



Bonding to a new place never visited: Exploring the relationship between landscape elements and place bonding



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Photo-assessment was used to evaluate emotional bonding to potential destination.
- Place bonding can be enhanced by adding familiar elements into unknown places.
- There was no effect of enhanced bonding from adding unfamiliar landscape elements.
- Individuals may associate emotional bonds with first-visited destinations.

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ABSTRACT

Place bonding is the positive emotion that individuals associate with a certain place and was believed to be absent from tourism research. Most place-bonding-related studies in tourism concerned the relationship with loyalty or involvement. Few tourism studies have discussed how individuals form bonds with destinations, especially first-time visitors. Although some scholars believe that individuals develop bonds with a place after long-term interaction with the place, others have suggested that individuals may bond emotionally with places they have never visited. Using a photo-based survey of two groups of respondents who grew up in different countries, the current study demonstrated that individuals' place bonding can be significantly enhanced by adding familiar landscape elements into unknown places. The results suggest that individuals may form initial bonds to destinations they first visit based on their prior experiences with similar environments. This initial bonding will be incorporated into composite bonding with the place that directly resembles the place. Detailed analysis and applications are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Because of the recent rapid globalization, widespread sameness-of-place in the modern world has produced excessive architectural and commercial uniformity among many tourist attractions. Dullness and conformity in the physical elements of locations have caused sites to lose their differing identities, characteristics, significance, and emotional associations, among other traits (Altman & Low, 1992; Lewicka, 2011b). These changes have decreased the diversity of locations and strengthened the public's desire for unique locations (Casey, 1997). In particular, individuals seek an emotional bonding between themselves and particular locations, and render those locations unique with

emotional bonds. Place bonding refers to the particular identity and emotional attachment that a user associates with an environment as a result of long-term interactions. Such bonding is a composite of a variety of factors such as emotional attachment, experiences, and meanings that individuals attribute to particular locations. Although the causes and mechanisms of place bonding remain unclear (Giuliani, 2003; Lewicka, 2011a; Morgan, 2010), many scholars believe that place bonding produces diverse positive effects in individuals such as enhancing tourism satisfaction and service quality (Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005), improving the perceived quality of life (Theodori, 2001), and altering attitudes toward an environment (Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003). Therefore, more than 400 relevant articles have been published in 120 different journals over the last 40 years (Lewicka, 2011b), including publications in the fields of environmental psychology, sociology, community development, human geography, anthropology, gerontology, urban planning, recreation, ecology, forestry, architecture, and economics. This phenomenon demonstrates the importance of this topic.

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Many scholars believe that long-term interactions between individuals and locations are necessary to generate place bonding (Hay, 1998; Low & Altman, 1992; Stedman, 2006). Studies have also suggested that emotional bonding is not necessarily correlated with duration of residence (Bolan, 1997; Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Elder, King, & Conger, 1996; Stedman, 2002; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). In fact, various studies have indicated that individuals may develop emotional bonding with locations they have never visited (Droseltis & Vignoles, 2010; Farnum, Hall, & Kruger, 2005; Feldman, 1990; Galliano & Loeffler, 1999; Jones, Patterson, & Hammitt, 2000). However, only a few empirical studies have examined place bonding with locations that are unknown or being visited for the first time.

The phenomenon of emotional bonding to places has been receiving increasing attention in the field of tourism. Place bonding was suggested to be an important tool for destination management and marketing (Gu & Ryan, 2008; Hawkins & Backman, 1998; Lew, 1989; Tsai, 2012; Walsh, Jamrozny, & Burr, 2001). Having tourist to build emotional connection with their destination is one of the major motivations for tourism providers (Alegre & Juaneda, 2006; Lew, 1989; Poria, Reichel, & Biran, 2006). Several studies have demonstrated the bonding to that destination was significantly associated with the destination image (Prayag & Ryan, 2012), the evaluation of the site (Brocato, 2006; Cheng, Wu, & Huang, 2013; Hou, Lin, & Morais, 2005; Lee, 2001, 2003; Lee & Allen, 1999; Ramkissoon, Smith, & Weiler, 2013; Yuksel, Yuksel, & Bilim, 2010), personal involvement (Gross & Brown, 2008; Hou et al., 2005; Lee, 2003; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Tsai, 2012), and tourists' revisiting intention and loyalty (Alegre & Juaneda, 2006; Alexandris, Kouthouris, & Meligdis, 2006; George & George, 2004; Lee, 2003; Li, Cheng, Kim, & Petrick, 2008; Mechinda, Serirat, & Gulid, 2009; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Tsai, 2012; Yuksel et al., 2010). However, the question of how emotional bonds between tourists and tourist destinations are formed has rarely been examined. While the traditional point of view emphasize the necessity of consistent visits in developing emotional bonding, it is important to understand how tourists can develop emotional bonding with destinations as opposed to residences or recreational sites.

The physical elements of an environment are considered an important factor that affects emotional bonding with a location (Dale, Ling, & Newman, 2008). Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) proposed "place-congruent continuity," which suggests that individuals can maintain location-related continuity by transferring the characteristics of a prior location to a new environment. Thus, individuals who relocate will begin searching for new places of residence that are similar to their old residences (Fried, 1963) and will decorate their new residences with old items (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Chow & Healey, 2008) and/or attempt to incorporate the landscape elements of their previous residences into their new residences (Brook, 2003; Hiruy, 2009; Ismail, 2010; Mayer, 2011; Sciorra & Cooper, 1990). Lowenthal proposed the concept of "landscape attachment" as early as 1978 and believed that individuals may emotionally attach to a particular type of landscape rather than to a particular place. Studies have also observed that regardless of whether individuals have visited a certain place, they will be more emotionally connected to a familiar landscape (Cheng & Kuo, 2014; Kuo, Cheng, & Shen, 2013). Therefore, we believe that upon their arrival at a new destination, tourists will transfer their emotional bonds with prior locations to the new setting based on familiar landscape elements.

The objective of this study is to verify the effects of landscape elements on place bonding and thereby elucidate the mechanisms by which emotional bonding forms in new or unfamiliar places, which is the case for most tourism destinations. The results will

help improve the understanding of the mechanisms by which place bonding develops in tourism destinations without long-term interaction.

2. Literature review

2.1. Definition of place bonding

Prior studies regarding emotional bonding with places have proposed many similar concepts (Giuliani & Feldman, 1993; Pretty, Chipuer, & Bramston, 2003), such as place rootedness (Tuan, 1977), sense of place (Farnum et al., 2005), place dependence (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981), place identity (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983), place bonding (Hammit, Kyle, & Oh, 2009), and place attachment (Williams & Vaske, 2003). Although these terms differ, they all describe the positive affective bond between individuals and specific places (Giuliani, 2003; Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Moore & Scott, 2003; Shumaker & Taylor, 1983) and have often been used interchangeably (e.g., Lewicka, 2011b). Although distinguishing among these ambiguous terms may not be an easy task (Giuliani, 2003; Prayag & Ryan, 2012), this study uses the term "place bonding" to refer to the "affective and cognitive-based attachment to special resource settings" (Hammit, Backlund, & Bixler, 2006, p. 17). Place bonding is a complex phenomenon. Stokols and Shumaker (1981) believed that place bonding relates not only to an individual's distinct perceptions of a particular location or environment but also to significant feelings regarding the functions, emotions, or value of the location. Steele (1981) defined place bonding as a process of experience accumulation. Once individuals have engaged in activities and accumulated experiences in a given location, the location becomes a meaningful place (Tuan, 1977).

Many scholars have suggested that place bonding responds to prior growth experiences (Low & Altman, 1992; Riley, 1992; Ryan, 1997). Giuliani and Feldman (1993) noted that the relations between individuals and places are based on comparative experiences and memories. In other words, individuals compare their experiences in a location with their earlier experiences in other locations. Ng (1998) also observed that bonding with a particular location actually reflects individuals' social and cultural experiences. Therefore, when individuals introduce elements that change a location, the affected location may become an environment full of symbolic significance that serves as a benchmark for comparison with other environments (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981).

Recent studies have commonly described the concept of place bonding in terms of place dependence and place identity (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Kyle, Bricker, Graefe, & Wickham, 2004; Moore & Scott, 2003; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992; Williams & Vaske, 2003). Some researchers have suggested that the scope of place bonding for recreational destinations extends beyond these two dimensions and proposed additional constructs for describing place bonding (e.g., Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001; Kyle, Mowen, & Tarrant, 2004; Shamai, 1991). Therefore, Hammit and colleagues (Hammit, Backlund, & Bixler, 2004; Hammit et al., 2006, 2009; Hammit & Cole, 1998) suggested a five-construct scale to thoroughly describe emotional bonding with places that includes place familiarity, place belongingness, place identity, place dependence, and place rootedness. Place familiarity is the initial stage of a people–place relation that involves different memories and images associated with a place. Place belongingness is a sense of affiliation with or feeling a sense of membership with an environment. Place identity is the feeling of treating a place as an extension of oneself (Hammit et al., 2006), which is a "combination of attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meanings, and behavior tendencies reaching beyond emotional attachment and belonging

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