

Sense of Place: *Concepts, Importance and Methods of Study*

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Abstract

Confusion and no standard way without clear constructs marks the study and analysis of sense of place (SOP). This article seeks to understand SOP discourse across disciplines interested in the place-people-process relationships. It aims to cover the key aspects in terms of components, importance and methods of investigation. This review was done by open access search for "sense of place" and within related literature of its sub-concepts. Findings reveal lack of clarity as different researches include different sub-dimensions as its components and employ different methods of investigation. Place attachment (PA), place identity (PI) and place dependence (PD), place meanings (PM), place satisfaction (PS) are the common dimensions. Many researches on SOP have been done within neighborhoods and public spaces. The study recommends the need for standard and uniform dimensions, methods for its investigation in order for built environment professionals, other professions and policy makers to integrate the findings in place making.

Keywords: Genius loci, place attachment, place dependence, place identity, place meanings, place satisfaction, sense of place

INTRODUCTION

There is a great interest in understating the concept of place across many fields. Studies of place in terms of SOP and cognate concepts of PI, PA, PD and PS is evidenced by recent publications and pioneer studies in this domain. Studies in various disciplines always have investigated this concept in different ways. The problem under investigation in this review is that many researchers still believe that sense of place is an amorphous term that has no clarity in studies across many disciplines. These authors include Jackson (1995) one of the pioneers in landscape studies who states that sense of place is a translation that has ambiguity, Stedman (2003), Jiven and Larkham (2003); Jackson (1995) who state that sense of place is similar to "genius loci" though with no clear translation. Jorgensen and Stedman 2001; Westerholt et al. 2022 opine that it is difficult to investigate due to several layers.

The aim of this article is to investigate the key aspects in terms of components, importance and methods of investigation. The study is significant to the built environment professionals, other professions that are interested in understanding

place-people-process studies that include sense of place and which have a bearing in place making and place keeping. The remaining part of this article is organized into various parts. The first part is on the research methods then theory on SOP (literature review). This is in terms of theoretical context from pioneer studies to recent discourse. The next part on results and discussion covers the key issues in SOP studies in terms of its components, methods used in its investigation and lastly the importance. The next section covers the conclusion and lastly the recommendations.

THEORY

THEORY ON SOP AND COGNATE CONCEPTS

Pioneer Earlier Studies

Tuan (1977) states that a place is a sphere of meanings, it's a field of care that based on the human experiences, relationships that are social, in addition to people's emotions and thoughts held. Relph (1976) defines places as a combination of human aspects and natural aspects creating an

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order. That they form center that are significant in terms of experiences. The focus within particular settings is in terms of what people experiences and their intentions. Several meanings can be given to a given place. SOP is a three component view. Places result from the physical setting, activities by humans that are carried out there and lastly the meanings and attachments given to the place. These happens as a result of the social, psychological processes by human users within the place. SOP can be created deliberately or unconsciously by groups of people of individuals (Relph, 1976). According Lynch (1960) and Montgomery (1998) sense of place has three main components namely; physical, perceptual and behavioral. This concurs with the sub components as propounded by Relph (1976). Lynch (1960) opines that a city that is well-knit is a base for associations and various meanings. SOP in this way, acts to enhance various activities by humans that happen there. It also can encourage the creation of traces of memories. Lynch is a pioneer author in regard to studies on city image. He states that we need an environment which is symbolic, poetic in addition to being well organized. This should communicate the history and traditions in addition to the natural settings (Lynch, 1960).

Sack (1980) supported by Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977) a place is embedded in meanings and relations that are based in social contexts. These pioneer studies from a geographical background considered place as a construct that is core in sense of place concept and other allied concepts that include identity to a given place, dependence to a given place and attachment to a given place. There has been a contest about what creates attachment and SOP. This is according to the various meanings in addition to contributions from a given place, a space and a landscape. Tuan (1977) opines that a place can achieve its reality whenever the experiences of it is complete and total. This happen when all the senses in terms of the reflective and active mind is involved (Tuan, 1977). The author in this article takes the position that sense of place accounts for landscapes at a large scale followed by a place that has the space. According to Jackson (1995) in his SOP and sense of time ideas, certain places have attractions which give us sense of wellbeing that cannot be defined. This makes us have the desire to return to such places again and again. This author opines that SOP is not a response that is temporary. This

is because it persists thus bringing us back. This reminds us of earlier visits to the place. From landscape studies, sense of place refers to that which we create in different places over a given time period. Habits or customs are the results of this. Sense of events that recur produces and reinforces this (Jackson, 1995).

Place identity as a concept was used by Proshansky et al. (1983). These authors defined it as a basis for self-identity. It consists people's memories for a given place. This is addition to ideas held by them, feelings they have, attitudes about the place, values they hold on to, preferences about various aspects, meanings they attach and behavior conceptions. This is addition to experiences that take place in various spaces. All these act to satisfy the needs an individual biologically, psychologically, socially and culturally (Proshansky, 1983). Proshansky (1978) earlier defined PI as connection to a place that is personal. This author avers that there is a connection that is deep between personal identity of a person and a given place. Relph (1976) focusses on identity of individuals within places. He refers identity of place to be that which distinguishes places from one another (Relph, 1976). Shao et al. (2020); K'oyoo (2023a; 2023b); K'oyoo and Breed (2023); K'oyoo and Breed (2024) in their recent studies of identity within urban realms considered the use of urban landscape identity terminology. All these studies lay focus on the value of considering place related concepts incase of place making, place keeping that are under threat of transformations under today's globalization and local needs for modernization.

Cullen (1960) through his "serial vision" idea pioneered the term townscape in urban design. He described sense of place within landscapes through this idea. This happens by creating a sequence of engaging spaces, serial vision can reinforce the unique sense of place making areas more identifiable and recognizable. Deep sense of place within urban environments can improve the quality of the residents' life (Cullen, 1960). According to the author in this article this formed the beginning of important considerations to be made by those involved in place making by considering sense of place. Tuan (1977) questions lasting attachment to a place in terms of the time period. Is the SOP as a result of awareness of being rooted in a place? Is it through unconsciousness and alienation that goes on within a state of being

conscious? (Tuan, 1977). The author in this paper feels that this earlier propositions by Tuan (1977) marked a good onset of studies on SOP.

Stedman (2003) supporting Williams and Stewart (1998) state that SOP has components which give descriptions and evaluations of a place. This consists of functions of the attributes of landscape and the landscape experiences. These in turn affect the behaviors that are related to place. SOP therefore encompasses the various meanings that a person or people attach to a given place spatially. This author questions meanings that are symbolic. This is in terms of the meanings derived from the landscapes. He also questions the attributes of the landscape and activities therein that contribute to them (Stedman, 2003).

Recent Theoretical Context

Various research areas that include geography, environmental sciences and psychology of the environment have studied SOP as a concept with several dimensions (Xu et al. 2022; Hussein et al. 2020; Mohammad et al. 2013; Soini et al. 2012; Qian et al. 2011). Earlier studies by Seamon 1979; Proshansky et al., 1983; Altman and Low, 1992, Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996 all point out by stating that SOP as a domain concept that consists of various sub concepts of PA and PD. PA has been studied by various authors over the years at various scales. This includes Xu et al. (2022) who studied SOP at street level with responses at block, community and urban area, Sanga and Mbisso (2020) within urban squares, Montalbano (2016) at neighborhood/village level without clarity on what constituted SOP as its components, Qian et al. (2011) at both community and city levels. Soini et al. (2012) had interesting boundary of investigation at rural-urban interface and earlier Billig (2004) investigated SOP at neighborhood level for housing developments as part of urban revitalization.

Mohammad et al. (2018) investigated sense of place as perceived within cultural settings of the landscape. They found out that peoples experiences of the past, belief in their background, and cultural inclinations had an influence on how SOP was perceived. They posit that what is physical, visual and spiritual that is attributed to various places have a contribution to the SOP. Various levels of SOP can have a contribution to social related activities. This is dependent on the meanings attached to

the place from various relationships. The findings in this study concurs with Tuan (1977) who opined that people have varying sense of space that is based on various places. Sense of place is influenced by physical attributes and involvement in a given space in addition to other features. This finally enhance the identity through unique features and enhance one's feelings for the place (Tuan, 1977). Hussein et al. (2020) state that SOP results from cultural memory, PA and PI. PI and PA are important in the formation of memories which are personal and cultural amongst a given people. These authors posit that formation of place identity is as a result of place attachment. This happens when one experiences feelings that site features in a given place exhibit sense of being distinct in addition to showing continuity. The research demonstrated that cultural memories are important in forming attachment to place in an emotional manner. It is an important factor that informs SOP thus resulting into better experiences in a given set up. (Hussein et al., 2020).

Some researchers believe that SOP has three sub concepts that is PA, PI and PD. These authors include Xu et al., 2022; Dameria et al., 2020; Qian & Zhu, 2014; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006; 2001. Chen and Dwyer (2018) on the contrary posit that SOP can be attributed to the sub concepts of PA and PI only. Najafi & Shariff (2011); Smaldone et al., (2005) opine that SOP is a broad relation and association to a given place that then includes PA and PM. These authors define PM as the meanings which are symbolic that different people associate with a given place (Smaldone et al. 2005). PA refers to the bonds formed emotionally between individuals and a given place. This depends on how strong the connection is. This relies on the person and the given place (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). This is supported by Altman & Low (1992).

Montalbano (2016) studied SOP within the urban realm and its history. They considered these two as a fabric that is bonded together. This is in terms of cultural heritage over time, cultural tourism therein and the heritage of the landscape. He was not clear in terms of what were the sub concepts that constituted the sense of place under study. The study delved into the need to enhance a strong identity of the urban space. The study states that the stronger the identity, the stronger its perception by the local communities. Stedman (2003) categorized PA as one of the sub concepts

of sense of place. This author argued that it was vague, hard to define and lacking clear ways of measurements. This author supporting Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) opines that SOP acts as a unifying domain with PA, PI and PD being its sub concepts. They are in agreement that these three factors are distinct as sub concepts but are related in empirical aspects. Shamsuddin and Ujang (2008) posit that development that is not fit has an effect on the SOP and people's attachment to a place. An interruption of feelings of the concerned people then happens. Concerning contribution of the various sub-concepts that form sense of place, Bakar et al., (2016) concluded that PA is significant in contributing to the sense of place.

Concern by Stedman (2003) is that there is complexity in place based concepts of SOP. Studies have failed to accommodate the complex measures of its theory into hypothesis of relationships among PA, PD and PI as its sub concepts. Existing studies on SOP have failed in between. This is in terms of the literature that is cited and the empirical questions involved. The author in this review article feels this failure and confusion is greatly contributed to due to by the lack of clarity its definition. The ambiguous ways of carrying out the empirical studies in a non-uniform manner all attest to this assertion by Stedman (2003). According Jiven and Larkham (2003) "genius loci" is a Latin term connected to SOP which is a misplaced translation of it. "Spirit of a place" is another term that also shows earlier translation of sense of place in different domains. Different periods have seen different translations for SOP. These translations date back to the 18th Century. Currently it is used to refer to the ambience of a given space/place, this is in terms of the environment and its qualities (Jiven & Larkham, 2003).

RESEARCH METHODS

The study employed content research design in investigating SOP concept. The review covers relevant secondary data from peer reviewed journal articles among other online data from scholars in various professions who have investigated SOP and allied concepts of PI, PA and PD. Relevant sources picked for this study were mainly from open access platforms like Google and Google Scholar. The search for the review materials was by using the main term "sense of

place". Other sources that yielded the search terms through allied concepts of "place identity", "place attachment", "place dependence", "place meanings" and "place satisfaction" were also analyzed for their contents on SOP. Each source was analyzed according to its contents for any inclusion of the SOP concept. This review provides a discourse on SOP as a common concept in place-people-process studies across various professions. It gives a nuanced understanding of the several sub concepts or dimensions that constitute SOP.

Methods of Investigation

In the various studies on SOP the sub dimensions of PA, PD and PI have been investigated through various questions with few modifications from one author to the other. **Table 1** summarizes the questions, the authors and inspiring previous studies that formulated and used the questions in their researches.

Wartmann and Purves (2018) approached study of SOP with a completely different approach. By using the free-listing task to list the landscape terms followed by structured interviews to elicit information on sense of place among participants, they identified twelve dimensions of SOP. The 12 dimensions include sense of tranquility, awe, wonder & appreciations, nature, connection to nature, living landscapes, wild, pristine & enduring landscapes, relaxation of spirit & mind, identity and belongingness, sensed landscapes, community, joy, happiness & pleasure, freedom and lastly the twelfth one was any other that was suggested by the participants through the free-listing. These authors sought to investigate SOP by asking the participants within the various landscapes meanings they had attached to the landscapes. They also inquired about the feelings they had while being within these landscapes. This according to the author in this paper was a complete shift from other studies of sense as based on major dimensions or constructs as indicated by selected studies in **Table 2**.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Key Issues in SOP Studies

The section offers selected reviews on SOP according to the components, methods used in its investigation and lastly the importance.

TABLE 1

Common questions for investigation of place attachment sub-dimensions

Place Attachment	Authors	Inspiring Authors	Common Questions
Place dependence	-Mousazadeh (2022) -Shamsuddin & Ujang (2008)	- Scannell and Gifford (2019), Tartaglia (2013), Jorgensen & Stedman (2006; 2001), Williams & Vaske (2003), Williams & Roggenbuck (1989)	-Z is the best place for what I do. -No other places can compare to Z -I get more satisfaction out of living in X than any other places. -Doing what I do in Z is more important to me than doing it in any other places. - I would not substitute any other areas for doing the types of things that I do in Z
Place identity	-Mousazadeh (2022) -Shamsuddin & Ujang (2008)	- Scannell and Gifford (2019), Tartaglia (2013), Jorgensen & Stedman (2006; 2001), Williams & Vaske (2003), Williams & Roggenbuck (1989)	-I feel Z is a part of me -Z is very special to me -I identify strongly with Z -I am very attached to Z -Living in Z says a lot about who I am. -Z means a lot to me

Source: Author's analysis (2024)

SOP Sub-concepts

Major sub-concepts in terms of the constructs that constitute SOP vary according to different authors from various fields and study's contexts. **Table 2** offers a summary of some selected studies.

According to Hussein et al. (2020) SOP comprises two main dimensions of PI (community attachment) and PA (relationship to a place). PI is in terms of continuity and distinctiveness while PA is in terms of affective, cognitive and practice bonds. All these dimensions combine and act to generate memories for the people (Hussein et al. 2020). According to Hay (1998) the main factors that influence SOP include aspects demographic characteristics of individuals, physical and social environments. Physical aspect includes the natural landscapes, community architectures in addition to infrastructures. Social environment is in terms of cultures and social capitals. SOP according to Qian et al. (2011) supported by Mousazadeh (2022), Dameria et al. (2020) SOP is composed of PA, PI and PD. The study found out that at the city level, PD is a dimension independent of both PI and PA and that it is the PD that has a strong effect on PA (Qian et al., 2011). SOP composition through PI and PA is supported by Shamsuddin and Ujang (2008), Xu et al. 2022. Shamsuddin and Ujang (2008) posit that SOP is a result of physical aspects, activities in addition to meanings that are

attached to various features. These authors point out that elements of physical environments and the various activities are significant in creation of SOP. They authors posit that PA has vital contribution to the formation of SOP and therefore should be an important consideration in place making within urban realms.

Taylor (2008) supports constitution of SOP through physical components, various activities in addition to meanings/symbols attached by a given people to a given place. Xu et al. (2022) found out that SOP among residents' is different within blocks, community and urban areas. The factor that was different was place attachment. Place identity was not affected at the different scales. Soini et al. (2012) examined SOP in terms of PA, PS and PI as the components as proposed by Jorgensen and Stedman (2006) in their study. The findings support earlier study by Jackson (1995) on well-being in addition to quality of people's life with regard to SOP. SOP has been touched in other independent discourses on PA, identity and dependence. Hernandez et al. (2014) considered PA as being part of SOP as an overarching superior concept.

Sanga and Mbisso (2020) bring in Global South context with study of urban open spaces in Tanzania. Their study concluded that open

TABLE 2

Components of sense of place

Authors (s)	Primary Concern of Research	Aspects of Studying Sense of Place	Methods of Study
Westerholt et al. 2022	-Explored the links to do with exposure to some urban features and SOP	-PD -PI -PA	- Both quantitative and qualitative -Survey with 230 respondents
Xu et al. (2022)	-SOP among residents on how they were willing to support aspects of urban regeneration	-PA -PI	-Quantitative and qualitative -Interviews -Survey questionnaire-379 respondents
Mousazadeh (2022)	-Investigated SOP attitudes on quality of life among urban residents who lived near a river on quality of life.	-PA -PI -PD	-Quantitative approach -Survey with 450 respondents
Kim & Kwak (2022)	-Formation of SOP through projects designed within the urban area	-PA -PM -Behavior intention -Cognition of place -Experiential value	-Quantitative approach -Survey with visitors and citizens
Dameria et al. (2020)	-Understanding SOP sub concepts within a heritage set up.	-PI -PA -PD	-Qualitative approach
Hussein et al., (2020)	-Memories due to culture and SOP in urban landscapes that are historic	-PI -PA Based on cultural memory	-Qualitative approach -Face to face interviews-12 respondents -On-site research
Rajala et al. (2020)	-Identifying SOP structure through PM	-PM -PA	-Quantitative approach -Mail survey
Sanga & Mbisso (2020)	-SOP and placelessness of open spaces within urban area	-Physical qualities -Type of activities -Perceptions of space	-Qualitative inquiry -Observations -Interviews-22 in depth, purposive
Soini et al. (2012)	-SOP among residents and perceptions of landscape	-PA -Rootedness -PS -Relations from social aspects	-Qualitative inquiry
Qian et al. (2011)	-SOP among migrants using various scales	-PD -PI -PA	-Qualitative and quantitative approach -104 questionnaires -12 in depth interviews
Shamsuddin & Ujang (2008)	-Role of PA in creating the SOP	-PI -PA	-Surveys with 220 respondents -Face to face interviews-24 purposive -Systematic field observation
Kianicka et al. (2006)	-SOP among tourists and locals	-PM -Place peculiarities -Place relationships -Landscape changes	-Qualitative approach -Semi-structured interviews -24 respondents

Source: Author's analysis (2024)

spaces do not exude SOP to its users as a result of low frequencies of visitors and uses that were unintended. Mohammad et al. (2013) investigated SOP of landscape within cultural settings. The dimensions they considered for SOP within the landscape included the visual, spiritual and psychology. Landscape elements considered as cultural according to them play a big role in defining SOP. These includes the people, landforms, climate, economy, waterbodies and the social aspects. These have an influence on place identity. These authors concluded different levels of SOP are found in different places. These have a contribution on social activities as a result of place meaning relationships (Mohammad et al., 2013). The structure of SOP has also been studied across social-ecological landscapes. Rajala et al. (2020) investigated SOP through PM and PA. This is composed of emotional bonds in addition to self-identities. These authors categorized meanings of place into four. This includes meanings as a result of landscape character, meanings as a result of functions, meanings that result from the experiences and lastly meanings that are interpersonal (Rajala et al. 2020).

Erfani (2020) explored SOP and other concepts based on place. These are concepts of identity, attachment and satisfaction. This author posits that PA, PI and PS can be counted as elements of SOP. This author proposes the adoption of a framework based on three themes that focusses on inter-relationships between a person, group of people and a given place to articulate notion of SOP from different angles. This is at community and individual levels. Links to other place based concepts of attachment, identity, satisfaction and dependence is also an important consideration

(Erfani, 2020). **Table 3** shows the different levels of sub constructs that constitute the dimensions of SOP according to Erfani (2020). Stedman (2003) earlier proposed the addition of a fourth dimension to consider in sense of place. This is place satisfaction. This should be accommodated to evaluate the quality of a space/place. This author argues that attachment is personally significant. It's important to be aware of the level of liking and disliking to a place. This has more to do with attitudes. This author supports the importance of the meanings ascribed to settings due to the social factors (Stedman, 2003).

Importance of SOP

Over time, SOP has been investigated in various aspects that affect and inform place-people bonding. The findings from these various studies across disciplines underscore the importance of SOP. It is inter-disciplinary in its character and so difficult to breakdown its contributions along lines informed by various disciplines (Westerholt et al., 2022). The following selected studies point out the outcomes of sense of place perceptions that the author in this paper feel are important in informing the body of literature. Hull et al. (1994) posit that urban elements should be sustained for their various meanings and identity creation. This is important as the creation of identity within an individual, sense of community and SOP. SOP should be an important consideration when planning for various spaces within urban areas. Billig (2004) avers that it is important to consider SOP in new housing developments in old neighborhoods during urban regenerations. They consider this to be vital with reference to social interactions in addition to physical environments in formation of SOP.

TABLE 3
 SOP Interrelationships of place, individual and community

Constructs	Sub Constructs		
	Individual	Community	Place
-PA	-Emotions	-Community interest	-Character
-PI	-Beliefs	-Collective behaviors	-Scale
-PD	-Intuitions	-Community identification	-Ecology
-PS	-Perceptions		-Territories
	-Individual behaviors		-Areas with boundaries
	-Self identification		

Source: Adopted from Erfani (2022)

Montalbano (2016) through identity investigated SOP of space within urban realms. These authors posit that awareness from social domain and its value favor the application of identity. It accelerates the growth of the social aspects in addition to economic aspects for a given local area. Xu et al. (2022) investigated residents support for regeneration projects through their SOP. These authors concluded that enhancing of the residents' SOP can reinforce their eagerness to assist and support renovations of the commercial districts directly. This also enhances their attention to the community. This happens when community concerns are improved (Xu et al., 2022). Hussein et al. (2020) explored how effective cultural memory was in creating SOP. They also investigated how this enhances the inhabitants' life quality. Iconic buildings of heritage value were shown to be important in creating cultural memories. This then creates a SOP thus enhancing the identity of the urban realm. According to this study physical changes in cities that occur in a rapid manner destroys the urban features that are deemed to be familiar. This has the impact of environments that are unfamiliar being the result. This destroys the urban memory and PI. The study findings showed that memory due to culture, PA and PI contributed to SOP (Hussein et al., 2020).

According to Masterson et al., (2017); Stedman (2003) both PA and PM are important in understanding SOP and behaviors related to a given place. The various meanings and attachment by an individual or group of people underpins the SOP. This they argue may be a guide to what is preferred and shapes the social changes in addition to ecological changes (Masterson et al., 2017). Place making/framing according to Mohammed and Sadek (2022) posit depends on PI and SOP that then results into to PA. They aver that the first step is to create an identity that is physical for a given area. This can be achieved by involving the users of the targeted areas in the planning and design of the places that concern them. This acts to enhance the feelings of the users' due to the characters of place. This then raises the SOP of the people. This creates a sense of belongingness and attachment within the various places. This in the long run can lead to enhancing of the quality of life amongst a given people (Mohammed & Sadek, 2022). This is supported by recently by Acedo et al. (2017) and earlier by Shamsuddin and Ujang (2008). Westerholt et al. (2022) who concluded

that certain types of urban features are related to SOP significantly. All the findings on SOP above are important to scholars in various professions and other decision makers on significance of SOP and its cognate sub-concepts in place making and keeping.

CONCLUSION

Several studies have conducted across disciplines on place-person-process bonds that include SOP. In terms of scale of the existing researches, most were carried out at neighborhood levels rather than city levels. In terms of the different spaces, most were common within public spaces. The findings reveal the importance of SOP in various ways that all lead to place making and place keeping in enhancing the quality of life. There is definitely a lack of common way of investigating sense of place as different authors' use various sub-concepts as the study constructs. Some researchers have adopted the original questions by the stated authors in **Table 2** to conduct SOP research though PI, PD sub-concepts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is need for further discourse on what dimensions constitutes SOP and the best methods for its investigation in various places at various levels in order for various interested professions and policy makers to integrate the findings in place making and place keeping.

The author in this article feels that there is no known existing research on SOP within post-mine brownfields, other industrial legacies and within cultural religious landscapes. These present a significant literature gap in understanding and investigating this concept within the place-people-process relationships. The suggested gaps point to areas that were completely not researched by any of the reviewed articles. There is definitely more to be done as concerns SOP studies and its importance.

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