

PLACE ATTACHMENT: CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL QUESTIONS

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Abstract

One of the limitations in the study of attachment to place has been its restriction to the spatial range of neighbourhood. Apart from some studies analysing attachment to house, there is a gap regarding other spatial environments. In this sense, we do not know to what extent people can be attached to other spatial categories, i.e., to bigger or smaller places, and whether the neighbourhood range is effectively the basic level of attachment, as many studies assume. On the other hand, most studies on attachment to place have viewed places as social environments only. We have found very few references to the physical dimension of place in the definition of the concept and also few regarding its operationalization. In this study, we measured place attachment within three spatial ranges (house, neighbourhood, and city) and two dimensions (physical and social), in order to establish some comparison between them. We did so by interviewing 177 people from different areas of Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Spain). The results indicate that attachment to place develops to different degrees within different spatial ranges and dimensions. Among the results, we can highlight that: 1) attachment to neighbourhood is the weakest; 2) social attachment is greater than physical attachment; and 3) the degree of attachment varies with age and sex.

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Introduction

The study of feelings that people develop toward the places where they were born and brought up, and the function these places fulfil in their lives is a research area which has been receiving increasing attention in recent years on the part of environmental psychologists. Scientific interest in this subject is not new, and it is easy to see that, in common with other fields within environmental psychology, it has been approached via a great variety of points of view and disciplines. So, we find approaches coming from geography, sociology and psychology among others. Among the latter the pioneering work of Fried (1963) in the 'West End' of Boston stands out, in which he brought to light the grief and distress of residents who were forced into relocation. Since then, the existence of strong affective bonds towards residential environments has become more apparent. Nevertheless, the rate of development in this field is limited. For example, we still do not know to what kind of places people mainly develop attachment; or what place aspects or dimensions

are more likely to awaken attachment. In this work we will deal with these issues. However, before exploring this we will describe the concept of attachment used in this work.

The concept of place attachment

For some time, the main difficulty the researcher has encountered when dealing with the study of place attachment has been the diversity of approaches available at the theoretical level as well as the empirical. There was no agreement regarding its name, definition or the methodological approach best suited to deal with it. We can find many similar terms such as community attachment (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974), sense of community (Sarason, 1974), place attachment (Gerson *et al.*, 1977), place identity (Proshansky, 1978), place dependence (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981), sense of place (Hummon, 1992), etc., such that it is often difficult to tell whether we are talking about the same concept with a different name or different concepts. On occasions we see

that one of the terms is used as a generic concept which embraces others (for example, for Lalli, (1992), place attachment is a component of place identity). On other occasions some authors use them without distinction as if they were synonyms (Brown & Werner, 1985, talk of attachment and identity without differentiating them).

This terminological and conceptual confusion has seriously blocked advances within this field as many authors have pointed out (Giuliani & Feldman, 1993; Lalli, 1992; Unger & Wandersman, 1985). Currently, there seems to exist a certain consensus in the use of the term 'place attachment'. In general, place attachment is defined as an affective bond or link between people and specific places. For example, for Shumaker and Taylor (1983) it is 'a positive affective bond or association between individuals and their residential environment' (p. 233). Hummon (1992) considers it 'emotional involvement with places' (p. 256), and Low (1992) defines it as 'an individual's cognitive or emotional connection to a particular setting or milieu' (p. 165). These definitions may be appropriate to describe this special feeling toward certain places, but they have the drawback of being too ambiguous and do not allow us to differentiate attachment from other closely-related concepts such as, for example, residential satisfaction, which has been defined as 'the positive or negative feeling that the occupants have for where they live' (Weidemann & Anderson, 1985; p. 156). For this reason, we consider it necessary to further delimit it. Towards this aim, we fall back on what we understand to be the main characteristic of the concept of attachment: the desire to maintain closeness to the object of attachment (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980). This characteristic, although is implicit in many definitions and operationalizations of the concept, has rarely been explicitly emphasized. If we incorporate this specific property into the previous definition of place attachment (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983), it could take the following form: a positive affective bond between an individual and a specific place, the main characteristic of which is the tendency of the individual to maintain closeness to such a place. We can only find one description of place attachment in these terms, although under a different name. Sarbin (1983) speaks of the Spanish term *querencia* which reflects the frequently observed tendency of people to prefer to stay near to specific places. It is the propensity of human beings and other animals to seek out the place where they were born or find a place in which they feel comfortable and secure. However, with the exception of this author, rarely has place attachment been

described in these terms. On the contrary, many other aspects have been incorporated in its description, for example, the role that attachment plays in the development of identity, its influence on the sense of community, etc. In our opinion, these other aspects are not inherent to attachment or definitive, but the tendency to stay close to the object of attachment is.

The range of analysis

Another question about place attachment that has not received much attention from researchers concerns specifying the different places towards which attachment develops. Most studies carried out up till now have focused their range of analysis on the neighbourhood or community environment. From the first studies about community attachment (Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974), or those previously carried out by Fried (1963) in the West End of Boston, the neighbourhood level has been the spatial range most often chosen by researchers. That is, the study of place attachment has been reduced almost exclusively to studying neighbourhood attachment. There may be various reasons for preferring this range. On one hand, it could be an effect of studies on residential satisfaction which, in principle, are highly linked to place attachment studies. On the other hand, a certain implicit assumption exists that the neighbourhood is the preferred level of attachment, that is, attachment to the neighbourhood is greater than attachment to other spatial levels such as, for example, the house, the city, or the region. Studies carried out indicate that a high percentage of people (between 40% and 65%) demonstrate attachment to their neighbourhoods (Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Gerson *et al.*, 1977; Guest & Lee, 1983). However, the question arises whether the neighbourhood is the preferred level of attachment or, on the contrary, other spatial levels exist where attachment is more relevant. In general, all authors explicitly or implicitly recognize that people can develop feelings of attachment toward other places with a smaller range, like a house or street, and to places with a greater range, like a city or a nation, but not many have investigated these. An exception to this general trend is Altman and Low's book (1992). According to these authors, the places to which people can be attached vary in scale, specificity, and tangibility, from the very small (for example, objects) to the nation, the planet Earth or the universe. In various chapters they describe examples of attachment to different places such as the house (Cooper Marcus,

1992; Ahrentzen, 1992), children's playgrounds (Chawla, 1992), a square (Low, 1992), the forest (Pel-low, 1992; Hufford, 1992) and objects (Belk, 1992). Nevertheless, each of these works analyses only one level, so it is not possible to make comparisons regarding attachment to different spatial levels.

One research study which simultaneously analyses several spatial levels is that of Cuba and Hummon (1993). Although these authors do not talk about attachment but place identity, the measure employed in this study ('Do you feel at home here?') has been used in other studies as a measurement of place attachment (e.g., Kasarda & Janowitz, 1974), so we can consider their results as relevant in this field. In that study, the existence of different levels of spatial identification was analysed (feeling 'at home') among the inhabitants of a Massachusetts county. The three places analysed were house, community and region. Most of the subjects (42.6%) stated that they identified with the three places, followed by 16 per cent who only identified with the region, 13 per cent with the house only, and finally 10.3 per cent who only identified with the community. Thus, these results seem to indicate that it is precisely toward the most-studied place (the neighbourhood or community) that the least number of people feel attached. In any case, it would be necessary to include other works which utilize specific measures of attachment and explore other levels in such a way as to make possible comparisons between them.

Place attachment dimensions

Often, when place attachment is spoken of, the concept of place which is being used is not specified. Focusing our attention on the studies carried out, we observed that most of them have only considered place as social environment, thus assuming that attachment is directed toward such environments. So, for example, a frequent measure of place attachment has been the existence of social relationships in the neighbourhood, assuming that these reflect place attachment. Some authors such as Low and Altman (1992) have dealt with this question affirming that 'places are repositories and contexts within which interpersonal, community and cultural relationships occur, and it is to those social relationships, not just to place qua place, to which people are attached' (p. 7). From this perspective we might be led to assume that place attachment is in reality attachment to the people who live in that place. However, in other closely related areas, for example, in resi-

dential satisfaction, both the social dimension as well as the physical residential environment are usually evaluated. Similarly, some studies exist about place attachment that support the need to take into account the physical component of the place. Riger and Lavrakas (1981), via factorial analysis, identify the existence of two dimensions or 'types' of neighbourhood attachment: rootedness or physical attachment and bonding or social attachment. Later, other authors have confirmed these two dimensions of place attachment. For example, Taylor *et al.* (1985) also obtained two dimensions or attachment factors: one of these they called Rootedness and Involvement (equivalent to physical bonds) and the second Local Bonds, equivalent to social attachment, although this also includes other types of variables such as length of residence. However, these results are not sufficiently conclusive as to break the excessive weight given to the social dimension of places in the formation of place attachment.

Thus, the specific aims of this study were to test the degree of attachment to three different spatial levels or ranges—house, neighbourhood, and city—, and two dimensions—physical and social, and analyse the differences between them. We also tried to find out whether the different types of attachment to place vary depending on sociodemographic characteristics such as age, sex, and social class.

Method

Participants

A total of 177 people, residents in Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Spain), participated in this study. They were selected using quota sampling taking into account age, sex and social class. The Tenerife population census we employed to establish the percentages correspond to each quota. Once the questionnaires were filled-in, some subjects were eliminated from the samples for various reasons, such as too many questions being left unanswered. As a consequence, the sample percentage does not coincide exactly with the quota assigned. However, given that the deviation is not important, the sample is perfectly suited to our purposes. The voluntary collaboration of psychology students, trained in interview techniques, was solicited to carry out the interviews and give the questionnaires. Each collaborator was assigned a number of subjects who had to be interviewed according to the population quota. Specifically, age, sex and social class

were controlled with the intention of guaranteeing the representativeness of these variables in the sample. Participants belonged to several neighbourhoods from Santa Cruz de Tenerife which presented a diversity of physical and social characteristics. The selection of participants on the part of the interviewers was based on their correspondence to the quota requirements. The interviews were carried out individually, at the home of the participant, and lasted 11 minutes on average.

As regards sex, the sample consisted of 44 per cent men and 56 per cent women. Concerning age, we obtained a distribution in line with the population distribution ranging between 18 and 83 years, with a mean of 40 years and a Standard Deviation of 16.48. Table 1 shows the interval distribution by participant age.

Social class was determined by the subjects' declared income level and the social level of the residential neighbourhood estimated by the interviewers. The classification of subjects into three groups generated a distribution in which 23 per cent belonged to the upper class, 42 per cent to the middle class, and 34 per cent to the working class. As regards marital status, 32 per cent of the subjects were single and 54 per cent married. The remaining 14 per cent consisted of widows/widowers or were separated. Thus, there was a majority of married people in the sample.

Design

We used a 2×3 factorial design, where the dimension of attachment had two levels (social and physical), and the range had three levels (house, neighbourhood and city). Also, we included items to evaluate the general level of attachment to house, neighbourhood and city. As these are not independent of the physical and social levels, we did not include them in the main analysis. Their purpose was to provide us with a way to evaluate the relative weight of the physical and social dimensions.

Instrument

For the purposes of this study we designed a questionnaire which allowed us to obtain a precise measure of place attachment. As reported by other authors (Brown & Perkins, 1992; Proshansky *et al.*, 1983), the individual is frequently unconscious of place attachment and this only manifests at a conscious level when there is a break or distancing from the place of attachment. McAndrew (1998) has developed a scale to measure place attachment

TABLE 1
Distribution of the age variable in the sample (n=177)

Age	Percentage
18-24	23.7
25-34	18.7
35-44	16.4
45-54	22
55-64	9.6
+64	9.6

to apply to relocated people. In this work we have tried to find a measure which could be applied to all people equally, whether they are far from the place of attachment or not. For this we selected an item which has been used previously by other authors (Gerson *et al.*, 1977) to measure attachment and which, in our opinion, meets with this requirement 'I would be unhappy to leave.' This item forces the subject to imagine a break or distancing situation, which could reveal place attachment. Mesch and Manor (1998) use a very similar item, i.e., 'sorry to move out'.

Subsequently, we adapted the format above to each of our research aims. That is, general items were formulated for attachment to the house, to the neighbourhood, and to the city 'I would be sorry to move out of my house/neighbourhood/city without the people I live with' (items 1, 4 and 7; see Table 2). This meant leaving the physical as well as the social environment of the place. Similarly, with the aim of differentiating between the physical and social components of place attachment, another two items were included in each range in which the subject had to either leave the physical or the social environment. For example, in the house range, we asked the participants how much they would be sorry if the people they lived with moved (social attachment to house), as well as how much they would be sorry moving along with the people they lived with (physical attachment to house). These questions were also asked regarding the neighbourhood and city. The place attachment scale was thus composed of nine items. Replies ranged from 1 (Nothing) to 4 (A lot). To avoid the response bias, the order of the items varied in such a way that all of them appeared in all positions, so giving rise to nine different versions of the questionnaire.

In addition to attachment, the questionnaire covered data referring to socio-demographic characteristics: age, sex, marital status, social class, home-ownership (whether rented or owned), length of residence in the house, the neighbourhood and the city, number of previous houses, and number of

TABLE 2
Place attachment scale

1. General attachment to house: I would be sorry to move out of my house, without the people I live with
2. Social attachment to house: I would be sorry if the people I lived with moved out without me
3. Physical attachment to house: I would be sorry if I and the people I lived with moved out
4. General attachment to neighbourhood: I would be sorry to move out of my neighbourhood, without the people who live there
5. Social attachment to neighbourhood: I would be sorry if the people who I appreciated in the neighbourhood moved out
6. Physical attachment to neighbourhood: I would be sorry if I and the people who I appreciated in the neighbourhood moved out
7. General attachment to city: I would be sorry to move out of my city, without the people who live there
8. Social attachment to city: I would be sorry if the people who I appreciate in the city moved out
9. Physical attachment to city: I would be sorry if I and the people who I appreciate in the city moved out

1. Apego general a la casa: Lamentaría tener que mudarme a otra casa, sin las personas que viven conmigo
2. Apego social a la casa: Lamentaría que las personas que viven conmigo se mudaran a otra casa
3. Apego físico a la casa: Lamentaría que las personas que viven conmigo y yo nos tuviéramos que mudar a otra casa
4. Apego general al barrio: Lamentaría tener que mudarme a otro barrio
5. Apego social al barrio: Lamentaría que las personas que aprecio en mi barrio se mudaran a otro barrio
6. Apego físico al barrio: Lamentaría que las personas que aprecio en el barrio y yo nos tuviéramos que mudar a otro barrio
7. Apego general a la ciudad: Lamentaría tener que mudarme a otra ciudad
8. Apego social a la ciudad: Lamentaría que las personas que aprecio en mi ciudad se mudaran a otra ciudad
9. Apego físico a la ciudad: Lamentaría que las personas que aprecio en mi ciudad y yo nos tuviéramos que mudar a otra ciudad

people in the house. These questions appeared in the questionnaire after the place attachment scale.

Results

First, we calculated the internal consistency of the scale used. As a result we obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 for the scale as a whole, indicating a high degree of reliability. This was also calculated for each of the subscales separately, i.e., house attachment, neighbourhood attachment, and city attachment, obtaining an alpha of 0.70 for the three cases. This result, although lower than the former, also indicates a high degree of reliability.

Nevertheless, our aim in this research was to compare the degree of attachment towards some ranges and dimensions of the place of residence, rather than obtaining a general measure of attachment to the place of residence. Therefore, we calculated average scores for the different types of attachment. Table 3 shows the scores.

As can be seen, mean attachment scores vary regarding range as well as dimension. First, we compared the degree of global attachment toward the house, neighbourhood and city (first column). Regarding the measure of global attachment to the neighbourhood, an average was reached of 2.92 on a 1 to 4 scale. That is, the subjects in the sample

were quite attached to their residential neighbourhood, which is consonant with the results of previous studies. On the other hand, the measure of house attachment as well as city attachment reached a value of 3.10 in both cases. An analysis of variance between the three scores revealed the existence of significant differences between the three ranges ($F(2,350) = 3.69; p < 0.001$). Planned comparisons indicated that global attachment to neighbourhood is significantly less than global attachment to house ($F(1,175) = 5.15; p < 0.05$) and to city ($F(1,175) = 5.91; p < 0.05$). On the other hand, there are no significant differences between house and city attachment. So, according to our results, neighbourhood attachment is less than house and city attachment, while there are no differences between these two latter ranges.

In order to test whether there were differences between the sample subgroups, we carried out the same analysis but added age, sex, and social class. Thus, the new analysis consisted of a repeated measures analysis of variance where the intragroup variable was the spatial range of attachment with three values (house, neighbourhood, city) and the intergroup variables were age, sex, and social class. Age was reclassified in three groups to have a greater number of subjects in each condition and enable the analysis of interactions with other variables (age 1 = 17–30 years, age 2 = 31–49 years,

TABLE 3
Mean scores in the different ranges and dimensions of attachment

	Global attachment	Social attachment	Physical attachment
House	3.10 (S.D. = 1.09)	3.13 (S.D. = 1.02)	2.39 (S.D. = 1.19)
Neighbourhood	2.92 (S.D. = 1.14)	2.37 (S.D. = 1.08)	2.28 (S.D. = 1.09)
City	3.10 (S.D. = 1.06)	2.80 (S.D. = 0.95)	2.56 (S.D. = 1.10)

age 3 = 50–83 years). The analysis reveals a main effect of sex ($F(1,158) = 4.41$; $p = 0.037$) suggesting that women develop more attachment to the house (mean = 3.3, S.D. = 0.99), the neighbourhood (mean = 3.1, S.D. = 1.09), and the city (mean = 3.3, S.D. = 0.93) than men (house mean = 2.9, S.D. = 1.18; neighbourhood mean = 2.7, S.D. = 1.19; city mean = 2.8, S.D. = 1.15). Similarly, a significant interaction between spatial range and age was found ($F(4,314) = 2.53$; $p = 0.04$). This is shown in Figure 1.

In this sense, planned comparisons yielded no differences in the older group regarding attachment level to house, neighbourhood, and city ($F(2,172) = 0.056$; $p = 0.946$). However, there are differences in these parameters in the younger (age = 1) ($F(2,172) = 3.17$; $p = 0.044$) and intermediate age groups (age = 2) ($F(2,172) = 6.39$; $p = 0.002$). A posteriori-comparisons within each age group suggested that in the younger group attachment to city was significantly higher ($F(1,173) = 6.14$; $p = 0.014$) than house and neighbourhood attachment. On the other hand, no differences were found between these two spatial ranges ($F(1,173) = 0.24$; $p = 0.625$). The intermediate age group showed higher scores in house attachment, while their attachment to the neighbourhood was the lowest ($F(1,173) = 12.81$; $p = 0.000$).

On the other hand, a posteriori intergroup comparison revealed that attachment was generally greater with age. In this sense, age group 1 had means significantly lower than the intermediate age group in the three spatial ranges; i.e., house ($F(1,173) = 31.98$; $p = 0.000$), neighbourhood ($F(1,173) = 10.08$; $p = 0.002$), and city ($F(1,173) = 8.00$; $p = 0.005$). Significant differences were also found between age groups 2 and 3 in attachment to neighbourhood ($F(1,173) = 4.48$; $p = 0.036$), while no differences were noted regarding attachment to house ($F(1,173) = 0.09$; $p = 0.759$) and to city ($F(1,173) = 1.41$; $p = 0.237$). Comparisons between age groups 1 and 3 yielded significance for house attachment ($F(1,173) = 23.93$; $p = 0.000$), neighbourhood ($F(1,173) = 25.44$; $p = 0.000$), and city ($F(1,173) = 14.38$; $p = 0.000$).

Once global attachment was compared (first column in Table 3), we established comparisons between physical and social attachment in the three spatial ranges: house, neighbourhood and city

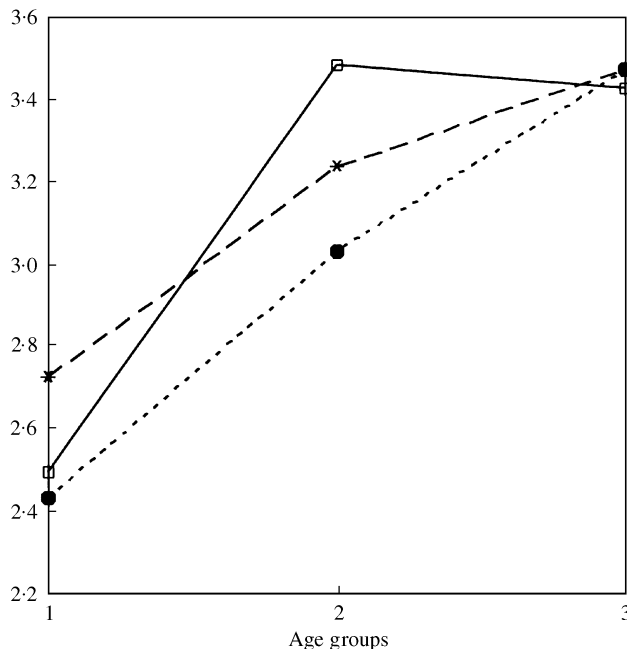


Fig 1. Global attachment to house, neighborhood and city in age groups. Range: □ House, ● Neighborhood, * City.

(Table 3, second and third columns). The results revealed the existence of an interaction between both variables ($F(2,352) = 17.18$; $p < 0.0001$). This interaction becomes apparent in Figure 2. Planned comparisons suggest that this interaction arose because house attachment was greater than city attachment in the social dimension, ($F(1,176) = 12.94$; $p < 0.0001$), while this pattern is reversed for the physical dimension, with city attachment being more important than house attachment ($F(1,176) = 4.16$; $p < 0.05$). Similarly, a main effect was found for the dimension variable ($F(1,176) = 28.99$; $p < 0.0001$), such that, globally, social attachment is stronger than physical attachment. However, no main effect regarding range attachment (house, neighbourhood, city) was found.

Finally, physical and social dimensions were compared (second and third columns) after adding socio-demographic variables. However, social class was eliminated from this analysis because it yielded a lack of significance. The design followed a two repeated measures model, range and dimension, and

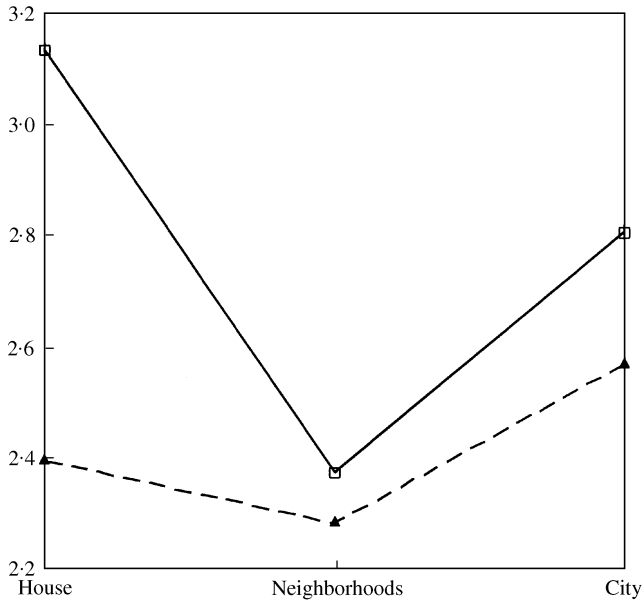


Fig 2. Social and physical attachment to house, neighborhoods and city. DIMENSION; □ Social, ▲ Physical.

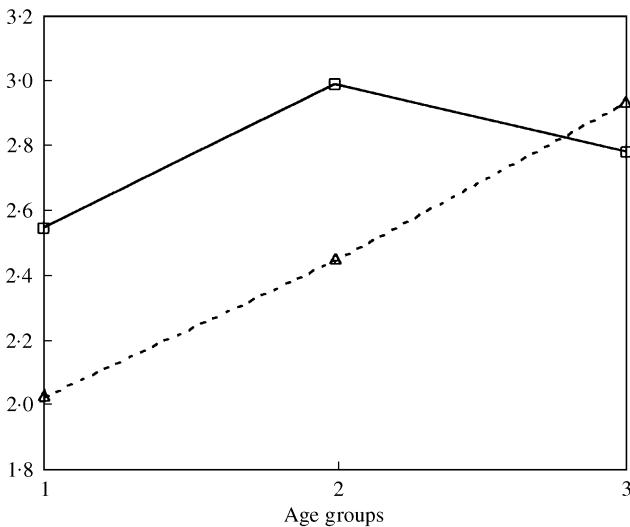


Fig 3. Social and physical attachment in age groups. DIMENSION; □ Social, ▲ Physical.

two intergroup measures, sex and age. A significant interaction was found between the range and dimension of the attachment on the one hand, and age and dimension on the other. We have already dealt with the former, i.e., range and dimension (Figure 2). Concerning age and dimension, the a posteriori comparison reveals no differences in the older group ($F(1,174) = 1.51$; $p = 0.220$). However, social attachment is greater than physical attachment in the intermediate ($F(1,174) = 28.42$; $p = 0.000$), and

young age groups ($F(1,174) = 26.34$). This interaction becomes apparent in Figure 3.

Discussion

We have seen that place attachment develops to different degrees towards places with different spatial ranges. In this work we have analysed three such ranges: house, neighbourhood, and city and two dimensions: social and physical. As a general rule, people feel attached to these places, although not to the same degree. The comparisons carried out yielded some interesting results. First, as we expected and in agreement with the results of the only study carrying out a similar comparison (Cuba & Hummon, 1993), the neighbourhood, i.e., the range which up to now has been considered the most important in the formation of bonds of attachment, is the one with the weakest level of attachment. At least, the other two ranges analysed in this work, the house and the city, are considered more significant in developing this affective bond. The current decrease in activities carried out in the neighbourhood and the possibility of coming back to it, even if one has moved to another neighbourhood, could be some of the reasons explaining its low relevance for the subjects. In any case, it has to be pointed out that it is not the case that people are not attached to the neighbourhood. In fact, they are. But in comparison to other spatial ranges this attachment is weaker. Our results suggest exercising some caution when deciding which spatial range involves the greatest attachment. No differences were found between house and city regarding global attachment. The city is the strongest range as regards physical attachment, while the house is stronger concerning social attachment. Future research would allow us to confirm or to reject these results.

Second, social attachment is greater than physical attachment in all cases. Up to now, a great number of studies have highlighted the importance of the social dimension in the growth of attachment, to the point that place attachment has become identified with attachment to the people who live in that place. This work has also shown the importance of the social dimension. However, we have observed that besides social attachment, people feel attached to the physical dimension of places. Without doubt, these two components of place attachment generally come together, and become a general affective feeling toward the place of residence, in its physical as well as its social dimension. However, this

distinction is important because it clearly has both theoretical and empirical implications.

Third, concerning the differences between subgroups in the sample, women show greater place attachment than men in all cases, which is in line with the findings of other authors. Similarly, attachment to place increases with age, although which one is the most significant range also changes with age, i.e., at a younger age the city involves greater attachment, at intermediate ages it is the house, and in the older age group no differences were found between the three spatial ranges. Finally, no differences were found in attachment regarding social class. Further studies using different samples and residential areas will help to test the consistency of these results.

Discovering the most significant ranges for place attachment can contribute to the understanding of this concept and its characteristics. In any case, it will be necessary to check whether this result can be extrapolated to other residential environments with different characteristics. Thus, for example, the city in which these studies were carried out is medium sized, and perhaps this factor might be related to the fact that life in the neighbourhood is not especially significant for its residents. It is possible that in large cities, where distances are greater, activities in the neighbourhood assume greater importance and in some way this influences the development of attachment.

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Notes

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