**Does the typological process help to build a sense of place?**

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Spaces are created to accommodate human activities, so that to pursue a better quality of life (QoL) the physical environment is in need of constant change to meet evolving human requirements. However, many cities are currently suffering from a typological crisis, experiencing conflicts between the old and the new, and the neglect of local, social and cultural values. This often leads to a loss of sense of place (SoP). Major influences are mass production and the internationalization of design, technologies and materials, resulting in universal architectural solutions to architecture and monotonous urban patterns. The study of urban form, particularly the subject of typo-morphology, aims to reconnect urban form with its important local values. It claims that a certain degree of continuity in the transformation processes of urban form, through a typological process, can help sustain SoP, thus benefiting people’s satisfaction with life (Chen and Thwaites, 2013; Rapoport, 1977). However, there is little empirical evidence supporting this statement. Empirical research is needed to monitor the level of SoP in relation to the transformation process of urban form so that the actual effect of typo-morphological changes on people’s lives can be better understood.

SoP is an essential indicator of QoL. Research suggests that a variety of factors affect SoP, including length of residence, ownership, personal characteristics, societal relations, cultural differences, ethnic and religious background, income, education, age, gender and marital status. However, the contribution of a quality physical environment to the fulfilment of place meaning and establishment of place attachment is often neglected (Stedman, 2003).

Considering the role of the physical environment in meeting people’s needs and aspirations as well as creating opportunities for human interaction, the impact of different spatial relations on SoP offered by different house typologies over time requires attention. As Lynch (1960, p. 119) indicates, there is always a need for an environment which is ‘well-organized’, ‘poetic’ and ‘symbolic’ to give residents enhanced ‘sense of place’. Therefore, one may ask whether continuous transformation of the built environment as observed in a typological process is beneficial for maintaining the SoP. This requires a typo-morphological analysis and a systematic SoP assessment.

A new conceptual framework is proposed by the authors to embrace SoP assessment and typo-morphological analysis. First, this framework needs to overcome the obstacle of the lack of a widely agreed definition and a set of measuring indicators of SoP. We have reviewed in detail the indicators of SoP that are an important part of QoL assessment. Various means of QoL assessment are well attested, but none have been specifically linked to in-depth study of physical forms. The conceptual framework of relevant SoP indicators is shown in Figure 1.

Secondly, it is important to identify appropriate study scales for both SoP monitoring and typo-morphological analysis. Andres and Whithey (1976, cited in Pacione, 1984, p. 65) have indicated that ‘it is possible for an individual to be extremely satisfied with a physical structure (of a house) but at the same time find the neighbourhood, both in physical and/or social terms, to be totally unacceptable. Such a situation could result in dissatisfaction with the total residential environment’.Thus, SoP should be discussed at different levels, such as at individual, regional, or city level. This matches the nature of typo-morphological study, which is concerned with the relationship between forms at different scales. Three main scales – building, street and neighbourhood scales – are proposed by the authors to be followed in empirical research using the aforementioned framework (Figure 2).

To provide specific conditions for the research inquiry, the SoP assessment should be carried out for neighbourhoods with series of house types from different morphological periods in a given context. Some house types will show continuity in transformation, thus forming a typological process, while others will not. SoP then should be assessed at the three scales in relation to these house types. The SoP assessment requires in-depth social survey. For instance, questionnaire orientated face-to-face interviews can be conducted against the indicators determined in Figure 1 and the residents’ SoP can be assessed using the Likert scale (e.g.Jorgensen & Steadman, 2006), so that such a subjective concept can be represented numerically.

In addition, it is also important that the research design should have adequate control over the impact of the aforementioned socio-economic, demographic variables on SoP. One measure is to select case study neighbourhoods with similar demographic status and at similar locations in the city. Moreover, with regard to interview, the influence of personal status could be minimized by seeking consensus on interview questions among members of the household. Another measure could be the use of statistical tools such as SPSS to make sure that the majority of results regarding the differences in SoP are derived from changes in house typology rather than differences in socio-economic and demographic variables. After the application of these measures, the results of SoP assessment should be compared, at the three scales, between neighbourhoods that have undergone a typological process and the rest.

We believe type should be treated as a point of departure in the housing design process. Thus, there is a need to verify the common belief in the field of urban studies that continuity in urban transformation helps to maintain SoP and therefore benefits residents’ QoL. This is necessary to understand the reasons why the future needs to be linked with the past and what characteristics or forms in the past are worth maintaining. The authors’ ongoing research is based on the above described rationale and conceptual framework.

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**Figure captions**

**Figure 1. SoP indicators.**

**Figure 2. SoP monitoring at three scales.**



