

SENSE OF ATTACHMENT IN RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENTS: A CASE STUDY IN FAMAGUSTA

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INTRODUCTION

Home is a starting point for human and their final destination during the day. It is known and felt as a soothing and comfortable place. People leave their homes going to work and doing social activities, and then return with new experiences. As long as home has the capacity of satisfying the eminent human needs such as self-esteem and thought, it would be a safe environment mentally. Home is an isolated area we return to after experiencing different dimensions of the world every day.¹ It is highly significant that we can name it as the centre of the world for human. It is an extensive and complicated concept having various dimensions and aspects which make it difficult to propose a single and comprehensive definition. Home is considered as a physical place which is a primary shelter and basic need of the family. It is a place where residents do not feel discomfort. Its inner space should have enough variety in order not to make the residents tired or bored. Le Corbusier introduces home similar to an envelopment which makes a true connection between the outer space and the biological phenomena of the human in accordance with certain conditions. Today, many of human and social values are neglected because of the life pressure, radical approach toward life, and centrality of economy. At the present time we see apartment units located in residential blocks, hidden behind uniform and similar windows, which makes it even difficult to be recognized from outside not only by guests but also by family members.² Many of residential buildings and neighbourhoods are designed without considering the occupant's interaction with surrounding environment as it is in the case study (Figure 1). This makes people feel no attachment to their home and neighborhood and leads to an identity crisis, monotony, and disharmony which overshadow all the environmental and social dimensions of life in the urban society. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to occupants, their needs and the images they have about their living space and home as a determining factor influenced by housing features. Among the issues on which housing has significant effects are psychological threads and influential mental and behavioral characteristics of human. It is proven that the efficiency of urban space depends on its conformity with human activities. However, because of some disorders in a number of present buildings and neighborhoods, finding solutions to improve environmental conditions and strengthen the sense of attachment to residential environments is significant. Therefore, in this research the possible problems of a residential area in Famagusta will be discussed at the first stage.

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21—22 January, 2016



Figure 1. The case study, Kaliland neighbourhood, located in Famagusta, Northern Cyprus

The concept of home becomes more challenging when immigration and permanent residency are concerned as well.³ Cyprus currently accommodates three groups of people; native people, international students who come from other countries and are not few in number, and immigrants. Home, therefore, has different meanings to these people. It is important to note that one of the principals and essential requirements of human life is to have a durable focal point in life, which preserves the human identity over time. And this focal point is home. Therefore, there would be a question; how is it possible to strengthen the residents' sense of attachment in a residential area?

BACKGROUND

Housing issues in Cyprus date back to the pre-industrial period.⁴ According to Alpar and Pulhan,⁵ Cyprus has experienced six periods regarding the housing issues. These periods are: The British Colonial period (1878-1960), the Cyprus Republic period (1960-1963), the Conflict period (1963-1974), the period following the division of the island (1974-1983), the period following the establishment of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the North (1983-2004), and the recent period after EU membership of the South (2004-). Each of these periods shows special socio-cultural, political, and economical differences and transformations which have consequently affected housing issues in certain manners. Since the division of Cyprus into Northern and Southern parts, both parts have been experiencing the consequences of the division. A significant issue in this regard is population replacement. The internal conflict has not only brought physical separation, but also caused social segregation in the island. After division and between 1974-1983, which divided Cyprus Island into the Greek Cypriot South sector and the Turkish Cypriot North sector, the houses left and abandoned by the Greek Cypriots in the North were occupied by the displaced people from the south. But in the southern part new housing developments were needed for the refugees urgently.⁵ A significant point in this period is the relocation of people and population transfer, and its consequences and influences on people's sense of attachment to their new living places which had not been theirs originally. There has been an increase in demand for housing which has led to rapid development in urban areas and caused an outstanding changes and deformation in the fabric and identity of both urban and rural areas.⁶ Undoubtedly, the re-activation of the construction sector in North has attracted the interest and investments internationally regarding housing.⁷ The most common method, although along with some differences, has been social housing, for which was a high demand in Cyprus in the late British Colonial period between 1925 and 1960. For the first time in Northern Cyprus, social housing appeared between 1983 and 2004 according to social housing laws of 1978.⁵ 'State housing' program initiated to meet the needs of low-income people. Although the results show a relative

satisfaction for housing condition in Cyprus, some goals have not been successfully reached, such as sustainability. There are still some challenging qualitative problems with the housing environments,⁸ among which lack of place attachment can be a possible one.

Generally, in order to design residential spaces, it is necessary to take the primary principals into consideration. One of these principals is space boundaries. Spaces which have gradually been constructed in habitats and cities during the human life have a form and sense different from the previous ones. Here we will review some different types of space which should have cognizable boundaries and can be distinguished from each other. First; spaces available for citizens as public places according to their inalienable citizenship rights, including shopping centers, cafes, restaurants, parks and etcetera, which are open to the public. At the first step, the act of finding a suitable location and determining the limitations of it should accurately be done, since these spaces might turn into landmarks of the residential area. The landmarks in residential areas can play important roles in strengthening the sense of attachment.⁹ Second; spaces which citizens keep in their minds as certain parts of their residential environment. These types of space can be simply seen on the low-traffic secondary passageways, as well as in some European historical cities and also Istanbul. An exceptional fact about the resemblance between the social spaces and urban communication is that proper zoning and urban design in residential areas can increase the sense of attachment to the place. Although the passageways and shopping centers, in fact, are public spaces, those appropriately located in residential zones and have a good design can create the sense of privacy and attachment in residents. Thus, spatial separation can be reached by defining the entrance of the building or the related zone and emphasizing the boundary of the passageways. Another significant factor is human, which is also the main factor in architecture, hence the reason architecture depends on this factor. The residential architecture determines the extent of the human comfort and should be able to meet their needs. Considering the local people's background in designing the residential environments is also necessary, as in the case study of this research we see permanent and temporary inhabitants from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds. Forms, materials, symbols, signs and the architectural identities could involve culture and the social history. Taking the materials and construction standards into consideration and also proper use of the principles and construction methods will result in a successful architecture. Physical aspects of architecture should be considered for two reasons; meeting the physical needs of human and influencing human spirit and soul. Residential architecture, according to its nature, is created in space; therefore, it needs proper spatial organization. Elegance couldn't be installed on architecture or hanged from it. Instead, it should be manifested from inside of it. On one hand, home is the center of feelings, affections, thoughts, individual and family attachments, and on the other hand it reflects the culture of its time, and culture is a part of human background. Home should have the capacity of affecting the human spirit and plays its significant role to make the human presence in the family and society more vivid. All over the world, culture by culture, housing is formed under the cultural, social, economic, and environmental conditions. Housing plays the role of a medium in sustaining culture. Different generations may live in a house. Today, this belief that 'making any changes in traditional architecture is wrong' does not exist anymore, since it does not meet the new and important needs of today life. But what kinds of changes are efficient and desirable in architecture? Any changes in architecture, whether gradually or rapidly, can cause conflict and duality between customs and beliefs (culture), and the function of residential space, and makes insufficiency in the human-environment interactions as long as it is not along with the necessary and sufficient knowledge about the user's culture and customs.

FIELD STUDY

Kaliland is a special area in Famagusta which has a particular identity and some specific values. Like any other place, it has physical and non-physical aspects and creates feelings in its residents. These feelings create a sense of attachment in them, a sense which forms the identity of the place. It is necessary to consider the human's mental imagination and perception of the area as an important factor.

Sense of Attachment

The previous researches on different dimensions of place attachment form essentially the base of the definition of place as a social environment. Thus, the place attachment is mainly interpreted as a sense of belonging to the social environments. Some researchers such as Altman and Low emphasize the social role of place and refer to the socio-cultural communications and interactions occurred in the place.¹⁰ They describe place attachment from a social perspective. However, some other researchers put the stress on the role of physical elements as another important factor in creating the sense of attachment and believe that it is necessary to pay attention to physical dimensions in the process of creating this sense.

Social attachment which is mainly created based on the social interactions in environment is formed according to the social environment theory. From this perspective, environment is a kind of belonging and a composition of social elements in which the individual seeks his own attachment. In his well-known book, *the language of space*, Lawson refers to the social rules of the environment as design standards and unwritten rules, and explains the society's valuable norms which are resulted from the social interactions and culture.¹¹ With the purpose of identifying the architects and users' intended differences, it is explained that one of the most important issues about the environment is lack of attention to its social dimensions and insufficient attention to physical elements by designers. Clarifying these differences, Gifford puts the stress on the need for reviewing and identifying the difference of the users and designers' intended meanings of the urban environments.¹²

Physical attachment is derived from physical elements and components of the place as a part of cognitive process and human identity. In their research, Riger and Lavrakas, refer to the main role of the physical attachment as a rootedness according which human keeps the environment and its physical elements in mind to create the attachment.¹³ Proshansky, emphasizes the necessity of putting the physical elements of human environments into consideration along with their role in human's personal identity formation and continuation. Putting the stress on the role of physical attachment to the environment as a part of place identity, he explains it as a part of personal identity and finally the social identity in different environments.¹⁴

The sense of place, on the other hand, is a factor which makes a connection between human and place and creates unity as a result. According to Tuan, it is an abstract distance between oneself and place which makes it possible to perceive the place.¹⁵ But is this unity felt in the considered case study? Following the research, data from the case study are collected through observations, questionnaires, and also documentary research. Since the author of this paper has been living in the case study about two years, it was also possible to arrange interviews during the survey. A combination of local people and international students currently live in Kaliland. 95 percent of the residential units are apartment units, plus 5 percent single houses and villas. The questionnaires are distributed mainly among the residents of apartments. But before reviewing the results, it is necessary to mention to the current problems of housing in the area. One of the problems housing development has faced in Cyprus during recent years is putting a significant emphasis only on supplying the demands for housing without

considering cultural, social and sustainability issues. This approach only meets the physical aspects of housing quantitatively and ignores the interests, affections, values and feelings. Thus, important issues that need to be considered in this regard include; appropriate site location, and considering the principals and standards of the architecture and urban development such as the width of the streets and passageways, residential units’ adjacency, view, lighting and etc. These factors are influential because they determine the condition of the residential environments. Conversion of the town into a temporary quarter, remaining public spaces limited, reduction in socio-cultural communications, and lack of spatial diversity can be the results of the loss of sense of attachment in the living places which makes the residents unwilling to interact with the environment. Thus, the mentioned issues are the possible problems of the case study according to the assumptions.

The factors investigated through the questionnaires are in 10 simple questions; to find out whether the residents feel happiness in daily life, have memories of their living place, feel secure, understand any meanings of their living place, remember their homes in case of leaving, feel bored or lonely where they live, feel close to their neighbors and have a good relation with them, and, care about their neighborhood or not. The questionnaires are distributed randomly between 30 residents of the selected area. Table 1 shows the results of this survey. For instance, for the security factor, 80 percent of participants have a positive feeling. It means there are fewer problems with security in the case of study. But the results show lack of social involvement among the residents. There are some recommendations offered in this article in order to decrease the problems and increase the sense of attachment. On the other hand, there is ‘sense of place’ which is a mental perception of the environment and conscious feeling about that. Since this sense involves human in an inner communication with place, the perception and feeling would be grafted onto the semantic context of the environment. This causes the space to be changed into a place with specific sensational and behavioral characteristics for the person.

Table 1. The results of the questionnaires

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree/ Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel happy with my apartment	50.00%		26.66%	23.33%	
I have significant memories of my apartment	53.33%		33.33%	13.33%	
I feel secure in my residential environment	-		20.00%	80.00%	
My residence has special meanings to me	13.33%		36.66%	50.00%	
I will forget about my living place if I move away	63.33%		13.33%	23.33%	
I feel bored where I am living	33.33%		20.00%	46.66%	
I feel lonely at my neighborhood	60.00%		26.66%	13.33%	
I feel close to my neighbors	60.00%		26.66%	13.33%	
I have a good relationship with my neighbors	63.33%		20.00%	16.66%	
I care about my neighborhood	10.00%		16.66%	73.33%	

In addition to creation of sense of comfort in human, Sense of place supports one's desired cultural implications and social communications in the society and in the specific place when they experience the environment, reminding them of the past experiences and reaching their identity. From a psychological perspective, human needs to have sensational, emotional and spiritual experiences of their living place. This need can be met by a kind of consubstantiation and close interaction with the place they live in. The researches in this field show that in addition to physical elements, environment includes messages, implications and codes which people decode and realize according to the roles, expectations, motives and other factors. This common sense arisen in human after perception and judgment of a specific place is in fact the sense of place. It is significant in coordination of human and environment, creation of sense of attachment to the environment, and perpetuating the human presence in the place. Place attachment also reflects the main components of socio-cultural life. In fact, attachment to a place means having a link or connection to the place in a positive manner.¹⁶ It is a sense that converts a space into a place with specific sensational and behavioral characteristics for human. According to Rapaport,¹⁷ from the phenomenological perspective, sense of place is defined as a reality and the nature of the place, showing the importance of place implications and messages which are decoded and realized based on the roles, expectations, motives and other factors. From this perspective, the perception and judgment formed in the one's mind based on decoding the mentioned implications results in creation of sense of place.¹⁸ Thus, by considering the sense of place as a concept created after realizing the place, we can understand the close relation between this concept and the perception of the place.

Social Participation

Participation is a social behavior which is based on the individual and collective beliefs and interests. It is the involvement of the members of a community in the decision making process. In fact, the essence of participation is the common interests of the individuals in the society, as well as their common interests in the group. Participation is defined by having a share in something and profiting from it, or taking part in a group and therefore cooperating with it.¹⁹ Social participation indicates voluntary activities through which members of the society take part directly or indirectly in the affairs related to their neighborhood, town or village to form the social life. The results of the survey indicate that the case of study lacks social involvement as assumed in the hypothesis. Although participants declare that they care about their housing (more than 73 percent agreed), there is no significant relationship between neighbors. Social connections takes place in different ways,²⁰ for instance, the number of friends and relatives living in the neighborhood and their informal social activities, the number of friends living in the neighborhood who are usually invited to the family events and ceremonies, social connections, the relationship of the neighbors who communicate with each other, the extent of the social networks, and probably many other factors.²¹ Based on these factors, providing more public spaces in residential zones for neighbors and their social communications strengthens the residents' sense of attachment and belonging to the environment. The case study shows an inappropriate status in this respect. Although there is enough space for designing more useful public spaces, it is still lacked (Figures 2 and 3).

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21—22 January, 2016



Figures 2 and 3. Potential open space in Kaliland

There is also the possibility to make a better use of the available spaces between the buildings (Figures 4 and 5). Another variable is to consider the external appearance of the area and the buildings.²² Façade is a significant criterion, since it defines unique characteristics for the building. It is a layer, separating the interior parts of the building from the outdoor. The external walls of a building are one of the basic foundations of aesthetic appearance of the city, in addition to having functional values. Façade is visually the social face of the building through which communications with surrounding environment takes place. Unfortunately, inappropriate façades have led to visual disorders and confusions in passageways in Kaliland area. All buildings' façades are nearly similar and the only difference between them is different colors (Figures 6 and 7). Lack of applicable laws and regulations in this regard has caused the town and neighborhoods lose their identity. Due to the rapid implementation of residential projects and economical limitations, developers have to use quite simple and similar materials for the façades. We have provided images hereunder illustrating facades in Kaliland residential area. Psychologically, dull monotony in facades of the buildings has negative effects on the residents and the environment is accordingly deprived of the vitality and dynamism. People barely find unique signs for their own apartment except colors. Consequently, their sense of belonging and attachment to their homes decreases. Such walls efface any visual diversity and finally result in residents' reluctance.



Figures 4 and 5. Unused spaces between the buildings



Figures 6 and 7. Similar and unattractive façades

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INCREASE THE RESIDENTS' SENSE OF ATTACHMENT

The lifeless and inactive spaces between buildings could be changed into dynamic places for neighbors meeting through increasing the equipment, providing creative playgrounds for children, designing sufficient and suitable public places in the area, and making some trails and paths together with enough green spaces. The appearance of the area also could more beautiful, dynamic and inviting by taking some strategies in action, including constructing attractive and convenient terraces in front of the buildings, breaking the façades into filled and concave forms to create visual rhythm, and finally, using a variety of materials with different colors and textures (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Abandoned terrace with no special design

The results of the research show that construction of new residential buildings without considering socio-cultural, physical, and psychological aspects will cause failure, since lack of these criteria leads to a gradual diminution in spatial and characteristic values as well as residents' sense of attachment. Thus, by applying the following recommended strategies in environmental design, it will be possible to take a major step toward improving the spirit of this residential area and making it as sustainable as possible. The recommended strategies would be as follows; creating playgrounds for children inside or near the area to increase the neighbors social interactions, designing sidewalks and paths along with adequate green spaces, designing terraces with the function of yard in front of the buildings, providing sufficient and suitable public places in the area, paying more attention to the design of the facades, using diverse colors and textures in the façades, modifying the urban design of the area, and redesigning the access roads to the area.

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Architecture_MPS; University of Cyprus; Cyprus Institute
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