



Environmental Psychology in Surroundings and Urban Environments

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Abstract

The factors in creating a good feeling in a subjects surroundings, more precisely environmental psychology and it's effect on people are the basis of our study in this paper. This article tries to investigate the use of environmental psychology in urban areas, the different factors that are involved and the effect of use on subjects exposed to it. In fact, the feelings about a 'location' are created by things such as connection level, mental imaginations and the attributes related to that specific environment. This meaning has a root in cognitive experiences such as memories, culture, tradition, rules and the society and in another way it's affected by outer components like smell, color, pattern and sounds. This shows us that the feeling of 'place' is a complex structure of feelings and human attachments to the environment which is created by his use and the process of recognition. It's the everyday use that creates the description of 'place' and 'location' in our minds. A person attributes to a location his actions and reactions and their effect. These also create his further reactions to the environment. On that basis, backed up by many solid findings, this study tries to define the needed attributes and structures in an urban environment.

Keywords

Environmental Psychology, Urban Structure, Memories, Evolving, Mental Attachments.



Introduction

Humans are part of nature. Mankind needs to be knowledgeable on the rules of nature and environment to have a comfortable life in all times and seasons by following the order our surroundings pose on us. On the other hand, neglecting such issues creates numerous problems on all fronts including financial, environmental and psychological. 'Sense of place' is a combination of two words; sense and place. Sense as defined by the Oxford dictionary has five meanings: one of our five primal senses, feelings, emotions and love[1]. In psychology it is the recognition of a visionary sense in a specific way. The judgement made after understanding the target can be good, bad, exciting etc. All in all we can say that sense is complete understanding of something by alive beings. But the word sense, as in sense of place, is pointing out to the emotions, feelings and any physical or non physical judgments that we have about our surroundings. Research shows that these surroundings also have non-physical, spiritual messages and secrets for the inhabitants who de-code it based on their own expectations, emotions, roles and other factors and then pass judgment about it. This broad feeling which is triggered about a specific place is what's called 'sense of place', it's also a very important factor in organizing the person and the place together for better use of it, satisfaction and a sense of belonging and stability. The relationship between mankind and his surroundings is a mutual one. People get what they give to their environment whether good or bad[2]. A place can cause many different feelings in different people based on their personality and past experiences. When traveling in a foreign country there is a sense of indifference about it meaning that it's not yet associated with happy or sad feelings. When meanings attach to a place it becomes it becomes a living being to us. The space needs to be recognizable and memorable for it to create the sense of place. In 2000, Morris and his colleagues concluded that the sense of place evolves and changes overtime. If a building, city or nature doesn't trigger a feeling in a person, it will be derived from any personality in his opinion. If he finds himself out of place he might feel like a stranger to that location. Now that the lingual meaning of our subject is defined it will make our work easier but still there remains the issue of how to sync with our surroundings[3].

Plan Definition

1- When people enter a certain place they have a feeling about it. This feeling can be happiness, sadness, anger, fear etc. The feeling is the same every time they enter the place. Sometimes there is a shared sense of place between a group of people which is called mutual sense of place and has the strongest effect on prejudices and opinions before realized interacting with the place[4].

2- Sense of place is what we get when we are put somewhere or go there. Society passes judgement on a place based on its environmental qualities and then evaluates its living qualities as a habitat. The very base to engineering any structure or location is sense of place and the plan maker needs to get every possible information about people's expectations and sense of place to offer a good plan.

3- Added to the comfort that the sense of place brings with itself, it also supports the cultural values, social norms and relations and the beliefs of its inhabitants in a certain place. By doing so it brings about the sense of belonging for its people which leads to recognition and remembering of past experiences for a stable definition to their personality.



4- Sense of place affects the local architecture. Every person gets a feeling when put in a specific place but it varies from one to another[5].

5- This research wants to study inner attributes of places and its effect on people's sense of place. The feeling of belonging is a very important factor in improving environmental quality, better relation between people and environment and protecting our surroundings. Based on Counters model, this inner attributes improve with better design, help establish meanings and activities and by satisfying mental, physical and social needs cause a series of contentment and understanding feeling which lead to sense of place.

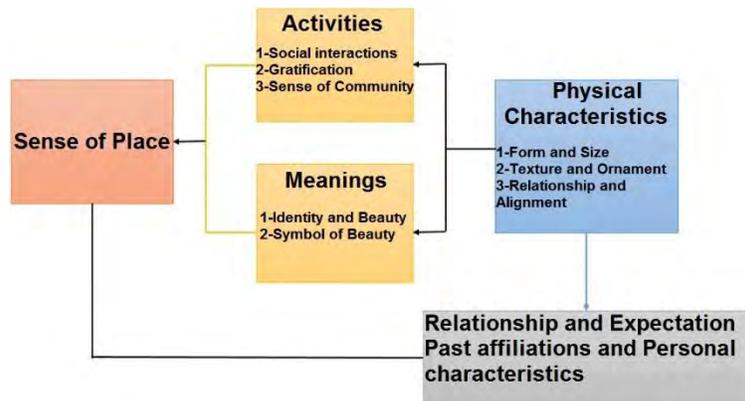


Fig 1.Counter model (factors influencing the formation of a sense of place and how it is)

Process of Human Behavior

To explain this process we need to start with the cradle of every behavior, environment. Humans are surrounded by the environment. Part of it which is made of triggers that the person shows sensitivity to it is called behavioral space[6]. Place can be the cradle of cognition, recognition and spatial behaviors. These are heavily influenced by social or personal mental models. These models are in direct correlation to human needs and wants. The very same models complete human cognition and so this creates a cycle between cognition, spatial behaviors and mental models.

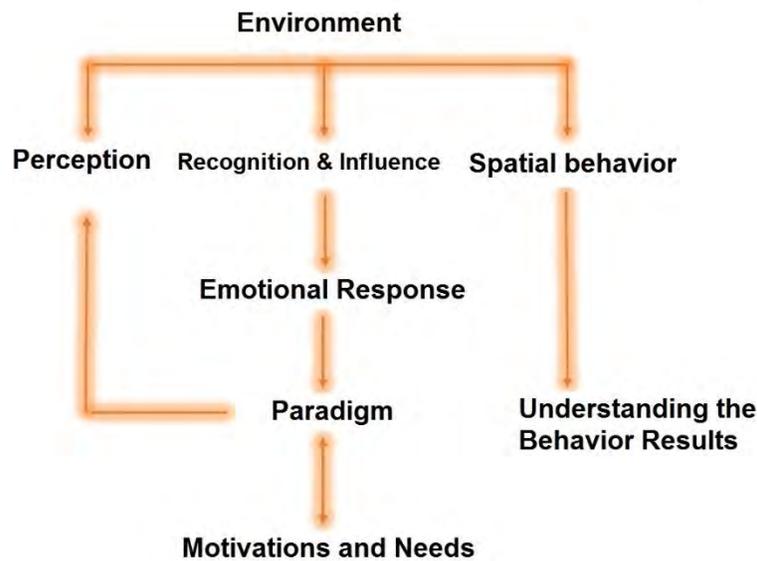


Fig 2. Contrasting environments and human behavior

Rate of Success in Recognition of Memories

Every human has a past, present and future and these directly influence his personality, life and activities. Memory is defined as part of past that we bring in to our present. As time passes, what goes on in our past every day life can become memories in our brain. Memory can be personal, social, positive or negative. What matters is the emotional weight and important role that memory's plays in our lives. Memories etch into human brain and he cannot runaway from them, rather he relives them within a specific settings[7]. Our behavior and activities always take place in a certain location and for each activity there is a designated location in urban structures. When remembering a certain memory the setting that it took place is also imagined. So if the space is somehow made to take us out of context and to a more desirable past, we recognize as a 'nice place '. If there are changes to be made in urban structures it needs to be noted that there are immeasurably worthy memories laying around for people there who remember these by going back to the place. A suddenly huge change can disrupt this cycle. These memories are part of the inhabitants lives which live on forever. Changes made to urban structures need to also protect personal and collective memories. Protecting the memories strengthens the sense of belonging and this positively affects human eagerness to improve his surroundings.

Space and Place

While we see space as this open, endless range, place is a part of space which is inhabited by a person or thing and has meaningful immaterial attachments to it. The definition of place as a limited space with certain traits and pre defined meaning has become under question for its lack of dynamism. It is the social relations that define a place and not the dirt that makes it. So now the essence that makes a place is an open greeting that defines itself based on a social process. Nationalistic and racist ideas and also those who put nostalgia factor on a certain place have based their view on a rigid definition of place[8]. They define it as a lifeless, unchangeable space which does not have a character of its own and no ties to time. The definition of place as a contentional space gives dynamism to our understanding of it. This gives us the ability to



understand the difference between places on a broader sense. Richard Sennet believes "Creation of a place based on monopoly, monotony or nostalgia is socially poisonous and psychologically pointless". Center of a modern city is made up of different people, ethnicities, races and cultures with lots of mobility and dynamism. In remote villages in backward countries the opposite of this is true. Modern technology and industry rarely gets to these places and progress is very slow with lack of dynamism compared to modern cities[9]. We are somewhat sure that dynamic perceptions of a place reflect multi dimensions of social character way more clearly. But there is a period of stagnation in every cycle. Change is judged based on existing frameworks and so all this frameworks are destined to change someday but not all at once. So the character of place is evolving and rewritten as time passes. This shows us why people can make decisions ignoring the ever changing conditions[10].

Sense of Place and its Probability in a Person or Group

This section consists of two seemingly opposite segments that really complete one another.

- 1- Independence and perception of space from humans
- 2- Familiarity of space for the person

If a space triggers memories, mentality or a series of thoughts for a person it will have an important impact on him. Upon sighting or perception of the place he may connect it to a certain good or bad memory. The familiarity of space and many other factors, noticeable or not, trigger this response. When humans enter or see a place they try to apprehend it based on past mentalities and connection to experiences and then pass his prejudices on it, a process made up of sighting and then immediately comparing it to past recollections. Even though every space is an independent existing presence but in cognition it is turned into a mental phenomenon. In this process we use our mental imaging to assess the vision so it is a form of quality assessment which is in direct relation to our mental recollections from direct experiences to culture and traditions[11]. When approached by one or many of coinciding sights and objectives with our personality we begin to recognize it as part of our own perception and in repeated contact it is internalized. The safety and mental dominance of this process helps give us safety and a sense of belonging. Campus for a student and his professor, office for a worker and stadium for athletes and their fans are every day familiar spaces and because of their direct and continuous relation with the person affect them and even form biases. Spaces which are compatible with social and cultural norms make a stronger sense of belonging because they are recognized by their socio-cultural form rather than the architecture[12]. The humans mind is after recognition and compatibility and although it wants compatible spaces to his and his groups behavior but it doesn't oppose tension or conflict. In other words humans are just as much after compatibility as they are curious. Humans are always after new experiences and understanding new stuff is pleasurable to him. Also, he wants every space to present itself as a separate being and challenge the mind. It needs to have a distinct outlook and message so that the receptor sees himself in relative quarrel with it and struggles to understand it's context and form otherwise it will be seen as worthless and repetitive. A quote from Kevin Lynch says "To have a nice mental image, first you need to be able to recognize that thing from others and feel its independence". We name it recognition but not in the sense that it is only the compatibility of one thing to another but complete characterization and complete identification of space in any context like home, street, district or city. The above description is not say the more standard a place is the better it is or that we should follow old structural models. The reality is that there is change happening all around



us. Space and its subjects are ever changing otherwise the compatibility would have been once and for all.

Space Efficiency in Amity with Sense of Place

The context in which responses are taken from the space and the persons concurrence to the environment are expressed in his behavior. The opposite can also be true that people show behaviors in certain places that may not be triggered in other settings so this settings set a condition that crate the need to express a certain behavior. We can say that before anything else, space is a dish which is for satisfaction of needs and certain behaviors. There is a close and mutual relation between space and behavior. Action triggers when the subject can get his response for need satisfaction from the space. The more it can satisfy the more useful it will be. Upon seeing a place every person will analyse to get the most use out of it. The environment creates a better condition when person needs less struggle to reach his goal. It happens many time to you when you stay in a place longer than expected because of need resolution and pleasure. Having access to optimal environment enriched with quality and use of it is the expectation of every citizen in an urban area and the perception of the surrounding is made by desirability of it in satisfaction of needs[13]. When you cross the street with ease and safety or reach your destination without being stuck in traffic you will have a positive outcome in your brain. Solving these functional relations can be a huge step towards success and desirability but it is not enough! The final result is up to the user of the environment. Taking care of strange and unknown factors that do not have a base in peoples culture has not been able to provide a reasonable answer to their expectations. It is very important that in reaching the optimal result, we do not forget peoples present, their use, culture, norms and traditions and the main step should be towards generalization and publication of space and urban environments.

Conclusion

A general takeout from different definitions of sense of place shows that this feeling is a result of inner human connection and his mental imaginations from environmental traits. This meaning has a root in mental experiences like memory, tradition, history, culture, society etc. And another in outer, visual and physical experiences like structure, looks, smell and sound which shows that sense of place is a complex meaning made of human feelings and attachments to the environment which is made by use and compatibility with the place. Meaning that sense of place is not a predefined subject but it is made of every day human interaction with his surroundings. Moreover, a person living in a place gives a set of prejudices and imaginations to it based on past mentalities. This imaginations define his reactions to the habitat. In some cases however, this pre defined imaginations are reshaped into new ones. Even though continuous familiarity is one of the reasons sense of place is triggered but on its own, it is of no use. Inner properties may help to make some actions easier and by that reinforce the sense of place.



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