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Emotion in the City: The Power of the Weak in the Construction of Place

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1. ABSTRACT

Globalisation, increased mobility, increased virtual connectivity and consequent reduction of attention to the physical environment, jeopardize our relationship with the places that used to be important to us. As a result, we get lost in the process of adaptation to the built environment, feeling increasingly uprooted, and try its adaptation instead, raising the problem of attachment in the construction of place. This paper seeks to uncover the role of architecture in this affective process.

In the literature about place we can find many models to describe how the physical environment can generate a sense of place and intensify the attachment to a place. However, none of these was 'tested' to gauge the extent of the relationship between the built environment and place attachment, nor the means by which it operates. This paper seeks to fill some of these gaps, asking: How does architecture contribute to the bonding between person and place? What is the model that provides the best explanation of the process by which this bonding occurs?

Assuming that place attachment has an affective base, this paper studies emotion in the experience of space to identify the architectural qualities that contribute most to place attachment. The research combines expertises of Architecture, Phenomenology, Psychology, and Neuroscience, in order to investigate the process associated with perception and encoding of spatial cues that induce place attachment and enhanced use of public space.

The working hypothesis departs from the notion of weak architecture (Vatimo, 1983; Solà-Morales, 1987) as a means to facilitate emotions (and save resources). The analytical model considers architecture, in any form or type, as experience, dealing, therefore, with phenomena. The study of how phenomena appear must therefore be the best way to understand the process by which architecture contributes to place making.

The analysis is based in two case studies conducted in everyday public spaces of Hong Kong and Lisbon. In loco behavioral observations were conducted to assess movement patterns, physical and social interactions with the object. Interviews were performed to assess attention and emotion. This will provide insights into the identification of the spatial cues that operate within and outside consciousness and make emotion and sensuousness necessary to the processes of attention, cognition, and ultimately attachment to a place.

2. AUTHOR BIO

Diogo Teixeira is a doctoral candidate in Architecture at the Technical University of Lisbon (Portugal). His major research interests are event-based design strategies, emotions and public space, namely understanding how architecture influences emotions and may be responsible for creative processes such as learning and modeling our memory associated with a place. He conducted research in the Institut d'Urbanisme de Paris (France) and in the Laboratori d'Urbanisme of the Polytechnical University of Catalonia (Spain).

Teixeira is currently a Senior Lecturer at the University of Saint Joseph (Macao, China), where he teaches design studios, and lectures on urbanism and construction technology.

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