

## Subjective (social) well-being in the neighbourhood: A conceptual exploration

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the relationships between place and subjective well-being. Despite the substantial growth in studies on this topic across multiple disciplines, there is still a long road ahead for urban planning theory. This work introduces a novel conceptual framework that illustrates in a structured manner the interrelations between place and subjective well-being, uncovering the mediating role of sense of place and highlighting the transformative potential of micro- and small-sized businesses in shaping urban neighbourhoods' sense of place. The study emphasizes the significance of understanding subjective well-being at the neighbourhood scale for informed urban planning and policy making, contributing to the theoretical discourse on people-place relations.

**Keywords:** subjective well-being; neighbourhood; sense of place; social well-being; micro and small-sized businesses

### **1. Introduction**

People and places are inseparable. Gifford (2014, p. 543) argues that an individual's whole life is interlaced with a place; "we are always nested within layers of place." This complex and dynamic relationship has bidirectional links: places are shaped by people, while where individuals spend their time shapes them (Ballas, 2021; Gifford, 2014; Healey, 2005; Stephenson, 2010). According to Gehl (2010, p. 9), "First we shape the cities – then they shape us."

The first part of this process (people shaping places) is often visible and direct. Consider this hypothetical scenario: one morning, you pass by a street that rarely crosses your path, a degraded district in the city. A few decades ago, several stores related to garment production would pile up here, and people would walk down the street. However, those days belong to the past. Today, this area is soulless and filled with shutdown stores, a void in the periphery of some busy streets. A month later, your journey takes you down this street again -it's always morning; as soon as the sun sets, you do not even think of passing from here. A pleasant change catches your eye: a pizzeria operates in one of the corners. Two people -most likely employees- are standing outside the store, chatting beside a couple of food counters decorated with a few flowers. A few weeks later, you return to the street with a couple of friends. This time, a crowd is enjoying their pizza, music is playing in the background, and people are chatting and laughing. This is not the gloomy street you used to know, and you notice that a handmade jewellery store has popped up across the street. This simple narrative underlines one of the many ways people may transform a place, change its meaning, and redefine an area's milieu.

On the contrary, how places shape people may be more difficult to comprehend. Often, these effects might be indirect, invisible or it might take time to show. The interaction between people and places may take multiple forms and be determined by numerous factors. Moreover, the experience and perception of this interaction may vary among individuals or social groups (Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1975), making it highly subjective. In recent years, the impact of place on people's subjective well-being (SWB) is increasingly recognized (Aslam and Corrado, 2012; Ballas and Dorling, 2013; Morrison, 2007). Fleury-Bahi et al. (2017) suggest that a person's satisfaction, expectations, and hopes, as well as frustrations and experiences, vary along urban contexts. Similarly, Ballas (2021) argues that the level of SWB is affected by the dynamics developed between personal circumstances, social interrelations, and geographical characteristics in proximity.

Exploring the relations between people and places within the urban setting is -or should be- at the limelight of the urban planning and development field. Yet, for years, the people dimension received limited attention (Gehl, 2010; Stephenson, 2010). Traditionally, the spatial dimension of subjective well-being, the focus of the herein study, has been overlooked (Morrison, 2007). Only recently have studies started to investigate this relationship, while only a paucity of these interweave the discussion simultaneously around the constructs of place, sense of place, and subjective well-being (Erfani, 2022). Ergo, there is an opportunity to delve deeper into the nuances of people-place relations. As we live at the peak of the urban era, we argue that investigating subjective well-being within the framework of cities, specifically the neighbourhood scale, is considered crucial for urban planning theory, applications, and policy making.

This paper investigates the relationships between place and subjective well-being. The theory synthesis methodology is adopted (Jaakkola, 2020), aiming to articulate the links and propose new relationships among these constructs. The relevant literature streams are critically reviewed, unravelling the key components of the concepts that allow the identification of common grounds. In attempting to achieve integration across the theories, concepts are being decomposed and re-approached through new theoretical lenses. The domain theory in this paper is subjective well-being. The method theories relate to the themes of place, sense of place, and micro- and small-sized businesses (MSBs) as components of the urban landscape. Despite today's expanded connectivity between people, we focus on the urban neighbourhood scale, as it remains the immediate socio-spatial context for most individuals (Agnew and Duncan, 1989).

More precisely, we explore the interrelations among the constructs of urban '*place*' and '*subjective well-being*' -we argue that the former impacts the latter, '*sense of place*' -we argue that it has a mediating role in the aforementioned relationship- and *the role that MSBs play* -we argue that they have transformative potentials in developing sense of place at the neighbourhood level. The study introduces a conceptual framework, synthesizing and theorizing previously unconnected pieces of knowledge. Therefore, this work is expected to contribute to theoretical debates, expanding the frontiers of knowledge related to people-place relations and stimulating debates on the role of MSBs in urban form and development. It is expected to shed light on the spatial dimensions of SWB in cities, and ultimately facilitate planning and development processes and outcomes. The ethos guiding this endeavour is reflected in Jane Jacobs' 1958 article "Downtown is for People": "There is no logic that can be superimposed on the city; people make it, and it is to them, not buildings, that we must fit our plans." (Jacobs, 1958, p. 127).

## 2. From 'Space' to 'Place'

The notion of '*place*' became central to geography and urban studies during the 1970s. The perceptible difference between abstract space and the specific place is the meaning that people ascribe to the former, thus, transforming it into the latter. A 'meaningful location' could also be an alternative description for place. According to Cresswell (2004, p. 7), these are the locations that people are "attached to in one way or another", embodying their relationships with the world. Agnew (1987) argues that every space interpreted as a meaningful location is constructed by three structural elements: (a) '*location*', i.e., where the place is; (b) '*locale*', i.e., its palpable dimension where social activities develop; and (c) '*sense of place*', which he interprets as the subjective and emotional attachment with a place. Locations exceed their tangible dimension and gain meaning when people give them names, identify them, and represent them (Cresswell,

2004; Gieryn, 2000). Thus, places are recognized in terms of their physical elements, but they also have a social and a psychological dimension as they can be “interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined” (Soja, 1996, cites Gieryn, 2000). As Casey underscores, a “place brings with it the very elements sheared off in the planiformity of site: identity, character, nuance, history” (Casey, 1997, p. 14).

Cities, the “centers of meaning” according to Tuan (1975, p. 156), perfectly embody the concept of place as they are possibly the only environments created exclusively for human use. The motivation driving their development is the organization and facilitation of people’s everyday lives. Cities are formed by smaller scale units, the neighbourhoods. This construction is considered one of the most important scales of research and intervention in urban studies and other place-related disciplines, constituting the “optimal level of abstraction” (Lewicka, 2011, p. 212). This is evident as a great amount of research related to people-place themes refers to the neighbourhood scale (Giuliani, 2003; Hidalgo and Hernández, 2001; Lewicka, 2011, 2010). According to Hallman, “a neighborhood is a limited territory within a larger urban area where people inhabit dwellings and interact socially” (Hallman, 1984, p. 3). Lee et al. define them as “social constructions named and bounded differently by numerous and diverse individuals” (Lee et al., 1994, p. 252). The above approaches imply that in neighbourhoods we found social connections and networks, attributes inherent also to the notion of community (Chaskin, 1997).

Accordingly, when hearing the word ‘*community*’, most people possibly understand that it refers to a concept incorporating a territorial dimension (i.e., the built and natural environment, but not limited to that), a social dimension (i.e., the people who live, work or are active in this setting), as well as the ongoing interactions between these two (i.e., the links, flows, and networks that develop) and the processes of collective actions (Farmer et al., 2016; Wilkinson, 1991). In fact, according to most definitions, three basic assumptions must apply to refer to a human community: first of all, it requires a group of people who are involved in interactive activities; second, these activities are expected to take place within the framework of a geographic territory; and third, often enough the involved people share some common values, beliefs or behaviours (Hillery, 1955). Even though the notion of community can be variously interpreted and understood, especially as we currently live in a globalized and virtually interrelated world that could situate the territorial element under dispute, it is our strong belief that the territorial dimension is present in every kind of human communities, even if not perceived in a traditional fashion.

Synthesizing the above, the current study approaches the ‘*neighbourhood*’ as a concept that denotes *proximity*, *compositionality*, and *community*. *Proximity* is a spatial dimension that can be understood in both objective and perceived terms. The term *compositionality* reflects the unique mosaic of a neighbourhood where the “juxtaposition of the dissonant” (Massey, 1997, p. 213) and the similarities co-exist. It may refer to a variety of things, including the built and natural environment (e.g., the architectural style and infrastructures, the environmental characteristics, etc.), and the socio-economic environment (e.g., the demographic composition, the accessibility to jobs and services, the social networks and the alterity). It may also refer to the cultural or intellectual composition or other identity-related characteristics that infiltrate a place, as well as the composition of different narratives about it. The *community* represents the dynamic entity of people that formulates through the ongoing social interactions, the networks, and the flows formatted while at a place and in interaction with the place itself. The neighbourhood can often be experienced differently, at different times by different individuals or social groups.

### 3. Exploring Sense of Place

As mentioned above, the concept of '*sense of place*' is inextricably linked to the construct of a meaningful location, given that each place is related to people and their ability to produce and consume meaning individually and as communities. While an acknowledged phenomenon (Duggan et al., 2023), it remains a nebulous one as there is yet no universal consensus on the definition and theory behind it (Nelson et al., 2020; Williams, 2014), or whether there is meaning to measure it (Shamai, 1991). It could be loosely described as the multidimensional attitude people hold towards a place and the emotional bond they form with it (Guthey et al., 2014; Lewicka, 2011; Nelson et al., 2020; Rajala et al., 2020; Relph, 1976). Nonetheless, this remains a broad and abstract description of the concept. Despite its complexity, the dynamic and subjective nature of sense of place becomes apparent. It is anchored in the individual's and collective sensory and cognitive experiences and develops over time (Relph, 1976; Shamai, 1991) and in relation to time (Jackson, 1995). According to Tuan (1975, 1997) the experiential processes a person undergoes at and with a place serve as the paths for the development of emotional bonds with it. However, it is argued that sense of place is not limited to that.

Datel and Dingemans (1984, cites Shamai and Ilatov, 2005) emphasize that people, either consciously or unconsciously, ascribe to localities all sorts of complex meanings, symbolic representations, and attributes, and the amalgamation of all these represents sense of place. Entrikin (1997) and Eisenhauer et al. (2000) illustrate the mediating role of the cultural dimension in the experience of a place and the social phenomenon that it is, highlighting the impact of collective narratives in the formulation of sense of place. Often, it is not just an individual's experience but responds to a shared structure of feelings that are shaped and reshaped among groups and generations (Pred, 1983). As people change so does the way they make sense of place (Anderson, 2004). Following the approach of the social construct of space, some studies (Allen et al., 1998; Rose, 1995) argue that it is crafted through power and inequality. Considering that places can serve as means of inclusion and exclusion (Madanipour, 2015; McGregor and McConnachie, 1995), separating 'us' from 'others', the experience of a place and thus sense of place differentiates for 'us' and 'others'.

Sense of place is different from '*genius loci*' – the spirit of place, though closely related. Genius loci denotes the character that a place has while sense refers to the perspectives and bonding a person develops about a place and its spirit (Meetiyyagoda et al., 2024). At the other end of the spectrum, we find the concept of '*placelessness*' introduced by Relph (1976). This concept represents the lack of any such bond with a place that, according to Relph (1976), is caused as a result of standardized landscapes that lack distinctiveness and authenticity and are subjugated by a homogenizing effect (e.g., suburbia). The intellectual discourse around the topic becomes quite perplexing as scholars often use the term sense of place interchangeably with that of place identity, place dependence, and place attachment (Duggan et al., 2023; Nelson et al., 2020). However, the recent literature recognizes them as three separate dimensions that clarify the essence of the overarching notion of sense of place and are often used to measure it (Domingues et al., 2021; Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001; Nanzer, 2004).

The concept of '*place identity*' was introduced during the 1970s in environmental psychology, defined as "a substructure of the self-identity of the person" (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 59). According to Proshansky it is shaped in relation to people's physical environment and involves their "conscious and unconscious ideals, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills" (Proshansky, 1978, p. 155). This definition highlights the impact of a place's (and its attributes) interpretation on an individual's identity. Brown-Saracino

and Parker (2017) approaches it as “a collection of attributes or an identity assigned to a place, and as a collective self–understanding that rests on a particular locale”. This stresses further the interplay between self-identity (or collective) and the perception of a particular place. Places may reflect a particular aspect of a person’s (or a group’s) identity (Anderson, 2004); given that an individual’s self-identity develops around conscious (and subconscious) beliefs, interpretations, and evaluations of oneself, place identity constitutes an aspect of a person’s identity (Nanzer, 2004). From the above emerges that place identity is found at the intersection between a person’s (or group’s) identity and the perceived understanding and interpretation of their surrounding environment. This convergence is the output of the experiences of a person (or a group) that involve interaction with a place. As the interaction changes the sense of place identity may change too (not necessarily in a positive way). At the neighbourhood scale, elements that may contribute to the formation of its identity could be the built and natural environment, the infrastructures, the residents, and their activities, as well as the meaning they produce, the institutions, and the commercial entities operating in the area, but also the memories and the narratives about the neighbourhood.

*‘Place dependence’* responds to the more functional dimension of sense of place (Meetiyyagoda et al., 2024). The notion reflects the connections and dependency developed with places on the basis of the activities, behaviours, and goals they facilitate (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2001; Stokols and Shumaker, 1982). Places are evaluated as important in accordance with the conditions they provide that enable and support these specific uses, goals, etc., and their ability to adequately provide these specific uses (Nanzer, 2004; Schreyer et al., 1981). Place dependence primarily focuses on whether a particular environment enables individuals to accomplish their objectives more effectively in comparison with known alternatives (Nanzer, 2004; Suntikul and Jachna, 2016). Inextricably this concept introduces comparability. To a degree, people’s assessments of whether a place can support their choices and goals are made compared to other existing alternatives (Dameria et al., 2020; Nanzer, 2004; Stokols and Shumaker, 1982). Lastly, *‘place attachment’* reflects the affective dimension of sense of place and constitutes a “complex, multifaceted concept” (Farnum et al., 2005, p. 3). According to Tuan, (1997, p. 159), “attachment of a deep though subconscious sort may come simply with familiarity and ease, with the assurance of nurture and security, with the memory of sounds and smells, of communal activities and homely pleasures accumulated over time”. Low and Altman (1992), assert that place attachment is generated and maintained through interactions with the environment and affected by interconnected biological, environmental, psychological, and sociocultural processes. It may emerge individually or collectively through spending time in places and engaging in deeper local relationships (Bonaiuto et al., 1999; Cuba and Hummon, 1993; Suntikul and Jachna, 2016). Therefore, the length of residency influences the sense of place attachment (Bonaiuto et al., 1999).

#### **4. Subjective Well-Being Beyond the Individual Level and the Impact of Place**

Traditionally, subjective well-being (SWB) was appraised as an aspatial conception. However, multiple studies have challenged this view over the past decades, highlighting the role of place-related determinants (Aslam and Corrado, 2012; Ballas, 2013; Morrison, 2007). In fact, the inclusion of the spatial dimension in models has been found to enhance their explanatory power (Brereton et al., 2008; Oswald and Wu, 2010). According to Diener (2006), SWB encompasses all the different cognitive evaluations -positive and negative- people make over their life and its aspects, being an “umbrella term” that despite its “subjective” character its manifestations can be objectively observed. In the same fashion, the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) argues that SWB is taken to be “good mental states, including all of

the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences” (OECD, 2013, p. 10). OECD identifies demographics (including geographic information and urbanization), material conditions, quality of life indicators, and psychological dimensions as the broad categories of variables that could be impactful to the levels of one’s well-being.

According to Manderson (2005), well-being is socially contingent, which implies a geographical dimension given that the immediate social context of people’s lives is found in geographical proximity (Agnew and Duncan, 1989). Multiple efforts have been conducted to understand SWB beyond the individual level. Keyes (1998) referred to social well-being which is described as the perceptions of people related to the quality of their relationships with others, their neighbourhood, and their community. More recent literature identifies it as community well-being (CWB). According to Lee and Kim (2015), it refers to a group of people who are geographically linked. Often, they are the dwellers in a locality, such as a neighbourhood or a city, involved in direct or indirect interactions with each other (Lee and Kim, 2015). Whereas, one might assume that it is simply the aggregation of individual well-being assessments or simply a “sum of community and well-being” (Lee and Kim, 2015), social well-being is a multifaceted and complex construct. It captures individuals’ well-being as nested within social and community contexts (Rollero and De Piccoli, 2010), incorporating numerous factors that can have a direct or indirect effect, while also impacting one another (Christakopoulou et al., 2001).

Chanan (2002, cites Lee et al., 2015, p. 2) highlights the complexity and abstraction that the notion involves:

When community is identifiable with a locality, CWB/the quality of community life is intimately connected with: how well that locality is functioning; how well that locality is governed; how the services in that locality are operating; and how safe, pleasant and rewarding it feels to live in that locality.

Another indicative approach is that of Wiseman and Brasher (2008, p. 358), according to which community well-being is “the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfill their potential”. This definition also emphasizes the contextual character of the notion defined by the population’s evaluations and the place. Atkinson et al. (2017) argue that the conceptualization of community well-being must incorporate the experience of “being well together”, i.e., the shared resources and experiences, that could include the provided services and the availability of public open spaces, the sense of safety and belonging, etc.

It becomes apparent that the concept is linked to a territorial dimension. However, only a scant of studies have investigated the connection between sense of place and subjective well-being beyond the individual level. Whereas, there are studies that indicate a connection between well-being and place influenced by the territorial sense of community (Albanesi et al., 2007; Cicognani et al., 2008) or place attachment (Afshar et al., 2017; Rollero and De Piccoli, 2010), there is still a long road ahead. Recently, there has been some effort in studying the links between sense of place and SWB (Li et al., 2023; Ng et al., 2022).

## **5. The Role of Micro- and Small-sized Businesses**

It is universally acknowledged that micro- and small-sized businesses (MSBs) (together with medium-sized) constitute the ‘backbone of the economy’, representing around 90% of businesses, 60% of employment, and 50% of GDP at a global level, according to the World Trade Organization (2016). Apart from their role as drivers of economic development (Davidsson et al., 1995; Kuratko and LaFollette, 1987; Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017), they could also be described as cornerstones of the community and social life (Ayalu et al., 2022; Farmer et al., 2016; Fitzgerald and Muske, 2016; Ribeiro-Soriano, 2017). Additionally, the crucial role of MSBs in achieving the 2030 Agenda for SDGs has been identified by the United Nations General Assembly through adopting Resolution (A/71/279). The key idea underpinning this statement is that since MSBs and the networks of people involved, nurture and thrive within urban neighbourhoods, they inescapably contribute to shaping their visual and cultural identity while forming gathering places that enhance social bonds, capital, and resilience (NALCAB, 2019; Oldenburg, 1999).

Research suggests that when defining a neighbourhood’s identity, its commercial character is equally, or even more (Felder and Pignolo, 2018), important to its residential qualities (Meltzer and Capperis, 2017). Being the “visible face of the neighborhood” (Zukin et al., 2016, p. 12), local MSBs have a fundamental role in driving the place’s identity, but also reflecting it (Deener, 2007; Lloyd, 2010; Martucci, 2019). People often spend considerable time in businesses consuming products or services. This is particularly prevalent in locations with a shortage of public spaces appropriate for socializing (Gomez et al., 2015), adverse conditions (such as prolonged winter periods), or places where spending time in public spaces is not the norm. Consequently, they have a highly symbolic role as parts of the urban landscape. Local businesses contribute to residents’ feeling of ownership (Martucci, 2019), generate a sense of familiarity and belonging (Duyvendak, 2011; Martucci, 2019), and add to the social and cultural capital of the neighbourhood (Fitzgerald and Muske, 2016; Oldenburg, 1999).

Further, Jacobs (1961) argues that local businesses are sources of safety and security in the neighbourhood (“eyes on the street”) while Oldenburg (1999) places them at the heart of democratic participation and community vitality. Felder and Pignolo (2018, p. 98) concretely presented the essential role of local businesses in the neighbourhood: “shop’s visible and concrete presence materializes the struggle over place identity”. Their symbolic and highly important role within a neighbourhood is also reflected in the inclusion/exclusion regulatory power that businesses can have on a given street or area (Clark, 2003; Jacobs, 1961; Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Martucci, 2019; Zukin and Kosta, 2004). Messages are being communicated via aesthetic choices, prices, and the provided products, reflecting in that way specific lifestyle standards (Martucci, 2019). This results in excluding specific social groups from accessing the provided resources and opportunities in the given location (Clark, 2003; Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Zukin and Kosta, 2004). Additionally, the way MSBs are nested in the urban form, (e.g., pedestrian-oriented streets or drive to plazas or malls) also impacts the health and well-being of individuals (Gomez et al., 2015).

## **6. From Place to Subjective Well-Being: Developing a Conceptual Framework**

The preceding discussion leads to the development of a conceptual understanding, framing the relationship between subjective well-being (SWB) and place. In attempting to advance this discourse, the study proposes a four-dimensional conceptual framework (Figure 1). This framework serves as an explanatory medium, unravelling the integration across the concepts and revealing their multidimensionality. It illustrates the relationships between place and SWB in a structured manner, facilitating understanding and unfolding what is expected to be

discovered through empirical research. In the proposed framework, each concept plays a distinct role. The first dimension, namely the place - neighbourhood, is presented as the explanatory element of SWB (second dimension) which in turn, is approached as the response phenomenon in the framework. The third one represents the micro- and small-sized businesses (MSBs) and illustrates the transformative potentials they have over sense of place (moderating role). The fourth dimension is sense of place. We argue that the relationship between place and SWB is mediated by the construct of sense of place through its three manifestations. It is approached as a holistic concept that glues together the concepts of place, SWB, and MSBs.

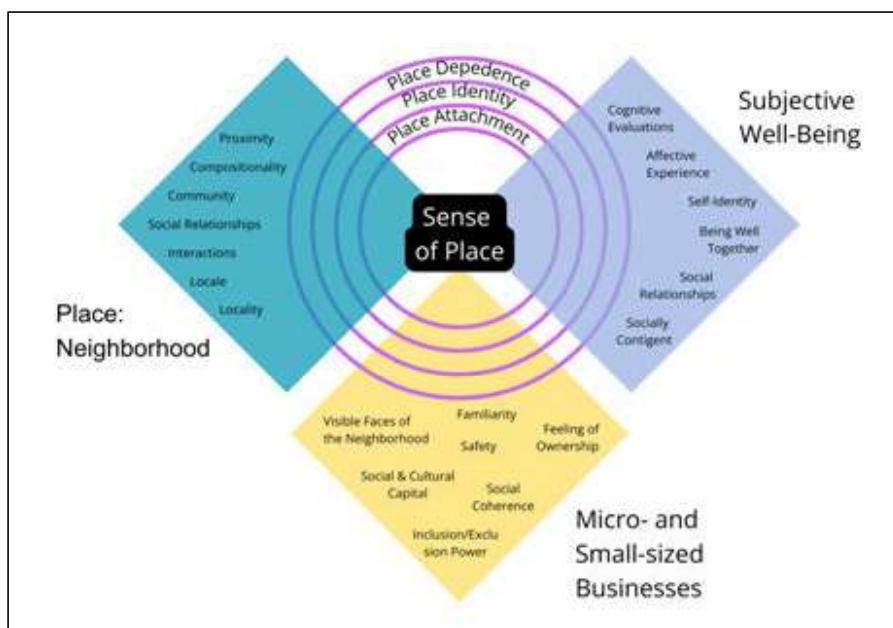


Figure 1. The proposed four-dimensional conceptual framework illustrates the interrelations between SWB, Place, Sense of Place, and MSBs

*Neighbourhood (place) and sense of place:* Our analysis identifies the neighbourhood as a meaningful location (place), denoting proximity, compositionality, and a sense of community. This suggests that the neighbourhood may influence sense of place, affecting how people relate to its environment and with each other. A neighbourhood's unique mosaic -encompassing a blend of the physical and built environment attributes and the social fabric- shapes people's cognitive understanding and experience of the place (meanings, feelings, narratives), thus, cultivating a distinct place identity (Bernardo and Palma-Oliveira, 2016). The physical and sensory engagement of individuals with their surrounding environment elicits perceptions and appreciations of its uniqueness (or lack of it), and the aesthetic, environmental and/or geological value (or lack of it). Through synergies and active participation, communities reshape places leading to an enhancement of the sense of attachment to the community and to place (Fang et al., 2016; Silberberg et al., 2013). Place attachment is further enhanced through the spatial opportunities provided for building networks and engaging in interactions with both other people and with the neighbourhood's environment (Fang et al., 2016; Low and Altman, 1992). Additionally, the duration of residency and the time spent engaging in activities in the

neighbourhood contribute to the sense of safety and belonging, leading to the enhancement of place attachment (Brown and Raymond, 2007; Lewicka, 2011; Mesch and Manor, 1998). The attributes a locality holds, creating the premises for individuals and groups to functionally satisfy their needs and accommodate their lifestyles may determine the sense of place dependence. Place dependence may also be subject to enhancement or retardment by the neighbourhood's capacity to support individuals or social groups in achieving their goals and engaging in desired and diverse activities (Jorgensen and Stedman, 2011). Collectively, the above neighbourhood dimensions may contribute to a strong (or a weak) sense of place, as well as satisfaction with the neighbourhood.

*MSBs and sense of place:* The proceeding analysis provided an overview of how MSBs can significantly influence all three manifestations of sense of place. The obvious is the functional aspect of MSBs that can support everyday life and the fulfilment of needs. This may influence the sense of place dependence by determining how well the neighbourhood meets the residents' needs and supports their lifestyles. Additionally, MSBs have a symbolic role and may play a distinctive role in formulating the sense of place identity in a neighbourhood. As indicated through literature, MSBs determine and act as a reflection of the neighbourhood's identity, cultural and social ethos (Felder and Pignolo, 2018; Martucci, 2019). Further, the symbolic role of MSBs and their impact on place identity is manifested through their inclusion or exclusion regulatory power, influencing who feels included in or excluded from the neighbourhood (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Zukin and Kosta, 2004). Finally, MSBs contribute to the feeling of ownership and generate a sense of familiarity and belonging in a neighbourhood (Duyvendak, 2011; Martucci, 2019). They are at the heart of community vitality, serving as places where residents interact, strengthening social bonds, and creating shared experiences, while MSBs support the neighbourhood's safety, enhancing in these ways place attachment.

*Sense of place and subjective well-being:* SWB involves cognitive evaluations of life and its various dimensions and affective experiences. Among the various determinants, SWB is sensitive to place of residency (Aslam and Corrado, 2012; Morrison, 2007). Thereby, an individual's evaluations of their neighbourhood are expected to impact their overall SWB. Evaluation of residential satisfaction involves "residents' attitude toward their living space" and "feelings of gratification from living in a specific space" (Sirgy, 2012, p. 303). It is argued that sense of place affects the levels of SWB both through its influence on residential satisfaction and evaluations related to quality of life, including social life, and through their affective experiences. Empirical evidence (Li et al., 2023; Ng et al., 2022) demonstrates that individuals with a stronger sense of place experience higher levels of SWB. Since place identity constitutes an aspect of a person's identity, it is expected to influence their affective experiences. Further, how well a place accommodates a person's lifestyle, goals, and expectations (place dependence) is expected to interfere both with their cognitive evaluations of life as a whole or aspects of it, and their daily affective experience given that spatial competence relates to people's physical and psychological well-being (Kaplan, 1983). Moreover, SWB is highly affected by the social relationships people develop with their community (OECD, 2007), but also with their physical environment and social structures (Maricchiolo et al., 2020). This extends SWB beyond the individual level. 'Being well together' involves strong community ties which are among the major social predictors of place attachment (Lewicka, 2011, 2010). Inversely, place attachment may increase the willingness to get involved with the community and the neighbourhood (Shamai, 1991).

## **7. Concluding Remarks**

The study of place and subjective well-being poses a challenge due to the complex and multifaceted nature of these constructs. This paper delves into an analysis that contributes to the enhancement of the conceptual understanding behind this relationship, revealing the mediating role of sense of place. Recently, there has been some empirical research investigating the links between place and SWB through the lenses of sense of place. The novelty of the herein contribution lies in the fact that it theorizes and illustrates in a structured manner the interrelations between place and subjective well-being, acknowledging the mediating role of sense of place. Additionally, it introduces in the discussion the transformative potentials of MSBs in shaping sense of place.

These interrelations require to be further investigated on a theoretical level and to be validated at the empirical level. However, it is argued that the development of this framework marks the first step in contributing to the theoretical debates and expanding the frontiers of knowledge regarding people-place relations in urban planning discourses. This framework may also have various implications for the application and policy making of urban planning. Gehl (1987) underscored the significance of urban planning in curating public spaces conducive to social interaction. Through creating the premises for experiential processes and social engagement, the role of urban planning can be pivotal to the development of individual and collective sense of place over time (Cartel et al., 2022; Erfani, 2022), which in turn can enhance subjective well-being at the individual level and beyond. To achieve this, it is considered imperative that a comprehensive understanding of the spatial dimensions of SWB in cities and urban neighbourhoods is achieved.

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