



Interrelations between sense of place, organizational commitment, and green neighborhoods



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ABSTRACT

Does the notion of organizational commitment apply to neighborhoods? Typically, sense of place is examined in relation to belonging and identification in communities, whereas organizational commitment is traditionally investigated in work settings. Based on apparent commonalities between the two constructs, we hypothesized that (a) neighborhood residents would experience them similarly, (b) the two constructs would be similarly associated with a physical variable ('greenness') and (c) individuals living in neighborhoods with more sustainable attributes would experience greater neighborhood (organizational) commitment, and a stronger sense of place. Neighborhood commitment and sense of place were significantly correlated, with moderate shared variance. Neighborhood commitment was significantly associated with the number of 'green' neighborhood attributes. Thus, neighborhood commitment and sense of place appear to be similar but not identical constructs, suggesting that neighborhood commitment has distinct value as an environmental construct in community research.

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Introduction

Neighborhood residents often experience a sense of place – a strong, emotional connection to the physical surroundings of their neighborhood. But might residents also feel a form of organizational commitment to their neighborhood? If so, to what extent are these constructs experienced similarly? Might organizational commitment add independent value to understanding social functioning in communities?

The construct of organizational commitment resides in the literatures of business and organizational/industrial psychology as an attitude based on the degree of identification with, or attachment to, the organization for which one works (Schultz & Schultz, 1998). It is "the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization" (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979, p. 226).

Whereas, theoretical (Cresswell, 2009; DeMigilo & Williams, 2008; Foote & Azaryahu, 2009; Relph, 1976, 1997, 2008; Tuan, 1974, 1980) and empirical studies (Derr, 2002; Eyles, 1985; Eyles & Williams, 2008; Hay, 1998; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006; Kaltenborn & Williams, 2002; Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989; Manzo, 2005; Shamai, 1991; Ulrich, 1981, 1984, 1986; Ulrich et al.,

1991; Williams, 1998, 1999) explain sense of place as a multidimensional construct that describes an emotional connection to a geographical environment, as well as to the values, symbols, and cultural meaning given to the setting.

To clarify the construct of sense of place, Shamai (1991) argued that it could be thought of as an umbrella term under which several place dimensions reside. Because numerous similar place dimensions exist in place literature, Jorgensen and Stedman (2001, 2006) put forward a three-dimensional theoretical model of sense of place that is individualistic in focus, treating places as attitude objects while differentiating between the cognitive (i.e., perceptual), affective (i.e., emotional), and conative (i.e., behavioral) domains.

Arguably, forming a 'sense of place' about an environment and its meaning is an instinctive and phenomenological human experience (Relph, 1976; Seamon, 2012; Stefanovic, 1998). Indeed, through this humanistic and phenomenological connection between perception and meaning, researchers in a variety of disciplines (e.g., human geography, environmental and social psychology, sociology, health studies, urban planning, and urban design) have investigated the notion of sense of place. Generally, those who experience a strong sense of place toward a neighborhood do not want to leave it because of the emotional, cognitive, and conative elements of the relationship between themselves and the setting (Casakin & Billig, 2009; Corcoran, 2010; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006; Williams & Stewart, 1998). This relationship involves both the physicality of an environment, as well as the

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familiar social interactions that occur within it (e.g., Fried, 1963; Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001).

The ways in which residents experience sense of place toward their neighborhood may be similar to how committed employees feel toward an organization. Arguably, organizationally committed individuals wish to be active, impactful players in their organization and contribute beyond what is expected, whether the notion of ‘organization’ represents a workplace or a neighborhood. Although organizational commitment and sense of place have been studied in different environments, the two constructs appear to be grounded in similar conceptual frameworks. Intriguing analogues exist between the three components of organizational commitment (affective, continuance, and normative organizational commitment; Allen & Meyer, 1987) and the three components of sense of place (place attachment, place dependence, and place identity; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006). Thus, the hypothesis that organizational commitment overlaps with sense of place, as experienced by neighborhood residents, seems reasonable. However, the overlap may not be perfect; organizational commitment may be somewhat distinct, and therefore add value to community research. The aim of this study is to take the first step in exploring the interrelations between these two constructs.

Do the constructs of organizational commitment and sense of place overlap?

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment refers to how strongly an individual identifies with, and becomes involved in, an organization (Mowday et al., 1979). The construct is correlated with motivation and satisfaction at work, and is characterized by acceptance of the values and goals of an organization, willingness to exert effort for an organization, and having a strong desire to remain affiliated with an organization (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982).

To further clarify organizational commitment, Allen and Meyer (1987) developed a three-component model composed of affective, continuance, and normative commitment dimensions. Affective organizational commitment is defined as an employees’ emotional bond to the organization and is influenced by personal characteristics and experiences at work (Allen & Meyer, 1987). Those who experience this component of organizational commitment accept and identify with the organization’s goals and values (Bogler & Somech, 2004).

Second, continuance organizational commitment is an employee’s perception of costs associated with leaving their workplace and is based on the magnitude and number of investments the employee has in the organization, together with a perceived lack of alternatives (Becker, 1960; Farrell & Rusbult, 1981; Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002; Rusbult & Farrell, 1983). The greater an individual’s perceived chances of obtaining a different job, and the greater desirability of that alternative position, the lower an individual’s continuance organizational commitment tends to be (Bateman & Strasser, 1984). Although this may seem like a negative aspect to the overall construct of organizational commitment, employees with strong continuance organizational commitment do experience a willingness to involve themselves with, and invest effort on behalf of, the organization (Bogler & Somech, 2004).

Third, normative organizational commitment is an employee’s level of motivation or obligation to remain working with an organization. This component is based on feelings of loyalty, developed through experiences prior to, and following, entry into an organization (Meyer et al., 2002; Wiener, 1982).

The three components of organizational commitment are inter-related: employees with strong affective organizational commitment remain working for an organization because they *want* to, those with strong continuance organizational commitment remain because they feel they *need* to, and those with strong normative organizational commitment stay because they feel they *ought* to (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Sense of place

Like organizational commitment, sense of place includes three components: place identity, place attachment, and place dependence (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006). Place identity is defined as individuals’ perceptions of their identity in relation to the physical environment (Proshansky, 1978). This component is generally formed through patterns of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies relevant to the environment (Proshansky, 1978). Later, Proshansky and his colleagues further explained that individuals incorporate places into their larger self-concept during the development of place identity (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983).

The second component, place attachment, has been defined as the affective relationship between people and a place that goes beyond cognition, preference, or judgment (Altman & Low, 1992; Riley, 1992; Scannell & Gifford, 2010; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992; Williams & Stewart, 1998). Place attachment can also refer to the richness of meaning that comes with familiarity (Gold & Burgess, 1982).

Third, place dependence is an individual’s perceived association (either positive or negative) between him or herself and a particular place (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). This component has been referred to as a person–place connection based on specific activities afforded by a setting (Schreyer, Jacob, & White, 1981). Often, place dependence is formed after an individual evaluates how well a setting might assist in goal achievement, given a range of alternatives (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). Thus, place dependence has more to do with whether an environment allows for behavioral goals to be attained, rather than whether strong emotions are felt toward a place.

Like the three-component model of organizational commitment, the three sense of place components noticeably overlap, but contain distinguishable elements (Bonnes & Secchiaroli, 1995). Interrelations among them are not fully understood (Brown & Raymond, 2007; Hammitt & Stewart, 1996; Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001, 2006; Kaltborn, 1997) but several attempts to articulate their links have been made. Jorgensen and Stedman (2001, 2006) assert that place identity, place attachment, and place dependence can be thought of singularly as “sense of place,” but others posit that place attachment may subsume place identity and place dependence (Altman & Low, 1992; Brown & Raymond, 2007; White, Virden, & van Riper, 2008). Jorgensen and Stedman’s arguments in favor of their multidimensional framework of sense of place appear strong and statistically viable. As they point out, understanding the cognitive, affective, and conative framework of sense of place can allow researchers to better “explore the potential for complexity in the concept” (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2006, pp. 317). Thus, for the purposes of this study, the three-component model put forward by Jorgensen and Stedman (2001, 2006) is used to conceptualize sense of place.

Complementary components of the two constructs

That both organizational commitment and sense of place consist of three components does not mean that the two constructs are equivalent. However, their components appear sufficiently

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