

The influence of place attachment on community leadership and place management

Community
leadership and
place
management

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to draw on [Seamon's\(2012a, 2012b, 2014, 2015, 2018\)](#) theories on the “processes of place attachment” to understand the influence of place attachment on community leadership and the management of four towns in the Barossa region of South Australia.

Design/methodology/approach – The research methodology combines photo-elicitation, participant observation and in-depth interviews with 12 community leaders across four town groups. [Scamell and Gifford's\(2010\)](#) tripartite model for place attachment is used to segment qualitative interview data to understand the nature of place attachment of community leaders. This was followed by thematic analysis using [Seamon's\(2012a, 2014, 2018\)](#) six processes of place attachment to understand how the dynamics of place attachment as a series of processes interact to influence community leadership and place-based action.

Findings – The research revealed that community leaders in the Barossa region regularly confront a tension between the “Being” and “Becoming” of Place. It also suggests that place attachment for new residents is accelerated by engaging multiple place attachment processes; these can be measured using the research methodology in this study. The result is a tipping point where place leadership from new residents can accelerate towards the “Being of Place” showing a tendency towards protectionist behaviour commonly seen amongst long-term residents.

Research limitations/implications – Testing the findings in this paper in other rural regions and other cultural contexts will add further insight and validation of these findings. It is recommended that future research could further develop this approach through engaging multiple place-based community groups in the same town and across different locations to understand the pattern language of communities with more accuracy.

Practical implications – This study has enabled a deeper understanding of place-based community groups and their motivations to protect the status quo or promote change in the development and management of the place. Each community requires a tailored approach to place management and development to activate community resources and partnerships successfully. This research also provides knowledge on how to accelerate place attachment for new residents to improve their sense of belonging, value and purpose by engaging programs that engage all six place attachment processes.

Social implications – The research reveals that place relations are dynamic, complex and often political. Rural towns display a pattern language for how they engage networks and resources that government needs to understand to engage community stewardship of place – its social, environmental and economic setting. This research offers a method to better understand the pattern language of place attachment that drives community leadership and place management to help communities sustain themselves and adapt to change.



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Originality/value – The research explores the inter-relationship between the place attachment of community leaders and their response to change from different types of community impacts such as bushfires or the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding these processes is valuable in informing place management partnerships between community, business and government.

Keywords Place attachment, Community leadership, Place management, Regional development, South Australia

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper examines the influence of place attachment on community leadership of four town groups in the Barossa Region of South Australia using theoretical processes of place attachment developed by [Seamon \(2012a, 2014, 2015, 2018\)](#). It examines how the complex dynamics of place attachment can influence community leadership and place-based community action in Australian rural towns. Whilst research on place attachment traditionally studies the physical attributes of a place that are subject to attachment by visitors or residents, this research seeks to understand the process of how place attachment forms and changes over time and how it influences community leadership in the management of the place.

The paper applies Seamon's theory on the processes of place attachment to understand how attachment influences the strategic action of community leaders of rural towns in South Australia. In Australia, community groups such as "town groups" or "progress associations" often play a central role in maintaining the social, cultural and economic strength of towns in rural regions. Towns play a vital role as a place for social interaction, a place to generate and activate social capital and a place to anchor personal and social identity ([Rogers and Collins, 2001](#); [Seamon, 2012b](#); [Martin and Budge, 2011](#)). The strategic actions of community leaders, in turn, impact place management and development strategies shaping rural Australia in a way that is not effectively engaged by government-led place management practice ([Heseltine, 2013](#)).

The greatest challenge for place-based community groups in rural Australia is that government policy centralises services, resourcing and decision-making to metropolitan centres ([Eversole, 2016](#)). This limits the ability of community leaders to drive change from within rural regions and necessitates lobbying for resources from the state ([Eversole and Walo, 2019](#)). Furthermore, an amalgamation of local government in Australia in the mid-1990s further increased the competition for public resources from local government, creating frustration amongst community leaders with the level of service provided for community assets such as public spaces and leisure facilities (Hebart, pers. comm. 2014). The local government in Australia equally has had a mixed experience in successfully engaging communities in "ground up" place management practice ([Heseltine, 2013](#); [Sanson et al., 2013a, 2013b](#)). There remains, however, interest in the role of community leadership that can move beyond political lobbying for resources by rural communities. Understanding the motivation and focus of residents choosing to take a place leadership role is an essential first step for place management partnerships driven by communities. Grounding the perspectives of community leadership can be examined using Seamon's framework for analysing the processes of place attachment. Seamon's framework brings knowledge on the processes that shape and anchor community-led action to protect or transform place – a common focus of place management and development. Furthermore, it can assist to make visible the distinctive ways rural communities engage social capital networks and resources to strengthen communities and improve the resilience of towns in regional Australia.

What is place and place attachment?

Place is *any environmental locus in and through which individual or group actions, experiences, intentions and meanings are drawn together spatially* (Casey, 2009; Relph, 1976, cited in Seamon, 2014, p. 11). The physical and social interactions that shape a place and develop a place's character and values, can be understood through theories on place attachment (Ramkissoon *et al.*, 2013). Place attachment shapes the behaviour of individuals to engage in collective action shaping place (Manzo and Perkins, 2006). Individuals who focus their interest on a place most often focus on the overall well-being of place for the community rather than self-interest and this resonates with community activism (Fornara *et al.*, 2020). Social relations and group identity are seen as important foundations for place attachment (Scannell and Gifford, 2010a) and the greater the attachment the increase in pressure and the need to engage decision-making to support place attachment (Han *et al.*, 2019; Hernandez *et al.*, 2010).

Theories of place attachment help understand the human dynamics of place experience and the ways to improve places to make those experiences better. This is the focus of place management and development, yet the link between place attachment and place management has not been given much attention. Place attachment research identifies the human need to seek a sense of belonging, a sense of place and a sense of social and personal identity, which becomes the driver for place-based community-led action (Cresswell, 2004; Entrikin, 1991; Lewicka, 2011; Moore, 2021). This framing is important if communities are to be engaged by government or business in the management and sustainable development of the place.

Research on place and place attachment crosses many disciplines and has long been part of studies focussed on tourism, leisure, architecture, sociology, environmental psychology, philosophy and human geography to name a few. The physical and social interactions that shape a place and develop a place's character and the social and environmental values held by residents, can be examined through the theory on place and place attachment (Manzo and Perkins, 2006; Ramkissoon *et al.*, 2013). Early research methods relied on psychographic analysis (Scannell and Gifford, 2010) and Likert-type scales for evaluating place attachment (Williams and Roggenbuck, 1989). These are, however, criticised for not explaining how place attachment influences people's bonding to place and the changes in that bond over time in response to disruption from experiences such as climate change, the loss of essential community services or enforced displacement from war (Hernandez *et al.*, 2014; Williams, 2014). Seamon (2015) also criticises early studies on place attachment for being focussed on the physical attributes of place itself as a static influence on the qualities of place experienced rather than focus on how people – place relationships form through social processes that constantly change. This point is raised by other place theorists including Creswell (2004), Pred (1984) and Thrift (1997). More recently, place attachment research has examined how the COVID-19 pandemic restructured people's attachment to place by being forced to stay at home and live within the immediate community and how people's presence in the local area revitalised local economies (Devine-Wright *et al.*, 2020). This process, in turn, rebuilds local place attachment, which is important for commuter towns. Research on place and place attachment is relevant for place management and development for this reason. It also helps to better understand the emotional-spatial bond that develops between people and their social-environmental setting shaping people's behaviour to that setting (Brown and Perkins, 1992; Gustafson, 2001; Hildago and Hernandez, 2001; Stedman, 2002; Scannell and Gifford, 2010). Place management and development is about shaping and managing the social-physical environment to improve its function and performance. The vibrancy of the high street, the design of a community centre or the safety of public space

being some examples. [Seamon's \(2012a, 2014, 2018\)](#) theory is framed within the field of architecture and design and such as place management and development, both disciplines engage the emotional-spatial bond between people in place, its environmental ensemble and common presence. The environmental ensemble is the material and environmental qualities of a place that make up its structural configuration. The common presence is the material and lived "togetherness" of place, its genius loci or sense of place. Together these three framings of place shape Seamon's six processes to place attachment, which operates together as a constructive and dynamic process influencing the bonding process of residents to the places they experience in their daily life. This place bonding process is important because it captures the dynamism of decision-making that constantly evaluates changes to social-environmental settings and the reiteration of the bonding process rather than seeing the bond as defined and set in time. The value of this approach, therefore, is not only understanding people's motivation for community-led action but also the constant re-evaluation of spatial circumstances to change that action as required to make place satisfying and with purpose. This extends the work of previous authors ([Mesch and Manor, 1998](#); [Brown et al., 2002](#); [Scannell and Gifford, 2010](#)) by understanding place holistically and pragmatically to account for the dynamic processes of shaping and reshaping the world of places ([Seamon, 2018](#)).

Seamon's theory, therefore, holds practical value in understanding the human-led processes of place management and development as being a constantly evolving process of communities influencing their place, their town or community – its function, aesthetics and performance.

Using place attachment to understand the motivations of community place leaders

Place attachment theory helps to explain why community leaders are willing to invest time and energy into the leadership, management and development of rural towns to make them better.

Towns in the Barossa region, the research focus of this paper, face challenges that are common to many Western societies; some are responding to population decline, others are tempering growth from the influx of new residents from nearby cities and some are challenged by government policy that threatens the architectural fabric, atmospheres and culture of their town or rural locality. As in many rural communities in Australia, community leaders are motivated to respond to disruption or capitalise on opportunities driven by the feeling of responsibility and pride for the well-being of their community.

Place attachment research, however, has not historically focussed on community place leadership or how leaders' place attachment drives the focus of community action. Rather, place attachment research originally focussed on identifying how attributes of physical settings influence resource dependence and Place Identity ([Schreyer et al., 1984](#); [Williams and Roggenbuck, 1989](#); [Moore and Graefe, 1994](#)). Over time, place attachment research progressed to consider the social relations between people and the physical setting in which they operate ([Grocke, 1999](#); [Hidalgo and Hernandez, 2001](#); [Kyle et al., 2004](#); [Scannell and Gifford, 2010](#); [Razem, 2018](#)), but without attention to how place attachment forms and reforms over time to influence the actions of community place leadership.

[Kitayama and Markus \(1994\)](#) laid the groundwork for a focus on place attachment processes by suggesting that place attachment changes are based on a person's experience living in place over time. They distinguished between the place attachment of new and long-term residents: proposing that new residents bond with the physical features of a place and its geography, whereas place attachment of long-term residents is founded on social

relationships. This perspective has been supported by other studies (Hummon, 1992; Cantrill and Senecah, 2001).

Research on place attachment as a dynamic rather than static process (Lewicka, 2011; Korpela, 2012; Devine-Wright, 2014) seeks to understand how people’s bonding to place changes in response to disruption from experiences such as environmental degradation or enforced displacement of refugees (Hernandez *et al.*, 2014; Williams, 2014; Hiruy, 2014). Studies seek to understand the complex dynamics of place attachment in various contexts (Seamon, 2012b; Marshall *et al.*, 2012; Devine-Wright, 2013b; Scannell and Gifford, 2013; Manzo, 2014; Boley *et al.*, 2018; Razem, 2018) yet with little attention to the context of community place leadership or place management and development, even though both are related.

Moore (2021), however, explores the role of place attachment in rural communities as the influence on participation in community land trusts. He identifies that rural communities participate in and influence civic behaviour based on the specific nature of their place attachment. Moore also suggests that place attachment is often used to explain the civic response to disruption (syndrome) but can also be used to explain participation in civic planning and pro-development action in rural communities. Moore’s study introduces the next step in place attachment research that this study also engages – exploring the role and influence of place attachment in motivating rural residents to volunteer in community-led action with the desire to maintain, protect and enhance social and functional bonding to place. Examining complex interactional processes within rural communities brings a better understanding of how communities can use their own internal networks and resources towards place management and development. This becomes important in response to highly variable government leadership and support to facilitate change through a top-down approach to place management and development.

Methodology – researching the processes of place attachment

Seamon’s (2012a, 2014, 2018) six interconnected processes of place attachment provide the conceptual and methodological framework in this paper to understand place attachment as a constructive process in what Seamon calls the “Triadic Interpretation of Place Attachment”. Table 1 provides a short summary of the six processes to place attachment adapted from Seamon (2014, 16–19; 2015, 25–27) to explain the triadic approach.

Place interaction	Being of place			Becoming of place	
	Place identity	Place realisation	Place release	Place creation	Place intensification
Routine actions and behaviours between people in a place that support strong social bonds	Taking up the dominant culture and values of a place to reflect personal identity and self-worth	Place character that reflects its history and cultural context. Nostalgia based on past experiences that support “situatedness”	Deep feelings or a surprise from place encounters that trigger a decision for change	Physical determinism by human action to design or shape place to improve its performance and prosperity	Independent power to use policy or projects to revive, reconfigure and strengthen place prosperity

Table 1.
Triadic interpretation of place attachment (Seamon, 2012a, 2014, 2018)

This interpretation reveals dimensions of human experience to show how place attachment processes tend to associate to form a triad of place attachment, what Seamon (2014, 16–19; 2015, 25–27) refers to as the “Being of Place” or the “Becoming of Place”.

The “Being of Place” refers to place attachment processes that reinforce the status quo. It is demonstrated when three associated place attachment processes predominate – Place Realisation, Place Interaction and Place Identity. These three place attachment processes are about reinforcing “place” as it is currently known: defined by past histories, practices and behaviours that help residents retain an identity associated with traditions.

The “Becoming of Place” refers to place attachment processes that seek to drive change. It is demonstrated when the remaining three of the six place attachment processes predominate – Place Creation, Place Release and Place Intensification. These three place attachment processes are about what a place could become (i.e. through place making) by shaping its physical nature to create situations and experiences that are not present currently or are weak. Thus, Becoming of Place predominates when town groups seek opportunities for an improved future for their town.

Seamon’s (2014, 16–19; 2015, 25–27) Triadic Interpretation of Place was used to analyse qualitative interview data on place attachment for 12 community leaders from four town groups in the Barossa region of South Australia. The case study analysis was used to understand place leadership and community-driven action following Seamon’s triadic framework to understand the balance between the community focus on the Being or Becoming of Place in place management initiatives.

Place leadership in the Barossa region of South Australia

The Barossa region has numerous towns within 7–15 km of each other; most have place-based community groups including local history groups, natural resource management groups and town groups. Town groups, which are the focus of this study, commonly focus on community infrastructure and services that improve the public life of towns. Town groups in the Barossa region are driven by two to three community leaders supported by a membership of 30–70 residents who drive place-based action such as community fundraising, political advocacy, place-making projects and local destination marketing to contribute to their town’s vibrancy and sense of community.

The scope of this study was four town groups, evenly spread across the Barossa Council. Each group is a not-for-profit organisation managed through a community committee. The four groups are:

- (1) Southern Barossa Community Alliance: a sub-regional community and business group representing the townships of Lyndoch and Williamstown;
- (2) Mt Pleasant Progress Association: a community-led town group that represents the township and environs of Mt Pleasant;
- (3) Nuriootpa Futures Association: a community-led town group that serve residents and businesses in the 5355 postcodes; and
- (4) Angaston Community and Business Alliance Incorporated: a community-led town group for the township Angaston.

Data collection

Three community leaders from each of the four town groups were identified to participate in the study. Leaders were selected based on the degree of involvement in their community,

and for being recognised within their community as instrumental in activating and delivering ideas to transform, protect or improve their town or locality.

A process called photo-elicitation (Tonge *et al.*, 2013) was used to prime in-depth interviews. Photo elicitation positions respondents as the producers, creators and directors of the visuals encountered during the research process and facilitates the connection between the researcher and the respondent to produce shared knowledge (Scarles, 2011) and emotional depth (Tonge *et al.*, 2013). A central objective of this approach is to understand the social meaning given to objects, actions and events and the way in which these meanings reflect, reiterate and renegotiate wider social discourses and cultures (Atkinson *et al.*, 2001).

Each leader was asked to provide a minimum of five photos or images of places or experiences of where they live that brought meaning to their life or held value or purpose. The objective was to allow the participant to select an image to talk about their connection to the image and why it was important to them. Photo elicitation empowered participants to direct the discussion on the place and their attachment to place during the interview. The participant-led approach was then supplemented with five-set questions at the end of the interview. Images selected included photos, a book cover and framed paintings or objects that often had a story that articulated the participant's connection to place. Some images and artifacts were about the physical environment that shaped respondent's lives and many related to social processes that connected the respondent to a place, often a connection that endured over time in the face of change.

The photo-elicitation process was chosen to minimize the direct influence of the researcher and allow the participant to communicate information on their own terms by choosing the image and driving the discussion on the meaning behind the image.

The interviewer's own role as an economic development practitioner, working across the Barossa region to facilitate place management partnerships, has assisted observation of community leaders and their town group over nine years. This assisted to contextualise the data collected from the 12 respondents, particularly in observing each town group's activities in response to change including bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data analysis

The data captured in the photo-elicitation process were classified according to the components of place attachment identified by Scannell and Gifford (2010), namely, person, place and psychological process, which have been widely adopted by other place attachment researchers (Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2014). Seamon's (2012a, 2014, 2018) "Six Processes of Place Attachment" was then used as a second stage thematic analysis to categorise and explore the cluster of primary cognitions, behaviours and feelings expressed in the voice-recorded data as they relate to each of the six place attachment processes.

Classifying the voice-recorded data from each interview using Scannell and Gifford's (2010) tripartite model for place attachment (Figure A) was a practical method to disaggregate a large volume of qualitative data into data sheets to better understand the nature of place attachment generally for each community leader interviewed. Whilst Scannell and Gifford refer to processes in their model, it does not consider person and place as processual in and of themselves, which is considered a weakness of this model (Devine-Wright, 2014), hence why Seamon's approach is applied as a second stage thematic analysis of the data sheets to capture "situatedness" of place experience – the place attachment processes as they interact as a complex whole with other place attachment processes.

Each topic of conversation recorded using a field microphone was transcribed then thematically coded based on the primary cognition, emotion or behaviour captured in the voice-recorded interview data. The data were then numerically coded to correspond with the

dominant place attachment process expressed based on Seamon’s six processes to place attachment. Data were from each interview were then reviewed and moderated after all interviews were completed to ensure consistency of interpretation. A second group interview was conducted and involved three community place leaders from the same town group. This was to further explore place-based action as a negotiated response influenced by place attachment processes of all three community leaders and the overall balance between the Being or Becoming of Place.

This approach was a practical means to explore place attachment and identify the predominant place leadership focus in response to disruption, change or opportunity between each town and the distinctiveness of place management action.

Results – the influence of place attachment on community leadership

The interview data for each of the four town groups are summarised in Table 2 to demonstrate characteristics of place attachment for each town group and the balance between the “Being” and “Becoming” of place. Table A1 in the appendix details the primary data collection template in support of Table 2 that allows a phenomenological lens to examine the balance of place attachment elements of each community leader, which influences as a collective, the action of each town group in the Barossa region. Examining whole systems of experience using Seamon’s Triadic Interpretation of Place allows a symbolic interactionist approach to compare the experience of community leaders of the same town group and other town groups to investigate the pattern language of place attachment and leadership in each town and the Barossa region overall. Table 2 shows the total number of responses recorded from all three leaders interviewed from each town group as they relate to the six place attachment processes. The higher the number the greater the role or relevance of that place attachment process to the lives of community leaders, which influences the focus of place leadership and community-led action.

Table 2, for example, shows the importance of Place Interaction, an attachment process that is restricted during COVID-19 lockdowns that could have a negative long-term effect on place attachment if restrictions continue. Table 2 also shows the high level of response to Place Realisation for three town groups. This shows the level to which residents are aware of the qualities of the place they live, and I would suggest the higher the number the more protective they are about those qualities based on the context of the interview content recorded. For two town groups, a high response rate for Place Intensification indicates that place management policy by the government that impacts the quality of place experience was of significant concern.

Case Study Group	Being of place			Total	Becoming of place			Total
	Place interaction	Place identity	Place realisation		Place release	Place creation	Place intensification	
Nuriootpa Futures Association	25	19	21	65	11	18	11	40
Angaston Community and Business Alliance	31	18	26	75	12	10	24	46
Southern Barossa Alliance	32	17	21	70	15	16	16	47
Mt Pleasant Progress Association	27	11	14	52	13	13	25	51

Table 2. Triadic interpretation of place attachment and leadership

Interview data also captured the role of place leadership including trust, networks and using knowledge and skills to make places better or protect the qualities of place that are important to residents:

Mount Pleasant Progress Association, Interview 3: “If you live here long enough you know who to go to, what group and what they can do”.

Angaston Community and Business Alliance, Interview 3 – “Lots of people are happy to follow if there is a good leader”.

Nuriootpa Futures Association, Interview 2 – “I am older, I have been here a whilst [on the committee for 20 years], it just happens. You have got to lead, have a profile and people can trust what you are doing”.

Mount Pleasant Progress Association, Interview 1 –

I guess seeing the potential and knowing you have got the experience and skills to make a difference. There is an obligation to your community to use your skills and help bring things together!

Across the four town groups studied, all but one group showed a dominance of the “Being” of place as a primary motivation of place leadership and community-led action. For three groups, there was evidence of numerous place attachment processes that value and reinforce the maintenance of the status quo anchored by existing Place Identity and history. At the same time, other processes associated with the “Becoming” of the place were also present in these groups – the need for change in the town to attract tourism, for example, or the need to advocate for change in place management practice to allow the local community to be solely responsible for public asset management. Whilst these place processes exist, they do not dominate the focus of community action which was towards heritage protection and retaining public events that hold onto cultural traditions. The Mt Pleasant Progress Association, however, was the only town to demonstrate a close balance in the number of topics discussed in the interview focussed between the Being and Becoming of place, which was evidenced by the tension about the Association’s strategic direction influenced by a mix of new and multi-generational residents with different perspectives on the town’s future.

Within each town group, there was variation across leadership in terms of their length of residency. Of the 12 community leaders interviewed, only three were multi-generational residents. Three were long-term residents of more than 20 years, four were medium-term residents of more than 10 years and two were short-term residents of less than 10 years. It was initially hypothesised that one of the sources of tension in these town groups could be between the place attachment of long-term residents (who might be expected to support the Being of Place) and the place attachment of new residents (who might be expected to champion change and the Becoming of Place) (Kitayama and Markus, 1994). The analysis of the data, however, demonstrated no conclusive link between the length of residency and focus on the “Being” or “Becoming” of Place, only political tension if the balance between the two positions was evenly split.

Examining the influence of each place attachment process, Place Interaction was clearly the most dominant process. Place Interaction referred to the process of social interaction and social bonding, which was a key process of place attachment for community leaders. Community leaders who identified to have a strong attachment through Place Interaction were long-term or multi-generational residents. This supports the findings of Cantrill and Senecah (2001), Hummon (1992) and Kitayama and Markus (1994) who identified place attachment of long-term residents is founded on social relationships.

Other dominant processes in these groups were Place Realisation: understanding what could be gained or lost and Place Intensification: engaging action to transform place through

policy and government programming. These three processes were emphasised most frequently in the interviews and appeared to be particularly influential in creating and maintaining place attachment through community action.

Place Identity did have a role for members of all town groups, but was far less of a driver for action, possibly because it was a less understood cognitive influence and was subordinate to other more immediate place attachment processes influencing respondent behaviour. Place Creation processes were less significant than expected, which reflects the dominance of government control over place-making projects in each town. Place Release or the experience of place as satisfying and fulfilling was the least influential place attachment process. Arguably, if Place Release was dominant, then there would be much less of a reason to participate in a town group to drive action for change.

Processes of place attachment influencing place management and development

The analysis identified that certain processes of place attachment were particularly influential in the leadership of place-based town groups. These processes were not fixed but balance such as scales that constantly move to reflect the change in place threats or opportunities that influence the qualities of place experienced by community leaders. In turn, this shapes place leadership and community action in response to that change. This dynamic is strongest during a critical social incident (Hiruy, 2014) such as COVID-19 or bushfires threatening Place Interaction and Place Realisation, that are identified in this study as strong drivers for community action.

The tension between the Being and Becoming of Place is also witnessed when place management partnerships change the social-physical and cultural fabric of a place that shapes Place Identity and Belonging. In the case of Mt Pleasant, the Progress Association was seeking greater engagement of local government in the co-creation and management of the town hall and civic park. The Being and Becoming of Place in Mt Pleasant at the time of data collection showed close tension. Some community leaders and residents were lobbying for greater co-management of community facilities with the local government to improve service quality. Others preferred to maintain the status quo to avoid a loss of control by incumbent user groups who through historical relationships had priority access to community facilities.

For the Southern Barossa Alliance, community action was a mix between lobbying for the redevelopment of sports facilities by new clubs servicing the demands of a younger population and older sports clubs protecting their traditional access to sporting facilities where they had exclusive use. The Southern Barossa Alliance represented the interests of two towns; bringing them together to address common issues was complicated by historical differences in managing community assets and negotiating which town was to receive priority for investment. The Alliance played the role of advocate and facilitator for other smaller community groups.

We would like council to engage us in making day to day decisions to help the community prosper. Volunteers [of small interest groups] are not paid to be persistent when it comes to place management.

For the Nuriootpa Future Association, the focus was the renovation of a heritage-listed homestead that belongs to the community and debate about its sale to reduce the Association's liability and debt. Long-term residents wanted the Association to keep the homestead as a community asset that was core to the town's history and identity, whilst

new residents could see the potential value of the sale to fund new place development initiatives for Nuriootpa.

Protecting what a place has, that is core to the social and cultural identity of residents or working to realise a place's potential and what it could bring in terms of prosperity for residents, is the underlying theme common across all town groups studied. A clear relationship exists between the place attachment of residents and their drive to lead place management. Action, however, is not driven by one individual but negotiated and heavily influenced by multiple community leaders who together lead, resist or negotiate place management initiatives with government and industry sectors. The data confirm observations that the greater the number of responses by community leaders of the same town group across all six-place attachment processes (either for the Being or Becoming of Place) the more passionate and driven that town groups are towards place management and development.

For example, the Angaston Community and Business Alliance have a well understood and widely agreed set of place management objectives and priorities. All community leaders interviewed in Angaston were cognizant of the value of the town's heritage and ambience for the vitality of the main street and to become a successful tourism destination. Strong place leadership to protect the town's character was evidenced by a high number of responses supporting the Being of Place evidenced by community-led action focussed on heritage protection and interpretation to retain Place Identity.

We had a high profile in the Community, been doing it for 10-12 years and the town felt part of it [Community operated Blacksmith Shop]. There was a sense of ownership since the 1980s. We ended getting 400 individual donors – it was a really good community response. [fundraising to buy the Blacksmith Shop as a tourism attraction].

Analysis of the data highlights that the length of residency has less influence on community leadership than the strength of place attachment. Two short-term resident leaders have engaged all six place attachment processes and a high degree of response focussed on the Being of Place ([Appendix](#)). Interview data shows an accelerated attachment to the community as a result of intensive participation in multiple community activities in a short period of residency. This suggests that the more place attachment processes a resident engages through their participation in everyday community life, the greater the motivation to not only lead community action but also to show a balance towards the Being of Place more common to long-term and multi-generational residents who are protective of the status quo.

(New Resident) – “I say I live in the Barossa Bubble and I like living in the Barossa Bubble that ends at the (Sturt) highway. [...] If there is one-thing I could change it would be to preserve that [Barossa Bubble] as it is getting a bit eroded as the world is slowly creeping in, but it is that authenticity and people appreciate that.”

Previous research on place attachment ([Williams and Roggenbuck, 1989](#); [Lewicka, 2011](#); [Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2014](#)) suggests that long-term or multi-generational residents are more attached and more resistant to change, and therefore, show place protection behaviours common to the Being of Place. This may be true, and this study does not provide conclusive evidence otherwise. The case study does suggest that people of any length of residency can engage all place processes to a level that accelerates place attachment to show the same behaviour as long-term residents.

Implications for place management and development practice

The challenge faced by town groups studied in this research paper is how to improve the economic performance, social and physical fabric of their town whilst also acknowledging

the distinctive character values that residents appreciate. Becoming more aware of the people – place dynamics within town groups can help governments to understand the distinctiveness of place management partnerships shaped by community relations.

The results of this study demonstrate how place attachment processes can be a strong mechanism for community-led action and how participation in place management and development itself engages the processes of place attachment, strengthening resident identity, belonging and purpose. [Table 3](#) summarises important implications for place management practice as each place attachment process is associated with a driver that can impact positively or negatively on the quality of life in a place.

The extension of understanding the processes of place attachment in the management of the place is the role of place leadership by residents to manage place ([Beer and Clower, 2014](#); [Beer et al., 2019](#)). Place leadership was raised during the interview of the Southern Barossa Alliance –

Place attachment process	Driver of concern	Impact on place	Place risk or loss	Place management mitigation strategy
Place Interaction	Sociability	Engaging social networks to access resources supports ongoing social interaction reaffirming place attachment and purpose	Smaller network results in a greater risk of network disconnection or collapse leading to social loss and isolation	Invest in and support accessible places and organisations for people to meet, gather and socialise
Place Identity	Belonging	Reinforces sense of identity and self-worth	Loss of social groups that bring familiarity which provides personal security and meaning	Invest in and support heritage and cultural practice that recognises the past and gives the context for the present
Place Release	Sense of place	Sustaining the qualities that give “zest” to a place	Decline in appeal of a place through loss of ambience and vigour	Engage events and celebrations that bring spontaneity and creativity
Place Realisation	Nostalgia	Activating historical knowledge and skills to create a palpable presence of place	Loss of distinctive place character and story	Storytelling and activation of encounters that capture the past and present character of a place
Place Creation	Physical determinism	Place activation that improves the quality of physical space, its encounter and presence	Disconnection to place due to poor physical quality and absence of character that defines the place	Engage community in the co-creation of physical spaces to activate character, ambience and ownership of space
Place Intensification	Spatial strengthening	Strengthening place through policy and strategy that engages community knowledge, resources and networks	Investment in place that does not recognise the distinctiveness of people-place relations understood by residents. Poor policy or strategy impact	Engage community in the co-management of place and policy to empower local stewardship of public spaces and allied resources

Table 3. Place management strategies to support resident place attachment

Council can't do everything. At the end of the day, we still have a role to drive our own community. One of our roles is to be the voice of the community and [make] decisions with a fluid process.

Place leadership is shaped by place attachment processes that work together to sustain community action that reinforces place leadership in a cyclical process that engages the triad of “people in place”, “environmental ensemble” and “common presence” as outlined by [Seamon \(2018\)](#). Government involvement in place management and development can advance by understanding this triadic interpretation of place attachment shaping community leadership and the orientation between the Being and Becoming of Place.

Conclusion

This paper explores the dynamics of community leadership and place-based action within four town groups in the Barossa region of South Australia. Seamon's work on the “Triadic Interpretation of Place” reveals the motivation behind community place leadership and how town groups oscillate between protectionism (“Being of Place”) and driving change (“Becoming of Place”) depending on the nature of place attachment influencing leadership and community action. This knowledge can assist external policy actors to gain an appreciation of what makes each town distinctive in managing the place and to avoid space-blind approaches to community partnerships that ignore distinctive community relationships that shape successful place management programmes.

Community resilience begins through empowering rural communities to activate place leadership to respond beyond the capacity of government-led services which are limited. This approach supports the principal findings of [Heseltine \(2013\)](#) and [McKinley \(2013\)](#) in developing sustainable place management partnerships in regional Australia that build social capital resources and networks within and between communities that align a common motivation to improve or protect the values of the place. This process of place building and reinforcing resident and community identity through community action will itself reinforce place attachment. This sustains the drive for residents to participate in and lead place management and development longer term. Place attachment is the motivation for sustainable community action. Understanding its dynamics through Seamon's “Triadic Interpretation of Place” is the key to strengthening communities to become active guardians of a place, its environmental and social qualities and to build and sustain people and place prosperity.

This research is the first time Seamon's approach to place attachment has been applied to understand place management and development. This study has enabled a deeper understanding of place-based community groups and their motivations to protect the status quo or promote change in the development and management of the place. Further, this study has highlighted significant differences within and across communities in a single local region. Each community requires a tailored approach to place management and development to activate community resources and partnerships successfully.

This research also provides knowledge on how to accelerate place attachment for new residents to improve their sense of belonging, value and purpose by engaging programs that engage all six place attachment processes.

It is recommended that future research could further develop this approach through engaging multiple place-based community groups in the same town and across different locations and cultural settings, to test and confirm these findings.

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Appendix. The number of topics identified from in-depth interviews of community leaders that correspond to each place attachment process.

Town group	Length of residency ^{***}	Being of place			Becoming of place			Place intensification #	
		Place interaction	Place identity	Place realisation @	Place release	Place creation			
<i>Nuriootpa Futures Association</i>									
Respondent 1	M	4	5	7	16	5	5	2	12
Respondent 2*	MG	14	7	11	32	4	8	5	17
Respondent 3	L	7	7	3	17	2	5	4	11
Total		25	19	21	65	11	18	11	40
<i>Angaston Community and Business Alliance</i>									
Respondent 1	MG	10	7	9	26	5	2	4	11
Respondent 2*	MG	13	4	8	25	3	5	18	26
Respondent 3	S	8	7	9	24	4	3	2	9
Total		31	18	26	75	12	10	24	46
<i>Southern Barossa Alliance</i>									
Respondent 1*	L	13	9	3	25	4	3	9	16
Respondent 2	S	8	4	13	25	8	5	1	14
Respondent 3	M	11	4	5	20	3	8	6	17
Total		32	17	21	70	15	16	16	47
<i>Mt Pleasant Inc.</i>									
Respondent 1*	L	11	6	5	22	3	5	14	22
Respondent 2	M	7	2	6	15	7	1	5	13
Respondent 3	M	9	3	3	15	3	7	6	16
Total		27	11	14	52	13	13	25	51
Total for all three groups		115	65	82	262	51	57	76	184

Table A1.
Triadic interpretation of four place-based town groups in the Barossa

Notes: ***S – short, L – long, M – medium, MG – multi-generational. *identify the most active primary leader of the group. It shows the number of interview responses from these leaders is the highest for all three leaders interviewed from each town group. This matched participant observation of place leadership in action. The table shows the value of the Triadic Interpretation of Place in identifying the primary place leader

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