

THE ROLE OF LANDSCAPE IN PLACE ATTACHMENT: A STUDY OF KAMACHCHODAI AND MORA WALA LOCALES AT NEGOMBO

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ABSTRACT

The human attachments are created physically and mentally which are either materialistic or non-materialistic. The strong bonds people develop with their memories, surroundings, locations, senses and people since birth, is known generally as “attachments”. When an attachment is developed with a particular place it is further defined as “place attachment”. This subject has gained much scientific attention in recent years as a topic interwoven with social sciences and has not been much highlighted in the perspective of landscape architecture. Therefore, this research questions, the impacts and role of landscape in the subject of place attachment. The paper discusses place attachment based on theories by scholars such as Law and Altman and subsequently focuses on the element of “landscape” within it, through literature based on landscape such as that of Robert B. Riley. Space, place and people complement each other by coexisting, thereby defining the landscape and creating an intriguing discussion within the study. Since people and landscape are broad topics, the study limits to a particular landscape with a specific group of users. The selected case studies are two significant landmarks in Sri Lanka, namely; Negombo Mora Wala and Kamachchodai Pola. The research was done by interviewing people, as a human dimension which plays a major role. Subsequently various impacts on place attachment, the landscape and its people were studied as the basic material, within which particular elements according to the theoretical framework based on the tripartite model theory, were focused in depth through data collection and analysis. An idea on the role of landscape within place attachment is apprehended through comparison and analytical discussions and observations of the existing situation of the sites with the theoretical framework formulated.

Key Words: *Place attachment, landscape, place, space, people, place identity, sense of place*

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Introduction

Place is defined as landscapes that are perceived by people in terms of experiences, symbols, meanings and etc. They are formed through spaces and in terms of landscapes is remarked as the landscape formed or defined by people according to "its' use". Hunziker, Buchecker, & Hartig, (2007) discusses that spaces are what turns into places and is studied as an existential activity in various studies. Many studies affirm the formation of places through spaces especially within communities, as it is where the collective use of a particular landscape can be observed specifically. Thus, a place and space can be easily identified and studied. Either the purpose or the landscape is used for or its unique characteristics and are exactly what become meaningful for people thus forming a place. This identification of either purpose or characteristic also develops within others out of the community who utilize these places. Many theories have evolved particularly in the subject matter of people, place and attachment. Some of which are sense of place, place identity, place attachment, place dependence, place making etc. As abstracted from the journal of environmental psychology, Williams et al. (1992), states "through the creation of places people visualize, memorize and thus stabilize constitutive human goods such as the sense of belonging, social integration, purposes that give meaning to life (values) and the sense of self" thus clearly emphasizing the value and meaning of a place for a person (Anton & Lawrence, 2014).

It was deduced that in the process of studying community and place attachment, the life style or the behavior of the particular community with the relevant place is what could be observed and further analyzed with theoretical data. Thus, as stated by Robert B. Riley, where he mentions that the tie the culture of the people which could also be a particular community and their landscape in this case which is defined as "place" will be the key in understanding collective human activity. Selecting a community for the study of place attachment and landscape can also be clarified by explaining the human role in it. As a community consists of some of the strongest human bonds, not only among themselves but also with the landscape or "place" they live in which clearly states the ease of discussing the topic. This is the basic identification of the existing "attachment". But what interests the topic more is the fact that this attachment is experienced not only by those within the community but also by visitors who help in creating and enhancing the identity of the community. Thus, the study is based on some of the aspects/theories that contribute in transforming spaces into a place. Subsequently, landscape with its special qualities and other aspects that contribute for the existence of the selected places and how they have come into being within the community will be discussed in depth by analyzing the selected theories on place attachment. As "Sense of Place" becomes the foundation of this discussion, the theories of place attachment and place dependence will be studied and discussed.

Many studies have been done on place attachment/place dependence referring to communities; where the causes for the existence of such concepts or the effects of the surrounding towards an individual or a group of people who engage in them are discussed. This research discusses such theories under physical, mental, economical and visual perspectives of the community, through which the discussion intends to lead to an understanding on the role/impact of a landscape creates on the basic subject matter: place attachment.

A place is defined in general as a synonym for location or as a unique ensemble of nature and culture. Further it is defined according to "its use", thus clarifying the meaning of the relationship between place, landscape and people (Qazimi, 2014a). According to many scholarly

discussions “place” is further elaborated to have formed through spaces because of its value, purpose and meaning added by an individual or a group of people.

In the study of place and place attachment, it is best to have a clear idea about a “place” in the general sense and also in a landscape point of view. The readings thus were selected so as to support and understand the meaning of place, its functions and its characteristics as well as the human place dimension. Additionally, other literature was studied to get an in-depth understanding about what place attachment is and how it is initiated within a person. As well as the reasons to why it exists and how it correlates with place, thus supporting the core discussion in understanding the role/impact of a landscape of a place for a person to be attached to it. Space and place should be studied as a whole, due to the former being what builds up the latter. Thus, when spaces are mentally, physically or visually perceived by people as a unique space, it can be identified as a place (Hunziker et al., 2007).

Many researches have been conducted over the past years trying to understand the impact of place on people and their quality of life. This has been taken into consideration as a basis in this discussion and studies addressing theories that are aligned with the concept, “Sense of Place”, while bearing in mind the role of landscape and its contribution to these theories on place attachment. Place attachment is a distinct component of a broader and more encompassing concept called “sense of place” stated Jorgesen and Stedman (2011). Reflecting on the levels of understanding sense of place, as described by Shamai (1991), place attachment can be understood as the strong feeling or the sense of belonging, a person develops towards a particular place.

Altman I, Low SM (1992) in *Place Attachment* (Plenum, New York) stated; “Place attachment describes the bonds people form with places and the meanings they ascribe to them” further building up the fact that places and the reasons for their formations could also be a core point of discussion in understanding the various impacts that links and attaches a person to a particular place, thereby proving the same which was explained before, that a place is the landscape of a community or an individual. This poses the question, if landscape can be the core reason for place attachment? Thus, understanding place as a part of the human experience provides a better path to study the bond between human and place thus directing the discussion towards a better explanation of place attachment of a person.

Relph states that most essentially, places are “significant centers of our immediate experiences of the world” (“E. C. Relph - *Place and placelessness* (1976, Pion), p.141.). Therefore, to understand place in depth, it is necessary that one uses a language so as to identify particular place experiences in terms of the intensity of a particular meaning and intention that the person and place holds for each other. This language can be defined as a mode of perception or a particular perspective of experiencing a place, which could be a biological experience or even simply a visual attraction. As expressed by Kevin Lynch “there is more than the eye can see, more than the ear can hear a setting or a view waiting to be explored.”, through which he further explains that nothing is experienced by itself, but always in relation to one element or the other (Lynch, 2005). These elements can be either of its surroundings or sequences of events leading up to it, and the memory of past experiences. Many have defined the concept of, *sense of place*, as a perception held by people, a characteristic of a geographical place, or even the experiences, expressions, imaginations of the place related to a person. As discussed in the Malaysia journal of Society and Space Issue 9 page 110, *sense of place* is a concept which is changing a typical space to a place with special behavior and sensory characteristics for certain people. This brings us back to the root of the study which explains the base; understanding the attachment of

people with places that are formed from space. As discussed in the beginning it is further confirmed that people adding values to a space or a “sense” to space is what creates a place. This is further explained by the relationship between man, his image and environmental characteristics. Thus, it can be concluded that it is both a physical and psychological concept. Attachment to a place is understood simply as a strong bond or a feeling which is more emotional. This is further understood through the explanation given by Robert B. Riley in the chapter Attachment to the ordinary landscape (Setham M. Low and Irwin Altman, 1992) where he explains attachment to a place under three main aspects which are; biology, culture and individual.

This study thus focuses on one main theory in place attachment. The Tripartite Model by Scannell and Gifford (2010) which is discussed under three main dimensions, namely; the person dimension, psychological or process dimension and the place dimension (refer figure 1 below). From a landscape perspective, it might seem that the third dimension stands out, as more important in understanding place attachment. But according to the theory discussed by Scannell and Gifford (2010), both physical and social aspects carry equal impacts on the subject. Where the person dimension focuses on “who” is attached to the place while discussing the extents an attachment exists individually and collectively. The psychological process dimension explains “how” an attachment exists which discusses the psychological process based on the effects of affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects. The Place dimension stands out as more important in understanding place attachment, but according to the theory discussed by Scannell and Gifford (2010), both physical and social aspects carry equal impacts on the subject.

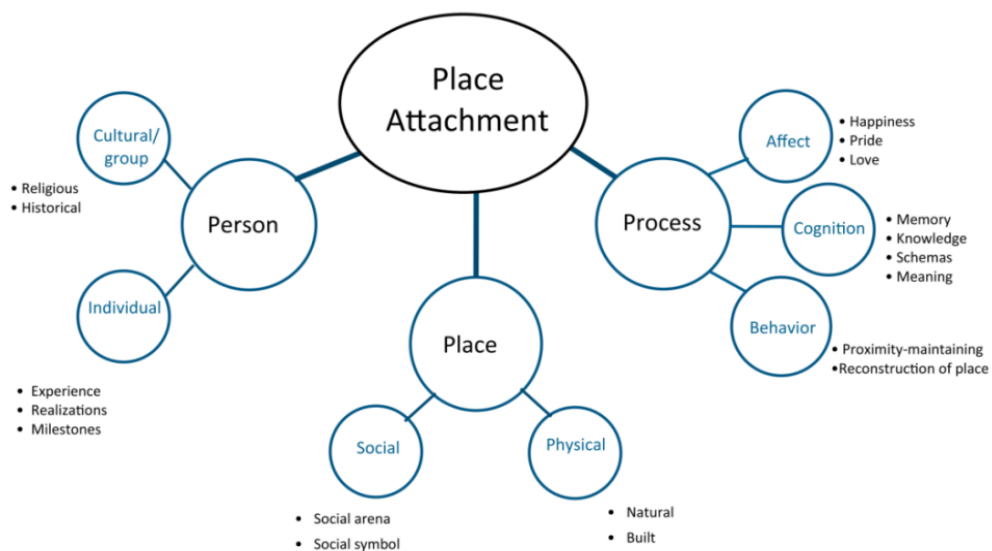


Fig 1: The tripartite model of place attachment
 Source: Journal of environment psychology

It was concluded by Hidalgo and Hernandez (2001), that the social element of a place in attachment is stronger than the physical element of the place. Also according to urban sociologists, it is necessarily social (Anton & Lawrence, 2014). The physical aspect being more focused on geographical features or physical elements of a landscape is outlined as a strong

element in the process, but the person being the focus even in a landscape outstands this, as for a person the bonds built up socially with their neighborhood, familiarity of the environment are stronger bonds that attaches them to a particular place. Thus, it is interesting to understand the balance effects of both elements of a place which creates place attachment for a community or for an individual.

Methodology

The intriguing discussion addressed in this research is based on the question “if landscape stands as the core” underneath each impact such as social, economy, geographical characteristics, norms, beliefs, culture and biological bonds that have been identified to have influenced place attachment one way or the other. Since the study is based on the tripartite model of place attachment, when referring various other literature relative to the theoretical framework, a lack in sufficient resources was noted of the resources in studies applicable for the tripartite model and landscape and those regarding the in-depth study of the tripartite model in selected place, its user and user perceptions. Though Robert B. Riley’s research provided an interesting discussion on the topic of landscape and place attachment it doesn’t talk in depth of landscape in particular and how it impacts a community or individuals in gaining an attachment to a place. The readings yet seemed to once again rewind and focus on the general surface reasons under the common fields of study mentioned above. Thereby the study intends to expose the underlying role of landscape on the impacts discussed in general under place attachment.

As discussed earlier in this paper, the formation of a place through a space can be explored under several areas of study, like urban public spaces, village gathering places, community spaces, slums, apartments, etc. The structure of the fishing community in Negombo has been identified as one of the longstanding settlements that have been built up on many cultures, activities and on a unique way of living of the fishing community and has existed over centuries. They have also been expanding as an informal community, creating a vivid image as a “place” of the community, and its visitors too creates an identity to the city of Negombo. Even the village gathering places have become the grassroots of formation of the more prominent places in the city of Negombo. Therefore, Negombo fishing settlements are appropriate for the case study for this research.

The sites selected for the case study provides physical evidence for reasons of attachment but what questions the mind is if there are other reasons beyond what we see at surface level that are also based on landscape creating place attachment within these sites. It was intriguing to discover that whether or not the place is beneficial to a person such as in economically, yet still remain attached. If not for a beneficial reason, could there be another cause that has an impact on creating place attachment? Furthermore, when discussing matters through a visitor’s perspective, that does not even hold a biological bond with a sense of belonging to identify the place as where they live, what factors could keep them attached or attracted? As most of the surface reasons have been frequently discussed in relates to occupational, aesthetical and etc. could Landscape also be a core reason that is not observed on the surface but underlay all aspects while coexisting with the other impacts discussed in general?

The question remains simple; why or what causes people to be regular or in other words attached to particular places and whether the landscape and its features have any impact on these reasons as well. The study thus discusses the subject matter with relevant theories selected in order to understand the identified problem. The tripartite model being the core

theory in which the study was based on, supporting in formulating the field study process. According to the tripartite model it is important to understand the existence of place attachment within the landscape by focusing in depth on the psychological process dimension, questioning “how” as well as the third dimension of place which questions “what” is attached. This research does not specifically categorize “who” is attached as the sample for the research was decided to be taken as unanimous, the local community and the visitors who visits the site. Thus, as the discussion is carried out on a general platform. The only limitation in selecting the sample was to consider the site boundary of the relevant place for the selection and not “who” was interviewed. The discussion focused on “how” place attachment exists, explaining the reasons for attachment that is observed to exist within the site. Further clarification is needed to figure if it exists or not. Apart from which it guided the discussion to understand the types of attachment identified: if it was based on occupation, people, the natural setting, attraction and etc., the question “what” provided a platform that opened discussions on studying the features and characteristics of the place in depth that was identified to be “attached” to the users. This supported the research to dig deep in understanding if there existed any landscape features or characteristics within the generally outspoken and identified elements, features and characteristics of a place.

The Field Study

The research was commenced with a pilot study that was carried out on a week day between the times between 5.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. The *Kamachchodai Pola* /market was identified to be not busy serving its usual purpose but instead other activities like leisure gathering of the family and children playing were observed at such times. This observation represented the contrasting image from a bustling busy day where the *Pola* (local market/fair) seems to turn into a “carnival” of its own (refer to figure 2 & figure 3). *Mora Wala* was similarly observed and thus was identified as a place with many unique landscape characteristics that attracted many people creating a particular identity in the area. Further, it was found that the place has been used for leisure activities since olden ages to this date by not only the locals but by outsiders as well.



Fig 2: Kamachchodai Pola on a dull day
Source: Captured by author



Fig 3: Kamachchodai Pola on a busy day
Source: Captured by author

The pilot study consist a photographic survey that allowed capturing the surrounding situation at the moment and which paves the way for a better analysis. The field study observed the day to day activities of the community of the selected settlement areas; *Kamachchodai Pola* and *Mora Wala*. Subsequently according to the outcomes of the pilot study, a suitable questionnaire was formed for the case study. Yet due to the identified issues faced in obtaining answers through writing during the pilot study due to the literacy level of the community, leading most of them to refrain from even trying to answer stating that “they’ve not learned well enough to write for such things”, it was converted into the format of a casual interview with the users which followed the outlined structure of the questionnaire prepared. It was realized at that moment that casual interviews would be the key to open up a more effective conversation with most of the people at site. It also exposed their attitude in being very helpful once you’ve earned their trust and confidence. It further highlighted the fact that if they are attached to any place, it definitely will be built up on a solid reason or a more sensitive one.

The interviews at first focused on questioning people on the purpose of using the particular place and for how long they have been using it, in order to understand whether an attachment existed to the particular place or not. In order for further understanding on the topic, the structure was revised where several questions indirectly questioned the people of any landscape element that has impacted their attachment or recognition of the places and the levels of their attachment to that element. As it questioned all three elements of the tripartite model: Who, What and How; according to the requirement of this research, the questions on understanding why people were attached, carried more weight compared to the others. The overall data collection process gathered information that supported to discover that landscape played a significant role in place attachment at the cases studied. The research further derived on a smaller scale, how it existed and to what extent. The photographic survey which was carried out in parallel to the interview supported the process of analyzing the data while acting as a tool of confirmation of the behavior of the people attached to the place. The study gathered information to find out;

- The existence of an attachment with the selected places,
- The reasons for people to use the particular places
- The applicability of theoretically identified factors to understand reasons for place attachment
- The applicability of the Tripartite Model Dimensions and factors in order to observe place attachment and the reasons for it to exist

- The impacts of landscape towards the attachment of the people that has already been deduced

Thereby collecting sufficient material for analyzing and validating the initially formulated research question based on the literary research and physical data collection methods done.

The study was limited to the two main places selected; *Kamachchodai* and *Mora Wala* due to the similarity of the functions in other proposed places like *Munnakkarai* and *Doowa* and due to the previously explained barrier identified in the literacy level of the majority of the sample selected. Data collection was done based on a questionnaire but in the form of individual interviews of users. An age limit was not considered in data collection since the fact that “who” is attached was not particularly focused in this research. A random sample was selected for this purpose in order to obtain a much balanced collection of data comprising all ages and gender. The study focused on the entire locale, therefore did not at any instant bias on the community but studied openly both insiders and outsiders at the places selected.

The case study of *Kamachchodai Pola* and *Mora Wala Beach*

As explained above, the overall data collected provided information on, the different impacts creating place attachment. In case of *Kamachchodai* depicted a higher percentage on those attached due to their occupation and residential locations while at *Mora Wala*, more leisure and residential factors topped the list. Thereafter, the various impacts for the identified attachments were analysed by questioning the users “why” they used the particular site and “what” attracted them to it the most. The deduction thereby represented common answers that supported the identified existing attachment defined by the people as occupation, residence, leisure and etc. Further understanding “what” attracted these people to select these sites over other similar sites in the country was categorized as buildings/structures (referring to buildings or any other manmade structures), natural features (The trees, reef, coastal belt, ocean within the area), people (The people that builds up the landscape (users, residents, customers etc.)), identity (The historical value or the knowledge of the place) and other factors such as those stated as the comfortability experienced, the accessibility to the place and the familiarity one carries with the place. Thus, majority at *Kamachchodai* selected structures and those at *Mora Wala* the attraction was caused by the identity and its natural features. But a considerable number from both sites also stated that the people within the landscapes were also the reasons that they felt ‘comfortable’ enough to move around the site and more confident of its safety leading them to remain attached to these places. This discussion was further continued informally with the interviewers who stated that basically it was the surrounding, the familiarity, the positive experiences, the people, the accessibility, ocean and other natural elements that were the reasons for them to constantly visit each place.

As observed through the likability factors and as discussed in the previous sections separately in each study, the landscape elements and characteristics such as the scenery, comfortability of the site, the people or the uniqueness created with a landscape feature within the site is one of the main reasons for the particular identity of each site, and the reason for the users to state that they prefer this site over other places which provides the same facilities and functions. Therefore, it can be understood that the landscape itself becomes the core reason for this attachment. Further as stated by one of the interviews at *Kamachchodai Pola*; “I come here because it is a known place to us and well known among people; so, we are sure to have business.” When, explaining the reasons for using the place due to the identity carried by it as well as the positive feedback the people who use the place provides for their occupation. But the

interviewee states this reason by expressing his “preference” to the site thus by reasoning out and justifying the fact that a landscape reason has impacted in initiating the surfaced reason for attachment.

Though at once one would say after all it is due to the business that particular person is attached, thereby implying that he is attached to the site due to the economic value, this discussion argues that according to all collected data, factors like the “space” provided for the business, the “comfortability”, the “identity” the site carries as well the element of “people” in this case being the frequent customer which are in landscape terms “characteristics and element of the landscape of that particular place” had been instrumental in creating place attachment. It could be stated that apart from the general and surface reasons one would identify in place attachment, the landscape indeed has a higher probability to be the core impact in creating the attachment.

Similarly, when discussing the reasons for appreciating a place where majority of the users identified a particular landscape characteristic: the accessibility to the site and the surrounding views of the site like the reef in *Mora Wala*, the wide beach in the area and the easy access to the *Kamachchodai Pola* which was almost the ultimate core reason for many to get attracted to the place making them attached to it subsequently.

Summing up to an interesting discussion, as each factor stated and identified through the filed study lead to be that of either a landscape characteristic, feature or element. For example, though a person visits the *Kamachchodai Pola* for occupational purposes, why he/she prefers it over other places, are being the facilities its surrounding provides, the friendliness of the people around, the comfortability gained over the years with the place are all landscape attributes that has created the attachment. Thus the research provides the clear image within the readers mind that, the most are those who has a longer relationship with the site, those who uses it often and the reasons for this also becomes either their occupational base, residential area as well as the other features and characteristics that forms the site are the people who are attached to the site. Every element being linked, when observing in depth and finding the “reasons” for these needs/attractions and bonds to occur or exist it shows as whole that the landscape itself has played a main role. It should be understood at this point that the landscape has provided the location for the people as suitable to live in as well as engage in their occupation, along with the structures and buildings. The entire area what the user perceives is the landscape of the site which attracts them to the place. In such manner, though the user appears to be attached to the site based on their occupation which is originally existing and easily perceived when observed, yet the occupation and the residences continues to exist due to the existence of the landscape of the site. Therefore, landscape characteristics and its elements tend to play a major role in place attachment as it soundly underlines the most common reasons in attachment yet is not often spoken of.

The research successfully observes the existing place attachment within the case study areas while unraveling the landscape role in place attachment and its impacts underlying the surface studies of impacts of place attachment based on the Tripartite Model. Thereby it discusses in depth how landscape characteristics are overlooked by many people, where in their everyday lifestyle most of their attachments with places are mostly based on a single or several landscape aspects. These aspects when studied further focuses on further study areas such ecological, social, economic landscape aspects as well. As this study is focused on the landscape aspects in general, when classified as tangible and intangible, it also depicts other various possible and important study areas that could be discussed. These focus on various landscape elements and

characteristics specifically such as the ecological aspect in landscape, which can be studied in depth as it stood out as an important factor within the Negombo locale when understanding the various landscape impacts of landscape in place attachment. It was identified as studies that could support the economical standards and livelihood of the community while increasing the value of the city if carried out. Thus, such studies will have to focus in depth on the fishing community as well as on the particular selected landscape aspects, for instance in this case, ecology and the eco system that has played a major role in attachment.

CONCLUSION

The research commences by discussing the facts that create an impact on having or not having a place attachment, which were categorized from general reasons to likability factors and further being used to understand these factors under a landscape perspective. According to most of the literature material, the theories and discussions states the general reasons and more of the sociological reasons such as appreciation of a place, the identity of a place and the purpose of utilizing the place to be the reasons for enforcing place attachment within an individual or a group of people. But the interesting finding grasped through the interviews and observations is that each of these reason in most cases turned out to be harbored by one or more landscape characteristics or components. For example, though a person states that he is attached to *Mora Wala* due to the identity of the place. When studying the reasons for this particular identity it was observed that the natural reef and the pools, leads to exploring a different level of attachment which the user himself may not identify at first site but could underlay the general reasons understood and seen, depicting the landscape role within it. As in most studies, landscape stands as the base of the study, but it is most of the time buried underneath other surfaced studies which is easier to perceive by people in general. Similarly, those who solely focused on their income regardless of place or time in *Kamachchodai*, a certain number of them had ignored the landscape aspects and yet are attached to the particular places through it. It might sound as if that landscape can only be perceived by “studying” how to, but in other terms, it further states that landscape is indeed perceived by those day to day users. More often conversational terminology is used to identify these impacts which do not suggest “landscape” for most people at first. Being a multi-disciplinary subject, landscape does tend to coincide with many other practices like sociology, ecology and etc. Yet, it is being and can be perceived by all who interact with it by simply experiencing, feeling or even seeing. In an overall observation, as a percentage it could be summed up that landscape indeed plays a major role in place attachment yet continues to lie beneath the general surfacing impacts of place attachment itself. This opens up an opportunity to ponder of possible methods to signify landscape aspects within identified places.

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