

Place Attachment in Seven Areas of Tirana, Albania

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Abstract

Little is known about place attachment in the Balkans. This study aims to start filling this gap. After a contextualization of place attachment studies in the Balkans and its relevance for research and practice, a brief review of theory is offered. Then the methodology of the empirical part of the study is clarified. Over 300 citizens living in seven different neighborhoods of Tirana have been interviewed on place attachment issues such as sense of belonging, familiarity, self-identification and neighborhood experience. The results of the empirical study show that place attachment in Tirana is quite positive. The findings and analysis indicate that place attachment indicators do not vary significantly according to educational level, gender and age, but do correlate with length of residence. It also appeared that place attachment indicators are higher in well-established neighborhoods compared to the new high-rise areas. The study concludes with recommendations for follow-up research, specifically qualitative research on citizens' meanings of place attachment and study on place attachment related to responsible behavior.

Keywords

Place Attachment, Place Identity, Tirana, Albania, Balkans

1. Introduction

Place attachment and meaning are the person-to-place bonds that evolve through emotional connection, meaning, and understandings of a specific place and/or features of a place (Shumaker & Taylor, 1983; Lewicka, 2011; Moulay et al., 2018). Place attachment, like most theoretical concepts, has been given several meanings. The roots of the concept are in environmental psychology, and encompass people's knowledge, understanding, beliefs and cognitions of various

aspects on the environment (Altman & Low, 1992). Landry and Murray (2017) find it surprising that psychology, as the study that explores the dynamics of feelings and emotion, has been given so little attention to by urban scholars and decision makers. They claim that cities are too often seen mechanistically, as inanimate clumps of buildings and technology. This misses their essential human nature. Stephenson (2010) asserts that, given the key role of planning practices in mediating change, it would appear self-evident that a central thread of planning theory and methodology should be concerned with people-place connections, and associated meanings and significance. She concludes in her study of the planning field: “No consistent and overriding concept of people-place relationships has so far emerged: rather, there exists a wide variety of responses to the protection, enhancement, and development of certain physical aspects of the environment” (Stephenson, 2010: p. 18).

The study of place attachment has both theoretical and practical relevance. Theoretical relevance lies in trying to understand the relation of individuals and groups in their environment and is important for interdisciplinary work between studies of place (such as architecture and urban and landscape planning) and studies of people (such as sociology, community studies). Disciplines like landscape design and architecture pay insufficient attention to man-environment relationships (Gehl, 2010). Practical relevance of place attachment research refers to “people-place attachment-place-behavior” and is a difficult relationship for empirical study (Lewicka, 2005, 2011). Araújo de Azevedo et al. (2013) revealed that the city’s quality of life attributes (comprising six dimensions) influences place attachment—which is significantly correlated with self-efficacy, perceived happiness and active citizenship behaviors. This is input for policy makers to enhance their understanding of factors that influence residents’ well-being. The question is whether people will be stimulated to show more responsible behavior (social, environmental) when their place attachment is high. On the one hand, practices show that people care more about places to which they are attached, as studies of for example recreational sites and forests show. Attachment (feelings) increases when people have a stake in the place (as user, as commoner). On the other hand, there are mixed results from other studies on this relationship: people who feel attached to their place, do not necessarily display positive behavior (environmentally, socially, economically) to the place. For dealing with questions about the relationship between place attachment and responsible behavior, basic empirical knowledge on place attachment is required, which is the aim of this study.

After 1990/1991 the collapse of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the countries’ inclusion into the competitive global economies had tremendous impacts on urban processes and urban spatial patterns, as the literature on post-socialist cities has analyzed in detail. Scholarly attention has been paid particularly to examining interconnections between historical-, sociological-, and market-related aspects of transitioning processes. Place attachment has

not been discussed extensively in CEE countries, except for the renowned work of Lewicka (2005, 2008, 2011). Also in socialist times, people in the CEE region felt attached to their place; place bonding is a rather universal process. During the socialist era, place attachment was not a research topic. Place attachment and identity have been studied by environmental psychology and human geography; two disciplines that have not been well developed in the region. In the communist systems, the state and its experts decided how places should be planned and developed; bureaucracy decided what was good for citizens. There was no tradition of asking citizens about their experience or attachment, because such questions could lead to unwanted answers. After the change of system, the educational and research communities have been occupied in survival and redefinition of their roles in society. They had to continue with limited R&D budgets and with new bureaucratic controls over education. In such environment, novel topics like place attachment and identity did not receive much priority. Moreover, most students seek diploma's leading to the labour market or to further studies abroad; higher education has been reluctant to take new avenues for education and research.

The goal of this study is to investigate to what extent citizens in various areas in Tirana are attached to Tirana and to what extent place attachment varies according to education, length of residence in Tirana, and age and gender. A relevant factor could also be possible differences between neighborhoods (cf. Kohlbacher et al., 2015). Given the lack of empirical research on place attachment in the Western Balkans, it was opted for a stock-taking exploratory research on place attachment in Albania's capital Tirana and dwell on the potential practical use of the research results gathered. Recently several overviews of theoretical perspectives and developments of place identity and place attachment concepts have been made, and they give ample insight into the literature (Lewicka, 2011; Belanche et al., 2017; Scannel & Gifford, 2017; Lappegard Hauge, 2007; Williams, 2014). The same holds for the question of measurement of place attachment and urban identity (Raymond et al., 2010; Lewicka, 2011). The review in the next paragraph can consequently be concise.

2. Place Attachment and Identity

2.1. Concepts

Place, like a city or neighborhood, is conceived as a meaningful location, it is an entity that has a social dimension and a very real physical basis (Lewicka, 2008). People feel attached to a place because of different motives or sentiments. Some have close social ties in their neighborhood or generational rootedness, others may feel attached to the physical assets of places, such as a physically stimulating environment, or architectural attractiveness. Also, economic aspects play a role, such as work, having local clients or an own home or a farm. Place attachment and urban (place) identity are concepts that rather hard to grasp. They are multi-referential phenomena and embrace linkages between the material and imma-

terial (cf. Araújo de Azevedo et al., 2013). The concepts of place attachment and identity have been studied from various perspectives: personal, collective, external, and by various disciplines, notably by environmental psychology and humanistic geography. Place identity is often studied as place attachment. Urban identity develops in time, is affected by change, and influenced by many factors (Nientied, 2018). Kaymaz (2013: p. 739) states that: “Place identity is an important dimension of social and cultural life in urban areas and continuity of place identity is strongly linked to place attachment and sense of belonging. In environmental psychology, it is assumed that people intrinsically strive to develop a sense of belonging to a place. Place attachment and sense of belonging are crucial in order to establish an emotional and cognitive bond with a place, which leads to the feeling of security and sense of community. Thus, identity of a place is more than just the physical appearance, but also involves a ‘meaning’ for the individual and the community”.

A distinction can be drawn between subjective identity and the identity of the place itself (Lalli, 1992). In other words: the identity of a city versus the identity with a city—the process of identification. Along that line, urban identity may be described 1) as a feature of the city based on a collective attribution and 2) as the self-identification of the person with the city. The former assumes that each city holds its own urban identity based on its main features and constructed by a collective attribution (Belanche et al., 2017). The self-identification can be approached through the concept of place attachment. A variety of models has been constructed to grasp place attachment (e.g. Belanche et al., 2017; Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014; Scannel & Gifford, 2010a). Researchers have developed various ways in which place attachment can be measured (Lewicka, 2011). They vary according to the theoretical construct, and the underlying assumptions. Questions like “Do you think that the area in which you live is a good place to live?” (Dallago et al., 2009) has been taken as a measure for place attachment, or, as Lewicka (2011: p. 2019) reports, the question “what is your level of attachment to your settlement/your region/your country” used by Shamaï and Ilatov (2005). Mesch and Manor (1998) used three questions for place attachment, concerning 1) pride about living in the neighborhood, 2) being sorry to move out, and 3) plans to move out in the next year. The validity of all these measures, i.e., diagnosticity for place attachment, is not known, and this may create interpretative problems. For many citizens, the question “what is your level of attachment” is a difficult question, as the word attachment will be understood in various manners, and a rather high level of reflective capabilities from people is expected from interviewees to obtain meaningful answers. In a city like Tirana, such question will not lead to reliable results. Researchers have developed a variety of multi-dimensional scales, with dimensions such as place familiarity, belongingness, satisfaction, social bonding, place dependence, rootedness, identity, etc. Lalli (1992) developed a scale for to measure the attachment to the German town of Heidelberg, with five dimensions: external evaluation, general attachment, con-

tinuity with personal past, perception of familiarity, and commitment.

Place attachment can also be studied with qualitative measures, with instruments to discover insight into meaning that places entail. In-depth qualitative research is important to supplement quantitative approaches to place attachment. Qualitative measures such as semi-structured questionnaires, item lists, focus groups, think-aloud protocols, photographs and drawings, narratives (Filep et al., 2014), etc. have limitations. Qualitative research is typically about in-depth insight into respondents' experiences and opinions but has limited representation of a neighborhood or urban population. And Williams (2014) advocates a critical pluralist perspective to place attachment to acknowledge the diversity of ways in which it has been conceptualized and measured. This perspective holds that no one research theory or program by itself can successfully engage the various facets of place inquiry. Also, Moulay et al. (2018) call for multi-dimensional models of place attachment.

2.2. Place Attachment and Practice

Manzo and Perkins (2006: p. 335) state that "literature on place attachment focuses on individual feelings and experiences and has not placed these bonds in the larger, socio-political context in which planners operate. Conversely, the community planning literature emphasizes participation and empowerment, but overlooks emotional connections to place. Yet these attachments can motivate cooperative efforts to improve one's community". Every day events in society are indications that positive place attachment can have significance for practice. A few examples are:

- people protest against an intervention of the government, because it has impact on their neighborhood, and they want to keep the neighborhood as it is;
- people engage in ecological behaviors (Scannel & Gifford, 2010b) because they love their area and want to protect it;
- citizens who are attached to the city, can be volunteers to guide visitors around, as can be seen in many cities through the "free tourist walking tours" (also in Tirana, see <http://www.tiranafreetour.com/>);
- Brown, Perkins and Brown (2003) found that neighbours who are less anonymous and stay long enough to develop any emotional connection to the place, show commitment to improve their own home and work with their neighbours and local agencies to improve the neighborhood;
- place attachment can contribute to well-being; Scannel and Gifford (2017) discuss experienced psychological benefits of place attachment and conclude that place attachment bonds can create belongingness and subsequently social capital, or an escape from daily stressors (hence the popularity of coffeehouses). Place attachment support memories that help persons to connect them to the past or evoke say childhood positive memories.

The practical relevance of place attachment studies is twofold. First, place attachment may serve to promote and encourage environmentally responsible be-

havior using appeals to individuals' self-identity and dependence (Manzo & Perkins, 2006). Second, by taking the emotional and rational aspects of direct and indirect users of space and place more into account, application of findings regarding environmental design (landscape, planning, mobility, etc.) may contribute to the attachment and well-being of citizens and visitors. It should be mentioned again that the relationship between place attachment and responsible behavior may seem apparent, but it is not always clear (cf. Lewicka, 2005). Garcia et al. (2013) for example studied water conservation behavior in the Girona region (Spain) and found no significant relationships between place attachment and pro-environmental water-conservation attitudes and behaviors, suggesting that the characteristics and descriptors of place attachment and pro-environmental behavior need further discrimination if relationships between the two are to be used to inform policy and intervention.

3. Tirana's Context

Tirana is the present capital and prime city of Albania (Dhamo, 2014; Dhamo et al., 2016; Manahasa & Özsoy, 2017). Tirana started as an organic settlement at the beginning of the 17th century when this territory was in the Ottoman Empire. It had about 10,000 inhabitants, until it was declared the capital of Albania in 1920. Urbanistic interventions aimed to legitimize Tirana as the capital of a newly created nation state. In 1930 the population of Tirana reached 25,000 inhabitants. People came to Tirana not only from other regions of the country, but also from the diaspora in order to contribute in King's administration and revival of the country. After the Second World War, in 1945, the population of Tirana reached to 68,000 inhabitants. A new government came into place that imposed a Stalinist-style centrally planned economy including total nationalization. Many people were transferred to Tirana, which was declared as the main administrative and industrial pole of Albania. To cope with the housing shortage the government enacted a program for the construction of low-cost standardized 3 to 5 story apartment blocks. According to reports of the communist regime, Tirana had never seen such a glorious construction. Up to 1960 in all Albania 4000 new apartments were supposed to be built, of which 2000 units in Tirana (Miho et al., 1958). In many cases, new factories combined workplaces with residential units, mostly in the periphery of Tirana like the case of the Textile Kombinat. In parallel, significant changes happened in the historic urban structure of Tirana, such as massive erasure of traditional neighborhoods, including religious centers and the Old Bazar. Deprived from its social and historic meaning, Tirana lost much attractiveness. At the city scale, a monocentric scheme combining radials and concentric rings was reinforced. By the end of the 1980s, Tirana's population reached 250,000 inhabitants, while Albania's urbanization rate was only 35%.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the fall of the communist regime and the vacuum left thereafter was the starting point for a wild process of uncontrolled urbanization (Aliaj et al., 2003; Pojani, 2010). The change of socio-economic situa-

tion and the privatization reforms of land and housing starting in 1993 opened new possibilities for the families to invest informally in their existing houses or to build incrementally new houses in periphery, and uncontrolled infill in the city center. Tirana went through a process of rapid and chaotic urbanization with an annual population increase of almost 7% during the first ten years after the collapse of dictatorship. An analysis of satellite images made in 2001 for the Strategic Plan For Greater Tirana 2001, showed an expansion of the Greater Tirana area: from 12 km² in 1991, to 32 km² in 1994 and 56 km² in 2001, or almost a five-fold increase. It signified a kind of return to the organic city. Most of the newcomers in the 1990s came from Northern Albania, and later people came from all regions of the country. From 2001 to 2005, every year more than 15,000 newcomers arrived in Tirana. In 2005, this margin marked the record with 29,271 newcomers arriving to Tirana. Interestingly, in 2005, the number of people leaving the city was over 42,000, marking also the largest exodus from Tirana. In 2005 Tirana's population reached 585,000 inhabitants. After the re-municipalization of 2015, Tirana has over 800,000 inhabitants living in urban areas and surrounding villages. New problems such as lack of adequate public transportation, basic infrastructure, traffic congestion and air pollution have emerged. However, both residents and the increasing number of visitors see Tirana as a very energetic city and a rather chaotic place at the same time.

4. Research Design

After a literature study and discussions about place attachment with planners, architects, sociologists and with citizens from all walks of life, it was opted to start developing insight into place attachment with a quantitative study among citizens. The research was carried out in Tirana, Albania. A questionnaire was developed, based on [Lalli's study \(1992\)](#), with introductory information, a place attachment scale based on four factors, questions on neighborhood attachment and two open ended questions (see Questionnaire, [Appendix 1](#)). Lalli's factor of "External evaluation" (perceptions how other see his case study city of Heidelberg) was skipped; this factor was considered more appropriate for an intermediate city than for the capital and prime city of Albania. Questions of Lalli's original questionnaire were adjusted to the local context. A 5-point Likert scale was used, with an added don't know/no answer option. Three questions on the neighborhood were added (namely: 20, 21, and 22 in the Questionnaire, [Appendix 1](#)). The questionnaire was first drafted in English, then translated into Albanian language and tested in the field. [Table 1](#) gives an overview of categories of items and number of items per category.

As will be explained below, the factor of continuity contained a question that did not work well. This question was skipped and the number of 3 questions reduced to 2. Random sampling for a city-wide survey on place attachment is not practicable. In the research experience of Polis University, sending out an e-mail to residents, does not results in an acceptable response and in adequate quality

of response (cf. Nientied & Shutina, 2017). It was decided to conduct street face-to-face interviews by well-trained students from Polis University. A directed sampling procedure was designed. The choice of neighborhood for the interviews was based on the urban and social characteristic of the city—and the municipal boundaries of Tirana before the 2016 municipal merger were applied. Seven areas were identified. A map with the locations is given in **Figure 1** below.

Table 1. Overview factors and questions.

Category/factor context label	Items/questions about	No. of items
Context	Age, place of residence in Tirana, years of residence in Tirana, place of birth, place of birth of parents, educational level	6
Familiarity	Sense of belonging, experience of town	3
Attachment	To stay in the city, to development of the city T	3
Continuity	Feelings, self-identification with the city	3
Commitment	Relation with the past, belonging	2 (3)
Neighborhood	Sense of neighborhood attachment, belonging	3
Favourite	Most/least favourite place in Tirana	2
Improve	What should be improved (open question)	2

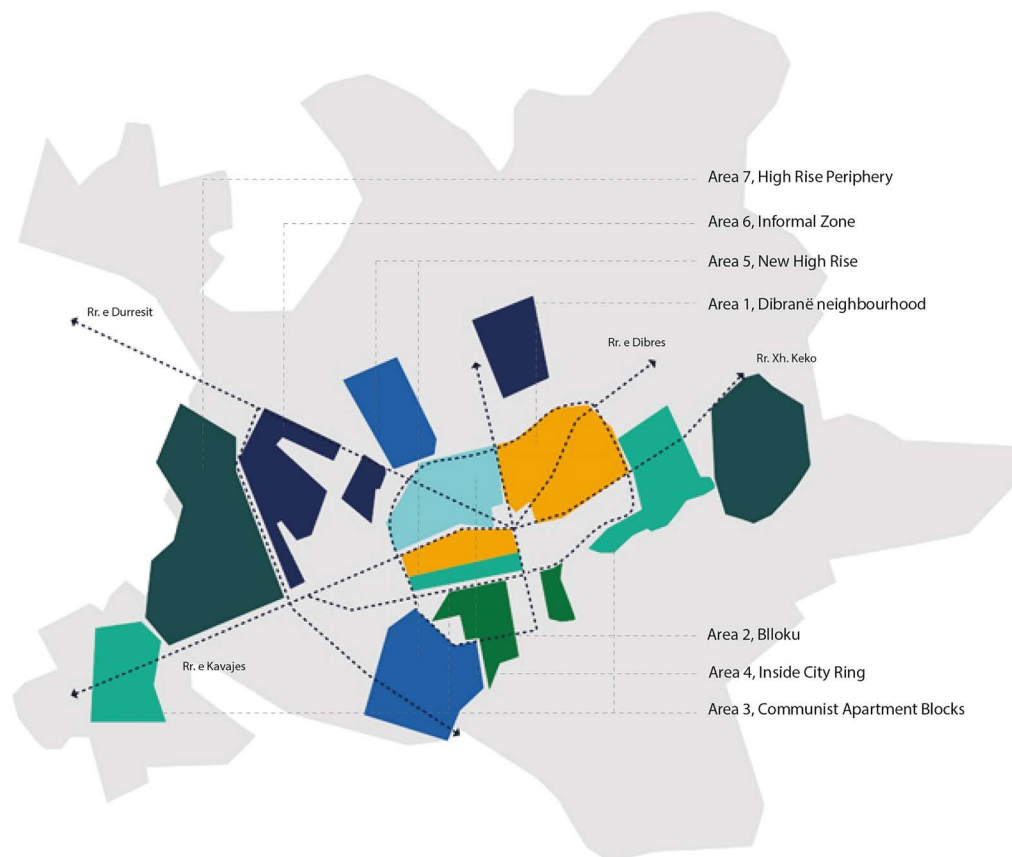


Figure 1. Map of Tirana.

The details of neighborhoods and numbers of respondents are given in **Table 2**. This study did not aim at a statistically representative sample—that was unfeasible due to well-known reasons (no access to the municipal population records, imprecise population data). The number of interviews per neighborhood ranges from a minimal 20 (area 2) to 41 (area 7). Larger areas (3 and 6) contained different interview areas which did not show any significant variation, they have been joined and therefore the numbers in these two areas are higher. The research resulted in a total of 306 valid questionnaires. Twice this number would have been better but was practically unachievable. Because of the interview situation with trained interviewers on the street approaching neighborhood citizens, the number of missing data was limited. Because of the limited number of respondents per neighborhood, the analysis below is merely indicative.

Area 1, *Dibranë*, is the historic and traditional center of Tirana. It is a traditional Ottoman neighborhood with 1 - 2 floor houses and with citizens living in the area for a long time. They still partially live in typical “Tirana dwellings”, surrounded by yards, which in some cases have been reconstructed. Recently, high-rise buildings were constructed in this area, but traditional local community is still the main group.

Area 2, *Blloku*, is the most central and expensive zone of the city nowadays. Originally, it was a rationally planned zone made of low-rise buildings and high spatial quality and was originally populated by people coming to Tirana after it became a capital. During communism, the zone was the headquarter of the Politburo and the political class and people close to the regime. After 1991, it developed into the fanciest zone of the city.

Area 3, *Communist apartment blocks*, includes areas characterized by typical communist apartment blocks and the residential district of Kombinat attached to the industrial area. The population living in these blocks mostly migrated to Tirana during the communism period. Because of the spatial organization of these neighborhoods with internal courts and public spaces, there was spatial order, but facilities and services were poor.

Area 4, *Inside city ring*, is an area largely developed during the communist

Table 2. Neighborhoods and number of respondents.

Neighborhood	n
1 Dibranë neighborhood	29
2 Blloku	20
3 Communist apartment blocks	71
4 Inside city ring	25
5 New high rise	25
6 Informal zone	95
7 High rise periphery	41
Total	306

period but has a quite different urban structure. Its characterized mostly of 1 - 2 floor houses with a yard, and 4 - 5 floor typical collective houses.

Area 5, *New high rise*, comprises the new high-rise neighborhoods built after 2000, outside the internal ring of Tirana but still not far from the city center. These neighborhoods can be typified as high-rise building without adequate road infrastructure, public space and parking space. The population consists mainly of people coming from different areas of Albania after the 1990s.

Area 6, *Informal zone*, includes the informal zone outside the internal ring road of Tirana, but with a relatively short distance from the city center. This zone was informally occupied and built after 1990. Nowadays it shows a low qualitative spatial structure, and it lacks adequate infrastructure and public space. Buildings in this area are usually 2 - 4 floor houses of an average to good quality. They are isolated and protected by high walls, hence community life is limited.

Area 7, *High rise periphery*, includes the new high-rise areas in the periphery of Tirana with high population densities. Compared to Area 5, these neighborhoods have better road infrastructure and a regular urban pattern because they were developed on empty land (no infill). These areas are considered today as sleeping neighborhoods. People living in Area 7 seem to be side-lined from the city center and urban public life.

5. Results

In **Table 3**, basic information is presented of the respondents. The pattern that emerges looks like a fairly good depiction of Tirana's (young) population, when compared with the details given in de report of Albania's Institute for Statistics,

Table 3. Characteristics respondents.

Characteristics respondents		N (% of total)
Age	18 - 25 years	30%
	26 - 40 years	28%
	41 - 60 years	30%
	61 years and older	12%
Gender	Female	49%
	Male	51%
Education	Elementary	6%
	Professional level	34%
	Bachelor	40%
	Master's and higher	20%
Years of residence	0 - 5 years	22%
	6 - 10 years	17%
	11 - 20 years	28%
	21 years and longer	33%

INSTAT (2018) and the databases accessible to the public. The relatively high percentage of respondents living in Tirana for 10 years or less, can be explained by Tirana's educational function and its economic primacy in the country. Young people come to Tirana to study, and stay in Tirana because of better employment opportunities.

To assess the internal consistency of the questions, whether a set of 3 questions can be considered as a consistent factor, Cronbach's alphas were calculated, and presented in **Table 4**.

The initial Cronbach's alpha on the factor of Continuity was low, namely 0.28. This was caused by one of the three questions. After looking at the correlations and going back to the questionnaire and the experiences of the interviewers, it was decided to skip one question, and Cronbach's alpha of the factor Continuity increased to a more acceptable level. It is still on the low side (but based on 2 questions only), and so is the factor commitment (3 questions); thus individual questions of these two factors are used. An ordinal scale (a 5-point Likert scale) was applied, meaning that data in which an ordering or ranking of responses is possible, but no measure of distance is possible. Descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, can have unclear meanings when applied to Likert scale responses. In the next section, ordinal data are treated as interval data. This is for some a disputed way of working, but for [Sullivan and Artino \(2013\)](#) such measures can be used if the number of responses (N) is adequate. For our case study this N is 306, which is adequate. Our analysis in the next chapter can be considered as a pilot analysis. The means and standard deviation of the answering categories of the questions and the Factors/single questions are presented in **Table 5**.

The figures in **Table 5** show that averages tend to be around 4. The lowest scoring single factor is "I miss my neighborhood when I am not there" (average 3.40), the highest is "Tirana is very important in my daily life" (average 4.30). On average, Tirana's citizens show a positive attachment to the city. As a next step, Person correlations were calculated, which are presented in **Table 6**.

Remarkable is that Q18 (I look forward to witness Tirana's future development) shows low correlations, with all factors and other questions. Q19 (Tirana plays an important role in my future plans) shows low correlations with several questions. An interpretation is that both questions 18 and 19 refer to the point

Table 4. Cronbach alphas.

Factors	Items about	Cronbach alpha
Familiarity	Sense of belonging, experience of town	0.73
Attachment	To stay in the city, to development of the city	0.84
Continuity	Feelings, self-identification with the city	0.62
Commitment	Relation with the past, belonging	0.53
Neighborhood	Sense of neighborhood attachment, belonging	0.64

Table 5. Mean and standard deviation.

Question	N	Mean	Std Dev
9 When I move around in Tirana, I feel strongly that I belong here	306	4.02	0.88
10 Tirana is very familiar to me	306	4.01	1.00
11 Tirana is very important for my daily life	306	4.30	0.87
F1 Familiarity (Q9-10-11)	306	4.11	0.74
12 I see myself as a real Tirana citizen	306	4.07	0.96
13 I feel at home in Tirana	305	4.07	0.98
14 Tirana is like a part of myself	306	3.98	0.98
F2 Attachment (Q12-13-14)	305	4.04	0.84
15 Many things in Tirana remind me of my own past	306	3.79	1.18
17 I know Tirana well and can find many places in town	303	4.13	0.90
18 I look forward to witness Tirana's future development	305	4.09	0.85
19 Tirana plays an important role in my future plans	300	3.92	0.97
20 I like to stay in Tirana for a long time to come.	301	3.81	1.05
21 I have a lot of social interaction in my neighborhood	295	3.89	1.00
22 My neighborhood is a safe neighborhood	305	3.84	0.93
23 I miss my neighborhood when I am not there	303	3.40	1.14
F5 Neighborhood (Q21-22-23)	292	3.71	0.78

Scale: 1 = don't agree - 5 = fully agree

Table 6. Pearson correlations.

Factor(F)/Question (Q)	F1	F2	Q15	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20	F5
F1 Familiarity	1							
F2 Attachment	0.72**	1						
Q15 Remind	0.53**	0.56**	1					
Q17 Know well	0.63**	0.53**	0.46**	1				
Q18 Future	0.05	0.09	0.04	0.09	1			
Q19 Plans	0.38**	0.41**	0.16**	0.16**	0.11	1		
Q20 Stay	0.38**	0.48**	0.50**	0.19**	0.07	0.59**	1	
F5 Neighborhood	0.52**	0.54**	0.35**	0.32**	0.11	0.33**	0.50**	1

**significant at 0.01 level.

that people have chosen Tirana because of the lack of services and economic prospects elsewhere. But they find that developments in the city (Albania in general), do not allow for long term plans and projections. Albania's population is shrinking, and many young people look for opportunities to study and work abroad. In other words, Tirana is the best option in Albania, but people look around for better options for their own future or the future of the children.

People may be attached to Tirana, but not wholeheartedly, they have a plan B in their minds.

A comparison was made between answers of male and female respondents. Differences in answers are very small (details in **Table A1, Appendix 2**). Also, across age categories answers on place attachment do not vary much (details in **Table A2, Appendix 2**); the older age group showed a bit higher scores on future related questions. An explanation is that they have settled and want to stay in Tirana and don't move abroad or to other cities or back to the countryside. Education levels did not make much difference with regards to place attachment (details in **Table A3, Appendix 2**).

More dissimilarity could be noted from investigating the relation between length of residence in Tirana, and attachment. Correlations between the categories "number of years residence in Tirana" and the factors and questions are presented in **Table 7**. With continued residence in Tirana, attachment increases, as correlations between number of years living in Tirana and attachment scores, show. In **Table A4 (Appendix 2)** details are given in cross tabulations.

Some correlations seem obvious, like the correlation between length of residence and knowing Tirana. But attachment of new residents needs not to be lower on average than residents who live in Tirana for a longer time. For example, length of residence and attachment are not positively related in the Turin study of **Rollero and De Piccolo (2010)**.

In **Table 8** below, the means and standard deviations of categories of "length of residence" are given for the seven areas. The broad conclusion is that in established neighborhoods, attachment is higher than in newer high-rise neighborhoods. Place attachment figures in the communist blocks, where housing quality and socio-economic class is expected to be lower, are comparable to the surrounding up-market areas. Earlier it was mentioned that place attachment indicators do not show significant differences across educational levels. It was also mentioned that the figures are indicative because of the limited number of responses.

Table 7. Correlations between categories "number of years residence in Tirana" and factors and questions.

Factor(F)/Question (Q)	N	Correlation
F1 Familiarity	305	0.52**
F2 Attachment	304	0.54**
Q15 Many things in Tirana remind me of my own past	305	0.51**
Q17 I know Tirana well and can find many places in town	304	0.42**
Q18 I look forward to witness Tirana's future development	299	0.12
Q19 Tirana plays an important role in my future plans	301	0.13
Q20 I like to stay in Tirana for a long time to come.	294	0.24**
F5 Neighborhood	295	0.43**

**significant at 0.01 level.

There are two pointers in the lower scores of areas 5 and 7, and the other areas. Areas 5 and 7 are both new high-rise areas, built after 2000. Area 5 is within the Ring, Area 7 is outside. The dominant housing type is apartments. To check whether the average years of residence in Tirana played a role, averages were calculated per area. **Table 9** shows the results.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics according to areas in Tirana*.

Factor/Question	Area 1 Dibranë			A2 Blloku			A3 Appt blocks			A4 Inside city ring		
	N	Mean	Std Dev	N	Mean	Std Dev	N	Mean	Std Dev	N	Mean	Std Dev
F1 Familiarity	29	4.11	0.87	20	4.37	0.67	71	4.32	0.67	25	4.11	0.57
F2 Attachment	29	4.03	0.89	20	4.35	0.94	70	4.16	0.82	25	4.04	0.73
Q15 Remind	29	4.00	1.13	20	4.10	1.21	71	3.99	1.15	25	3.96	0.98
Q17 Know well	29	3.93	1.13	20	4.55	0.69	70	4.36	0.76	25	4.36	0.64
Q18 Future	29	4.31	0.71	20	4.50	0.61	69	4.17	0.95	21	3.19	0.68
Q19 Plans	28	3.96	0.79	20	4.10	1.07	69	3.93	0.99	24	3.25	0.68
Q20 Stay	26	3.58	1.03	20	3.85	1.31	67	3.75	1.06	23	2.91	0.90
F5 Neighbourhood	29	3.63	0.82	20	4.20	0.74	68	3.91	0.78	25	3.52	0.81

Factor/Question	A5 New High rise			A6 Informal zone			A 7 High rise periphery		
	N	Mean	Std Dev	N	Mean	Std Dev	N	Mean	Std Dev
F1 Familiarity	25	3.61	0.77	95	4.26	0.67	41	3.59	0.67
F2 Attachment	25	3.79	0.71	95	4.21	0.78	41	3.48	0.84
Q15 Remind	25	3.60	0.96	95	3.72	1.25	41	3.32	1.21
Q17 Know well	25	3.48	1.16	95	4.28	0.69	41	3.56	0.98
Q18 Future	25	4.12	0.33	95	3.99	0.89	41	4.24	0.77
Q19 Plans	25	4.04	0.35	95	4.16	1.04	40	3.55	1.01
Q20 Stay	25	4.04	0.20	94	4.27	0.94	40	3.35	0.98
F5 Neighbourhood	25	3.77	0.51	92	3.75	0.74	40	3.19	0.74

*Note: standard deviations are indications only in areas with smaller number of respondents.

Table 9. Neighbourhoods and years of residence.

Neighborhood	N	Mean	Std.dev.
1 Dibranë neighborhood	29	2.61	1.07
2 Blloku	20	3.50	0.95
3 Communist apartment blocks	71	2.93	1.11
4 Inside city ring	25	2.88	0.97
5 New high rise	25	2.32	1.11
6 Informal zone	95	2.79	1.15
7 High rise periphery	41	2.05	1.14

Years of residence: 1 = 0 - 5 years, 2 = 5 - 10 years, 3 = 11 - 20 years, 4 ≥ 20 years. N = 306.

Table 9 shows that the length of residence in the two high-rise areas is lower than in the other areas. Next to the on average shorter length of residence, it is likely that another factor plays a role. Families in high-rise apartments face difficulties of elevators that do not work, or inadequate cleaning—because not all residents can or are willing to contribute to the costs—a typical condominium problem in Tirana. An elevator that is broken for a few days, is a problem for people living on the 10th floor. To what extent general dissatisfaction with their residential environment impact their feeling of place attachment, is not known.

6. Conclusion and Follow-Up Research

The findings of this empirical study can be summarized as follows. Place attachment—perceived as a constructive experience—in Tirana is on average quite positive. A comparison with other Balkan cities is not possible due to the lack of data. Studies in other Balkan cities would be helpful to develop more insight into factors and contexts that influence place attachment. The findings and analysis show that place attachment indicators do not vary according to educational level, gender and age. That is remarkable following [Lewicka \(2005\)](#) who expected—and confirmed—a negative correlation between place attachment and education. In Tirana's case, place attachment indicators positively relate with length of residence. It also appeared that place attachment indicators are higher in well-established neighborhoods compared to the new high-rise areas—and the reasons for this difference will need to be studied in more detail. Perhaps it would point out that in the new high-rise areas a more anonymous and distant lifestyle is prominent, with more attention to work and family and less to neighborhood and city, or that dissatisfaction with the living environment plays a role.

This study has developed a first picture of place attachment in Tirana. It has some limitations. The questionnaire is an adjusted version of the instrument developed by [Lalli \(1992\)](#). The revised questionnaire was checked with several academicians working in the field of people-place studies. No comparable research on place attachment in the Balkans was found, and therefore no references were obtained. The interviewers were final year students planning and architecture, invited by the research team and have been well trained. Q. 16 of the questionnaire, did not work as a contributing question to a factor, as has been explained in the text. Second, the sample is not representative of Tirana as a whole—an assessment of its degree of representativeness is hard to give. It may also be mentioned that Tirana's citizens are cautious with regards to interviewers—consider it something in the DNA of a city with a harsh communist past. On purpose, the questionnaire did not contain sensitive questions (on the appreciation of the municipality for example) but nonetheless Tirana's people are not known as frank and open when it comes to answering interviewers. The researchers' assessment is that due to the choice of locations and the selected interviewers and interviewees, the results of the study should give a fair picture of place attachment in Tirana.

This study calls for follow-up research. The study showed that citizens have a positive place attachment. It is essential to understand meanings related to place attachment and the following options can be next steps for research. First, qualitative research on citizens' perceptions regarding place attachment is needed. The present study applied a questionnaire in various areas of the city. Qualitative research on basis of a semi-structured list with more open questions, could give insight into the feelings and thoughts Tirana's citizens have with regards to their city. The difference between the survey results in established areas versus the new high-rise areas, should be studied. Through interviews a better understanding could be developed regarding the possible relationship between place attachment, and civic activities and positive environmental behavior. A second research option is how place attachment could be translated into positive behavior, and what kind of approach from local government would be needed. The topic of neighborhood ties and civic activities needs to be explored. This could lead to experiments for local governments to stimulate civic activities, for example through participatory budgeting. Wirth et al. (2016) discuss the influence of perceived changes in the urban environment on residents' place attachments and found that urban design, at least indirectly, can influence residents' relatedness to places. When change in the urban environment was perceived as an attractive upgrade and as (still) familiar, it was positively associated with place attachment. The inclusion of residents' perceptions in early stages of urban planning may be valuable for identifying and mediating value trade-offs that might occur during later stages of urban changes. In this area, Tirana's local authorities can improve a lot. Involving people in urban change—being active in a physical environment leads to the development of a higher place attachment (and perhaps the other way around: a high place attachment can also encourage participation in activities connected to the place). In Tirana, such insights are absent.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Items 9 - 23 have a 4 point Likert scale

- 1) Man/woman
- 2) Age
- 3) Place of residence (street—neighborhood)
- 4) Years of residence in Tirana
- 5) Place of birth
- 6) Place of birth of parents
- 7) Educational level
- 8) Residential status

- 9) When I move around in Tirana, I feel very strongly that I belong here
- 10) Tirana is very familiar to me
- 11) Tirana is very important for my daily life

- 12) I see myself as a real Tirana-citizen
- 13) I feel really at home in Tirana
- 14) Tirana is like a part of myself

- 15) Lots of things in Tirana remind me of my own past
- 16) I cannot imagine living in a different town because I would give up too much of myself
- 17) I know Tirana very well and can find many places in town

- 18) I look forward to witness Tirana's future development
- 19) Tirana plays an important role in my future plans
- 20) My personal future is closely tied up with Tirana

- 21) I have a lot of social interaction in my neighborhood
- 22) I trust the people in my neighborhood
- 23) I miss my neighborhood when I am not there

- 24) My favourite place in Tirana is: ---, because ---
- 25) A part of Tirana I dislike is: ---, because ---
- 26) The most important thing that should be improved in Tirana (first choice) is: ---
- 27) The second most important thing in Tirana that needs to be improved is: ---

Appendix 2: Tables

Table A1. Factors and questions according to gender.

Factor(F)/Question (Q)	Female		Male	
	N	Mean	N	Mean
F1 Familiarity	149	4.05	156	4.18
F2 Attachment	148	4.04	156	4.05
Q15 Many things in Tirana remind me of my own past	149	3.75	156	3.83
Q17 I know Tirana well and can find many places in town	148	4.01	156	4.24
Q18 I look forward to witness Tirana's future development	144	4.10	155	4.08
Q19 Tirana plays an important role in my future plans	146	3.97	154	3.87
Q20 I like to stay in Tirana for a long time to come.	142	3.82	152	3.80
F5 Neighbourhood	146	3.70	152	3.72

Table A2. Factors and questions according to age categories.

Factor(F)/Question (Q)	18 - 25 y.		26 - 40 y.		41 - 60 y.		>60 y	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
F1 Familiarity	91	3.83	86	4.03	92	4.36	37	4.38
F2 Attachment	90	3.76	86	4.02	92	4.20	37	4.41
Q15 Remind	91	3.48	86	3.84	92	3.84	37	4.30
Q17 Know well	91	4.08	85	4.05	92	4.13	37	4.43
Q18 Future	90	4.00	83	4.07	92	4.07	35	4.40
Q19 Plans	90	3.70	83	3.87	91	4.17	37	3.97
Q20 Stay	87	3.44	80	3.65	91	4.06	37	4.40
F5 Neighbourhood	88	3.50	84	3.51	90	3.92	37	4.18

Table A3. Factors and questions according to educational levels.

Factor(F)/Question (Q)	Elementary		Professional		Bachelor		Masters and higher	
	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean
F1 Familiarity	19	3.91	105	4.10	122	4.11	60	4.21
F2 Attachment	19	4.02	105	3.99	122	4.07	59	4.08
Q15 Remind	19	3.58	105	3.66	122	3.84	60	3.97
Q17 Know well	19	3.68	105	4.05	122	4.17	59	4.32
Q18 Future	19	4.53	103	4.08	121	3.98	57	4.19
Q19 Plans	19	3.63	104	3.90	120	4.02	58	3.84
Q20 Stay	19	3.68	103	3.99	117	3.76	56	3.63
F5 Neighbourhood	19	3.88	104	3.78	119	3.57	57	3.81

Table A4. Factors and questions according to length of residence in Tirana.

	Years 0 - 5			6 - 10 years			11 - 20 years			>21 years		
	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.
F1 Familiarity	67	3.53	0.68	53	3.86	0.62	84	4.24	0.71	100	4.54	0.53
F2 Attachment	66	3.35	0.81	53	3.74	0.74	84	4.19	0.71	100	4.55	0.63
Q15 Remind	67	2.76	1.12	53	3.62	1.04	84	3.96	1.06	100	4.41	0.90
Q17 Know well	67	3.52	1.08	53	3.94	0.82	84	4.25	0.82	100	4.53	0.59
Q18 Future	66	3.94	0.80	51	4.06	0.79	83	4.05	0.97	98	4.22	0.81
Q19 Plans	65	3.85	0.87	52	3.56	0.98	83	4.00	1.02	100	4.11	0.93
Q20 Stay	61	3.69	0.92	51	3.20	0.98	82	3.80	1.08	99	4.21	0.94
F5 Neighbourhood	64	3.23	0.74	51	3.44	0.68	84	3.78	0.73	98	4.12	0.67