



# Is satisfaction the key? The role of citizen satisfaction, place attachment and place brand attitude on positive citizenship behavior



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## ABSTRACT

Even though satisfaction is a main research topic in many disciplines (especially in marketing and organizational studies), surprisingly few attempts have been made to discern the role of satisfaction in the field of urban research, at least compared to other concepts such as place attachment. The aim of this paper is to empirically show the role of citizen satisfaction in this field, highlighting its strong influence on place attachment, place brand attitude and positive citizenship behavior.

Our empirical study ( $N = 765$ ) shows that the satisfaction of citizens (using the Citizen Satisfaction Index (CSI) measurement) should be implemented in urban research, since this factor shows a high-explained variance for place attachment, place brand attitude and positive citizenship behavior. Additionally, this study raises the question of whether the commonly suggested antecedents of place attachment (i.e., place of birth and length of residence) are enough to explain when people create a strong bond with a place of living – or if citizen satisfaction can provide a better explanation.

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## Introduction: citizen satisfaction

Why do people feel bound to a place? Why do they want to leave a place? Many studies have raised these questions, to the point that place attachment is one of the most popular concepts in the environmental psychology literature (e.g., Low & Altman, 1992; Hernández, Hidalgo, Salazar-Laplace, & Hess, 2007; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Other related disciplines have also researched these questions and published a large number of theoretical and empirical papers concerning the relationship between a person and his or her environment. Most of them address the identity of place (e.g., Knez, 2005; Lalli, 1992; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; Stedman, 2002) and the identification with a place (e.g., Fleury-Bahi, Line-Félonneau, & Marchand, 2008; Uzzell, Pol, & Badesnas, 2002), often focusing on the so-called person–environment (P–E) fit (e.g., Edwards, Cable, Williamson, Lambert, & Shipp, 2006; Phillips, Cheng, Yeh, & Sui, 2010). Many of these papers focus on the positive results of such a relationship, such as the psychological well-being of residents (Phillips et al., 2010) or protective behavior towards the place (Stedman, 2002).

This strong relationship between a person and a place is often described as an inevitable effect of length of residence (Fleury-Bahi

et al., 2008) or property ownership (Lalli, 1992). Other researchers like Hernández et al. (2007) show that the degree of place attachment depends on the place of birth and place attitude of a person. Surprisingly few attempts have been made to think about the role of citizen satisfaction in this context. Sometimes it is measured or conceptualized as outcome (e.g., Fleury-Bahi et al., 2008; Insch, 2010; Insch & Florek, 2008, 2010; Zenker & Martin, 2011), and sometimes it is used as an antecedence of place attachment or positive citizenship behavior, like staying at a place (Hernández et al., 2007; Insch & Florek, 2008; Zenker, Petersen, & Aholt, 2013).

Even though we strongly agree that in urban management and research citizen satisfaction is an important aim in itself, we focus on its power on other factors. Thus, the aim of this paper is to further explore the role of citizen satisfaction in light of its influence on place attachment, the attitude towards a place and positive citizenship behavior. Therefore, we use the Citizen Satisfaction Index (CSI) model by Zenker et al. (2013) and empirically show that citizen satisfaction strongly influences place attachment, the evaluation of a place and the intention to leave a place. However, place attachment seems to be more important for talking positively about the place (positive place word-of-mouth) than citizen satisfaction. These results are interesting not only for place managers, but also for the field of place marketing, since the transformation of citizens into authentic place ambassadors (i.e., positive place word-of-mouth; Kavratzis, 2012) and citizen satisfaction itself are general aims of place marketing activities (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; Zenker & Martin, 2011).

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## Theoretical framework

### *The Citizen Satisfaction Index (CSI)*

In their Citizen Satisfaction Index (CSI) model, [Zenker et al. \(2013\)](#) argue that the overall satisfaction with a place is mainly explained by four distinct basic factors: namely “urbanity & diversity,” “nature & recreation,” “job chances” and “cost-efficiency” (see [Table 1](#)). These four factors explain 50% of the total variance of a citizen’s satisfaction with a place.

“Urbanity & diversity” could be understood as a kind of metropolitan character for a place: for example, a big city with a wide range of opportunities, cultural events or shopping activities. Additionally, this factor describes a place that is open and tolerant to many different cultures and subcultures. “Nature & recreation,” on the other hand, expresses the citizens’ need for low pollution, parks and open spaces, and the tranquility of a place. “Job opportunities” is related to all job-relevant items, like the general level of wages, and the “cost-efficiency” factor expresses the perception of the place’s costs of living. Furthermore, the authors show that the four factors are leading to a greater commitment with the place, which they use as an indicator for the feeling of being attached to a place and positive citizenship behavior.

Additionally, [Zenker, Eggers, and Farsky \(2013\)](#) show that these four factors are highly relevant for potential place-to-live-decisions of so-called talents (i.e., highly educated workforce). They are even willing to pay for these factors in terms of an income sacrifice: For instance, talents living in Berlin would sacrifice 9% of their annual income to stay in a city with an “urbanity & diversity” factor like in Berlin (p. 137). Another study by [Zenker and Gollan \(2010\)](#) shows that the intention to leave a place is lowered by the overall satisfaction with a place – as well as by the attitude towards the place brand.

### *Place brand attitude*

A brand can be understood as the mental representation of an object (and even a subject) in the mind of the customer. This representation is stored in the form of an association network, or so-called brand knowledge ([Keller, 1993](#)). For place brands, several authors focus on the association networks stored in the minds of place customers (e.g., [Anholt, 2010](#); [Braun, 2008](#); [Kavaratzis, 2008](#)). Citizens – besides other groups like tourists – could be seen as one customer group of places ([Zenker, 2011](#)). Even so, no shared definition of a place brand yet exists in the place branding literature ([Braun, 2011](#); [Gertner, 2011](#); [Kavaratzis & Ashworth, 2005](#)) and some have proposed that the essence of a place brand is “nothing more and nothing less than the good name of something that’s on offer to the public” ([Anholt & Hildreth, 2005, p. 164](#)).

The reputation of a place can also be described as the attitude towards a brand ([Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957](#)) – in this case, a place brand. This evaluation of or the attitude towards the brand drives the behavior of the place’s customers ([Zenker, 2011](#)). For example, the intention to leave a place ([Zenker & Gollan,](#)

[2010](#)) as said before, or the attitude towards a place’s products (like “USA Made” products), is influenced by the attitude towards the place brand ([Fullerton, Kendrick, Chan, Hamilton, & Kerr, 2007](#)). Most of the time, place branding campaigns aim to improve the attitude towards a place – for instance, the city of Turin attempting to become more creative ([Vanolo, 2008](#)). In general, places try to change negative associations into positive ones ([Gertner & Kotler, 2004](#)), since it is believed that this will lead to positive place customer behavior, like for example higher visiting rates for tourists (or a lower intention to leave and positive place word-of-mouth – as we measure it in this study).

### *Place attachment*

In the environmental psychology literature, place attachment is one of the most popular concepts (e.g., [Hernández et al., 2007](#); [Low & Altman, 1992](#); [Scannell & Gifford, 2010](#)), but unfortunately it is not often well distinguished from other concepts. At its core, place attachment describes the affective bond between a person and a particular place ([Hernández et al., 2007](#); [Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001](#)). This bond is assumed to be elementary for an individual because it leads to a sub-identity ([Hernández et al., 2007](#); [Lalli, 1992](#)) – the so-called place identity ([Proshansky et al., 1983](#)) – which is an important part of the person’s whole identity.

According to the literature, place attachment has two dimensions: a physical one, which is dedicated to the environmental features of the place; and a social one, which means the social bonds to other people who are associated with the place ([Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001](#); [Low & Altman, 1992](#)).

To explain when and why people feel strongly bound to a place, several authors postulate that people are more likely attached to the place of their birth (e.g., [Hernández et al., 2007](#); [Morgan, 2010](#)). Furthermore, the length of residence seems to positively influence place attachment ([Florek, 2011](#); [Hernández et al., 2007](#)). This could be because the length of residence is an indicator of potential experiences with the place and, as [Rubinstein and Parmelee \(1992\)](#) postulate, experiences with a place generally lead to more place attachment. However, these experiences have to be positive: [Hernández et al. \(2007\)](#) highlight in their definition that the place must be linked with a feeling of comfort and safety. Consequently, it can be supposed that only a satisfying place leads to place attachment ([Insch & Florek, 2008](#)), so that citizen satisfaction can be assumed as an antecedent of place attachment in this regards.

A high level of place attachment leads to several positive outcomes: For instance, people show a higher preference to stay close to the place ([Hidalgo & Hernández, 2001](#)) or generally show more beneficial behavior towards the place ([Florek, 2011](#); [Stedman, 2002](#)).

### *Hypotheses*

As stated before, people who are born in a place should have a stronger connection to said place because they build a long-term

**Table 1**  
The four factors of Citizen Satisfaction Index (CSI).

Factor	Sample items
Urbanity & diversity	Openness and tolerance of a city; many different cultures and subcultures; the energy of a city; the urban image of a city; a variety of shopping opportunities; a wide range of cultural activities (theatre, nightlife)
Nature & recreation	A number of parks and open spaces; tranquility of the place; access to water; low pollution; a wide range of outdoor-activities
Job chances	Professional networks in the city; general economic growth of the particular region; good job and promotion opportunities; the general level of wages
Cost-efficiency	The general price level in the city; costs of living; housing market; availability of apartments and houses

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