

PSYCHOLOGY OF THE PLACE

A discipline investigating psychological aspects of relationships between humans and their environment, with particular emphasis on the mechanisms that build the relationship between humans and places.

The psychology of a place is embedded in environmental psychology, which studies the relations between humans and the environment, understood in two ways: as the influence of humanity on the environment and the environment on humans. Representatives of this discipline emphasise the emotional (not intellectual) basis of human-place relations, which is expressed in specific behaviors, attitudes (social, individual) and beliefs. The concepts of place psychology use elements of social psychology, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology and behavioural psychology. In this approach, the psychological interpretation is given to the category of place, which means here not so much geographical or physical location, but rather an "internal experience" of an emotional nature.

Among the issues particularly stressed by the representatives of psychology of the place there are issues concerning: 1) the sense of belonging to a place treated in terms of familiarity, intimacy or involvement (Lewicka), 2) identity (identification with a place, both in the individual and social aspect) and 3) attachment to a place, i.e. a certain emotional attitude built on the basis of both physical and natural features of the place, as well as symbolic meanings inscribed in them, related values or history of the place (with which an individual biography may be connected), creating a sense of continuity with the past, embodying tradition (Madurowicz). Identification with a place occurs in the case of a particularly strong sense of belonging to a place, treated in terms of uniqueness (expressed e.g. in the idea of *genius loci* [Norberg-Schultz]), which in turn translates into human otherness (Twigger-Ross and Uzzell). The degree of this identification depends on the type of place (for some it is a family village, for others it is a region or country, etc.) and is correlated with factors such as awareness, education level and others on the basis of which people build their identity: ethnic, gender, age-related, religious or related to the presence of loved ones. Sometimes "narrow" identification (e.g. regional) is weaker than "broad" (national), sometimes vice versa.

The most important contemporary issues relating to the psychology of the place include those concerning the so-called "dynamic rooting" or "variable territory", shaping variable and fluid identities created by the media (we identify ourselves with, for example, places known from television [Kita]). The memory of the place, both individual and social, is also an important issue considered within the psychology of the place.

The psychology of the place can be useful in urban and architectural design. The way of developing and shaping the place (surroundings, neighbourhood) may foster the creation of interpersonal relations, provide conditions for meeting needs, emphasise prestige or social status, evoke specific emotions and attitudes (Borowska).

[M. G.]

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