



# Forms and sources of place attachment: Evidence from two protected areas



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## ABSTRACT

Sense of place is a widely researched concept that has been used to describe and analyze people–place relationships. However, there is no consensus regarding the forms of place attachment, the relative importance of the sources for such attachments, or the spatial extent of place formation. The purpose of the paper is to contribute case examples of sense of place for significant natural areas, thereby adding to the body of evidence that explicates the diverse sources and forms of place attachment. Using content analysis of qualitative stakeholder interviews, we identify these dimensions of place attachment for two nationally significant Australian natural areas. Our data support a tripartite structure for sense of place comprising affective, functional and cognitive forms of attachment. We also examine the extent to which these place attachments are localized on the study sites and/or spatially generalized across sites possessing the same sources of place formation. Our case studies provide evidence for both localized and generalized senses of place. Localized place attachments had affective and functional components, respectively founded on social and biophysical sources. Generalized senses of place comprised functional and cognitive components, with appreciation of historical values of these places key to the formation of the latter. Our results indicate the spatial diversity of place attachments for protected areas and their social, cultural and biophysical sources.

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## 1. Introduction

Sense of place is a widely researched concept that has been used to describe and analyze the values people confer on their surroundings, together with associated behavioral relationships with place. As a multi-faceted and overarching concept that embraces a complex of people–place relations, sense of place provides a conceptual frame for exploring place-based values. For example, sense of place has become an important focus for understanding the human dimensions of natural resource management (Kaltenborn and Williams, 2002; Moore and Graefe, 1994; Williams et al., 1992; Williams and Stewart, 1998).

Place formation is as an experiential and interactive process involving physical and social dimensions (Gunderson and Watson, 2007; Manzo, 2003). Places are incarnated by experiences and aspirations that emphasize human emotions and relationships (Tuan, 1977). Many scholars have conceptualized place attachment as comprising two forms: social/emotional and physical/functional (Bricker and Kerstetter, 2000; Gunderson and Watson, 2007;

Moore and Graefe, 1994; Warzecha and Lime, 2001; Williams and Roggenbuck, 1989). Moore and Graefe (1994) empirically demonstrated the existence of functional place dependence and an affective place identity for rail-trail recreational settings. Gunderson and Watson (2007) identified functional and emotional bases for attachment using both quantitative and qualitative methods to uncover place meanings for the Bitterroot National Forest in Montana. These are indicative of case studies that support a two dimensional structure for sense of place comprising affective and functional forms of attachment.

Affective or emotional attachment is a socially constructed response that involves a deep tie to place, to the extent that this place becomes important as part of one's identity (Stokols and Shumaker, 1981; Williams and Vaske, 2003). Mood and emotion are a fundamental component of a person's relationship with a place (Russell and Snodgrass, 1991). Place dependency, on the other hand, is a functional attachment to a place's physical attributes or resources, such that this place satisfies an important personal need (Kaltenborn, 1998). This instrumental form of sense of place is grounded on behavioral interactions through the practice of particular activities, often of a recreational nature (Stedman, 2002; Tapsuwan et al., 2011). Two components are essential to place dependence: an individual or group assessment of the quality

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of a specific setting to facilitate and support user-specific goals or desired activities (Bricker and Kerstetter, 2000; Williams and Roggenbuck, 1989); and awareness of alternatives, which involves judgments about the superiority of a place compared with other settings that may also satisfy needs or goals (Gunderson and Watson, 2007; Stokols and Shumaker, 1981).

Other conceptualizations of sense of place have been offered. Brown and Werner (1985) and Stedman (2003), for example, treated place attachment as synonymous with place identity, whereas Lalli (1992) considered place attachment to be a subcomponent of place identity. Place attachment has also been conceptualized as a distinct form of sense of place, to be examined alongside place identity and place dependence (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001, 2006; Stedman, 2002, 2003), while Pretty et al. (2003) distinguished between place attachment and place dependence. There is also evidence for a cognitive form of place attachment. Wynveen et al. (2012) found that place meanings not only involved individuals and their social interactions, but also intellectualized interpretations of a setting's physical attributes, such as perceived degree of naturalness. When place meanings are associated with particular physical attributes, a distinctive cognitive form of attachment may be evident, as well as emotional and behavioral responses to place.

In addition to the multiple views regarding forms of place attachment, there are divergent claims about the spatial extent of place formation. A common view is that sense of place is a spatially localized phenomenon, with attachment to a specific location arising from intense first-hand experience (Farnum et al., 2005). Here sense of place is conceived as a construct representing beliefs, emotions and behavioral commitments concerning a localized geographic setting (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2006; Kaltenborn, 1998).

On the other hand, there is support for a sense of place that forms in relation to sets of places that share common characteristics or associations. Proshansky et al. (1983) argued that place identity can form for both specific physical settings as well as types of settings that share similar sources for place formation. Similarly, Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996, p. 208) distinguished between two types of place identity: place-referent continuity ('the maintenance of continuity via specific places that have emotional significance for a person') and place-congruent continuity ('the maintenance of continuity via characteristics of places which are generic and transferable from one place to another'). Geographically extended or generalized place attachment can form for 'types of places sharing features that humans find attractive, calming, or safe' and 'shared affinity for types of places occurs via cultural ideologies while also recognizing that sociocultural processes occurring at specific sites contribute to place attachment' (Farnum et al., 2005, p. 17). Vistad and Vorkinn (2012) and Williams et al. (1992) identified attachments to wild areas in general that varied as a function of context, individual factors and cultural determinants. These findings indicate the potential for spatially generalized as well as localized attachments.

Alongside the various conceptualizations of the forms and spatial expressions for sense of place, a variety of place characteristics have been observed to be sources for place formation. Place attachments can be influenced by physical place attributes such as natural features (Bonaiuto et al., 1999; Schroeder, 1996; Wilkinson, 1991) and landscape characteristics (Kaltenborn and Bjerke, 2002; Warzecha and Lime, 2001; Williams et al., 1992). Stedman (2003) emphasized the role of biophysical features such as landscape elements and wildlife, as well as the perceived degree of naturalness of a place. Wynveen et al. (2012) found place meanings derived from interpretations of the physical attributes of a setting, such as the pristine nature of the environment and the presence of rare or important species and ecosystems. Natural and historical values were identified by Tapsuwan et al. (2011) as

important sources of sense of place for residents in the Western Australian city of Perth.

Physical historical evidence such as artifacts and buildings, as well as personal associations with historical events, can be important cultural sources for place formation (Beckley et al., 2007). Johnston (1992) argued that social value may often be based on a continuity of historical attachment to or association with places over time that creates shared community perceptions and thus make it difficult to distinguish it from historical value. Beckley et al. (2007) and Brehm (2007) also demonstrated that sociocultural sources can be central to place meaning. Affective factors underlying place attachment typically involve a history of personally-significant social interactions associated with a place, such as a tradition of spending family holidays or undertaking particular place-based activities (Hull et al., 1994).

In many cases, of course, there are multiple sources for place formation. Rogan et al. (2005) observed that participants in their study were intimately involved in an on-going relationship with the land, operating on personal, social, and biophysical levels. The joint significance of social and physical dimensions was evident in a study of attachment to place within two New Zealand rural communities, where place identity was both culturally constructed and founded upon particular landscape attributes (Sampson and Goodrich, 2009).

In response to these diverse understandings in the literature regarding forms of attachment, as well as the spatial extent of and sources for place formation, the purpose of this paper is to contribute case examples of sense of place for a significant type of place. In doing so, we seek to add to the body of evidence that explicates the forms, spatial characteristics and sources for place attachment. As sense of place research is necessarily conducted with reference to a particular group of people in a particular place, drawing general conclusions relies on interpretations of accumulated case evidence. The wider significance of particular cases thus lies in the salience of their localities – the extent to which the researched place is an instance of a type that has global reach, for example. Two important place types that are well represented by case examples are cities (including neighborhoods) and recreational settings. By contrast, explorations of sense of place for protected areas<sup>1</sup> are relatively few in number, and most of those (for example, Fishwick and Vining, 1992; Halpenny, 2010; Kaltenborn and Williams, 2002; Warzecha and Lime, 2001; Williams et al., 1992) have been motivated by their importance as recreation settings rather than an explicit engagement with the multiple values they support.

Protected areas are typically of outstanding aesthetic, ecological, and/or cultural significance (Lockwood et al., 2006). They are distinguishable from other types of land or sea use because their primary goals of governance and management are to protect biological diversity, other natural values, and associated cultural heritage (Dudley, 2008). Their values are both location-specific and, often, spatially extensive, with significant biophysical features, cultural heritage and types of recreation opportunities present in multiple areas. These significant values often attract a wide range of users and thus provide opportunities for studying people–place relationships. Their diversity of place-based values distributed across a range of spatial scales also makes protected areas well suited to identifying sources and forms of both localized and generalized senses of place. These considerations motivated our choice of two Australian protected areas as case studies. These areas provide case evidence for a type of place that, in 2010,

<sup>1</sup> An internationally accepted definition of a protected area is: 'A clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values' (Dudley, 2008, p. 8).

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