POSTSCRIPT

Affect and Cognition in the Context of Home: The Quest for Intangibles

Stephen Kaplan
University of Michigan

The three papers in this special issue represent an important advance in the effort to understand people's attachment to place. Economic factors do not provide an adequate explanation; it is necessary to seek less tangible influences. There are grounds for looking to the physical setting, and especially the natural environment available to residents. Access to other resources may also be important. And group affiliation can impact both cognitive and affective aspects of the attachment process. In terms of future research to better understand these intangibles, it may help to focus on the sense of place, the factors that make an environment psychologically comfortable. Three variables are proposed as research- able facets of the sense of place: (1) legibility, (2) the perception of and preference for the visual environment, and (3) the compatibility of the set- ting with human purposes.

The environment makes a difference to human experience and human well-being. Surely this fact has been one of the driving forces behind the emergence of environmental psychology as an area of research and theory. And just as surely, the widespread recognition of this fact owes much to the research examining the destruction of Boston's West End neighborhood in the name of ur- ban renewal. Gans (1962) and Fried (1963) have forcefully

described the psychological havoc wrought by this involuntary relocation, which separated individuals from an environment of great significance to them. The characterization of relocated individuals as "grieving for a lost home" (Fried, 1963) provides a vivid memorable image of the potential impact of the environment on people.

If this research of two decades ago can be said to have helped launch environmental psychology, the present special issue can be considered a sign of its increasing maturity. The fact of the environment's impact on people must be counted a vital beginning; at the same time it leaves much of vital importance unsaid. What are the sources of this impact? What are the factors which lead people to care so much about their environment in the first place? What can be done to enhance this potentially powerful and constructive relationship between people and their environment? By addressing these issues directly, the present papers demonstrate both a fidelity to an important theme in environmental psychology and a substantial advance in the way we think about it.

SOME COMMENTS ON THE STUDIES

Goodman and Hankin's systematic study makes an important contribution by exploring a range of economic and social variables that are a priori appropriate candidates as predictors of neighborhood satisfaction. As it turns out most of these do not emerge as significant influences on satisfaction, thus focussing attention on the question of what other variables play this role. Goodman and Hankin adopt an economic perspective in their analysis, looking for the consumption of goods and services to predict attachment and satisfaction. Their results, however, would seem to raise doubts about the appropriateness of this model. "Goods and services" did not appear to predict effectively. By contrast, they point to "intangibles" as a likely explanation for the relatively high satisfaction found in the oldest and poorest neighborhood in their sample. Unfortunately, the study included no measures for these potential predictors.

Putting aside such economic predictors is an important step. There is much to be said in favor of adopting a psychological perspective to place attachment and satisfaction. And the underlying economic assumptions are, after all, at variance with a psychological point of view. A central, although sometimes hidden

assumption of the economic or rational model is that people have perfect knowledge, that they know what their options are and what these imply. This assumption, of course, flies in the face of considerable evidence that confusion and ignorance are rampant and difficult to correct. The economic approach further assumes that people are oriented towards maximization of some unitary gain. As Midgley (1978) points out, however, people are far more appropriately characterized as having multiple rather than unitary wants. Foa (1978) further demonstrates that the ready interchange or trade-off among different wants, which is central to the idea of unitary gain, is not supported by psychological data. Money is not a satisfactory substitute for love or status or information, all of which are of considerable concern to people.

The key assumption of maximization of unitary gain turns out to be doubly flawed. The inappropriateness of assuming some unitary gain is only part of the problem: the maximization concept is also highly questionable. Simon (1978) introduced his power concept of "satisficing" as an alternative to maximization. He effectively demonstrates that maximization is often an inappropriate and unlikely strategy, and points out how costly it would be as applied in the context of environmental design. The three pivotal assumptions of the economic model — perfect knowledge, maximization, and unitary gain — thus have serious limitations as descriptors of human behavior. (For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see Kaplan & Kaplan, 1982.)

It is thus welcome news that intangibles are vital to understanding the human relation to place. It is welcome both because an economic explanation seemed highly unlikely on intuitive grounds (materialism isn't *that* satisfying) and because intangibles are precisely the sort of variables that psychologists are accustomed to dealing with.

Fortunately is not necessary to go far afield to discover what some of these intangibles might be. The central findings of Fried's study provide some fascinating clues. Fried's basic strategy is to use factor analysis to look at the structure of community satisfaction and then to examine the relationship of the resulting factors to the larger variable of life satisfaction. "Local residental satisfaction" was a significant predictor of life satisfaction; this factor combines housing satisfaction, neighborhood satisfaction and ease of access to nature.

While the importance of housing and neighborhood satisfaction might have been anticipated, the strong influence of the

natural environment may seem surprising. Yet findings of this sort are not unprecedented. R. Kaplan (1983) found the perceived quality of nearby nature to be a major factor in neighborhood satisfaction, and Frey (1981) found a relation between this variable and life satisfaction. Here, clearly, is a good example of one category of intangible that can function quite independently of the economic level of the residents.

The analysis of potential intangibles is also advanced by another of Fried's components of residential satisfaction, although in this case the significance of the underlyng concept may be obscured by his choice of terminology. His label, "Local convenience satisfaction," carries with it a sense of the optional, of the nice but not necessary. Yet in the detailed description of this factor, the terms "availability" and "access" play a prominent role. It is important to recognize that what looks from afar to be no more than convenience may be much more pivotal from the resident's viewpoint. Given limited time and limited attention, what appears to be convenience readily translates into access. And it goes without saying that resources to which one has no access are functionally not resources, despite their presence in some official or definitional sense.

Another of Fried's findings also helps cast a new light on the role of economic factors in people's relation to place. Community satisfaction was a more important factor in life satisfaction, the lower the social class of the participant. Thus SES may not be a simple predictor, but a moderating or interacting variable, where psychological mediation of effects is both complex and worthy of study. Again this finding, although on first glance surprising, had been anticipated over a decade ago. Greenbie (1973) pointed out that factors in the physical environment were likely to make more difference for lower SES individuals; he argued that the more affluent can more readily find their territory in their work and rely less on the physical world. This, of course, can lead to major misunderstandings between planners with their relatively portable territories and poorer citizens who have strong roots in their physical surrounds.

An important additional component is contributed by Taylor, Gottfredson and Brower who focussed on group affiliation as an element of the individual's relation to place. Group affiliation is particularly fascinating because of the multiple roles it can play. It can be a source of both affect and information. It can also be interpreted projectively; affiliation can be an indication of both

trust of others and belief in the possibility of improving the local neighborhood.

In this study too, SES (and ethnicity) plays a complex role. Lower SES predicts lower likelihood of group affiliation, possibly due to lower trust of neighbors. Here too are powerful consequences of economic factors that cry out for more extensive study to understand the psychological mechanisms that may be at work.

Despite the stimulating and suggestive nature of these findings, however, some caution in interpretation must be exercised due to the limitations of the dependent variable employed. This variable, one's ability to recall the name of one's neighborhood, is by itself a slim measure of attachment. Although there is theoretical justification for using this measure, any single item is susceptible to noise. A multiple-item measure is not only far more reliable, it also allows the analysis of interrelationships among facets of the measure that can be most enlightening for one's theoretical perspective.

ATTACHMENT AND THE SENSE OF PLACE

It seems abundantly clear that future research on attachment will have to become increasingly concerned with these elusive yet potent "intangibles," which at present are only dimly understood. Sometimes it seems as if traditional psychology is only concerned with two aspects of the environment: reinforcers and other people. A fascinating contribution of the work reported here is that it has demonstrated the inadequacy of both of these factors as far as attachment is concerned. If, in this context, one can roughly equate reinforcers with the economist's goods and services, then it is clear that this slice of the environment does not adequately account for attachment. Comparably, Fried has shown that social relations, too, account for only a small part of the variance. These limited facets of the environment leave much to be explained; our focus must turn to the remaining environment, to the physical world in which people cope and function and, hopefully, find attachment.

It is in this area that the work reported here is the most limited. There is little emphasis on the physical environment and a paucity of measures of people's reactions to it. These omissions, while unfortunate, are quite understandable; it is difficult to study what is not yet adequately conceptualized. In my remaining com-

ments I would like to try to sketch some directions in which such a conceptualization, and the research associated with it, might proceed.

The central issue in linking attachment and the physical world can be stated simply: What is it that makes an environment easy to become attached to? This is an issue that has long been a concern of environmental designers. They refer to what makes a setting feel comfortable, easy to relate to, as the "sense of place." It is clear that some designers have a powerful, albeit intuitive grasp of this concept. From a scientific perspective such an intuitive understanding needs to be supplemented by a more analytic grasp of the issues. Let us then examine three concepts that are potential constituents of the sense of place. All three are derived from one aspect or another of environmental psychology; thus, they hold the potential of linking attachment research more strongly with the rest of the area.

The first of these is the distinctiveness and mapability of a place. Environments differ greatly, as Lynch (1960) has so graphically pointed out, in the ease which with one gets to know them. Way-finding information is functionally important and far more readily accessible in some settings than in others. The sense of place concept suggests a setting with which one feels familiar even if one has never been there before. Likely correlates of a readily mapable environment are a greater sense of personal competence and a higher level of safety. As Taylor, Gottfredson and Brower have pointed out, participation in neighborhood groups can serve as a means of learning more about the neighborhood; thus a sense of legibility might be acquired through social channels even in a neighborhood where the distinctiveness of the physical setting is not particularly noteworthy.

A second potentially interesting variable involves the visual and spatial configuration of the environment, but viewed from a more global perspective. The issue here is how the scenes which would be considered characteristic of a particular environment are perceived and evaluated. It is clear from several studies of the urban environment that preference judgements can be used to study both perceptual categories and evaluations of such settings (Herzog, Kaplan & Kaplan, 1976, 1982). Such aspects of the physical setting as scale, enclosure and spatial diversity would be likely to figure importantly in such analyses. A methodology of this kind can be a powerful tool in attempting to understand neighborhood "intangibles." It is by no means the case that affluence or higher

expenditure will inevitably lead to more positive reactions. It is interesting to note that Taylor, Gottfredson and Brower obtained slides of the physical environment of each surveyed household for their "physical assessment" measure. Thus in the context of their study it would have been relatively straightforward to explore these issues.

A third concept which might be useful in understanding the sense of place is the compatibility or congruence between the person and the setting. An environment can be supportive of one's plans and one's functioning. Distraction, confusion, inaccessibility of needed information or resources are among the many urban assaults on environmental compatibility. People are often well aware of such incompatibilities that increase effort and reduce satisfaction. On the other hand, incompatibility can also impair functioning quite outside of the individual's consciousness. Sometimes it is only by experiencing an environment unusually high in compatibility that the individual realizes what is possible under favorable conditions in terms of competence and satisfaction (S. Kaplan, 1983; Kaplan & Talbot, 1983).

It must be recognized that these three proposed components of a sense of place are overlapping concepts; there is certainly much interplay among them. They are proposed, not as a mutually exclusive and exhaustive theoretical typology, but rather as examples of variables that might be worth incorporating in future research. Whatever their limitations, they have two distinct assets. They suggest ways of incorporating the physical environment in research in this area, and they provide a strong antidote to the ever present temptation towards rationalism in psychological theory.

REFERENCES

Foa, U. G. (1978). Interpersonal and economic resources. In S. Kaplan & R. Kaplan (Eds.), *Humanscape: Environments for people*. Belmont, CA: Duxbury. (Republished by Ulrich's, Ann Arbor, MI, 1982).

Frey, J. E. (1981). *Preferences, satisfactions, and the physical environments of urban neighborhoods*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan.

Fried, M. (1963). Grieving for a lost home. In L. J. Duhl (Ed.), *The urban condition*. New York: Simon Schuster.

Gans, H. J. (1962). *The urban villagers*. New York: Free Press.

Greenbie, B. B. (1973). An ethological approach to community design. In W. F. E. Preiser (Ed.), *Environmental design research*. Stroudsburg, PA: Dowden, Hutchinson & Ross. `

Herzog, T. R., Kaplan, S. & Kaplan, R. (1976). The prediction of preference for familiar urban places. *Environment and Behavior, 8,* 627-645.

Herzog, T. R., Kaplan, S. & Kaplan, R. (1982). The prediction of preference for unfamiliar urban places. *Population and Environment, 5,* 43-59.

Kaplan, R. (1983). The role of nature in the urban context. In I. Altman & J. F. Wohlwill (Eds.), *Behavior and the natural environment*. New York: Plenum Press.

Kaplan S. (1983). A model for person-environment compatibility. *Environment and Behavior, 15,* 311-332.

Kaplan, S. & Kaplan, R. (1982). *Cognition and environment: Functioning in an uncertain world*. New York: Praeger.

Kaplan, S. & Talbot, J. F. (1983). Psychological benefits of the wilderness experience. In I. Altman & J. F. Wohlwill (Eds.), *Behavior and the natural environment*. New York: Plenum Press.

Lynch, K. (1960). *The image of the city*. Cambridge, MA: MIT.

Midgley, M. (1978). *Beast and man: The roots of human nature*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Simon, H. A. (1978). Satisficing and the one right way. In S. Kaplan & R. Kaplan (Eds.), *Humanscape: Environments for people*. Belmont, CA: Duxbury. (Republished by Ulrich's, Ann Arbor, MI, 1982).