

“Place’ and ‘Sense of Place’: Making the Connection”

David Osborne

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Abstract:

Many models of ‘place’ adopt variations of the tripartite construct involving the physical form, the activities that take place there and, in particular, the subsequent meaning that is created there (Canter 1977; Relph 1976; Ujang 2010). The physical forms associated with place are interpreted within a socially constructed framework of meaning (Easthope 2004; Massey 1994; Nazar 2004) and thus, through the interpretation of the physical properties and the activities that are carried out, place becomes a site for the creation, negotiation and exchange of meaning (Nazer 2004). This process of meaning creation has been extended by Gustafson (2001); treating the three constructs as poles within the model he has identified the activities between these poles to produce and enriched model of place.

In contrast, studies into ‘sense of place’ rarely make reference to this process of meaning creation, instead referring to a more general ‘experiencing of place’, involving identifying ones surroundings in order to recognize place (Relph 1976) and identify qualities to make it distinctive from other places (Lynch 1960). The outcome of these experiences is regarded as ‘sense of place’ (Nazar 2004), a condition which according to Jorgensen and Stedman (2001) comprises of place attachment, place dependence, and place identity. So whilst these two areas of studies – place and sense of place – are well represented in the literature, the relationship between the two has generally been neglected.

This paper makes two propositions. Firstly, that the ‘meaning’ component in the earlier models needs to be elaborated on as a complex element; it is not only a component of place but is also both a product of place and an interpretive agent of place. Secondly, that the recognition of this complexity provides an explanatory connection between ‘place’ and ‘sense of place’. The outcome of these propositions is an integrated model that illustrates the way in which people use the place construct to develop their sense of place. Further, and as a result of the complexity of meaning within this model, this paper draws into question the inclusion of place dependency as a component of sense of place.