

Article

How to Capture Place Identity Contents? A Tool for Planning Interventions

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Abstract: Research into place identity has mainly focused on its intensity rather than its contents. Place identity measurement is relatively mature, and the scales have been used in many literatures. However, the contents of place identity are rarely addressed, and if so, only in qualitative studies, constraining comparative studies. Thus, the purpose of the current paper was to develop a measure of place identity contents that elucidates the dimensions that contribute most to place identity in different urban contexts. The three studies described here developed and implemented a place identity contents scale. The scale was designed and validated amongst a sample of 422 residents in Study 1, with the identification of an eight-factor structure consistent with the literature review. Study 2 replicated the factor structure and confirmed correlations with place identity, place satisfaction and quality of life in the place. Study 3 explored the applicability of the PIC scale in a field study investigating three parishes that differed significantly in their physical and social features. Overall, the results suggest that place identity is a flexible and dynamic process and that, in order to form a bond with a place, people make use of those available features (both physical and social) that better contribute to a positive place identity. The results also suggest which place identity contents better favor identification and may, therefore, contribute to improving the quality of places and human well-being.



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1. Introduction

Since its introduction [1], the concept of place identity has been addressed from different perspectives; the individualistic point of view focuses on the impact of place on residents' identity, while the social perspective emphasizes the nature of relationships between individuals, identities and places [2–5]. It is argued here that these approaches are interconnected. We defined place identity as those features of individual and social identity related to the perception of belonging to a specific place [6], those that are shared by groups identified with the place. Place identity is constructed by way of a long-term and complex process of individuals and groups interacting with the physical and symbolic features of places [7,8].

Identity comprises two components: the intensity, or the strength of belief, and the degree of positive connection with the object of identity [9] (Barney et al., 1998), and the contents of the schemata which compose the identity, i.e., the characteristics used by people to define their identity [10]. In a broader sense, we can think of “the meaning of a collective identity” or the contents associated with a specific identity [11]. Despite being related, these different components may operate relatively independently [12].

Place identity contents encompass a constellation of characteristics [13,14] that make a place unique for its inhabitants, who, in turn, are marked as unique. This set of contents is