

University of Padua, Master: Clinical, Social and Intercultural  
Psychology

Frame: Quality of life, sustainability and local identity

The sense of territorial  
belonging. An odd combination  
of feelings and spatial  
relationships

*Giorgio Osti*

# Background

Place attachment is relevant in modern societies and supports positive social functions

“several studies indicate that territorial belonging is associated with personal well-being, involvement in community life, and social solidarity” (Gustafson 2009)

Positive impact on environment protection, too.

Reciprocal strengthening between urban green and urban place attachment (*Green Cities: Good Health* ([www.greenhealth.washington.edu](http://www.greenhealth.washington.edu)))

Political risks around “territorial identity” (F. Remotti, *Ossessione identitaria*)

Anycase, it is an ancillary social dimension (sigh)

# Many researches of many disciplines

Environmental psychology: universal mechanisms of environmental control and dissonance reduction (behaviourism & cognitivism): **place attachment**

Anthropology/human geography: cultural values mediation between community and environment (cognitivism & cultural ecology): **sense of place**

Politics, Identity, Territory. The “Strength” and “Value” of Nation-State, the Weakness of Regional Challenge (Nevola 2011) (political ecology & regionalism): **place identity**

Analytically, the **sense of territorial belonging** is composed of

- Sentiment dimension (feeling of attraction)
- Perception of spatial forms
- Denomination and connotation of spatial forms
- Duration, a permanent, stable, rooted feeling

‘Sense’ is polysemic: mix of perception (senses), coherence (make sense), sentiment (soul touch, *commovente, toccante* in Italian)

# Anthropological tradition

## **Sense of place as *the match of effectivities and affordances*;**

the term effectivity denotes the action capabilities of the agent “what he or she is practically equipped to do” and is the reciprocal of affordances, which “are properties of the real environment as directly perceived by an agent in the context of practical action”, thus, “the range of affordances of an object will be constrained by the effectivities of the subject, and conversely, the effectivities of the subject will be constrained by the affordances of the objects encountered” (Ingold, 1992, p. 46)

## **Sense of place depends on a universal mechanism of (so called, direct, without reflexive) perception :**

“we *discover* meaningful objects in the environment by moving about in it and extracting invariants from the continually changing optic array” (Ingold, 1992, p. 47)

# **Evolutionary explanation: from traditional to modern society**

Territorial belonging depends on

- degree of social differentiation/complexity
- strong community versus weak society interactions
- static versus mobile society
- religious uncritical versus lay emancipated society

In sum, solid vs liquid society (rural vs urban?)

## An old simplified analysis

Useful for analytics of place attachment and for formulating at least one hypothesis

We need one or more frameworks

We adopt evolutionary approach to place sense:

Passage from traditional to modern society (inevitable)

h: older, less educated, less mobile people have a stronger and more articulated place attachment

Research design: areas of research, sample and detection methods (questionnaires)

# Phenomenology of the sense of territorial belongings

(University of Trento Sociologists team, Gubert 1999)

**Presence/Intensity of the feeling: (86% interviewed = yes)**

34% very strong,      42% quite      8% little      16% not at all

**Extension of belonging area: neighborhood 31%, commune 35%, district 14%**  
(Average Diameter : 19 KMs)

**Zone of belonging with a name and clear borders: about 75% of “belongers”**

**Most nominated feature of SofTB area: mentality, landscape,**

**SofTB to area compared with other values: job and family first**

**Motivations that support the relative STB value.. see next figure**

Figure 3.14 - Reasons cited for the sense of attachment to the zone of belonging

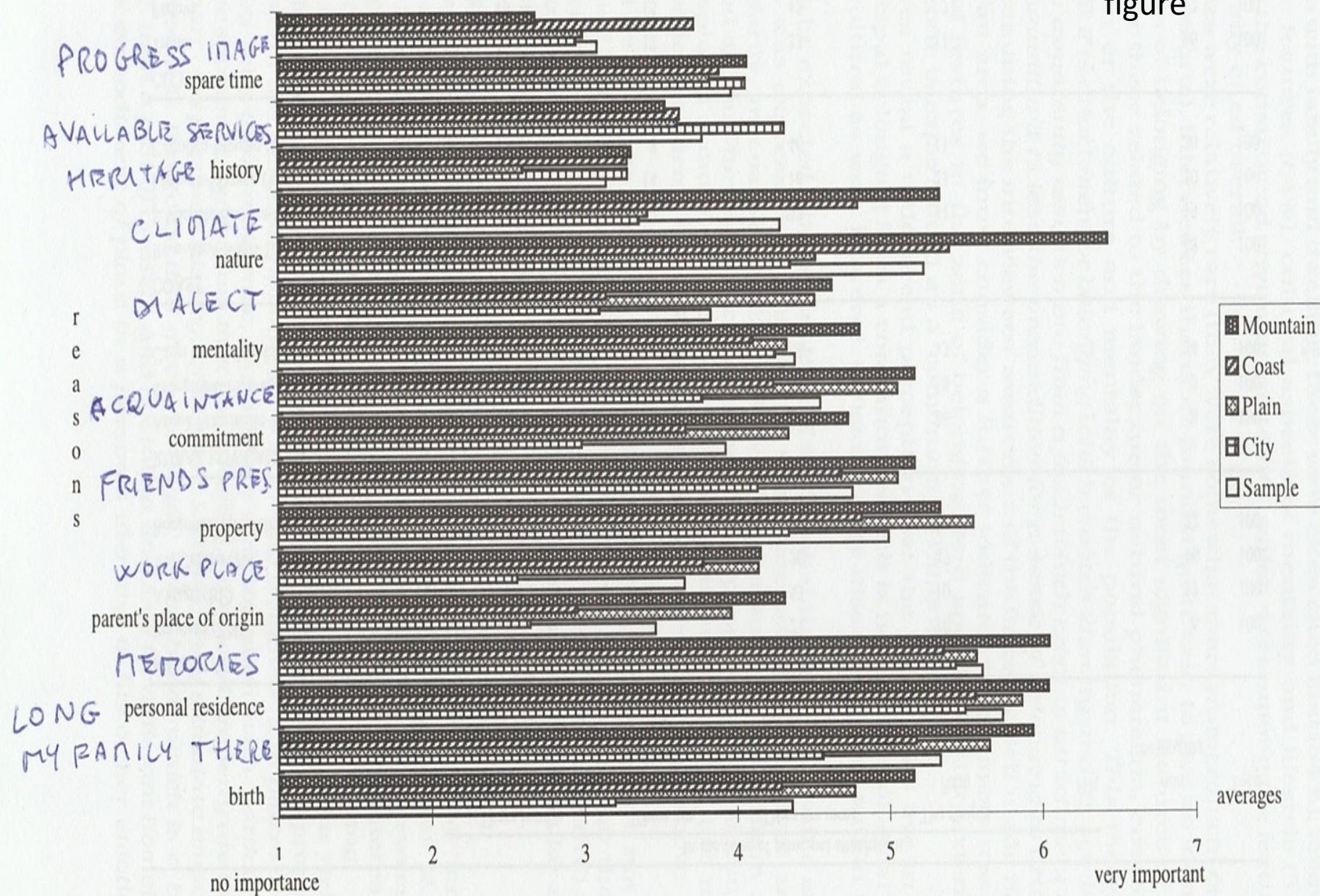
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figure

TABLE 5.1 - Indices of correlation (Pearson's) between features of the commune of residence and features of the sentiment of territorial belonging

VARIABLES	classification criterion	ECOLOGICAL VARIABLES (\$)			
		rural communes		mountain communes	
		(I)	(II)	(III)	(IV)
*1st hypothesis					
Intensity of sent. of t. b.		,16	,15	-,02	,08
*2nd hypothesis					
Reason for sent. of t. b.: birth		,21	,28	,12	,20
Reason for sent. of t. b.: my family lives there		,18	,18	,08	,15
Reason for sent. of t. b.: long-term residence		,06	,05	,04	,08
Reason for sent. of t. b.: memories		,05	,12	,14	,14
Reason for sent. of t. b.: parents' birthplace		,20	,30	,15	,22
Reason for sent. of t. b.: work		,19	,19	,04	,12
Reason for sent. of t. b.: property		,14	,13	,02	,08
Reason for sent. of t. b.: friends		,13	,15	,07	,12
Reason for sent. of t. b.: usefulness to others		,24	,28	,17	,22
Reason for sent. of t. b.: reciprocal knowledge		,21	,25	,09	,17
Reason for sent. of t. b.: shared mentality		,07	,10	,06	,11
Reason for sent. of t. b.: communality of dialect		,22	,30	,09	,19
Reason for sent. of t. b.: beauty of natural environment		,20	,23	,38	,37
Reason for sent. of t. b.: the climate		,16	,19	,35	,32
Reason for sent. of t. b.: because of historic-artistic herit.		,00	,04	,08	,06
Reason for sent. of t. b.: because of services available		-,14	-,12	-,02	-,08
Reason for sent. of t. b.: because of leisure opportunities		-,03	,01	,10	,04
Reason for sent. of t. b.: because of the image of progress		-,05	-,11	-,10	-,12
*3rd hypothesis					
Aspect of area of belonging: family relations		-,03	,04	,06	,08
Aspects of a. of b.: friendly relations		-,04	,01	,04	,04
Aspects of a. of b.: economic-productive		,15	,07	-,13	-,10
Aspects of a. of b.: social services		-,14	-,20	-,10	-,12
Aspects of a. of b.: culture and way of life		-,10	-,05	,08	,07
Aspects of a. of b.: political, religious integration		-,03	,00	,04	,06
Aspects of a. of b.: natural environment		,11	,15	,39	,38
Aspects of a. of b.: history, art, architecture		-,15	-,13	-,13	-,13
Centrality of dwelling in area		,18	,19	,19	,13
*4th hypothesis					
Maximum diameter of area of belonging		,31	,32	,21	,26
*5th hypothesis					
Number of alternative zones of attachment		-,10	-,10	-,05	-,06
gradient of attachment		-,09	-,07	,10	,05
*6th hypothesis					
Identification of area with place-names		,06	,02	,23	,27
Degree of delimitation of area		,14	,08	,16	,14
Degree of complexity of borders		-,16	-,26	-,01	-,03

(\$) dichotomous variables in which urban and lowland communes are classified with the value "1" and rural and mountain communes with the value "2"

(I) classification criterion: 1 = communes with more than 10,000 inhabitants; 2 = communes with fewer than 10,000

(II) classification criterion: 1 = communes with more than 54% of population employed in the tertiary sector; 2 = communes with less than 54%

(III) classification criterion: 1 = communes non included among mountain communities; 2 = communes included among MC

(IV) classification criterion: 2 = mountain communes (as criterion III) and rural communes (as criterion II)

## Evolutionary patterns often used in sociology appear an ideological position not verified on data that show high persistence of SofTB in modern-urban societies

... generate a sense of territorial belonging.

Figure 3.14 sets out the median values of the replies. A first datum yielded by the median values of importance obtained by each of the reasons proposed tends to confirm the Paretian hypothesis concerning attachment to place: that it is caused by long-term residence, by a place's association with particularly cherished life-moments, by the fact that one's family, home and property are there. Places are part of a person's history, of his/her identity; they stimulate emotions and memories. It is this force that gives 'strength' to the bond; which is a bond with oneself, with a part of oneself. And nostalgia and love for a distant homeland express this embodiment of place in a person's identity, in his or her emotional

experience, in the memory of self and of the others with whom his or her life is shared" Gubert 1999 pp. 141-3

Pareto's intuition seems validated more than the relationship that others, for instance Tönnies, have established between attachment to place and the persistence of the 'community' as the dominant framework of life and culture, although 'the community', in its territorial form, is anything but smothered by mobility or modern territorial fluidity. The bond with the territory springs from the association established between self-experience in everyday life within the family, with friends, with the land, with communal living, so that the sites of such experience come to symbolize the known, the welcoming, the maternal and the paternal, the conjugal as part of the self-identity constructed through these relations. And the greater the spatial concentration of these significant experiences, the smaller the place of identification and the stronger the sense of belonging, which assumes non-aggressive forms stemming principally from primary sociality rather than group solidarity and interests.

Further speculative steps (heuristics of socio-spatial relations):

- 1) Results in general indicate “private web of relationships” is the more frequent reference for attachment
- 1) Symbols of power, authority and commons (the “towers”) are ignored or even disliked
- 1) Soft, instrumental and liquid relations (the “piazza”) have middle level of importance

## Conclusions

- Overcoming prejudices toward place based perspectives.... 20 years later scholars changed their mind
- Assuming however a critical attitude toward easy functional analyses
- Deepening relational approaches which assume the existence of socio-spatial forms
- Developing procedures of research that combine subjective and objective methods with a wide time-consuming field observation of practices.