

Residents' Sense of the Place in Galata Neighbourhood, in Istanbul

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The paper intends to examine the sense of the place phenomenon, which can be defined as a result of constant interaction between psychophysiological mechanisms of human-beings and physical properties of tangible environment. Shamai's (1991) approach to sense of the place will be employed in this research. According to his suggested scale, level of sense of the place varies from "not having any sense of a place" to "sacrifice for a place" (Shamai, 1991). The generic hypothesis of this research is that there are certain factors (historical, social, cultural, physical or temporal) which determine particular level of sense of the place. The case study of Galata neighbourhood will be carried out in order to gain better understanding of sense of the place phenomenon and to define the significance of its decisive factors. Galata is a very special historical neighbourhood of Istanbul. It was established as a western, Latin and Catholic colony. Later on, it became a residential area for Greeks and Jews. Thus, this area was a non-Muslim area for quite a long time. Turkish people started to move in here more abundantly only since the middle of the twentieth century. Despite that, Galata neighbourhood has kept its international character even till now. Today Galata is famous worldwide for the richness of architectural, cultural and religious heritage and it attracts millions of tourist every year. Therefore, it is even more interesting to understand how locals feel this place and what factors strengthen their place attachment.

KEYWORDS: Galata neighbourhood, Istanbul, place attachment, sense of place.

The world around is not fixed. Everything changes and cities are not an exception. Urban spaces are transformed over and over again. It is never-ending process. Still, despite that permanent change, "<...> inhabited place has to inform us not only where we are geographically, but it has to inform us, where we are in our culture" (Kunstler, 2004). There should be a spirit of the place. Actually, majority of inhabited places evoke certain feelings. However, the question is what kind of feelings and why? Definitely, there plenty of research trying to answer this question. Still, when people's feelings are involved the unique situations might appear and unique situations call for the unique studies.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to examine residents' sense of the place phenomenon in Galata neighbourhood. It will be a transactionally oriented research because the phenomenon will be treated as holistic unit rather than combination of separate elements. Scientific literature distinguishes four qualities of socio-behavioural phenomena, which are as follows: *physical environment, people, psychological processes* and *time with its temporal qualities* (Werner et al,

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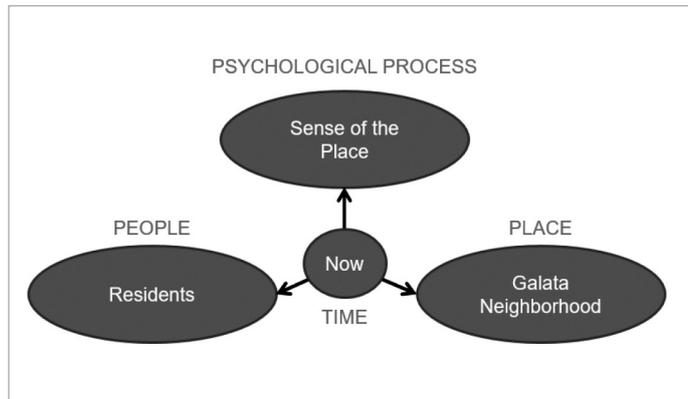
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Introduction



Fig. 1

The Aim of the Research – Analysis of Socio-behaviour Phenomenon



2003). In this research, public spaces of Galata neighbourhood are chosen as a *physical environment*. The study will be targeted to the certain group of *people* – social participants, which are residents of the neighbourhood. The *psychological process* which will be tackled is sense of the place at the present *time* (see Fig. 1). Actually, the reason why focus is particularly

on the residents of the district is the nature of sense of place phenomenon. It is a very complex psychological process, encompassing the meanings and the attachments that people develop for the certain place. Thus, the level of the sense of the place might depend on the familiarity with the place and time spent here. However, it is still hypothetical statement, which will be tested further.

The methods of the research include: overview of the scientific literature, related with historical development of Galata neighbourhood; descriptive analysis of existing situation in Galata; comparative analysis of scientific methods which could be applicable to evaluate sense of the place; the semi-structured interview with the residents; systematization, comparison and generalization of all collected data.

Historical development of Galata Neighbourhood

Galata name comes from old times and it is not an official administrative unit of Istanbul at the present (Galata belongs to the borough of Beyoğlu). Though, this term is still commonly used to define the area, located at the north side of the Golden Horn, towards Taksim Square.

It might be that history of Galata area goes back to 1200 B.C., when Greek Clans probably built up the first settlement here. Anyway, there are not any doubts, that Galata was inhabited area later on. During the Roman Imperial Period, the settlement was thrifty and around the fourth century A.D. Galata city was surrounded by walls for the first time. This area also was prosperous during the Byzantium Period: walls of the city were enlarged, Galata citadel was built and the significance of Galata as privileged commerce centre was still growing. The tranquillity was disturbed for a while by Crusader occupation. Though, after Latin people were conquered by Byzantines, the whole Galata district was left for Genoese and Genova Colony was established. During the Ottoman Empire, whole Istanbul and especially Galata area was cosmopolitan. A lot of embassies were opened here. As Ottomans were interested in Western culture, the foreign institutions, restaurants and cafes were flourishing. After founding the Republic of Turkey, Ankara became its capital and the foreign embassies moved there. Thus, Galata became emptier, but still kept its position as the most important business centre in Istanbul, because of a very good strategical location. Also, Galata district went through the modernization process with drastic demolition and radical changes of urban pattern during the first decades of the Republic. Later on, the local population also did not escape the changes. Local inhabitants of other nationalities moved to their home countries or somewhere else, due to the establishment of "property tax", following that more Turkish people moved into the Galata district. Intensive urban transformations of Galata area lasted till 1993, when it was defined as urban protected area. Since 2000, the cultural life has increased significantly here. Galata neighbourhood became a very attractive place for artists and designers. (Yarıkkaya, 2003; Özgür et al, 2013; Özlü et al, 2013).

Analysis of any psychological process is a difficult challenge. A deep understanding of the process itself is necessary to start with and then the methodology of process assessment is equally important. There is a plethora of concepts describing relationship between people and spatial settings (e.g., *place identity*, *place dependence*, *place attachment* and etc.). However, *sense of the place* is chosen as the most general umbrella term that covers other notions, because this concept reflects not only positive people's relation with the place (as *place attachment*, for example) but any kind of emotions (Table 1).

DIMENSIONS/ ATTRIBUTES	Sense of the space			
	Analysis of people's feelings toward place			
	NEGATIVE FEELINGS	NEUTRAL PHASE	POSITIVE FEELINGS	
				1. Belonging to place

Sense of the Place

Table 1

Concept of Sense of the Place

According to analysed literature, several levels of *sense of the place* can be distinguished and defined as dimensions or attributes:

Negative feelings – the most of overviewed studies ignore this dimension. However, certainly, some places can evoke negative emotions and sometimes they cannot be ignored (Shamai et al, 2005).

Neutral phase – is when the place does not cause any feelings. Some authors define this phase as “not having any sense of the place” (Shamai, 1991; Shamai et al, 2005), others as “homelessness” or “not belonging to place” (Relph, 1976).

Positive feelings – the content and hierarchical structure of this dimension vary among the theories. Different authors suggest different methodological systems. Therefore, sometimes the same attribute might not have the same meaning in different methodological models. For example, Relph (1976) described positive feelings toward place as “belonging to place” or “deep identity with the place”; Proshansky (1978) used a term of “place identity” to define the emotional attachment to the place; while Stokols and Shumaker (1981) defined functional attachment to the place as “place dependence”. Later on, several academicians (William et al, 1989; Altman et al, 1992; Williams et al, 1995; Vaske et al, 2001; Williams et al, 2003 and etc.) used “place attachment” as more general term that covers both “place identity” and “place dependence”. However, the use of this term also might be confusing, because we can find the attribute of “attachment” as one of five components of Lalli's (1992) Urban Identity Scale. It is unclear if the “place attachment” is a component of “place identity” or vice versa. Therefore, Shamai's (1991) model of “sense of the place”, which integrates all attributes into one hierarchical system, is chosen to define the attributes of *Positive feelings* in this research:

1 *Belonging to place* – the lowest level of positive feelings toward place. There is not strong or intense affection still. However, according Shamai (1991), there is knowledge of being located in place and the feeling of belonging.

2 *Place attachment* – is higher level of positive feelings, because emotions intensify and the place starts to influence people's behaviour in certain ways. People feel attached to place and identify themselves with place goals (Shamai, 1991). This dimension consists of:

2.1. *Place identity* – emotional attachment (Proshansky, 1978)

2.2. *Place dependence* – functional attachment (Stokols et al, 1981)

3 *Place commitment* – the highest level of positive feelings toward a place. Full involvement to a place and even sacrifice for a place (Shamai, 1991).

Based on this hierarchical system, the semi-structured interview was designed to reveal residents' sense of the place in Galata neighbourhood.

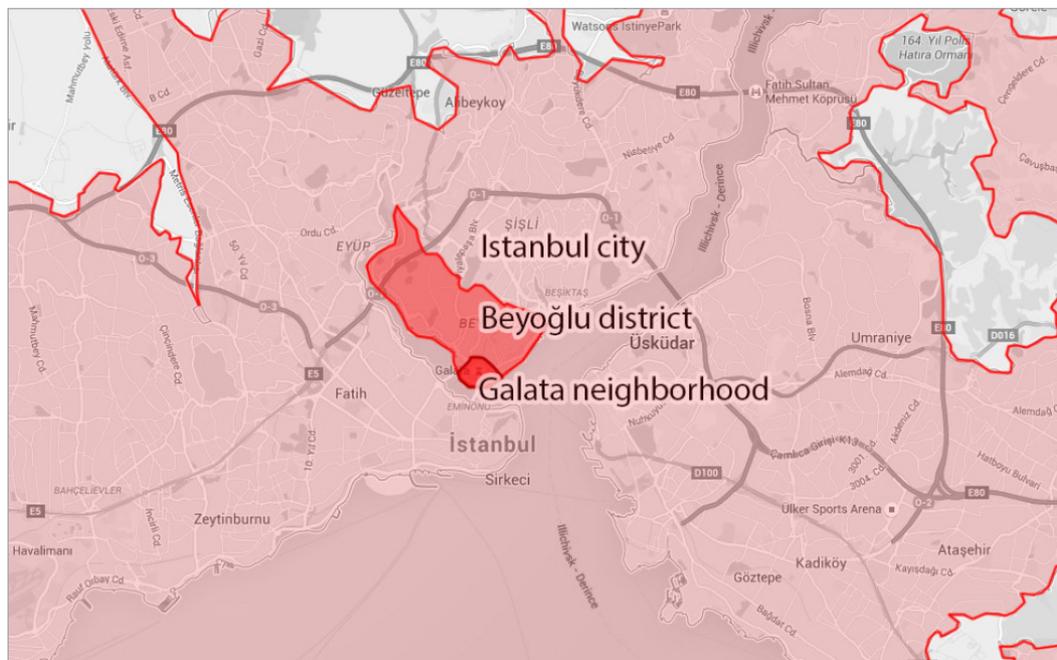
Results of the Interviews

Thirty respondents were interviewed for this research. Ninety percent of them were younger than 40 years old. Such young age of the sample was influenced by the language barrier, as the questions were prepared and interviews were carried out in English. Thirty percent of interviewed people were born in Istanbul. In general, an average duration of residence in Istanbul was sixteen years and respondents have lived averagely for three years in Galata neighbourhood. Based on "Sense of the Place" Scale (Shamai, 1991), respondents were asked to evaluate their feelings toward place in three different spatial scales: considering whole Istanbul city, Beyoğlu administrative district and Galata neighbourhood (see Fig. 2).

Results revealed, that the place got the highest rates at smallest scale and the sense of the place and place attachment were gradually decreasing for the bigger geographical units. Most of the respondents said that they *feel belonging* to Istanbul (40%) or they are *emotionally attached* to it (30%). Meanwhile, respondents not only feel *emotionally attached* to Galata neighbourhood (30%), but also *identify with the lifestyle and values* of the other people who live here (30%) and even they would *make personal sacrifices to save, protect or maintain* Galata neighbourhood as it is (30%). It was also noticed, that there is a moderate positive correlation between duration time of residence in Galata neighbourhood and its rating ($R=0,51$). That means, the longer people live in the neighbourhood, the more attached they feel. There was no such correlation regarding whole Istanbul city ($R=0,23$). Therefore, it can be claimed, that people maintain stronger sense of place for their neighbourhood as they experience its spaces every single day, while the sense of the whole city is more distant and fragmented concept.

During the interviews, respondents were also asked about the factors influencing their sense of attachment in Galata neighbourhood. Four possible aspects were distinguished by author: *social network and friendships* (1), *culture and lifestyle* (2), *geographical location* (3) and *physical environment* (4). Respondents also had a possibility to suggest something else. Likert scale (from 1 to 5, where 5 indicates the most important and 1 – the least important factor) was used to evaluate the significance of these factors. *Culture and lifestyle* was chosen as the most salient aspect of Galata neighbourhood. The importance of *social network and friendships* was also rated quite

Fig. 2
Different Scale
Geographical Units



high. *Geographical location* got a little less points and was left in the third place. Finally, *physical environment* was considered as the least important aspect (Fig. 3).

Furthermore, the results of rating showed, that there is a significant positive correlation between the duration of *residence time* in Galata and the importance of *social network and friendships* ($R=0,82$). Besides, there is a significant negative relationship between the *time of residence* and the level of importance of *geographical location* ($R=-0,84$) and a moderate negative correlation between the *residence time* and the rating of *cultural and lifestyle* aspect of Galata District (Fig. 4). All these correlations revealed, that people, who settled down recently in the area, appreciate it because of the convenient, central and strategic location or because of the unique cultural atmosphere and bohemian lifestyle. However, the longer they live here, the less important these primary factors become. During the time, people make friends, start to form and expand social networks and later they try to maintain and foster them. Thus, even though the culture and lifestyle got the highest rate in this research, the aspect of social network and friendships might be

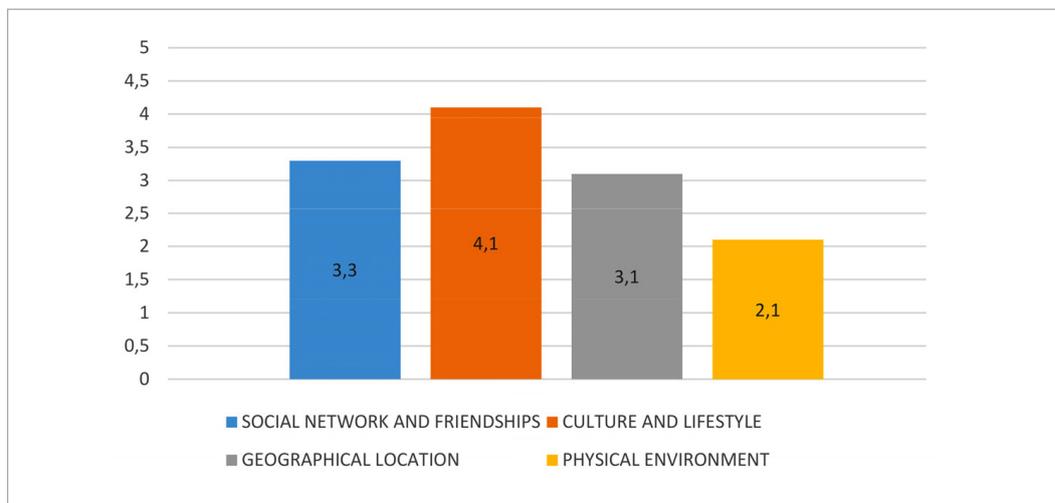


Fig. 3

Average Ranking Values of Place's Aspects

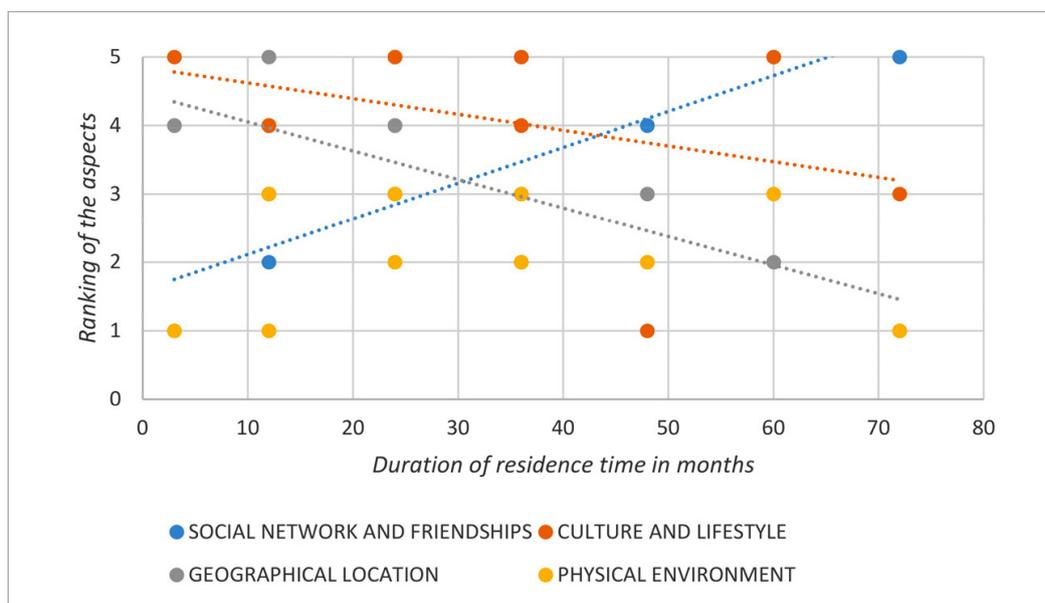


Fig. 4

Distribution of Ranking Values of Different Aspects of the Galata Neighbourhood Depending on Residence Time

Fig. 5

Galata Tower is a Symbol of Whole Neighbourhood (Photo by I. Povilaitienė)



even more important, as only this aspect shows the growing tendency during the time. By the way, level of physical environment's influence on the respondents' place attachment did not have any relation with their residence time.

The question about associations with "Galata District" revealed that the most iconic symbol is Galata Tower as ninety percent of respondents mentioned it (Fig. 5).

Although some of the interviewed people mentioned several disadvantages of the Galata neighbourhood (such as too overcrowded, too touristic or too hilly place), none of respondents said that they would wish to live somewhere else because of these negative factors.

Conclusions

Definitely, there are few limitations of this research. First, that the sample of respondents is pretty small for the interviews, thus it is quite difficult to get the comprehensive understanding about the phenomenon. Second, that only English-speaking respondents were involved into the interviewing process and the significant insights might be missing because there is no data collected about feelings toward place from older generation. Third, that the results also might be influenced by "trendy ideas", because when people are asked to answer the questions, they purposively think about it and their answers might be biased. Therefore, another methods of data collection (like pure observation) might be very useful in providing the unprejudiced evidence about the phenomenon.

Overall, this research reveals, that time of residence is a very crucial aspect for the sense of the place. People, who live longer in the place, feel much more attached to it. Furthermore, the significance of all other factors (social, cultural, strategical) influencing the positive sense of the place, changes over the time. Only the properties of physical environment are independent from residence of time. However, surprisingly physical properties also were not found as a decisive factor for the sense of place in this research. It might be, that the intensity and abundance of other factors overshadow the static characteristics. Another explanation could be that, there is a good environmental fit, as "...we are unaware of being comfortable. We are more aware when we feel uncomfortable..." (Lang, 1987).

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