian, 1986).

Conclusion

Looking at the conducted research, we find that building social relationships (and their amount) is of vital importance in the attachment process. The significance of the social dimension in the growth of attachment emphasizes that place attachment is known through the attachment to people occupying that place (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001)

In the course of the five-month study on place attachment among students, Chow and Healey (2008) found that the students' sense of place attachment and their place identity have been developed through a displacement. However, the place alone is not enough in creating such attachment, indeed, the person-place and person-person relationships have caused it (Pretty et al., 2003). In fact, this displacement itself can be thought of as a disturbance process in place attachment and creates a profound sense of lost, alienation with a place, nostalgia and lack of belonging (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004)

During their research, Chow and Healey (2008) concluded that the sense of displacement and the lack of having a home has paled through a long interactive process between students and their new cultural and social environment, and the emotions and excitements resulting from the initial sudden conflict have begun to dwindle. Expressing less dependency on the home leads to an understanding of the importance of a new place in changing the concept of "self" and developing new identity. As Wiborg (2004) believes:

For many students, communicating with the home is a completely emotional case reflecting the dual emotions associated with the fact that they have left home with the goal of achieving to higher education for a better future. A process that separates them both spatially and socially from their home and past.

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