

# EXPERIENCING PLACE: A STUDY OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN MAN AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN THE OLARIAS NEIGHBOURHOOD, TERESINA, PIAUÍ

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LARA CARVALHO DE OLIVEIRA<sup>1</sup>  
WILZA GOMES REIS LOPES<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

Man is in constant interaction with the space he inhabits, modifying it according to his will and his needs while at the same time being influenced by the medium he is inserted in. Given that mutual relationship and the consequent impossibility of considering man and the physical environment separately, the concept of environment acquires a multi-dimensional nature insofar as it comes to embrace not only the physical aspect but also the social one and therefore needs to be viewed in all its complexity.

In the context of urban issues, such a holistic vision, admitting the fundamental correlation of man and the physical medium, has become more important since the United Nations presented its definition of Sustainable Development in the Brundtland Report (CMMAD, 1988), which refers to the need for development to be in harmony not only with the environment but also with the needs, satisfaction and well-being of individuals. Since then those guidelines have been at least theoretically underscored in various international and local public policies designed to foster sustainability.

The North Lakes Program (*Programa Lagoas do Norte - PLN*) developed by the Municipal Government of Teresina in the State of Piauí through a partnership arrangement with the World Bank and the Brazilian Federal Government, has materialized in the form of one of the various urban renewal initiatives undertaken in the national ambit with a view to improving physical-environmental conditions and fostering the social and economic development of degraded areas.

Created in 1852 to be the capital of the state of Piauí, Teresina is bordered and traversed by the rivers Parnaíba and the Poti, respectively. In 2010 it had a population of 814,230 inhabitants, distributed in 112 neighbourhoods (IBGE, 2010). The city is divided

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1. Psychologist with a Masters Degree in Development and Environment from the Federal University of Piauí. E-mail: larawell@hotmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-6389-8725.

2. Architect and Urban Planner, Ph.D. in Agricultural Engineering from UNICAMP. Full Professor in the Architecture and Urbanism course and in the Masters and Doctorate courses in Development and Environment at the Federal University of Piauí. E-mail: wilza@ufpi.edu.br. ORCID: 0000-0002-3567-6831.

into five administrative regions: Centre, North, South, East and Southeast. The North region is the one with the highest level of socio-environmental vulnerability (CHAVES; LOPES, 2011).

The northern zone consists of broad fluvial terraces with the lowest lying land in the city and is currently occupied by 23 neighbourhoods marked by disorderly and largely inadequate forms of occupation and land use that have had negative impacts on the area which embraces a system of pluvial-fluvial lakes known as *Lagoas do Norte*. 13 neighbourhoods in the area, São Francisco, Mocambinho, Poti Velho, Olarias, Alto Alegre, Itaperu, Mafrense, São Joaquim, Nova Brasília, Aeroporto, Alvorada, Matadouro and Acarape have been the object of interventions of the North Lakes Program (TERESINA, 2007).

One of the neighbourhoods included in the Program is Olaria. The name refers to what was formerly the main economic activity in the area which was the extraction of clay for brick making and it has one of the lowest ratings among the city's neighbourhoods in regard to infrastructure and the residents' socioeconomic development. Clay has been extracted there for more than 50 years; it has always been the main driver of local settlement and it was the main source of income for most of the families living there until the PNL closed the brickyards in 2012.

In proportion to its population, the neighbourhood has been the one most affected by compulsory resettlement imposed by the PLN which involved the displacement of more than a thousand families to make way for drainage works and the recuperation of areas of permanent preservation around the lakes as well as for various roadworks, the implantation of sewage pumping stations and the removal of dwellings situated in high risk areas. Local residents opposed those measures, revealing a divergence of interests between insiders (the local population) and outsiders (municipal planners) that threatens the achievement of the objectives of both sides.,

As Thibaud (2005) has underscored, for more than a decade now, environmental policies have been mainly based on addressing physical aspects and have frequently oversimplified the human aspect of the inhabited environment. That standpoint fails to consider the active role people play in their interactions with the environment or to consider how those interactions vary and are peculiar to the situation and the social and cultural backgrounds of those involved.

Furthermore, in regard to individuals' wellbeing, another basic premise in the realm of sustainability, Moser (2003) stresses that even though everyone aspires to a certain quality of life, the notion itself may differ substantially from one human group to another; groups' needs are often anchored in territoriality and find their expression in specific relationships developed between people and places.

Because of their importance, the interrelations that are established between people and their physical medium as a result of their living experiences and the fact that the latter result in a process of connection that transforms mere space into place, have been highlighted in various Brazilian academic papers (DE PAULA, 2017; RIBEIRO; VARGAS, 2001) and international works (LIVINGTON; BAILEY; KEARNS, 2008; ROZAS; MONCADA MERINO; AHUMADA CALDERON, 2007) all of which describe them as being fundamental aspects to consider when elaborating various types of public policy

and environmental intervention programs, especially those involving forced resettlement.

In the light of the preceding considerations, this article sets out to analyse affective, symbolic and functional aspects of the relationships between residents of the Olarias neighbourhood and the place that they live in. It is based on an interdisciplinary theoretical explanation of 'place' and its aspect as a spatial-symbolic category and of the different processes and dimensions involved in the connection between man and place. The reference works for the analysis and discussion of data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with neighbourhood residents were those of authors in the field of geography (TUAN, 1983, 2012; MARANDOLA JR.; MELLO, 2009) and environmental psychology (POL, 1996, 2002; VALERA, 1996, GIULIANI, 2004; SCANNELL; GIFFORD, 2010).

### **The neighbourhood: from space to place**

Among the various spatial categories that the social sciences address, Marandola Jr. and Mello (2009, p. 71) highlight 'place' as having the smallest territorial amplitude. It is extremely fluid and difficult to measure or demarcate and it is the spatial category that is most strongly associated to affectivity and experience and therefore presents a fundamental qualitative component that surpasses in importance its objective properties insofar as places constitute "identitary and existential spatial cells".

Tuan (1983) holds that the ideas of 'space' and 'place' cannot be defined separately from one another. 'Space' is more abstract and associated to freedom and only becomes transformed into 'place' when we get to know it better and attribute some kind of value to it. Accordingly, as Marandola Jr. and Hogan (2009, p.167) have pointed out, "the concept of place is formed within the dimension of experience, surpassing individual and collective scales and consubstantiating the spatial scales of the occurrences of physical, social and identitary phenomena". When the living experience in a given place unfolds in a positive manner, it becomes a topophilic place (TUAN, 2012). On the other hand negative experiences with the place can instil aversion and make it become topophobic. According to Guimarães (2002, p. 135), "although topophilia and topophobia are quite distinct, they are not mutually exclusive and those two opposing feelings can be found together in regard to a single landscape or occurrence associated to a single individual or cultural group".

In the context of the urban living experience, the neighbourhood shows itself to be an important cross-section insofar as, according to Costa and Maciel (2009, p. 69), "it can be understood to be a physical and affective space in which the subject's everyday social relations occur". In spite of the fact that a neighbourhood is an administrative unit delimited by the public authorities, in a psychosocial perspective, the neighbourhood is seen not as a mere spatial construction but instead as the collective construction of a community that acknowledges itself as such and furthermore, the administrative area demarcated by the public authorities does not always coincide with the neighbourhood 'lived' by the population.

That transformation of space into place is related to the process of space appropriation which, in the ambit of Environmental Psychology, stands out as one of the central

nuclei for enabling an understanding of the interactions between man and his physical surroundings and constitutes the basis for man's attachment to the environment. The explanatory model that Pol (1996, 2002) developed encompasses various aspects that can be decomposed into two main components: action-transformation and symbolic identification; there is an observable sequentiality between the two.

The tendency is that first, through action-transformation, the subject modifies the space and adapts it, leaving his marks and giving it a meaning which may or may not be shared with the collectivity. Then, at a second moment, the subject and/or the community, by means of symbolic identification, tends to identify itself with that 'meaning imbued space' and seeks to preserve it. Once that transformation of the space into place has occurred, there is a perceptible resistance to any further transformation and that resistance plays a fundamental role in the subject's and/or the group's cognitive, affective and identity processes (POL, 1996).

The influences of the place in defining identity, however, are not restricted to the individual plane. As Valera and Pol (1994) have stated, the place can be treated as if it were a social category and doing so makes it possible to speak of a place identity founded in the collectivity.

The bond with a specific territory, in the view of Rozas, Moncada Merino and Ahumada Calderon (2007), insofar as it exercises a fundamental influence on the identity construction of a group, makes it possible to satisfy the need for a sense of belonging and to structure community relations. That boosting of a sense of community is associated to the establishment of interactions based on trust, respect, solidarity and social cohesion. It can also foster actions in favour of the common good and is capable of having a direct influence on the group's quality of life.

In that context, Valera (1996, p. 71) considers that certain places may have the property of facilitating urban social identification processes and may even come to be configured as symbols of identity by groups associated to the place. Such spaces, known as 'urban symbolic space', correspond to "[...] the element of a determined urban structure, understood to be a social category that identifies a determined social group associated to those surroundings, capable of symbolizing some of the important aspects of that category [...]". Thus, insofar as it is the result of interactions between groups or communities with the space itself, that set of meanings associated to a symbolic urban space is a product that is always unfinished, because it is always evolving and transforming itself together with the group (VALERA, 1996).

Rozas, Moncada Merino and Ahumada Calderon (2007) consider that the existence of a form of customized identity can be a fundamental tool in implementing actions directed at achieving common goals and objectives as it implies a commitment to the collectivity. They also state that the social identity of a place reveals itself to be a powerful articulator of other concepts such as participation, sense of belonging and collective memory and by means of the this last it is possible to obtain a more integral understanding of the community-environment complex. Thus, acquiring knowledge of the collective identity is of fundamental importance for the success of any plan designed to foster community development.

On the other hand, Marandola Jr. and Mello (2009) call attention to the fact that whenever environmental interventions modify spaces without taking into account the historical and identity bonds that are established between places and groups, they are liable to promote discontinuity in the community's historicity, shattering the meanings of the place and consequently contributing to its demobilization and to withdrawal of commitment and abandonment.

## Place attachment

Although some authors have defined it in a predominantly emotional framework (GIULIANI, 2004; SPELLER, 2005), in a broader vision place attachment can be understood as the bonds that form between people and the places they interact with and they may or may not be based on symbolic qualities attributed to the environment (LIVINGSTON, BAILEY, KEARNS, 2008).

There are various reasons why those bonds are formed and so different types of attachment can be identified. They can result from at least three processes a) a positive assessment of the quality of the location in relation to the individual's needs and therefore formed on a cognitive basis rather than an affective one; b) the meaning the place holds for the individual person; or c) from a long period of residence and familiarity that has instilled a feeling of security and wellbeing and therefore formed on an emotional basis rather than a functional one (GIULIANI, 2004)..

Scannell and Gifford (2010) base their explanation of place attachment on three dimensions: person, psychological processes and places. The first dimension refers to whoever is attached and the attachment may be in the individual sphere (evoked by personal connections with the place) or at the group level (related to symbolic meanings shared by the group) or the two spheres may even overlap. Among the factors in the individual sphere that have the greatest impact on attachment are age and time of residence (GIULIANI, 2004; LIVINGSTON, BAILEY, KEARNS, 2008).

The second dimension concerns the psychological aspects involved in the way groups and individuals express their attachment to a place. They are: affection, with the attachment generally being defined in terms of positive emotions associated to the place; cognition, when the place attachment is expressed in the forms of memories, beliefs, and attributed meanings; and behaviour, when the attachment is expressed by means of actions, especially those related to a desire to stay close to the place (SCANNELL; GIFFORD, 2010).

Lastly, Scannell and Gifford (2010) consider that the third dimension of attachment is related to the various geographic scales and although they have typically been divided into two levels, local (physical attachment) and social, it must be borne in mind that the two are actually inseparable. Much of the research on place attachment has concentrated on the social aspects; people become attached to places that facilitate their social relations. That acknowledgement that the place symbolizes the social group itself is, in turn, in alignment with the place's identity.

Livingston, Bailey, Kearns (2008) have underscored the existence of positive correlation between place attachment and social capital in the communities. The more

attached a person is to an area the more likely it is that he or she are involved with other residents in developing the social capital needed for community renewal. Thus the relations of place attachment have been used to reinvigorate and strengthen communities, increasing trust and self-esteem and stimulating mutual self-help among the residents. That is equivalent to an attempt to reconstruct dilapidated social capital, considered to be one of the causes of decline in poor neighbourhoods.

## Methodology

For the purposes of this qualitative research, data was obtained by conducting semi-structured, recorded, transcribed interviews analysed using Content Analysis technique (BARDIN, 1977) with the additional support of field notes.

The interviews with residents in the 22 to 68 age group took place in the first half of 2016. The sample group was defined by means of the non-probabilistic 'snowball' technique whereby the first participants indicate new ones and they then indicate others and so on. The first participants were contacted through the intermediation of the Brick Workers Association (*Associação de Oleiros*). The criteria for inclusion in the research were residence in the Olarias neighbourhood, being over 18 years old and willingness to participate.

Given the impossibility of determining what would be the minimum time of residence needed for a person to become fully involved with the place, and presuming that it would be directly proportional to the time of residence (HERNÁNDEZ et al., 2007), preference was given to the most long-standing residents and those who had actually been born in the neighbourhood.

The sample size of ten participants was defined by theoretical saturation which occurs when the data being obtained becomes repetitive making it unnecessary to extend data gathering any farther (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 1994).

All participants were fully informed about the research objectives and procedures and duly signed a term of voluntary, informed consent. The research project was designed in alignment with the provisions of Decree 466/2012 and submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Piauí (Protocol Nº 43320315.2.0000.5214).

## Results and discussion

The first settlement in the area of Teresina dates back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and took place in the northern zone in the region of the confluence of the Parnaíba and Poti rivers known as the Barra do Poti (Poti Bar) and today the site of the Olarias and Poti Velho neighbourhoods. Its privileged geographic location led to extraordinary increases in the population and commercial development. However, being so low-lying and subject to frequent flooding, the area has gradually become forgotten in terms of public investments. With the constant flooding in the rainy season, especially of the areas closest to the river banks and the shores of the lakes the land became vacant and subject to irregular occupation (SILVAI; SCABELLO, 2013, MOURA, 2006, TERESINA, 2002).

Most of the buildings in the neighbourhood are associated to irregular settlement with the predominant feature being local residents' proximity to the Poti river and its presence as a feature of their everyday lives.

**Figure 1 – Houses in the Olarias neighbourhood**



Source: Photos by the authors (2015)

Among the Olarias residents' activities is making use of the Poti riverbanks to grow crops (Figure 2).

**Figure 2 – Cultivated area on the banks of the Poti river**



Source: Photos by the authors (2015)

Young people also make use of the riverbanks for leisure sports activities such as playing football (Figure 3).

**Figure 3\_ Leisure activity on the banks of the Poti River in the Olarias neighbourhood, Teresina.**



Source: Photos by the authors (2015)

Backgrounds of adversity and the quest for better living conditions were aspects common to most of the accounts residents gave of how they had come to live in Olarias. Coming from small cities in the interior or from other states altogether, to the immigrant population the region had appeared to be an attractive alternative in the light of their needs. Not only was acquisition of land easy but also the natural and physical characteristics made a series of activities possible such as planting in the meadow areas, raising animals and, above all, working in the brickyards, as the verbatim accounts below reveal. It must be stated that the transcriptions [in the Portuguese original] reproduce the vernacular forms of speech of each individual interviewee:

In Esperantina, where we used to live, there wasn't much work going. So we came here to raise our kids; we already had five children when we came here. After the family grew we came to have eight children [...] And I never went back. I liked it here, I worked all these years in the brickyard until they closed the brickyards and there was no more work for us. After work in the brickyards ended we became riverbank farmers [...] living off the river bank and from fishing (M. aged 68).



The life stories of the most longstanding residents are interlaced with the history of the neighbourhood itself, starting with the building of the first dwellings at a time when “there was only bush” until ‘urbanization’ came along. According to Perea Restrepo (2006), the process of self-construction, observable in most grassroots neighbourhoods built entirely through the efforts of the community itself, creates a singular bond with the territory that is reminiscent of peasants’ ancestral relations with the land. That building of the neighbourhood with their ‘bare hands’ can be taken as a process of space appropriation after which meanings were attributed to it, transforming it into a ‘place’ as the residents’ statements clearly portray:

Nowadays it’s all changed because there are so many inhabitants; when we came ‘ere there were none at all... only bush and clay pits. We residents were the first to live in Boa Esperanca. This ‘ere was all bush, from ‘ere to the Poti [...] Right ‘ere was just a dirt road in the time of Alberto Silva. He was the one who made this ‘ere avenue. (A., aged 62).

When we arrived here, this was an unpaved avenue, the oldest residents here, those who took part in it all are dead already... [...] So we’re just what’s left of the older ones [...] they founded the brickyard here... but the very first to found brickyards here [...] they weren’t even from here, were they? So then the city hall divided the place in parts for the people to work. Because [first] we worked for other people, didn’t we? So then we got our own piece for us to work (D., aged 53).

Against the background of the everyday struggle for better living conditions, the residents underscore the brickyards, in their discourse, as being important symbolic elements that agglutinate place meanings and memories. It is clear that far more than being just a means of guaranteeing the family’s sustenance, they represented a way of life, influencing the community’s routine and their social and family relationships and therefore revealing themselves to be structuring elements of local identity as illustrated by the following statement:

This ‘ere eased the hunger of many a poor one, working day and night to feed the family, working in the brickyard, making bricks, burning bricks ... even the children worked. I myself put my children to work, we used to do overtime, I would light the fire and set them to put firewood [...]... what a crazy carry on, me and my neighbours taking out the bricks [...] when I got to lie down, to bathe and wash off the dirt, it was two in the morning (A. aged 62).

The fact that the Olarias neighbourhood does not have a residents association but instead a Brick Workers Association and a Women Brick Workers Association,

which both have members from other contiguous neighbourhoods, indicates that the 'brick worker identity' overlies and goes beyond the physical delimitations of the Olarias neighbourhood which are actually not very clear to the residents themselves. In spite of the brickyards' no longer existing, the statements show that their symbolic power is still alive, defining the group on the basis of a common history, the environmental past and the shared collective memory (STOETZEL, 1970, apud VALERA; POL, 1994).

The lakes and rivers, so intensely used in the past before there was ever any piped water supply in the region, also come to the fore as elements that have left strong impressions on the residents' memories. According to Tuan (2012) that relationship of physical proximity and material dependency, together with memories related to the natural medium, typical of those who not only know nature but also gain their livelihood from it, are indicators of the strongest topophilic bonds. Such feelings, however, are mixed with other topophobic ones especially related to the current polluted state of the river and the lakes but also to the recrudescence of the bush since the brickyards were closed and to the proliferation of wild animals and insects as the following statement shows:

When I was 9 I used to wash clothes in the river with my mother; I used to wash the dishes in the river because we lived on the edge of it and there was no piped water then. We even used to drink water from the river, from the Poti; who would dare to do that today? (R., aged 33).

There's a lake here but the lake is full of vegetation. Nobody goes to the lakes because of the alligators there, snakes, all kinds of things in the lakes [...] Washing clothes. We used to go to the river to wash clothes and to drink water too; the river was for everything. Now we have plenty of [piped] water; no need to go to the river [...] especially because it is polluted, all kinds of stuff floats down... [...] you can't even bathe in it anymore because the water stinks... so nobody goes there any more (E., aged 33).

Again in regard to the rivers, it is important to stress that there were no spontaneous mentions of episodes of flooding in the area, which is probably because of the threat of removal due to the works foreseen in the North Lakes Program. However, when they were specifically asked about the great flood of 1985, one of the biggest ever recorded for the city and one that resulted in widespread destruction and the displacement of the local population, the statements indicate that in spite of the losses they suffered and the difficulties that ensued, there was no sign that the event had produced negative impacts on the residents' attachment to the place. On the contrary, they underscored the sense of community engendered and the mutual help that residents provided to one another.

While traumatic events can be a source of stress and uncertainty for the subjects inhabiting the space, liable to transform the community's surroundings into topophobic places, the collective actions taken to face up to the problem can cause the reappearance

ce of topophilic feelings and a sensation that the community is capable of overcoming adversity, thereby constructing an even greater attachment (VALDÉS, 2012).

Furthermore, Marandola Jr. and Modesto (2012, p. 148) consider that individuals' everyday experiences make it possible to recognize where danger exists and to know the practices necessary to face them and that leads individuals familiar with the places to have a diminished perception of the existence and seriousness of local dangers. In that context, memory plays a fundamental role and, despite its being unable to ensure success in facing new dangers, it "is one of a set of elements that can help to absorb the impacts or adapt to them".

That being so, even though place attachment seems to derive mainly from a functional relationship between residents and their physical environment, given the possibility of their living in the latter and developing their own way of life, the contribution that familiarity makes, especially in regard to adaptive skills, most certainly fosters the formation of symbolically and affectively-based bonds. Going beyond the purely utilitarian aspect it can be seen that place comes to signify the very construction of the individual's own history and that contributes to a feeling of existential security. That attachment is clearly expressed in the desire to stay and becomes particularly intense when there is any threat to break off the attachment (GIULIANI, 2004; POL, 1996) as can be seen in the statement of one of the interviewees:

I've been here a very long time, right? Here I have deep roots. I cannot imagine myself living in another place. Only if it were a very big thing... being told: no, you can't stay, go and stay somewhere else, then I might leave. But really leaving, wanting to leave, no, I don't want to (U., aged 46).

You get used to it, don't you? You get used to being in that place; you end up liking the place... (D., aged 53).

In that context, faced with the difficulties imposed by a low income and by the characteristics of the land subject to flooding, the construction of a dwelling acquires considerable importance and weight in regard to the personal attachment to the place as the interviewees' declarations show:

So what I am I supposed to live in, some kind of hut? You mean to say I've spent 40 years working to build a house just to hand it over to others? (H., aged 67).

My little house as well, I struggled a lot for it [...] So then you know what I keep imagining? Losing my house to get another really tiny one [...] I lie down at night and think, my God, I struggled so hard for it, all of it in brick, I struggled so hard, I took out 500 bricks from every clamp [I produced] (D., aged 53).

Nunes (2010), who conducted research among residents resettled under the aegis of the PLN in its first stage, observes that in spite of acknowledging the risks involved in living so close to the lakes they declared that they would not have left their houses if they had been given a choice. However, in spite of the emotional cost resulting from the removal, the facts that the resettlement area was in the same neighbourhood of origin and that the disposition of the dwellings maintained the pre-existing bonds of neighbourhood were identified as important facilitators of the population's adherence to the measure and of its consequent sustainability. That was because to a certain extent, it made it possible to preserve identity and the structuring of the socio-spatial networks of the residents' everyday lives.

It is worth noting that, as Ribeiro and Vargas (2001) declared, by failing to consider the interests of the population directly involved in environmental management, the Program came up against obstacles in the form of either non-cooperation or total opposition of certain social groups or individuals as the following excerpt from a statement made by a resident regarding removal from his home reveals:

Only if they come to tear it down. But tear it down on top of me because I don't want any kind of tiny rubbishy house, no I don't (H., aged 67).

The networks of friendship and family together with the feeling of security and tranquillity that stem from the good relations of coexistence with the neighbours were the aspects that most of the Olarias residents highlighted as the underlying reasons for their wishing to stay on in the same location. For Livingston, Bailey and Kearns (2008), even though place attachment is often viewed as being part of the product of local social relations, social involvement can also be taken to be a positive consequence of that emotional attachment.

Here is as peaceful as can be. I don't know what it's like up there ... but half way there, from half way to here, it's as peaceful as can be; you can even go to sleep with the door open, no problem... [...] So, we get on well with all the neighbours, it's all very nice (H., aged 67).

I really like it here. Only if we really have to leave, if there is no other way out, well then I will leave. But if not, if there is any chance of staying here, I want to stay here. [...] This is a nice peaceful place; you don't get all the rowdy goings on you get in other places [...] the kids are used to living here .... Everybody knows one another here (E., aged 33).

As Vargas (2009) has pointed out, in such grassroots neighbourhoods the local sociability implies the existence of mutual assistance strategies and they, in turn, explain the reasons for remaining in the place. The presence of sociability networks shows itself to be determinant in subsistence management, solidarity that stems from the bond esta-

blished with the neighbourhood formed during years of social coexistence as the following excerpt confirms:

Everyone knows everybody and they help each other. [If a child] is in school and there is no way to collect it on time, friends will go and do it, the neighbours [...] ... we are all like that, a friend in need [...] so I get to thinking [about] leaving here to go to some unknown place where we don't know the people, don't know who's who...that's all I can think about (R., aged 33).

The fact that the negotiations for the forced resettlement foreseen in the second stage of the PLN have been dragging on for years, leaving the local population in a situation of uncertainty regarding the future, also creates tensions associated to the discontinuity of everyday sociability given that the latter is completely interwoven with the place itself

Everything I've got is here, my kids' school,, in the afternoons they go to the PAI project, or when there's something going on here, at the football field, that's where they go, it's right in front here where they go... the clinic for my daughter [...] for her treatment, I go from here., my son drops me off with the bike right there in Poti Velho and then I take the bus to go farther on [...] so they want to throw me out to some place that I don't even know how to get there... don't know how it's to be done...(R., aged 33).

That experience with the place, according to Giddens (2002), translates into a feeling of security, cognitively and emotionally anchored in the practical awareness acquired in everyday activities. Those activities together with the daily routines awareness reproduces offer a kind of orientation which, at the subconscious level, 'answers' fundamental existential questions, allowing the person to achieve a kind of 'faith' in the coherence of daily life. Thus it is in terms of the emotional and behavioural 'formulas' acquired in the day to day living experiences that people address adversity, so the rituals of everyday life can be understood as being confrontation mechanisms associated to the way anxiety is managed socially.

In the resident' view, the main positive aspect of the PLN's proposed actions in the region is the cleaning up of the lakes which would represent an improvement in the local population's quality of life. However, in spite of all the urbanization, water supply and sanitation programs, which have indeed brought progress to the affected areas, the physical and social displacement of the marginalized groups ends up depriving of the respective benefits those who need them most.

If the money came for them to say – we're gonna clean up North Lakes 'ere and clean...well that'd be like going to heaven [...] If it was enough to clean up everything and leave us in peace in our homes, that would be heaven... there's no better heaven than this one, right 'ere (H., aged 67).

I think things are going to get better because if they clean up the lake here, make a leisure area [...] it's going to be a lot better. Because then the children would have somewhere to play, wouldn't they? [...] But if they take us away from here, well that would be terrible (E., aged 33).

In spite of the desire to enjoy the benefits that the PLN brought with it, there were ambivalent feelings identified in some of the resident's whose houses were in a poor condition so that for them a conflict arose between attachment to the place and the desire to satisfy their basic needs, as the following transcriptions illustrate:

The people who don't want to leave, they have good houses [...] But those with very bad houses want to leave... I mean, it's not so much that they want to leave but they want to get a better house (E., aged 33).

Well I would be glad if each of my sons received a little house of their own. Because they lost their houses in that flood... since the flood [...] there is always this ban, an order not to build any houses, they won't let us make a house... so we have obeyed [...] lots of people here need a house [...] at least over there, we will have a house on our own plot of land (M., aged 68).

Livingston, Bailey and Kearns (2008) state that attachment to an area does not necessarily prevent people from wanting to move. In those authors' research into the influence of neighbourhood deprivation on place attachment, the interviewees declared that, had they been given the chance, they would have lived in neighbourhoods with fewer privations in spite of their strong bonds with their current area of residence. Similarly, Brown and Perkins (1992) state that such attachments are sensitive to human aspirations and experiences and when people are unable to modify their environment in such a way that it provides support for their identities and the achievement of their objectives, then attachment may be eroded.

In that context, it can be seen that the closure of the brickyards had a negative impact not only on the population's bonds with the place but also on the dynamics of the families who were financially dependent on them and the statements below illustrate that fact:

[...] people stopped working, the mayor started off saying that we would be given an area to work in and a decent house to live in ... but he has been putting that off for a long time now. I mean to say, up till now he hasn't given us any work not to mention a house to live in [...] Those people who received that measly little compensation from the North Lakes project... well some of them did well with it, others just frittered it away, finished...so then everyone was left suffering and out of work (M., aged 68).

I met my husband here, we had our children here ... then he upped and decided he'd go to Sao Paulo because the brickyards were going to be closed down, well then, how're we going to raise these children?

Although the Teresina City Hall has offered professional training courses to the residents as a way of providing them with new opportunities for gaining an income and the courses have included capacity building for the production of ecological bricks, the courses did not go down well with the local people, showing once more the failure in the implantation of programs elaborated without duly considering the peculiarities of the groups they were directed at.

It must also be stated that the brick making activity carried out in the neighbourhood gave support to the existence of effectively active associations of considerable importance for the formation of the community's social capital and for its self-organization and engagement in the endeavours to achieve improvements and common objectives. With the closure of the brickyards however, those associations seem to have lost their reason for existing and either become extinct or have considerably reduced their activities to the extent that their very existence is no longer widely acknowledged by neighbourhood residents.

Another issue that was frequently mentioned was the increase in crime and drug use in the region and many attributed that to the shutting down of the brickyards. In that context, the North Lakes Park, although it is supposed to be a leisure area accessible to the community, appears in the research survey as a topophobic place because of the crime rate there:

Well they made that North Lakes over there, didn't they?... we used to go there too. But there were muggings over there so we never went there again; we were scared to go there (E., aged 33).

I'm definitely not going there [...] there's robbery and death over there [...] I have a relative who lives nearby, a son murdered his father right nearby as well, so I'm never going there to visit. I say to her – woman, I'm not going to come here, I don't even like my mother to go there. I'm not going to come here, oh no, only if it was a case of life or death then I might come... I don't have the courage to go there (R., aged 33).

Some residents also believe that the crime rate in the North Lakes Park is a consequence of a process of abandonment of the place after the rupture of the population's bonds with it stemming from the resettlement of the former residents of that area. Insofar as they ignore the historical relations a community establishes and decide to demarcate a given location, public authorities and the planners may be able to create spaces but certainly not places. The spaces they create, according to Marandola Jr. and Mello (2009, p. 64) "tend to become a kind of no man's land where a living experience of violence, privation, lack of commitment and abandon have practically become the rule".

Thus it can be said that the Olarias neighbourhood is undergoing a process of the kind that De Paula (2017) refers to as 'place dismantlement' whereby the sense of place is gradually eroded by the imposition of a change on it; one that does not take place suddenly but is experienced over the years, taking place in the everyday life of those that live in it.

In a similar manner to the one Perea Restrepo (2006) describes, while in the past the attachment established with the collectivity resulted from the joining of forces to build the neighbourhood, in the present it seems mainly to express itself through the joint suffering and confrontation of the adversity that threatens the maintenance of the place and indeed of their very lives. That configures an identity of resistance which, as Vargas (2009) proposes, is constructed on the basis of the experience of poverty, defining a 'a place in the world' where the absence of any power of command or decision and the privation of material goods and of any knowledge of the social processes that explain those living conditions, occur simultaneously with practices of struggle and resistance.

## Final considerations

The analysis of the affective, symbolic and functional aspects of the relationship between the Olarias neighbourhood residents and the place where they live made it possible to acquire knowledge of some aspects of the lived-in dimension which, by revealing the potentialities and the fragilities of that relationship, show those aspects to be essential for the success of any urban upgrading intervention such as the one proposed by the North Lakes Program. However, as this research observed, that knowledge is still clearly underestimated or under-utilized in the technical evaluations.

The research identified the existence of powerful bonds between the residents and the place they live in. Those bonds have a strong functional basis due to the ease of acquiring a piece of land, albeit in an illegal and irregular manner, the arduous process of building a house and the development of economic activities there such as fishing, cultivating the river banks and, above all, the brickmaking work. The everyday experience and familiarity, in turn, contribute towards the emergence of symbolic and affective bonds which form the basis for a collective identity that has, at its heart, a shared history of facing adversity strongly associated to the physical elements of the place, especially, the lakes and rivers.

On the one hand, those bonds call for an effort to be made to align the urban upgrading project represented by the PLN with the needs identified by the local population and accordingly: provide the population with better living conditions, foster the strengthening of community identity and social capital and achieve the population's engagement through the intensification of its place attachment.

On the other hand, the actions carried out with no consideration for the specific relationship the Olarias neighbourhood residents have established with the place where they live or for the life constructed within that very relationship with the place, lead to the fragmentation of the meaning attributed to life itself thereby relegating the population to a condition of psychosocial vulnerability.

This study, however, did not set out to identify solutions for the local environmental conflict stemming from the forced resettlement of Olarias residents, given the complexity



of the variables involved in the issue but, instead, to underscore how important it is, in the planning and execution of the various stages of environmental interventions, to acknowledge, study and take into account the peculiarities of the relationships that specific populations establish with specific places, in addition to the attention generally paid to the physical-environmental, social and economic aspects.

In a broader context, the bonds between man (individually and/or collectively) and place have been increasingly threatened by the logic of capitalism, either by forced resettlement driven by gentrification processes or by large-scale public works or by disasters resulting from neglect as in the case of the Mariana and Brumadinho dam bursts, which means that more studies are needed that focus not merely on the losses pursuant to the shattering or weakening of such attachments, but also on identifying ways to reconstruct and/or strengthen those bonds and the communities themselves.

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Original Article



# EXPERIENCING PLACE: A STUDY OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN MAN AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN THE OLARIAS NEIGHBOURHOOD, TERESINA, PIAUÍ

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LARA CARVALHO DE OLIVEIRA  
WILZA GOMES REIS LOPES

## EXPERIENCING PLACE: A STUDY OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN MAN AND THE ENVIRONMENT AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS IN THE OLARIAS NEIGHBOURHOOD, TERESINA, PIAUÍ

**Abstract:** The North Lakes Program (PLN) proposes urban regeneration and socio-economic and environmental development interventions for an environmentally fragile area in the city of Teresina, Piauí. Given the importance of adjusting any environmental intervention to the specifics of the interactions between different human groups and the environment they live in, this article aims to analyse affective, symbolic and functional aspects of the relationship between residents of the Olarias district, located in the coverage area of the PLN and the place where they live. The research used qualitative methodology involving desk research, visits *in loco* and interviews with residents, analysed according to the Content Analysis technique. The results indicate the existence of strong affective, symbolic and functional bonds between residents and place, which, however, have been severely strained by PLN actions that disregard the relationships established between man and environment.

**Key words:** place attachment; place identity; urban upgrading; affective bonds

## VIVENCIANDO O LUGAR: ESTUDO DAS RELAÇÕES HOMEM-AMBIENTE E SUAS IMPLICAÇÕES NO BAIRRO OLARIAS, TERESINA, PIAUÍ

**Resumo:** O Programa Lagoas do Norte (PLN) propõe intervenções de requalificação urbana e desenvolvimento socioeconômico e ambiental em áreas ambientalmente frágeis na cidade de Teresina, Piauí. Dada a importância de pautar qualquer intervenção ambiental nas especificidades das interações que se estabelecem entre os diferentes grupos humanos e o ambiente em que vivem, este artigo objetivou analisar aspectos afetivos, simbólicos e funcionais da relação entre moradores do bairro Olarias, localizado na área de abrangência

do PLN, e o lugar onde vivem. Foi utilizada metodologia qualitativa, envolvendo pesquisa documental, entrevistas semiestruturadas com os moradores, que foram analisadas, segundo a técnica de Análise de Conteúdo e, ainda, visitas ao local. Constatou-se a existência de fortes vínculos de base afetiva, simbólica e funcional entre moradores e o lugar, que, no entanto, têm sido abalados pelas ações do PLN, que desconsideram as relações estabelecidas entre homem e ambiente.

**Palavras-chave:** apego ao lugar; identidade de lugar, requalificação urbana; vínculos afetivos.

## VIVIENDO EL LUGAR: UN ESTUDIO DE LAS RELACIONES ENTRE EL HOMBRE Y EL MEDIO AMBIENTE Y SUS IMPLICACIONES EN BARRIO OLARIAS, TERESINA, PIAUÍ

**Resumen:** El Programa Lagoas del Norte (PLN) propone intervenciones de recalificación urbana y desarrollo socioeconómico y ambiental en áreas ambientalmente frágiles en la ciudad de Teresina, Piauí. Dada la importancia de pautar cualquier intervención ambiental en las especificidades de las interacciones que se establecen entre los diferentes grupos humanos y el ambiente en que viven, este artículo objetivó analizar aspectos afectivos, simbólicos y funcionales de la relación entre moradores del barrio Olarias, localizado en el área de cobertura del PLN, y el lugar donde viven. Se utilizó metodología cualitativa, involucrando investigación documental, entrevistas semiestruturadas con los habitantes, analizadas, según la técnica de Análisis de Contenido y visitas al local. Se observó la existencia de fuertes vínculos de base afectiva, simbólica y funcional entre moradores y el lugar, que, sin embargo, han sido sacudidos por las acciones del PLN, que desconsideran las relaciones establecidas entre hombre y ambiente.

**Palabras clave:** Apego al lugar; Identidad de lugar; Recalificación urbana; Los vínculos afectivos

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