

Understanding the factors relating to place attachment in ageing: an exploratory study of place attributes and socio-ecological factors



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BACKGROUND

Existing research suggested that well-being in later life was more closely linked to the physical environment as it mediated ageing experiences and opportunities (Cunningham & Michael, 2004)

Place attachment, defined as the cognitive-emotional bond to a meaningful setting, typically the living place (Brown et al., 2003), is associated with a person-environment relationship and impacts health outcomes (e.g. quality of life (Harris et al., 1995), life satisfaction (Billig et al., 2006) and social well-being (Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010a)).

Knowledge gaps remain - evidence skewed towards observations in the social rather than the physical environment, not specific to older adults and were primarily rural areas (e.g. Brehm et al., 2004; Theodori, 2001).



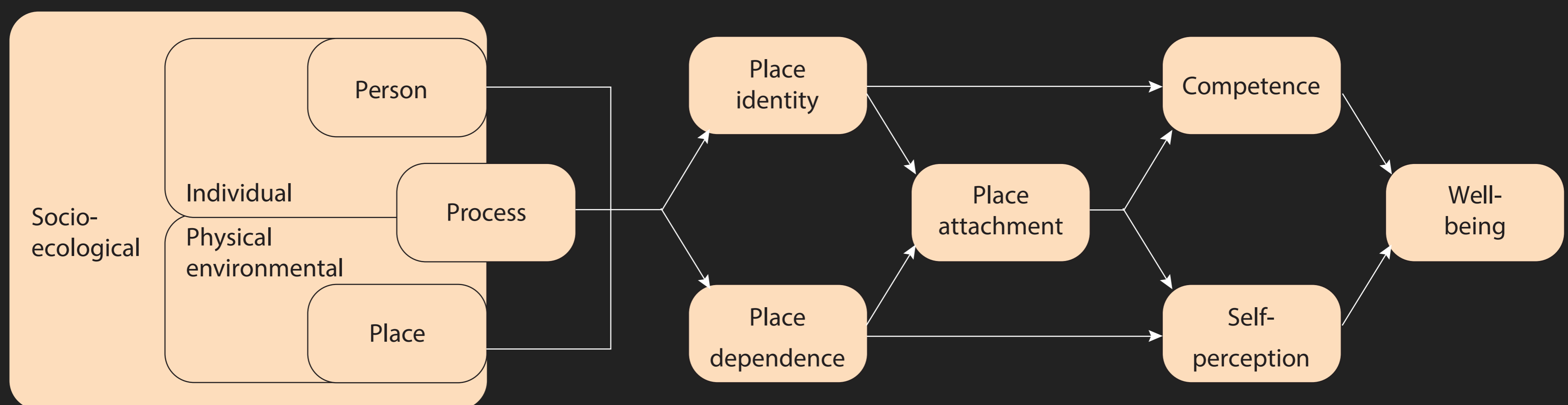
OBJECTIVES

The current study aims to respond to the research gap and explore the physical environmental requirements sufficient to enable processes facilitating or discouraging place attachment.



METHODS

- Qualitative walking interview
- Five participants from the city of Edinburgh, Dalkeith and Newtongrange
- Three parts: place attachment interview, general health and demographic questions
- Thematic analysis - based on tripartite framework of place attachment



RESULTS

PERSON

- Individual factors
- Length of residency, memories and milestones
 - Decreased mobility
- Socio-ecological
- Community support
 - Established relationships or commonality
 - Stories, narratives, and history

PLACE

- Physical environment
- Tangible references: a place/ a building/ an object/ a street/ a group of buildings
 - Non-tangible qualities: Accessibility, avoidance of adverse environmental conditions, architectural style, scale and size, diversity of destinations, neighbourhood management, safety, impressions, socialising infrastructure, opportunities for growth and development

PROCESS

- Ownership
- Memory

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Increased place dependency means gaining more competence in controlling the proximate environment increased environmental mastery, autonomy, which improved the psychological aspects of the emotional well-being. Enhanced place identity reshaped older adults' self-perceptions by integrating their characteristics with the physical environmental qualities they resided, which strengthens personal identity, contributing to emotional well-being.

Social interactions were among the most frequently mentioned themes - secure needed resources (Robison et al., 2002), and respond to emergencies promptly, independently, and efficiently (Murphy, 2007). Thereby increasing place dependency.

One participant perceived greenspace as a sanctuary from adverse environments in the neighbourhood. the diversity of the landscape and retaining the appearance and characteristics of wilderness were critical factors - warrants further research on sufficient level of wilderness.

Two participants reported that easy wayfinding and connectivity encouraged more opportunities for social interaction, which increased their sense of connectedness - future research using geospatial method to confirm the association between spatial design and interactions, and place attachment.