

# Dwelling structures in a flood-prone area in the philippines: Sense of place and its functions for mitigating flood experiences

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## ABSTRACT

Sense of place is a multidimensional concept consisting of place dependence, place identity and place attachment aspects. These three aspects are distinct place concepts which refer to an individual's subjective perception and his/her conscious feelings which result from daily interactions within a predefined functioning environment. In order to determine how sense of place is affected by natural phenomena, this paper identified place dependence, place attachment, and place identity of residents in barangay Tadlac, a flood-prone, lakeshore barangay located in the Municipality of Los Baños, Laguna in the Philippines. A combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to gather and interpret data concerning resident's sense of place in relation to Tadlac as a flood-prone community. Results show that in spite of repeated experiences of flooding events in the community, sense of place is seen as a functional mechanism which allow residents to adapt, as well as maintain, their residency within Tadlac. In considering community responses to disasters, disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) frameworks should thus incorporate sense of place as one important variable, in addition to other environmental and social variables, for interpreting the rationale of residents living in disaster-prone areas.

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## 1. Introduction

Sense of place refers to people's subjective perceptions and their conscious feelings about their environments. It can be further identified as an individual's interpretative perspective on the environment, as well as emotional reactions to his or her environment [1,2]. As a transactional process between humans and their environment, sense of place allows a person to (consciously and unconsciously) associate a particular place to contain a complex bundle of meanings, symbols, and characteristics; encapsulating a person's feelings, perceptions, attitudes and behavior towards a place [3,4,5]. Although the way a person senses a place is one's own unique and individual expression, there are often socially shared meanings, beliefs, symbols, values, or feelings associated with that particular place [6].

While existing papers have measured sense of place, it is highly contextual since various authors' disciplinary origins carry differing ontological and epistemological perspectives, as well as varied research circumstances. As a result, there is a plurality of sense of place concepts [7,8,9]. In spite of this diversity, there are distinctive

[10] and multidimensional [11] characteristics between these concepts which can be categorically identified. Jorgensen and Stedman have organized sense of place into a general framework of attitude structure that incorporates three categorical responses to spatial settings. These attitude structures of cognitive (mental processes), affective (emotional processes) and conative (impulse or tendency) variables are further interpreted as place identity, place attachment, and place dependence, respectively [12].

Various authors have defined place identity, place attachment, and place dependence as independent concepts not necessarily associated with or components of sense of place. Place identity as a cognitive process, could also refer to the categorization of self in terms of place, which gives a particular individual a sense of meaning or behavioral norm as a result of being immersed in a particular place [3,13,14]. It denotes an individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment through complex patterns of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to that particular environment [15]. Place attachment, meanwhile, is described as a positive bond that develops between groups or individuals and their environment, and heavily contains emotional content [11,16,17]. Finally, place dependence is described by Stokols and Shumaker as an occupant's perceived strength of relationship between himself or herself and specific places [18]. It

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also refers to connections based specifically on activities that take place in a setting, reflecting the importance of a place in affording conditions that serve an intended use, activities such as timber harvesting or horse-riding, as well as the ability for that particular environment to adequately cater for that purpose [19]. Shamai, and later on, Jorgensen and Stedman, unified these place concepts and other similar ideas, to refer to “Sense of Place” (SOP) [3,7,12].

More importantly, these differing but related concepts

contribute to the multidimensionality of sense of place as a framework for analyzing various socio-environmental phenomena, such as disaster risk reduction and management. Dramatic changes in the physical landscape and social milieu as a result of disasters could result into the non-functionality of a site or a loss of sense of place, and that new places such as evacuation sites may not be suitable for certain activities previously practiced [20]. This could result into the formation of a disordered and inappropriate

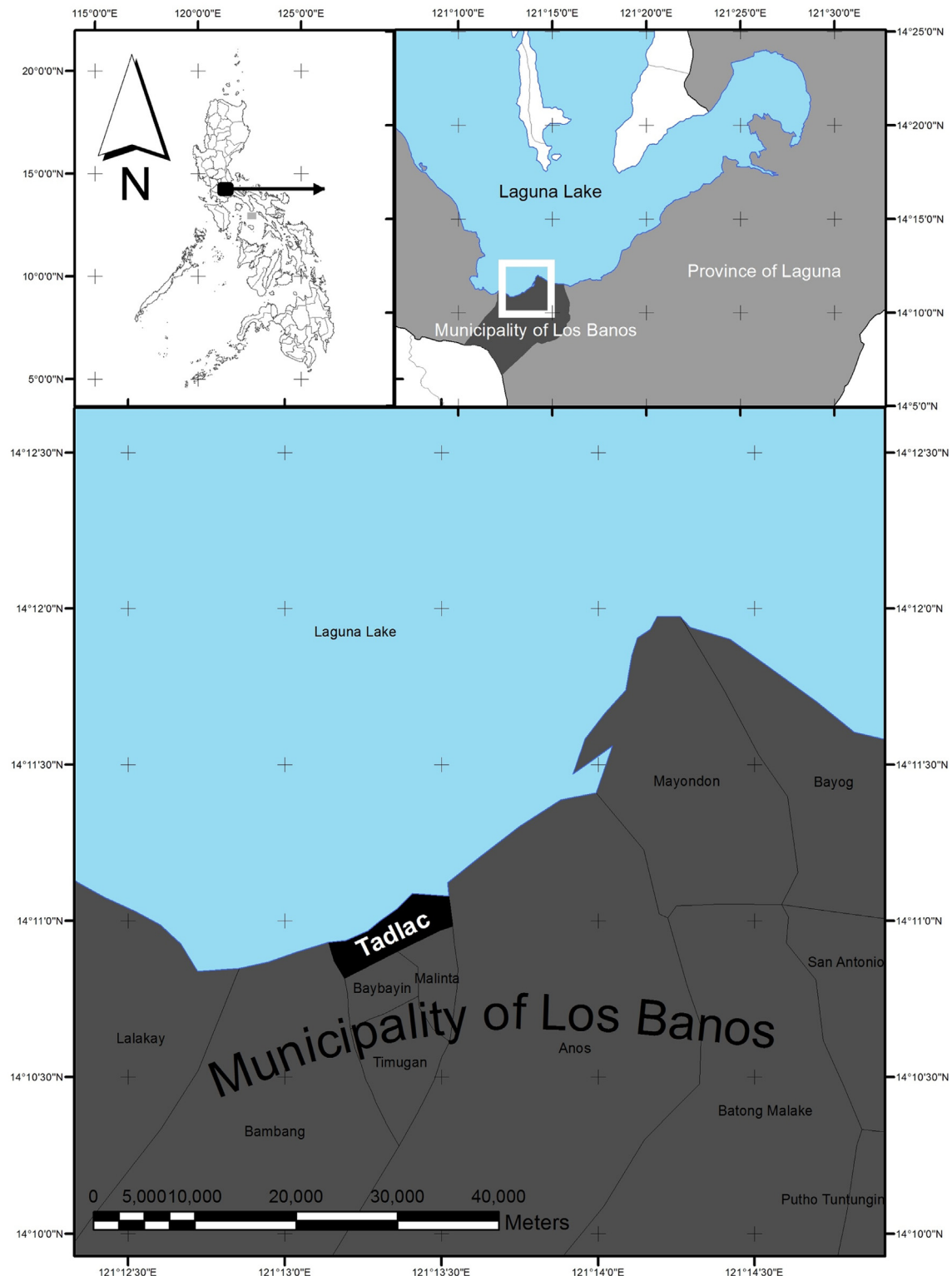


Fig. 1. Tadlac in relation to the municipality of Los Baños and its other barangays, the Laguna lake (Laguna de Bay), and the province of Laguna.

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