ARL ACADEMY FOR TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE LEIBNIZ ASSOCIATION

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Place identity

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Place identity manifests itself by means of cognitive-emotive constructs, which represent the identities of spatial objects in people's minds as images and mental maps. These spatial entities are reference points for emotive appropriation (feeling at home, being loyal to a place), which become effective as elements of a person's own identity (ego-identity) and a collective identity (we-identity).

1 Introduction

Identity is one of the most complex concepts in the social sciences and cultural studies. Place identity is a specific variant of this concept and refers to different sub-dimensions or meanings of identity that are interrelated but also require differentiation from an analytical point of view. Various academic fields address these different meanings.

2 Key meanings of identity

Identity in its primary sense is addressed within the disciplines of philosophy and logic. An object or entity X is identical with itself: X = X. Thus, identity is the prerequisite for an entity X to actually be recognised as X and to be distinguishable from other entities. On a cognitive level, the identity of X can be understood as a holistic gestalt quality or analytically as a relational compilation of X's attributes. In one of its variants, the term is used to describe a concept that is central to the discipline of psychology: a person's ego-identity (I-identity, self-identity). Ego-identity is the result of a reflective act of consciousness that is used by individuals to process experiences about their own existence and through which a person's self-image is expressed. Its focus is on the perception of the self's continuity and development (Weichhart/Weiske/Werlen 2006: 34). A person's ego-identity is a reflection of their understanding of themselves and their emotional self-assessment. It provides the subject with answers to questions such as 'Who am I?', 'What kind of person do I want to be?' or 'What is it that makes me special and unique?', which need to be revisited and updated again and again during the course of a person's life. In order to articulate and substantiate this mental model of self in detail, a subject can choose from a wide range of context- and situation-specific characteristics. Of particular importance are factors such as age, gender, personal history, occupation, cultural background, social roles, reference groups, religion or ethnicity. When describing one's own self, an individual may also refer to characteristics that relate to their position in physical space: place of birth, place of residence, spaces for social interaction or spatial-social milieus (Weichhart/Weiske/Werlen 2006; Weichhart 1990). Such biographical constellations in which spatial attachments to significant places are formed can also be seen as the backdrop for developing a cultural identity (Werlen 1992). Depending on the person, the ego-identity's various dimensions may be weighted differently. Their relational structure and significance may also change considerably as the individual's personality evolves.

3 How identity relates to space

For the purpose of illustrating the different spatial dimensions of identity in a consistent way and relating them to each other, this section will use the concept of multiple identity developed by the psychologist Carl Friedrich Graumann (1983) as theoretical background. Graumann differentiates between identity and identification. He considers identification to be a conscious process that refers to three basic operations through which identification takes place. Firstly, identification is defined as the process through which a subject cognitively registers an object by means of perception and recognition. As we engage with the world we recognise certain entities. We identify

them as certain objects and name them. At the same time, we usually ascribe certain attributes to them. This is, as it were, a process of classifying objects. Graumann described this cognitive operation as 'identification of'.

In real-life contexts, such objects may include other people, social circumstances or physical objects. The ubiquitous identifications in our lives naturally also concern spatial objects: settlements, towns and cities, neighbourhoods, regions, countries, etc. Through this mental process of registering an object and expressing it linguistically, we also describe the identity of the object in question. This identity is defined by the entity's location in physical space, its demarcation from other objects and its properties (including emotionally-relevant characteristics). In the context of this identification process, place identity refers to a spatial object being represented emotionally and cognitively in an individual's consciousness or through a group's collective judgement (Weichhart/Weiske/Werlen 2006: 33; Weichhart 1990). To a large extent, this involves social stereotypes which are mediated during the course of socialisation in the form of group- and culture-specific judgement patterns that are then internalised by the individual.

During social interactions, each person also becomes the object of identification as they are identified by others as a particular kind of person. In this case, too, identification refers to the process of ascribing certain attributes that are coupled with social roles and the associated expectations set by the social environment. With regard to these attributes, spatial classification criteria play a role together with many other categories. In Germany for example, being identified as a person from North Germany, Munich, Swabia or East Frisia goes hand in hand with being associated with very specific socio-cultural contexts (Weichhart/Weiske/Werlen 2006: 33; Weichhart 1990). People who are identified in this way may even be assigned certain character traits that are said to be typical of the inhabitants of these places/regions. Graumann describes this passive form of identification as 'being identified'. Thus, place identity can refer to the mental representations of human subjects or persons in an individual's consciousness or through a group's collective judgement. The identified person is ascribed attributes and character traits that can (supposedly) be derived from their position in physical ▷ *Space*. In so doing, assertions are made about aspects of their ego-identity. Again, these assertions are to a large extent based on social stereotypes that persist with great tenacity over time.

According to Graumann, the third meaning of identification can be described as 'identification with': it is not only possible to perceive a certain entity as a particular object, but also to identify oneself *with* a certain object. Points of reference for this form of identification are primarily other people, but may also be abstract ideas, values or even physical and spatial objects found in the world we live in. 'Identification with' means making a given object one's own and relating it in some way to one's own ego-identity. It is a type of appropriation through which the object is assimilated into an element of the subject or construed to be a projection of ego-identity. With regard to the 'identification with' process, place identity refers to the mental representation and emotional evaluation of those elements within our everyday environments that individuals incorporate into their self-concepts or groups into their collective we-concepts.

4 The ontological status of place identity

Place identity is thus a phenomenon that occurs in people's consciousness. The three underlying identification processes are cognitive-emotive operations pertaining to spatial entities. In the terms of Karl Popper's three-world theory (1973: 186 et seq.), the resulting cognitive schemata clearly belong to world 2, the world of mental processes and subjective, conscious experiences. By means of articulation, abstraction and communication, these become elements of world 3, the world of objective ideas or *intelligibilia*. The various facets of place identity are thus projections that refer to the world of physical things and objects (Popper's world 1). Consequently, they must not be regarded as attributes of world 1. In other words, they are not inherent to space. Instead, they represent attributions that exist in people's consciousness and thus must be regarded as personal, social and cultural constructs. This is why it is also necessary to speak of place identity and not spatial identity.

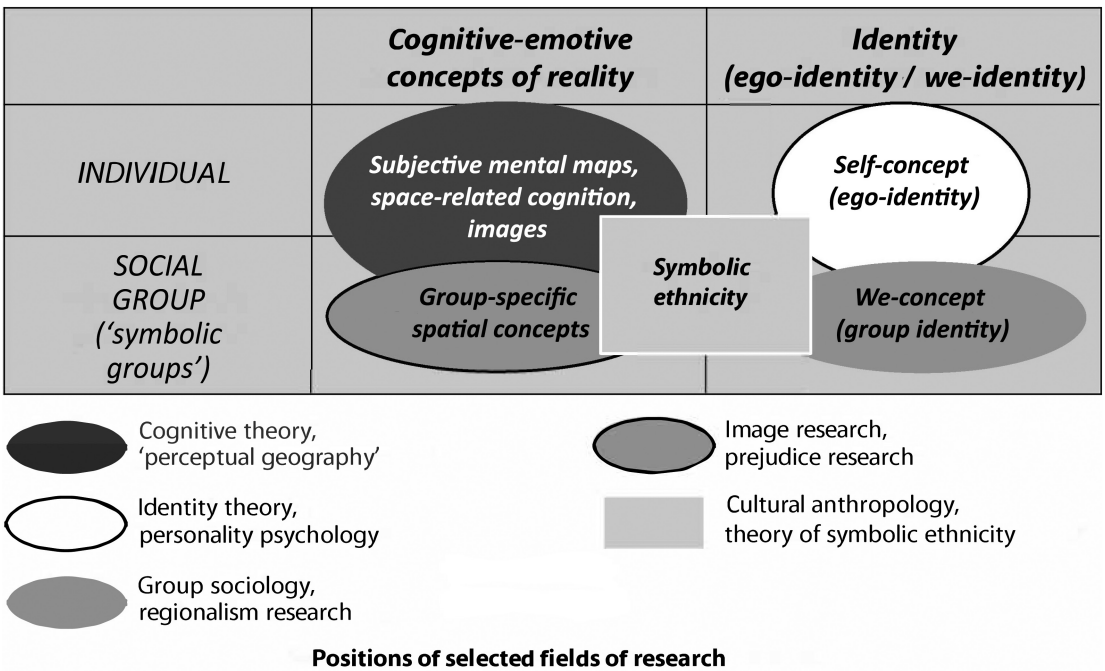
5 Place identity and its relevance for spatial planning

Figure 1 shows the four main dimensions that the research on place identity encompasses.

The phenomenon of place identity refers to both humans as individuals and to social groupings of various kinds, for example small groups, symbolic groups and even social constructs such as ethnic groups or nations (rows in Figure 1). Substantively, this phenomenon firstly includes cognitive-emotive spatial concepts of the world we live in and which result from the first two identification processes. Secondly, it also includes those links between ego- or we-identities and certain spatial entities that result from the 'identification with' process (columns in Figure 1). When discussing identities of spatial objects or places (regions, countries or cities) with regard to concepts of reality, the focus is on how they are perceived by individuals or how they are anchored in a group's collective imagination. This includes all those theoretical approaches that deal with mental maps and the images of spatial entities. In the context of self- and we-concepts, emotional attachments to places as well as the feelings of belonging or being loyal to a place are addressed.

Given the research fields listed here, it should be clear that the phenomenon is undoubtedly highly relevant to spatial planning. Reconstructing and systematically creating spatial images are standard tasks of contemporary spatial planning. On a meta-level, the construction and commercialisation of spatial images is also relevant for the process of spatial planning itself (cf. Blotevogel 2001; Faludi 1996). The communication-based urban and regional development policy (Helbrecht 1994) that is implemented in ▹ *Urban and regional marketing* as well as in stakeholder planning (▹ *Participation*) relies on leveraging precisely those feelings of loyalty and solidarity that arise in the 'identification with' process and can stimulate endogenous potentials for development and creativity.

Figure 1: The main dimensions of place identity research



Source: Weichhart/Weiske/Werlen 2006: 37

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