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## Analyzing the concept of sense of place and its effect on the identity of place in new cities

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### Abstract

The purpose of current article is to study the effect of sense of place on creating the urban identity in new cities. In order to fulfill the mentioned purpose, the key concepts of research and the theories related to the issue were studied. According to it, in order to collect the data, library method and note taking tool were used. The studies indicated the presence of human in the environment and the perceptions arising from physical-spatial structures, social-activity structures, individual-mental structures as the result of defining the meaning of environment convert the space's environment to the place. This definition of meaning has led to the positioning of person in the face of place and it is effective on the quality and quantity of his presence at present and future in that special place. This positioning has been expressed in the frame of sense of place and according to this sense, linking the person with the place is formed. This sense can be equal more and less for a set of persons in the frame of social groups. Different levels from indifference-placelessness to awareness, dependency, affection, commitment and finally loyalty and sacrifice are determined for sense of place. The sense of place is effective on formation of individual and social identity by linking the person to the place and also the dependency sense to the place. The identity of place is also influenced by the sense of place. In other words, individual identity can be found in the special and unique features of him/her and also in the features of a society in which he has been present as a member of it. A place that person is present is also added to the mentioned phrase and therefore, the identity of human will be influenced by individual, social and spatial features. Therefore, it can be said that citizenship identity is influenced by the identity of place and in wider interpretation spatial identity or identity of city.

**Key words:** *sense of place, identity of place, phenomenology, psychology of environment, new cities.*

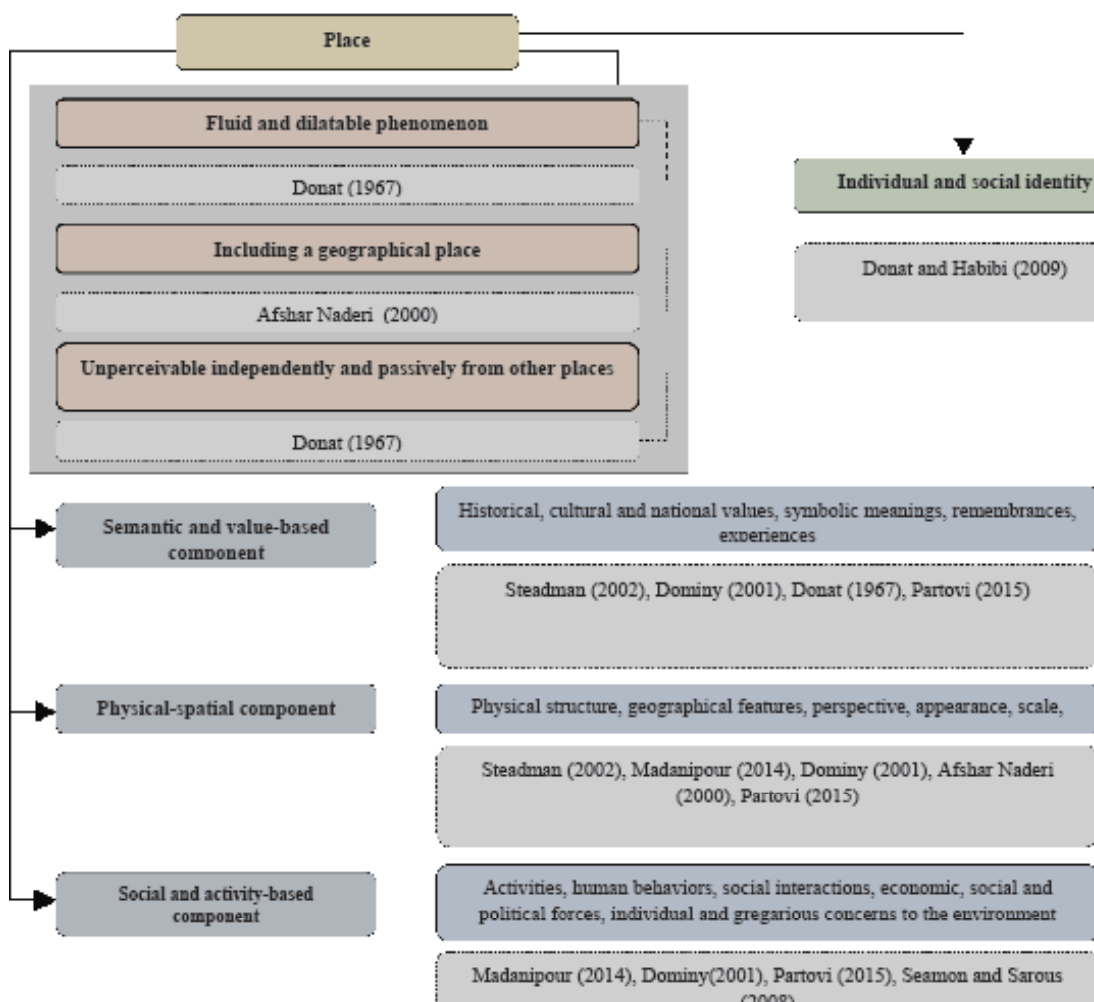
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## Introduction

Human is always looking for solutions to improve his/her life utility. Urban planning has not been also an exception of this rule and its main purpose is to promote the life quality of citizens. The quality of the environment is also influenced by numerous factors that among them identity means a property which distinguishes a phenomenon from other similar species which have been engraved in the mind. A review on researches which have been already accomplished indicates that environmental perception has been the central core of many researches in the behavioral geography of human (Daneshpazhouh and Modiri, 2015: pages 45 and 46). Environmental psychology of psychological study of human's behavior is in a manner that is related to his daily life in the physical environment (Matlabi, 2002: page 55). Human is the most important factor which gives meaning to the place. A kind of relationship governs between human and place that in Relph's belief, it is called the soul (sense) of place. Human's perceptions and feelings of space have a place in his/her mind that in facing with external real possibility play the role of associative, and they cause the acquaintance with the place. Each place due to the specified features that divulges from itself and as the result of it, creates a picture in human's mind, introduces itself to him/her and from this path, it creates specification and distinction from other places for itself. This process leads to the identification of place that is a concept of norms and values. In many researches based on normative valuating and positioning, identity has been considered with the meaning of belonging sense and identification with the environment and criteria like security feeling, memorability, belonging and dependency sense to the appearance have been applied for evaluating it (Daneshpour, 2001). The book of "the face of the city" written by Kevin Lynch has been the most famous sample of this kind of studies which have been accomplished according to the psychology of Goshtalt. The

legible concepts and a meaning which have been mentioned by Lynch are arising from formation of environment picture in people's mind and the manner of perception of environment by them (Lynch, 2012). Human has different pictures from different places in his/her mind and his/her feelings can influence on his/her perception of environment and formation of mental picture of place (Habibi, 2009). From the view of environmental psychology, humans need the sensory, emotional and spiritual experience to the life environment. Through intimate interaction or a kind of identification with a place in which human resides or so-called soul or sense of place, these needs can be fulfilled. In addition to the environmental psychology, studying the place is also accomplished from the view of phenomenology. According to it, the phenomenon of the world depends on the amount and manner of perception and attention of human's mind (Bemanian and Mahmoudinezhad, 2009: page 18). From the view of phenomenologists, the sense of place means connecting with the place by perceiving daily symbols and activities which have been created in the life place of person and it is developed and deepened over time (Relph, 1976). Individual and gregarious values influence on the manner of sense of place and the sense of place also influences on values, attitudes and especially individual and social behavior of persons in the place (Canter, 1977). This sense not only leads to the desired relation between space (place) and human, but also it helps to the person's, identification and their belonging feeling (Daneshpazhouh and Modiri, 2015: 171). In other words, a part of the human's existence personality which makes his/her individual identity, is a place that human introduces himself to the others with it, when he thinks about himself, he knows himself connected to that place and he accounts that place a part of himself (Behzadfar, 2012: 65). Consequently, the relation between the sense of place and identity hasn't led only to define the identity of place; rather it has much



▲ Diagram 1. Combinative pattern of concept of place

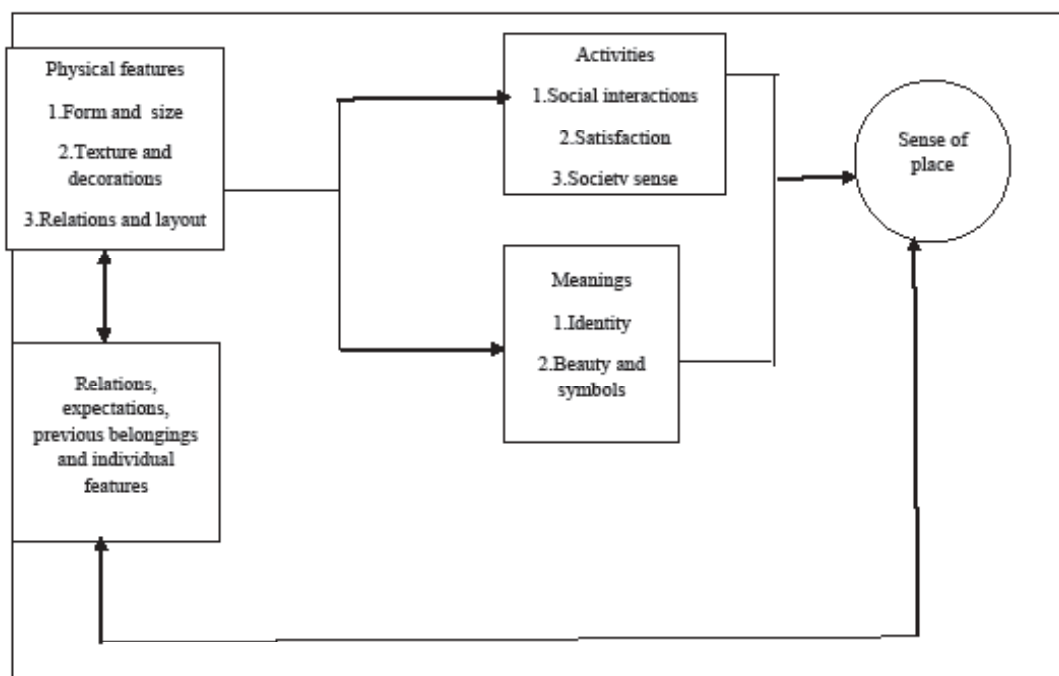
effect in formation of individual identity and following it social identity.

Human's life and his/her activities occur in the place. This phrase simply expresses that this concept has been always challenged and it has been studied in different courses and issues. Although the sense of place has been also considered more in recent years, but in the modern translation, the soul is the protective<sup>1</sup> of place that doesn't refer to a physical place historically. Therefore and at first, considering the issue of sense of place is not accounted eligible for innovation; but its connection with identity concept especially urban identity can be considered a relatively new issue. Identity is an easy and abstainer word. It is easy because

in the investigative and extensional search, the related issues can not be considered easily. Due to it, many users stop the meaning of this word in general understanding and generalizations. When the identity word is mixed with city, the problem becomes double (Behzadfar, 2012: 15). Because the identity of city has abundant complexities. Therefore, studying two concepts of sense of place and identity (urban) and the effects that sense of place has on the urban identity have significant importance.

#### Place

It is a fluid and dilatable phenomenon that in addition to include a geographical place, it hasn't been perceived independently and passively from other environmental phenomena



▲ Diagram 2. Mutual relations of sense of place and the concepts related to it (Falahat, 2007: 64)

and in addition to dependency on time, it has semantic and value-based, physical-spatial and social-behavioral dimensions. Each one of mentioned dimensions includes sub-components according to the order of diagram No.1.

### The sense of place

The sense of place means people's mental perception of environment and their more and less conscious feeling of their environment that put the person in an internal relationship with environment, so that the perception and feeling is linked (connected) to the semantic field of environment and it becomes integrated (Falahat, 2007: 57). The sense of place means the observer's perception sense of the environment features which depends on the person's features such as gender, social class, beliefs and values (Cowan, 2005: 347). The sense of place can be introduced according to diagram-2.

### The sense of place from the view of phenomenologists

From the view of phenomenologists, the sense of place means connecting with the place by perceiving daily symbols and activities. This sense can be created in the life place of person and it can be deepened and developed over

time (Relph, 1976). From the view of phenomenology, the most important related concepts in expressing the sense of place are words like place-friendship, experience of place and personality of place and the sense of place means immaterial features or the personality of place which has close meaning with soul or spirit of place. Historically, the soul of place was applied for holding religious celebrations and ceremonies in which the visitors should pay attention to the movements of worships in the ceremonies a lot. Therefore the place that these ceremonies and acts occurred in it was converted to a special place and this respect feeling was one of the place's features which distinguished it from other spaces and it was called the soul of place. The elements of soul of place and alive and dynamic awareness of environment were as a religious repetition and also the friendship feeling with place (Brinck-erhoff, 1994).

In phenomenology of place, experience is the main element of perception. The phenomenology experience means mental purification and achieving to the affairs, essence by manifestation of objects through the person that is effective on the sense of place. Allen

Relation	Kind of connection	Process
Biography	Historical and familial	Being born and living in one place, complementarity of place for personal history, influenced by time
Spiritual	Emotional and intangible	Belonging sense to the place, feeling instead of being created, difficulty in description, generally unexpected
Ideological	Moral and conscionable	Living according to moral guides about human's personality to the place, religious and unreligious guides
Narrative	Legendary	Acquiring information about place through stories, myths, familial histories and explanation of events
Commodified	Cognitive	Selecting the place based on desired features and preferences about life style, comparing the real places with ideal places
Dependent	Commodified	Becoming limited by lack of existence of selection, dependency on person or opportunities

▲ Table 1. Human's relations with place and its processes (Cross, 2005)

Gussow knows this deep experience as a factor that converts each physical and environmental situation to a place (Relph, 1976). The personality of place is also one of the most important factors of sense of place. From the view of Seamon, not only the place refers to a geographical location, but also it indicates the main personality of a site which distinguishes it from other places. Therefore, in the place, different dimensions of perspective are gathered to create a distinct environment and special locality sense (Seamon, 1982).

#### **The sense of place from the view of environmental psychologists**

From the view of environmental psychology, humans need the special sensory, emotional and spiritual experience to the life environment. These needs can be fulfilled through intimate interaction and a kind of identification with a place in which the humans reside. This intimate interaction and identification is called the soul or sense of place. Mentally, the sense of place is a catalyst which causes to convert an environment to a place, the procedure of deep experience of place isn't as an object, rather it is as an alive organism which is fulfilled after

successive mutual conformity, therefore the relations between the persons and places need special stability (Altman and Low, 1992).

#### **The levels of sense of place**

David Hummon has introduced five species of sense of place (Hummon, 1992) which are: ideological rootedness, taken for granted rootedness, place relativity, place alienation and placelessness. Jeniffer E. Cross also following Hummon defines the sense of place as a combination of relation with the place and the sense of presence in the society. He classifies the relation with the place in the form of a biography, spiritual, ideological, narrative, commodified and dependent that with factors like identity, insight and satisfaction, five different levels of sense of place namely, cohesive rootedness, divided rootedness, place alienation, relativity and uncommitted placelessness are created (Cross, 2005). Generally, he defines relations with place and belonging to the place based on links or connections that persons establish with place. The view of Cross has been summarized in the table No.1

#### **Factors which form the sense of place**

The elements which make the sense of place



can be included in two classes of perceptual-cognitive factors and physical factors.

**1-Perceptual and cognitive factors:** As it was said, the sense of place is a complex combination of meanings, symbols and qualities that person perceives from a special space or region unconsciously or consciously (Shamai, 1991). The meanings and concepts which are decrypted after perception of place by person are the factors of creating the sense of place. Therefore, the sense of place is not only a sense or emotion or any kind of relation or special place, but also it is a cognitive system and structure that person with it has belonging feeling to the issues, persons, objects and concepts of a place. Therefore, the persons are not able to live in a special environment without sense of place, because the sense of place is the capability of space or place in creating a special sense to the place generality and with this sense, the relation of person with all concepts, persons and other issues existing in that place is provided. In this concept, sense doesn't mean feeling before the perception stage, rather it means emotion namely after the cognition stage. Therefore, places create different senses in different persons and the role of personality and past experiences of humans is effective on perceiving this sense (Falahat, 2007: 61).

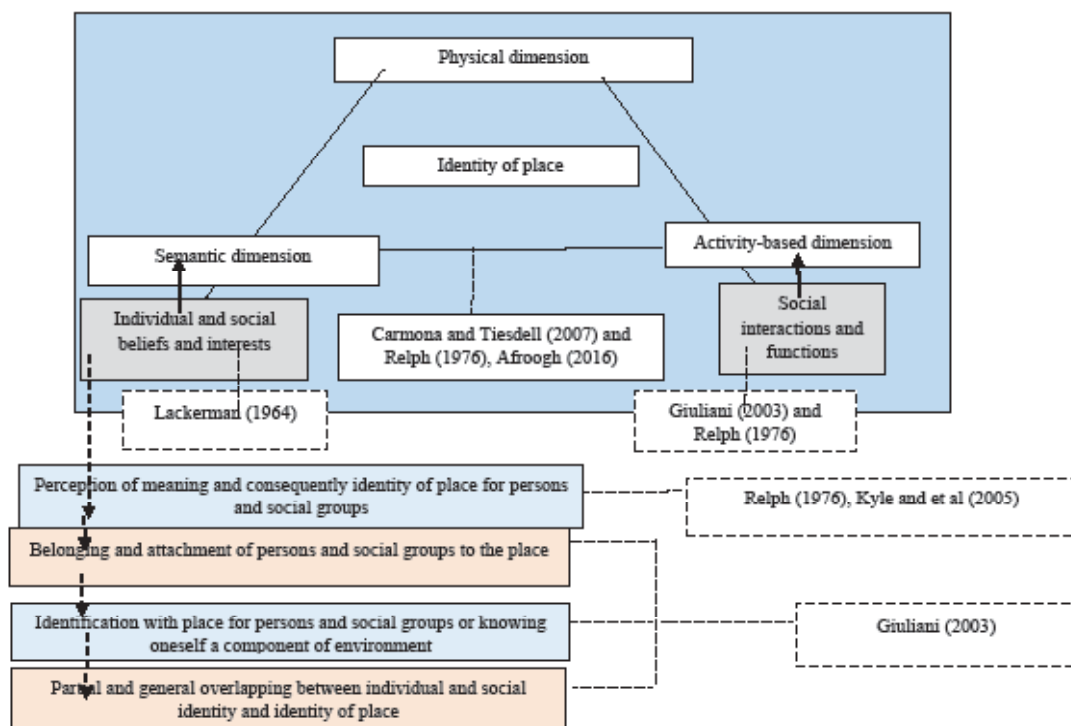
## 2-Physical factors

From the view of Steele, the most important physical factors which are effective on perception, sense of place, size of place, degree of closure, contrariety, scale, proportion, human scale, distance, texture, color, smell, sound and visual variety (Steele, 1981). Also he knows the properties like identity, history, fantasy, mystery, joy, surprise, security, vitality, livability and remembrance cause to establish concentrated relation with place. From the view of David Salvesen, the sense of place is created from interaction of three elements of situation, appearance and individual interweaving that each one of them lonely is not enough for creating the sense of place. Different factors like impa-

tience, monotony of buildings and advent of digital era are accounted a threat for sense of place. Physical personality, ownership, genuineness, residents, welfare devices, nature like water, plants, sky, sun and private and gregarious spaces are the constituent components of place which are effective on creating the place (Salvesen, 2002).

## Identity of place

When belonging to a place for a person is increased, he knows himself with this place (s). This issue is true either in relation with sub-scaled places like house and work place or macro-scaled places like city and country. Intensification of belonging to the place converts it to a component of identity of place. Although separating the concepts of identity of place and spatial belonging is difficult (Giuliani, 2003). This identity expresses the symbolic meaning of a place for person (Kylel & et al, 2005). The identity of place includes three related components that none of them can be reduced to the physical features or façade, visible activities and performances or meanings and symbols. Each one of these components of course has unlimited spectrum of content and also many ways for combining with each other (Carmona & Tiesdell, 2007). The identity of place somehow refers to the triple elements of physical environment, activity and meaning. The meaning of place may have root in the physical environment of objects and activities, but this should not be known as its natural feature. In fact meaning refers to the human's motivation and experience which can be changed and transferred from a physical set to another set. Three mentioned elements can not be reduced to each otherbut inseparably they have been linked (connected) in our perception of different places. The physical component can be land, sea, sky or human-made environment. As the same way, activities and functions can be social, individual, creative, destructive and like them. Totally these three elements form a dialectic which are related to each other in a place. Physical face, activities



▲ Diagram 3. Combinative pattern of the concept of identity of place

and meanings are the raw material of spatial identity and dialectics between them are the structural relations of this identity (Afroogh, 2015). From this view of Relph (1976), identity is not only the product of triple elements of physical environment, activity and meaning but also identity is made socially. In other words, identity is changed with regard to the individual and gregarious picture of that place. In fact, the picture and pattern of a place are its identity and perceiving the social structure of patterns is the necessary pre condition for perceiving the identity. On the other hand, Lackerman (1964) expresses, human beliefs and interests give identity to the place. In diagram No.3, the combinative pattern of identity of place has been brought schematically.

### The identity of new cities

The identity of each city is influenced by different national, cultural, spatial, historical, physical, social and economic aspects. The identity of each city hasn't been separated from the identity of its residents and residing in a new city gives new identity to its citizens. Although for new city like other ancient successful cit-

ies for acquiring identity, time is needed. But for formation and acceleration of this identity, effective factors and components in this field are needed. Giving the identity to new city can be started from the same geographical context in which the city is established. The domicile of city which is the same seat of city has been occupied by humans due to the necessity of the district topography; the city's sperm has been created, rooted and finally developed there (Farid, 1993: 51). This place or refuge of city has a special natural feature which depicts a part of the identity of city which can be described in the frame of natural identity of city (Yazdani & Yari, 2008: 220). The kind of climate, mounts, rivers, lakes, vegetation and cases like them which are as the main symbols of a city play an important role in introducing the city and its residents (Varesi & et al, 2011: 26). In addition to the natural elements which demonstrate the apparent manifestation of a city, buildings, ways network, public spaces, complementary elements of space like urban furniture and generally elements and artificial environment in the event of identification can

demonstrate different appearance and face of the body of each city. Urban facades and spaces according to the physical features and their special functional role are proposed as the first element that gives identity to this part of elements of new cities. Giving identity to these dimensions should be coordinated and proportional with culture and beliefs of residents in the city (Hashemizadeh, 1995: 227). It should be considered that culture in new cities has taken a new form to itself, because in these cities, different sub-cultures are in interaction with each other and they create new cultural mechanisms which are influenced by dominant factors in that city such as physical and social (Rabbani & et al, 2011: 201).

Symbols and signs are potential tools for conveying the meaning (Madanipour, 2014: 102). According to it, cultural elements, customs, religious and historical ceremonies can be used for giving identity to the cities especially new cities. Agreeable and familiar spaces in the district create human relations and they can create nearness and neighborhood sense in residents of a city. These spaces provide the possibility of social supervision and controlling others, behavior for users and this issue creates positive experiences. Whatever these remembrances are more and stronger, identity of city or human becomes more complete. These spaces can be traditional and modern, but important factor is the manner of organizing them that creates a hangout and social correlation. Daily events and incidents are effective on formation of remembrances of city and human. Holding competitions, local, regional and national congregation, street representations, mourning are the events that remain in the city's memory and city becomes memorable. City or remembrance creates the attachment of person with life place (Varesi and et al: 2011, 26).

The effect of people's votes and theories in urban planning and designing is another tool for creating the identity field in urban textures and new cities (Barati, 1995: 431). If the citizens participate in the affairs, our country will be

created and this issue conducts the urbanites toward becoming citizen which has a more range than mere residing. Also economic activities can be proposed as the index that gives identity to the urban spaces. Some activities which exist especially in the places or cities are a lot and they show off as one of the identity elements of city and there are a lot of economic features and activities which influence on the urban face. (Yazdani & Yari, 2008: 223). Since new cities have been often designed and positioned in order to settle the workers of special spectrum of the society, manifestation of the economic activity kind in physiognomy, city face and other urban elements can help to form the sense of place. For sample, strengthening the special and native activities of district, handcrafts and tourism are the objective samples of urban identity dimensions (Varesi & et al, 2011:26).

### Conclusion

According to the mentioned issues, it can be expressed that presence in a space apart from being conscious or unconscious and consequently, if that perception of space is accomplished in difficult levels, in Relph's interpretation, it will propose a common sense or place concept (cited in Carmona and Tiesdell, 2007: 103). Despite of it, the processes of converting the space to place and its causes have complexities which have been always studied and considered. Because perception of space isn't accomplished with the same method for persons and social groups; and consequently, a unique pattern can not be introduced in this relation. However there is significant consensus that induction of meaning or meaningfulness of space for human converts it to the place. The mechanism of space meaningfulness by implication of this concept from complex social structures, individual experiences and mental pictures is beside the physical components of place. The significant point is this issue that whether the interpreted meaning by observer has been arisen from a thing that is in the place (objective level) or what is attrib-



uted to the place in the observer, mind (mental level). Therefore perceiving the meaning of environment has significant dependency on observer and according to it, the meaning of place and consequently that feeling that presence creates for the person in the place will be different. Although this feeling which is so-called the sense of place can have similarities between persons and social groups; so that presence in a holy place creates similar sense of place for persons. On the other hand, the sense of place can be created for observers for specified purpose in significant level by environmental designers and planners. Therefore, the sense of place arising from place meaning can be defined as a brand for place and it can express special expectations of quality, solidity and credibility. This kind of labels will be effective on distinguishing that place from other places and consequently the place identity.

The sense of place is arising from a perception which is formed by existence of physical and non-physical elements. Therefore at first stage, the features of place such as natural and human-made components as the result of giving meaning to the place can provoke special feeling to it. In this state, human's connection with place apart from existence of others is merely considered. In such conditions, presence in a place may revive some remembrances for the person that the existence of other persons or social relations for creating feeling in him/her isn't needed. In other state, physical elements or in other words the physical container of place is a context for social interactions and activities and the sense of place is formed beside other humans. It is clear that such specified boundaries may be observed hardly in practice. And it will be better that a spectrum from sense of place merely physical to sense of place merely social is considered.

The sense of place such as physical and social accepts different levels from indifference<sup>3</sup> to loyalty and sacrifice to itself that belonging sense can define a mediocre among them. Consequently, parallel to the spectrum

of sense of place or emphasizing on physical and non-physical (social) elements, a spectrum from spatial belonging sense and social belonging sense can be defined. By considering this issue that sense of place has close relations with permanence of human's presence in the place, the amount of his spatial or social belonging also defines the frequency and duration of presence in the place.

In other words, whatever that person has more belonging feeling to the physical nature of space of society and activities existing in the physical container of the place, indicates more tendency to the presence and permanence in the place from him. This belonging feeling especially by emphasizing on social dimension has been very effective on person's identification with place to some extent that person defines himself with present group in the place. The clear sample of this claim is to introduce him based on life or work place. In fact, person tries to introduce himself to another person by a place in which live or work and also he tries to use of the credibility of that place as a benefit for himself. Therefore, it can be observed that how place can play role in defining the persons, identity. It is emphasized that the purpose of place hasn't been merely its body; rather the present society in it is also considered. As Erikson interprets, identity expresses both a kind of special and permanent internal feature and partnership in some features with others (Erikson, 1959: page 102). In other words, individual identity can be found both in his unique features and in features of a society in which he has been present as a member of it. A place in which person is present can be also added to the mentioned phrase and therefore, human's identity will be influenced by individual, social and spatial features. Therefore, it can be said, citizenship identity is influenced by space identity and in wider interpretation, spatial identity or city identity.

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