



# Understanding the cognitive, affective and evaluative components of social urban identity: Determinants, measurement, and practical consequences



Daniel Belanche <sup>a</sup>, Luis V. Casaló <sup>b</sup>, Carlos Flavián <sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Faculty of Economy and Business, University of Zaragoza, Zaragoza, Spain

<sup>b</sup> Faculty of Business and Public Management, University of Zaragoza, Huesca, Spain

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## ABSTRACT

Although place-related identity is receiving increasing attention within the environmental psychology field, little attention has been paid to deepen on place identity at the local level and better understand the social nature of urban identity. Focusing on the case of Zaragoza (the fifth largest city in Spain), this work aims to contribute to previous literature by understanding how shared city meanings and socio-demographic characteristics influence urban identity formation, proposing a standard measure of urban identity as a social identity formed by three-dimensions (cognitive, affective and evaluative), and testing the influence of urban identity on citizens' behaviors. Results show that: (1) city social representations participate in the formation process of the three dimensions of urban identity, (2) the operationalization of urban identity as a second-order construct is validated, and (3) urban identity influences citizens behavioral support to local initiatives via personal and social norms.

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## 1. Introduction: the social nature of urban identity

Place-related identity has received increasing attention by researchers within the environmental psychology field (Anton & Lawrence, 2014; Lewicka, 2011). Several overlapping theoretical concepts such as “place identity”, “sense of place”, “place attachment”, “community attachment”, or “sense of community” have provided complementary insights to research on this phenomenon (see Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001; Lalli, 1992). However, after decades of research focused on shaping the interrelationship between people and places, little attention has been paid to deepen on place identity at the local level, also termed urban identity (Lalli, 1992).

Scholars are recognizing the social nature of urban identity in an explicit or implicit manner (Bernardo & Palma-Oliveira, 2016). In a spatial sense, a person may be attached to very specific places (e.g. my home); nevertheless, at high geographical levels such as cities, social representation (shared meanings) or social belonging are critical to place identity formation (Hay, 1998). This social identification process is based on the assumption that individual

activities, especially those that attain a subjective meaning or an affective relevance, often involve other people in the individual's environment (Lalli, 1992), favoring the development of placed related social relationships along time (Bernardo & Palma-Oliveira, 2016; Lewicka, 2011). Depending on the social links rooted and developed in a location (Stedman, 2002), each person feels a certain level of identification and attachment with the members and shared elements that belong to a city; and might share common beliefs, collective memories, experiences, values and life-styles (Lewicka, 2008; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Therefore, as a consequence of the social construction of the place and by means of self-identification processes, individuals not only interiorize their belongingness to a place such as a neighborhood, a city or a country (Rijnks & Strijker, 2013), but also experience and behave as inner members of such communities (Cuba & Hummon, 1993).

On the other hand, cities hold unique cultural and social characteristics (Lalli, 1992), representing ideal places for the development of an urban related identity. In addition, a better understanding of urban identity formation and identification processes is essential to comprehend citizens' support or disapproval of current challenging local initiatives such as pro-environmental actions or sustainability plans (Bamberg, Rees, & Seebauer, 2015; Belanche, Casaló, & Orús, 2016; Lind, Nordfjaern, Jorgensen, &

\* Corresponding author. Facultad de Economía y Empresa, Gran Vía, 2, 50005 Zaragoza, Spain.

E-mail address: [cflavian@unizar.es](mailto:cflavian@unizar.es) (C. Flavián).

Rundmo, 2015). However, previous research on place identity have often confounded the determinants that contribute to increase individuals' identification, the instruments to measure place identity and the behavioral consequences derived from such identification. Based on a wide examination of previous literature and focusing on the city level, our work exposes that there is still a need to advance on the analysis of the urban identity concept and clearly distinguish between: (1) the social representations participating in the cognitive, affective and evaluative formation of urban identity, (2) the operationalization of urban identity through standard measures, and (3) the actual consequences of urban identity on citizens' behavior (e.g. people's support for local initiatives).

As a result, this research deepens on the social nature of urban identities to propose a holistic perspective considering its formation, measurement and consequences on people's behaviors related to the city. More precisely, we review previous works that describe urban identities as social constructions derived from social representations and empirically evaluate how specific factors of the city culture, history, politics, environment and society determine urban identity. As well, based on previous research on social identities, we propose a scale of urban identity and carry out another study to validate it as a second order construct reflecting its cognitive, affective and evaluative dimensions. To prove the nomological validity of the scale, we also explore the influence of demographics and other personal variables (e.g. education level) on each of these three dimensions. Finally, we hypothesize and test how urban identity influence local initiatives as the adoption of an urban ID, and how both social and individual norms may mediate this effect.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The social construction of urban identity based on social representations

Literature on place identity enhances its social basis (Burley, 2007; Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Trentelman, 2009) and describes this phenomenon as the socialization of the physical world by the self (Proshansky & Fabian, 1987; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983). Thus, "social psychological place identities" (Felonneau, 2004) refer to the physical setting, the human activities which generates a sense of place, and also the human social and psychological processes rooted in the setting (Stedman, 2002). Focusing on urban identity, research suggests that people are easily linked to places at the local level (Steyaert, 2000), being the city a perfect exemplification of the place concept (Tuan, 1974). This is because representations of the city are grounded in social experiences and constitute a deep expression of the subjectivity of the person (Lalli, 1992).

Conceptually, urban identity may be described (1) as a feature of the city based on a collective attribution and (2) as the self-identification of the person with the city. The former assumes that each city holds its own urban identity based on its main features and constructed by a collective attribution. In this sense, literature describes the city or town as a fundamental geographical unit (Bonnes, Mannetti, Secchiaroli, & Tanucci, 1990; Lalli, 1992), exclusively created for the human use (Tuan, 1974) and stable in time compared to other places such as homes and countries (Lewicka, 2008). Cities also have clearly socio-cultural, geographical and legal-administrational limited borders (Lalli, 1992; Lewicka, 2011), but also convey weak ingroup-outgroup distinctions based on empathy or stereotypes (Stürmer, Snyder, Kropp, & Siem, 2006). In addition, urban identity is filled in with concrete contents (Lalli, 1992) consisting of a great number of historical, cultural, or political factors, among others, affecting to the meanings, rules and values attributed to the city by the city-dwellers (Gupta & Ferguson, 1992).

All these social representations favor a sense of city uniqueness and distinctiveness from other cities or spatial levels.

Complementarily, urban identity should be also conceptualized as a positive self-definition of a person (Lalli, 1992). This conceptualization of urban identity is based on the complex process of appropriating the town as a living environment that builds a personal urban identity concerning the self-identity subsystem. From this view, sometimes the town transfers some quasi-psychological characteristics to residents, as a kind of personality (e.g. cold, cosmopolitan, courageous; Lalli, 1992). In addition, urban-related identity also contributes to differentiate residents from other individuals. This function is particularly relevant considering the ingroup-outgroup social categorizations (Turner, 1981) and we-they distinctions (Deaux, 1997) by which the individual perceives intragroup similarities (between insiders) and intergroup dissimilarities (between insiders and outsiders) (Bardach & Park, 1996; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000; Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002). This distinction could be related to cultural interrelationships within a community to defend the good (self) from the bad (other) (Rijnks & Strijker, 2013; Sibley, 1995) and probably rising competitive insights such as rivalries between cities (Turok, 2004). Both conceptualizations of urban identity, as a feature of the city based on a collective attribution and as a positive self-identity of the person, contribute to develop and support each other, especially from the subjective perspective of each individual. Nevertheless, our research will focus on urban identity as a positive definition of the self hereafter (Lalli, 1992).

In the identification of urban identity determinants, previous research has usually disregarded the underlying social processes that are needed to better understand its construction and development (Bernardo & Palma-Oliveira, 2016). Considering the social construction of place identities (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Trentelman, 2009), the city represents an exceptional opportunity to develop the inter-member relationships typically distinguished in anthropology and sociology (e.g. neighborhood solidarities and social networks, Wellman & Gulia, 1999, pp. 331–366). Indeed, interpersonal relations at the city level are sometimes strong and tightly bounded but also can be narrowly defined and loosely bounded (Granovetter, 1973). Thus, living in the same city, as well as sharing certain values, culture, or experiences, represents a clear common bond that helps generate a common urban identity in the long run (Lalli, 1992). This view agrees with classical assumptions by which objects and places have meanings that are shared by individuals with whom one interacts (Mead, 1934). Consequently, these inter-subjective meanings (Wilson, 1980) generate a dynamic symbolization process by which social actions are associated with spatial characteristics (Lalli, 1992). Theoretically, this process leads to social or socio-spatial representations of the social space (Dias & Ramadier, 2015; Liu & Sibley, 2004) that rely on collective memories (Lewicka, 2008) or cultural shared meanings (Low & Altman, 1992; Antonsich, 2010) internalized by each individual by central (e.g. salient object-based meaning) or peripheral (e.g. category based) processing (Lewicka, 2008). This way, the city becomes a general symbol of individual's wealth in terms of personal experience that perfectly fits the classical functions (distinctiveness, stability, social value, etc.) attributed to identity (Breakwell, 1986; Lewicka, 2008).

In this line, social bounds and community ties strength have been identified as the main social basis of place identities (Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001; Lewicka, 2010). Research has also found that place attachment is affected by some specific social elements such as racial tensions (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996) or security issues (Brown, Perkins, & Brown, 2003). In contrast, the historical, cultural and political factors affecting place identity have received scant attention by researchers (Antonsich, 2010; Dixon & Durrheim,

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