# Place Change and Identity Processes

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## Abstract

This study intents to examine the relationship between place change and identity process, using Breakwell's model (1986, 1992) as framework. In the context of a process of imposed relocation in an old neighbourhood in Lisbon, two groups of residents were studied in two different moments along the relocation process. These two groups differ in terms of their choice of relocation. The generic hypothesis of the study is that relocation, and the residents' choice changes the relation of the people with the space, the social relationships, and it has also an impact in the resident's identity. The results show that the relocation process threats the identity principles in the two groups, but in different ways, depending of the residential choice, and also had impact in the social relationships and in the relation of the people with the space. As other studies (e.g.: Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Speller, Lyons, and Twigger-Ross, 2002) this research underlines the relationship between changes in physical environment and identity, in the context of residential environment.

**Key-words:** Place identity, Place attachment, Relocation, Social Networks.

## Cambios de residencia y procesos de identidad

Este studio quiere examiner la relación entre cambios de residencia y procesos de identidad mediante el modelo de Breakwell (1986, 1992). En el contexto de un proceso de reubicación impuesta en un barrio antiguo de Lisboa, se estudió dos grupos de residentes en dos momentos a lo largo del proceso de reubicación. Los grupos diferían en el grado de elección de la recolocación. La hipótesis general del estudio es que la reubicación y las elecciones de los residentes cambian la relación de las personas con el espacio, las relaciones sociales y, asimismo, tiene impacto sobre la identidad de los residentes. Los resultados muestran que el proceso de reubicación fuerza los

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principios de identidad en ambos grupos, pero de manera diferenciada, dependiendo de la elección de residencia. También tiene impacto sobre las relaciones sociales y sobre la relación de las personas con el espacio. Al igual que otros estudios (p.ej. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Speller, Lyons, and Twigger-Ross, 2002), esta investigación subraya la relación entre cambios de ambiente físico e identidad en el contexto del ambiente residencial.

**Palabras clave:** Identidad con el lugar, Apego al lugar, Reubicación, Redes sociales.

## Introduction

Concerns with relocation issues are marked historically by the Fried's research (1963) that observed the disruptive psychological experience in residents that were forced to move from West End Boston. This author drew on a psychodynamic theory to suggest a parallel between the grief response to the loss of significant people and the loss of place. Thus, he suggested that forced relocation represents a disruption in the "sense of continuity" that leads to the disruption of two cognitive components of identity, meaning, spatial and group identity.

By this time the dominant perspective was that a forced relocation was always a source of negative impacts, both psychological and to the physical health. In the 80ties this deterministic perspective was contested. For example, Stokols and Shumaker (1982) using a contextual analysis of mobility and health concluded that mobility does not necessarily result in negative consequences, but that there are other variables that can be important in this process, as low choice of residence or low congruity with expectations. In these situations the relocation process may result in adverse experience.

Actually, forced relocation has a tendency to be seen as a change situation that can provide opportunities and risks (e.g.: Hormuth, 1990; Weiss, 1990). If on one hand it can be an opportunity for a social and individual improvement, on the other hand, it can be source of negative impacts.

The relocation processes frequently include significant changes in the location and architectonic structure of the residential area. These alterations can change the residents' environmental relationship as well as the social interaction (Speller, Lyons, and Twigger-Ross, 2001). In

some relocation from "popular neighbourhoods" to areas of new high buildings, the residents loose the "defensible spaces" (Newman, 1972, 1975, 1995) that promote space appropriation, the sense of belonging, social control of space and perception of security.

The generic hypothesis of the study is that relocation, and the residents' choice changes the relation of people with space, in terms of the resident's attachment, identity and residential satisfaction.

## Place Identity

There have been different approaches to the understanding of the relation between place and identity. However, until now it does not exist a consensual clarification of the relationship between these two concepts. In the context of Environmental Psychology, the concept of "Place Identity", developed by Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff (1983), continued by other authors (e.g. Lalli, 1988; Feldman, 1990) or with different orientation (e.g. Sarbin, 1983; Korpela, 1989), was very important, but cannot explain how or why the place becomes salient for identity or how changes in the place context can influence the identity of the subject or the group. In the extent of Social Psychology and of the self-concept there is little theorizing about the role of place, despite James (1890) who has theorized about the material self. More recently, Hormuth (1990) presented a conceptualisation of the ecology of the self that is constituted by others, objects and the environments. However, objects and environment aspects are used only as representative and supports of social relations.

It this context it is also important refer the concept of urban social identity (Valera, 1997; Valera and Pol, 1994) as a substructure of the social identity. This conceptualisation emphasises that the physical characteristics of urban space together with the social meaning of space can been seen as a "social category". Thus, persons or groups can define themselves as belonging to this social category that also is recognized by the members of others categories.

In the context of Social Psychology, Breakwell (1986, 1992, 1993) develops the "Identity Process Model" that is, recently, used to understand the importance of place attachment to support or develop the identity (e.g.: Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Devine-Wright and Lyons, 1997; Loureiro, 1999; Speller et al., 2001).

Breakwell's model proposes four principles of identity: self-esteem, self-efficacy, distinctiveness and continuity. These principles are examined here, in an environmental context, in relation to attachment to a residential area. It aims at illustrating that environment plays a role in identity dynamics, that the four principles are related to place, and that different principles are likely to be threatened in different individuals.

The first principle of identity is the desire to maintain personal distinctiveness. Distinctiveness is related with the perception of a high positive valence of place (Hummon, 1992), and the use of place of residence to differentiate themselves from people from other parts of town (Lalli, 1992). The "distinctiveness summarizes a lifestyle and establishes that person as having a specific type of relationship with his/her home environment, which is clearly distinct from any other type of relationship" (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996, p.207). This identity with a specific territory allows the person's identification with the others that live in this space (Valera, 1997).

The second principle is the need for continuity over time and situation. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) found support for two forms of continuity in environmental relationships: (1) the 'place-referent continuity', when place acts as referents to past selves and actions and thus provide a link between past and present identities; (2) the 'place-congruent continuity' is the congruence between the environment and the residents' desires and values.

The self-esteem is defined as a positive self-evaluation or the group with which one identifies. Several studies demonstrate that personal evaluation of the local environment and positive evaluation of that environment by others results in pride and thus contributes to self-esteem. Devine-Wright and Lyons (1997) and Lalli (1992) refer the importance of live in historical places to self-esteem, Korpela (1989) emphasises the relevance of favourite places when children are distressed, Loureiro (1999) studied the impact of a national parks to the self-esteem of residents that live in the park surroundings.

The fourth principle, self-efficacy, is the persons perceived ability to function competently in a specific physical or social situation, and it is connected to the human need of environmental control (Belk, 1992).

## Place attachment

People are attached to places by processes that reflect their behavioural, cognitive and emotional experiences in their socio-physical environment. "Place attachment involves positively experienced bonds, sometimes occurring without awareness, that are developed over time from the behavioural, affective, and cognitive ties between individuals and/or groups and their socio-physical environment" (Brown and Perkins, 1992, p. 284).

Research on relocation shows a negative correlation between place attachment and adaptation to the new residential area (e.g. Fried, 1992; Speller, Lyons, and Twigger-Ross, 1996, 2002; Brown and Perkins, 1992; Stokols and Shumaker, 1982), in the sense that, the relocation process demands an interruption in the residents' attachment to the physical and social residential environment, as much as the place attachment, as much as the difficulty of adaptation to the new residential area.

It is important to include the interrelated physical and social dimensions of attachment as well as to analyse the degrees of attachment in the different spatial ranges, as the house, the neighbourhood and, at a larger range, the village or the city (Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001). In the context of relocation processes this analysis can contribute to understand the impact extent, and also to contribute to develop strategies to improve the relocation process.

The appropriation of space plays an important role in place attachment and place identity. By the two main components of appropriation, the action-transformation (behavioural component) and the identification (symbolic component) the person and the group transforms the space and give them their individual and social significance. For this symbolic interaction the person and the group recognizes themselves in this environment and by the categorization processes uses the environment qualities as part of their identity (Pol, 1996; Moreno and Pol, 1999).

## Research Context

In the nineties, a new motorway was constructed across the city of Lisbon. More than 500 families living in slums and shantytowns had their homes destroyed and had to be rehoused by the city Council in new social housing. The most important area that had to be demolished belongs to

the Liberdade Neighbourhood. The majority of the people were relocated in the Padre Cruz Neighbourhood, a new neighbourhood located in the administrative limits of Lisbon.

The Liberdade Neighbourhood area is located near the most important park of the city, nearby the railway train station, and it is crossed by a XVIII century aqueduct. The historical origin of this area is associated to the construction of this monument. The aqueduct workers built, at that time, temporary houses that were later occupied by poor workers that arrived in the city from the rural areas.

This area grew in the last two centuries without a plan and in an almost clandestine fashion. The neighbourhood is composed by single housing or small buildings (2 to 3 floors). Most of the houses are very old, degraded, some do not have channelled water or bathroom, only a washing basin. Thus, there are public services as showers, telephone and fountains. The streets are mainly reserved to the residents' access and are the privileged place for social interaction: the street is the continuum of the house itself in terms of some domestic activities, recreation or resting.

Collective institutions have an important role in the community, promoting social and health support and also leisure.

The population is quite old and the economic and educational level is low. The most important source of friendships is among the neighbours and family. In the neighbourhood it is possible to find several relatives of the same person.

The Padre Cruz neighbourhood is located at Lisbon city limit, in a spatial and urban discontinuity. However, there is a good public transport network that makes the connection between the neighbourhood and the centre of the city easier. The Padre Cruz neighbourhood is formed by a group of 133 buildings with five or six floors, with a central area reserved for pedestrians. The neighbourhood is crossed by streets with a high traffic intensity particularly of public transport.

The Padre Cruz neighbourhood was build especially to relocated people from different neighbourhoods. So, the residents from the Liberdade neighbourhood are only a small percentage of the people of Padre Cruz neighbourhood, and they were dispersed all over the new area.

The population of Liberdade neighbourhood had a strong place and community attachment and a strong resistance to change. Therefore, the population proposed to the city council the relocation in the same neighbourhood, in new houses. Due to the time schedule of the motorway construction, the city council decided that all the people had to be relocated in a new neighbourhood (Padre Cruz) and some years later they could return to the old neighbourhood. So, about six years later, a group of building was constructed in the Liberdade neighbourhood to relocated the population of Padre Cruz neighbourhood that want return to the old area.

In this context the main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between place change and identity process among two groups of residents of Liberdade neighbourhood that differ in terms of their choice of relocation.
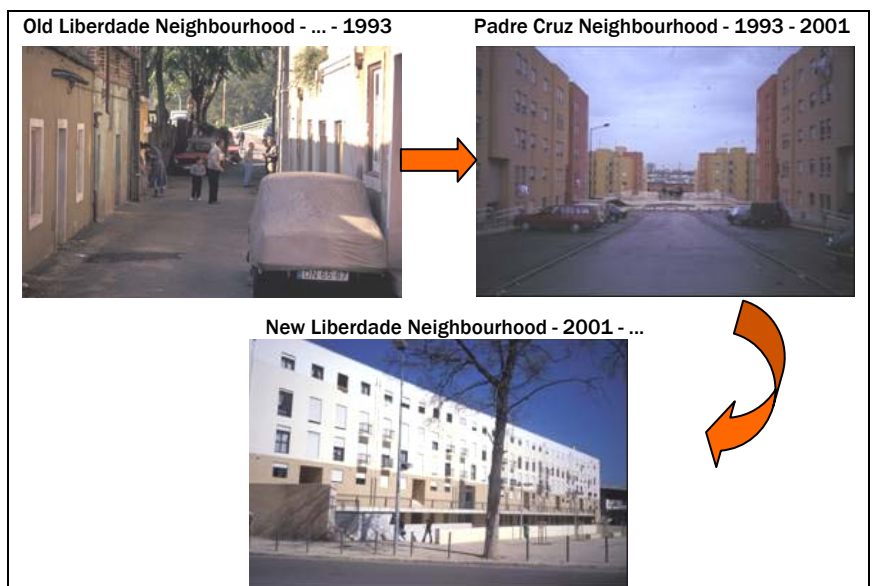


Figure 1. One of the typical streets of the Old Liberdade neighbourhood, Padre Cruz neighbourhood and New Liberdade neighbourhood.

# Method

## Sample

Two groups of twenty residents each were studied. One group choose to return to the old area (Liberdade neighbourhood) to new houses, when they are built (group1), and the other one group choose to stay in the new neighbourhood (Padre Cruz neighbourhood) (group 2). Both groups are similar in terms of age, gender, marital status, and time spend in the old and new neighbourhood. So, the residents studied here have age between 25 and 45 years old (in the moment of the first inquiry), have the same number of subjects from each gender, and are married. Only the residents that lived during at least 10 years in the Liberdade neighbourhood and 3 years in the Padre Cruz neighbourhood were considered.

## Hypothesis

The generic hypothesis is that the two groups in the two observations present differences in terms of the identity principles, place attachment, use of space and coping mechanisms.
- In the first moment the group that choose to return to the Liberdade neighbourhood (group 1) will present a reduced interaction with the new residents and weak identity and attachment to the new neighbourhood, and a low residential satisfaction in comparison with the group2.
- In the second moment the group1, will present a stronger identity, attachment to the environment, a strong social interaction to the neighbours and a high residential satisfaction in comparison with the group 2.
- In the comparison between the first and the second moment it is expected that both the groups present a stronger identity and attachment to the place and neighbours, and a high residential satisfaction in the second moment.
- In the two moments both groups will present different strategies of coping with the situation.

## Instruments

The interview consists of several sections:

- Socio-demographic characteristics, age, gender, marital status, educational level, profession;
- Residential history and building characteristics;
- Use of space and sociability;
- Residential satisfaction.

- A residential satisfaction scale developed by Freitas (1995) was used. This scale is composed by 66 items divided in six groups: satisfaction with the apartment (14 items); satisfaction with rooms and apartment arrangement (13 items); satisfaction with the building (11 items); satisfaction with the infrastructures (11 items); satisfaction with the neighbourhood (11 items); satisfaction with the relocation process (5 items).

- Place attachment scale - this questionnaire was adapted from Speller' Place Attachment Scale (1988, 1996). In the pre-test the Alpha was 0.75 and 0.80 in the final test. The factorial analysis in principal components, with a varimax rotation, it was obtained four factors that explain 64.405% of the variance. The first factor is related with the personal attachment to the home. The second factor is related with the change capacity. The third factor is the behavioural attachment that is related with the level of care and tendencies to act in certain ways towards personal space. The last factor is the social component of the attachment.

- Threats of identity scale - adapted from the Speller' Threat to Identity scale (1996), based on the Breakwell' identity principles (1986, 1992), that include four principles: distinctiveness, self-esteem, continuity and self-efficacy. In the pre-test the Alpha was 0.85 and 0.91 in the final test. The factorial analysis allows to identity four factors that explain 77.4% of the variance. The first factor is related with the principle of self-esteem, the second with the continuity' principle. The third factor is the distinctiveness' principle and the fourth the self-efficacy.

- Coping mechanisms scale - adapted from Speller' Coping Mechanism Scale (1996). The Alpha in the pre-test was 0.85 and 0.9468 in the final test. The factorial analysis the Principal Components allows isolating two main factors (78.642% of variance). The first factor is related with passivity and avoidance,

and the second factor is related with the confrontation mechanisms.

## Procedure

The two groups were interviewed in two moments: after the relocation in the Padre Cruz neighbourhood and six years later, when the second group had already returned to the old neighbourhood.

The subjects were contact at their homes and the interviews have an average duration of 93 minutes.

## Results

Results show that the majority of the hypotheses came be confirmed. So, the methodology used in this study seems to be useful to understand the relocation impact on the two groups considered, in terms of identity principles, place attachment, residential satisfaction, coping mechanisms, use of space and sociability.

In the first interview, the results show that the relocation contributed, in both groups, to the reduction of the frequency and intensity of the interaction between neighbours. They have a more negative view of the neighbours (notably among the group 1) in the sense that they like them less than the present's neighbours.

Concerning the place attachment (table 1) the results show a high social attachment and resistance to the change. Both groups presented in the residential satisfaction scale a satisfaction with rooms and apartment arrangement and with the building and no satisfaction with the neighbourhood and relocation organization (table 3).

Table 1. Place attachment scale: average, standard deviation and analysis of differences between the group 1 and the group 2.

| Moment | Scale | Group 1 | Group 2 | | |
|--------|-------|---------|---------|------|------|
| | | X (Sd) | X (Sd) | t* | sig |
| 1st | Personal Attachment | 2.65 (0.25) | 2.63 (0.22) | .336 | .738 |
| | Change | 2.11 (0.29) | 2.99 (0.54) | -6.365 | 000 |
| | Behavioural Attachment | 1.77 (0.42) | 1.68 (0.51) | 0.562 | .577 |
| | Social Attachment | 2.20 (0.37) | 2.67(0.56) | -3.114 | .003 |
| 2nd | Personal Attachment | 1.78 (0.67) | 2.23 (0.79) | -1.980 | .054 |
| | Change | 2.53 (0.90) | 2.95 (1.08) | -1.327 | .192 |
| | Behavioural Attachment | 1.37 (0.61) | 1.37 (0.63) | .000 | 1.000 |
| | Social Attachment | 2.15 (0.81) | 2.70(0.99) | -1.920 | .062 |

*It was used the t test for independent groups

In terms of the coping mechanisms the results show a significant difference between the two groups. Group 1 uses the passivity and avoidance mechanisms more often than group 2. In relation to the identity principles the group 1 present results significantly lower than the group 2 (table 2), as it was anticipated in the hypotheses.

In the second moment of evaluation the results show that group 1 has a high social interaction and a strong place attachment than group 2, as it was previous by the hypothesis. In relation to the residential satisfaction the two groups do not present significant differences.

Concerning the coping strategies the two groups reveals significant differences. The group 1 presents more mechanisms of confrontation and less mechanisms of passivity/avoidance.

The analysis of the identity principles allows confirming this study hypothesis. Group 1 presents all the principles of identity stronger than group 2 (table 2).

Table 2. Threats of identity scale: average, standard deviation and analysis of differences between the group 1 and the group 2

| Moment | Scale | Group 1 | Group 2 | | |
|--------|-------|---------|---------|-----|-----|
| | | X (Sd) | X (Sd) | t* | sig |
| 1st | Self-esteem | 4.08 (0.42) | 2.29 (0.32) | 15.050 | .000 |
| | Continuity | 4.43 (0.29) | 3.29 (0.50) | 8.895 | .000 |
| | Distinctiveness | 3.36 (0.35) | 2.81 (0.32) | 4.554 | .000 |
| | Self-efficacy | 4.26 (0.32) | 3.74 (0.40) | 5.203 | .000 |
| 2nd | Self-esteem | 1.71 (0.25) | 2.11 (0.19) | -5473 | .000 |
| | Continuity | 2.57 (0.24) | 2.89 (0.36) | -3.136 | .004 |
| | Distinctiveness | 1.69 (0.21) | 3.45 (0.27) | -21.938 | .000 |
| | Self-efficacy | 2.07 (0.33) | 2.74 (0.27) | -6.729 | .000 |

*It was used the t test for independent groups

In relation to the comparison between the first and the second evaluation moment it is possible to verify that group 1 presents in the second moment an increase in the frequency and intensity of the social interaction. Group 2 reveals a reduction in social interaction. These results confirm the initial hypothesis.

Table 3. Residential satisfaction scale: average, standard deviation and analysis of differences between the group 1 and the group 2

| Mo-ment | Subscale | Group 1 | Group 2 | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | X (Sd) | X (Sd) | t* | sig |
| 1st | Satisf. with the apartment | 2.61 (0.22) | 3.12 (0.30) | -6.048 | .000 |
| | Satisf. with rooms and apartment arrangement | 2.89 (0.08) | 3.39 (0.21) | -9.888 | .000 |
| | Satisfaction with the building | 2.75 (0.27) | 2.80 (0.25) | -.774 | .444 |
| | Satisf. with the infrastructures | 2.26 (0.28) | 2.54 (0.25) | -3.361 | .002 |
| | Satisf. with the neighbourhood | 1.85 (0.36) | 2.39 (0.33) | -4.946 | .000 |
| | Satisf. with the relocation process | 1.75 (0.37) | 2.44 (0.42) | -5.474 | .000 |
| 2nd | Satisf. with the apartment | 3.03 (1.06) | 2.96 (1.04) | 0.183 | .856 |
| | Satisf. with rooms and apartment arrangement | 3.19 (1.11) | 3.25 (1.13) | -.174 | .863 |
| | Satisfaction with the building | 2.97 (1.05) | 2.64 (0.94) | 1.050 | .300 |
| | Satisf. with the infrastructures | 3.00 (1.04) | 2.85 (0.99) | 0.492 | .625 |
| | Satisf. with the neighbourhood | 2.91 (1.02) | 2.56 (0.89) | 1.173 | .248 |
| | Satisf. with the relocation process | 2.08 (0.76) | 2.37 (0.86) | -1.129 | .266 |

*It was used the t test for independent groups

Concerning the place attachment group 1 presents in the second moment an increase in the personal attachment and resistance to the change (confirmation of the hypothesis). Group 2 presents, in the second moment an increase of the personal attachment (table 4).

Table 4. Place attachment scale: average, standard deviation and analysis of differences of each group between the first and the second moment

| Group | Scale | 1st moment | 2nd moment | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | X (Sd) | X (Sd) | t* | sig |
| Group 1 | Personal Attachment | 2.65 (0.25) | 1.78 (0.67) | 7.003 | .000 |
| | Change resistance | 2.11 (0.29) | 2.53 (0.90) | -7.822 | .000 |
| | Behavioural Attachment | 1.77 (0.42) | 1.37 (0.61) | 1.593 | .130 |
| | Social Attachment | 2.20 (0.37) | 2.15 (0.81) | -1.731 | .114 |
| Group 2 | Personal Attachment | 2.63 (0.22) | 2.23 (0.79) | 2.324 | .033 |
| | Change resistance | 2.99 (0.54) | 2.95 (1.08) | -1.976 | .065 |
| | Behavioural Attachment | 1.68 (0.51) | 1.37 (0.63) | .881 | .390 |
| | Social Attachment | 2.67 (0.56) | 2.70 (0.99) | -1.672 | .113 |

*It was used the paired-sample t test

The residential satisfaction increases, significantly, in the second moment in group 1, notably concerning the satisfaction with the neighbourhood infrastructures, and relocation process, as it was

previewed in this study hypothesis. To group 2 it does not present significant differences between the first and second moment of evaluation. This result is contrary to the study's initial hypothesis (table 6).

**Table 5.** Threats of identity scale: average, standard deviation and analysis of differences of each group between the first and the second moment.

| Group | Scale | 1st moment | 2nd moment | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | X (Sd) | X (Sd) | t* | sig |
| | Self-esteem | 4.08 (0.42) | 1.71 (0.25) | 19.161 | .000 |
| Group 1 | Continuity | 4.43 (0.29) | 2.57 (0.24) | 26.148 | .000 |
| | Distinctiveness | 4.26 (0.32) | 1.69 (0.21) | 26.685 | .000 |
| | Self-efficacy | 3.36 (0.34) | 2.07 (0.33) | 10.025 | .000 |
| | Self-esteem | 2.29 (0.32) | 2.11 (0.19) | 1.444 | .167 |
| Group 2 | Continuity | 3.29 (0.50) | 2.89 (0.36) | 2.929 | .009 |
| | Distinctiveness | 3.74 (0.40) | 3.45 (0.27) | 2.057 | .050 |
| | Self-efficacy | 2.81 (0.32) | 2.74 (0.27) | 0.407 | .689 |

**\*It was used the paired-sample t test**

Concerning the place identity scale, in the group 1 all the identity principles are stronger in the second moment (initial hypothesis confirmed). In the group 2 only the principle of continuity and distinctiveness are more intense in the second moment (table 5).

**Table 6.** Residential satisfaction scale: average, standard deviation and analysis of differences of each group between the first and the second moment.

| Group | Scale | 1st moment | 2nd moment | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | X (Sd) | X (Sd) | t* | sig |
| | Satisf. with the apartment | 2.61 (0.22) | 3.03 (1.06) | -1.709 | .096 |
| | Satisf. with rooms and apartment arrangement | 2.89 (0.08) | 3.19 (1.07) | -1.224 | .228 |
| Group 1 | Satisfaction with the building | 2.75 (0.27) | 2.97 (1.05) | -0.935 | .356 |
| | Satisf. with the infrastructures | 2.26 (0.28) | 3.00 (1.05) | -3.081 | .004 |
| | Satisf. with the neighbourhood | 1.85 (0.36) | 2.90 (1.02) | -4.415 | .000 |
| | Satisf. with the relocation process | 1.75 (0.37) | 2.08 (0.76) | -1.738 | .090 |
| | Satisf. with the apartment | 3.12 (0.30) | 2.96 (1.04) | 0.651 | .519 |
| | Satisf. with rooms and apartment arrangement | 3.39 (0.21) | 3.25 (1.13) | 0.541 | .592 |
| Group 2 | Satisf. with the building | 2.81 (0.24) | 2.64 (0.94) | 0.772 | .445 |
| | Satisf. with the infrastructures | 2.54 (0.25) | 2.84 (0.99) | -1.335 | .190 |
| | Satisf. with the neighbourhood | 2.39 (0.33) | 2.55 (0.89) | -.790 | .435 |
| | Satisf. with the relocation process | 2.44 (0.42) | 2.37 (0.86) | 0.327 | .075 |

**\*It was used the paired-sample t test**

## Conclusions

The results of this study confirm several aspects that were already emphasised by the literature about relocation processes in low-income neighbourhoods.

As was referred by Marc Fried to analyse a relocation processes is necessary to focus on the characteristic of the residents. In the Liberdade Neighbourhood, as in others classical studies like Fried (1963), and Fried and Gleicher (1961) and in other more recent researches like Mesch e Manor (1998), Hays (1998), and Ng (1998), with people with low-income, that live in the neighbourhood a long time ago, it was verified a strong place attachment to the residential area and neighbours, and the use of the streets as the privileged place for social interaction, and leisure.

The Liberdade neighbourhood is until now the place of reference to the relocated population. This feeling was present in expressions like "we" to refer to the residents of the Liberdade neighbourhood, and "the others" to the residents of the new neighbourhood. This categorisation include, like Tajfel and Turner (1986) refer, an attribution of positive characteristics to the ingroup and negative characteristics to the outgroup that are consequences in terms of the social interaction.

Despite the old neighbourhood being a degraded area, and the houses having in most cases slums conditions, the Liberdade´residents maintain a strong attachment and identity to the area. As refers Thompson (1984) a "nonplace" may be someone else's place". So, as emphasises David Canter (1977) to understand a place it is necessary to understand its users.

Newman (1972) and the Pruitt-Igoe' studies (e.g.: Rainwater, 1966; Yancey, 1971) point out the impact of the physical characteristics in the social dynamics. In the study here presented the physical and social characteristics of the new neighbourhood are very different from the older. The relocation occurred from a single housing urban typology with restricted access of motorized vehicles to a high-rise multi-storey building with intensive traffic flow. So, these differences have a major impact in terms of reduction of the frequency and intensity social interaction, because the physical setting of the new space does not facilitate the spontaneous meetings in the streets. This process was amplified by the fact that "old friends" were dispersed around the new neighbour.

Several studies observed before (e.g.: Twigger-Ross and Uzzell, 1996; Devine-Wright and Lyons, 1997, Speller *et al.*, 2001) that important alterations in the residential context can have impact in the identity of the residents on terms of the identity principles defined by Breakwell (1986, 1992).

Results show that the relocation process threats the identity principles in the two groups, but in different ways, depending on the residential choice. The residents of the first group redefine their identity in function with the new environment. They present more attachment and satisfaction to the new place, and more social interactions with the new residents. The second group maintains their identity to the old neighbourhood and neighbours, with reduced interaction to the new residents. After the relocation to the old neighbourhood, they present a strong identity to the space and community. The coping strategies are also different between both groups. The second group uses more strategies of confront, speciality in the second moment.

In the first moment the relocation contributes, in both groups, to the reduction of the frequency and intensity of neighbours' interaction, and to a more negative view of the neighbours. In terms of the use of the space the street is not any longer the most important place of social interaction. Both groups reveal satisfaction with the apartment and with the building but a strong dissatisfaction towards the neighbourhood and towards the relocation organization.

The second group, after the relocation to the old neighbourhood, presents a stronger place and neighbourhood attachment as well as a higher residential satisfaction than the other group.

This work suggests that identity processes have a dynamic relationship with the residential environment, and the residents' choice is an important mediator in the change adaptation.

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