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## Abstract

Place attachment is composed of functional and psychological bonds that people establish with the near spatial context, from home to the local neighborhood. This spatial context is formed by a physical, architectural dimension, and by social and emotional links. The types of place attachment vary with the characteristics of individuals, households, and spatial contexts. Place attachment develops over time and is related to concepts of home stability and security. On the other hand, after the global financial crisis, job precariousness has spread out and has led to a growing uncertainty in households' lives, as well as housing insecurity—particularly in the most fragile households, which are dependent on the difficulties of housing markets that raise fears of losing one's home.

As progressive dismantling of public welfare continues, place attachment is more necessary than ever before because fragile households can be helped by family and social networks. Thus, place attachment is not only a consequence of housing stability, but increasingly a prerequisite to social sustainability. This chapter address the paradox of the increasing need for place attachment while public welfare declines, resulting in housing insecurity. The chapter will analyze also how this paradox introduces a new dimension of social and spatial inequality between people, leading to place attachment developing as a commodity as opposed to a social resource. An empirical exploration will be made using the European Quality of Life Survey, which considers the sociocultural heterogeneity of Europe

## Place Attachment: Personal Perceptions Subject to Social Regularities

Researchers on place attachment discuss how people develop positive links with the places they live in. Three fundamental concepts appear in the former sentence: attachment, place, and people. Our contribution will deal, above all, with the third one—

people. Particularly, this chapter illuminates how people of diverse social, demographic, economic, or even national backgrounds experience different degrees of place attachment.

People interact with various territorial contexts throughout their daily activities and routines. The main ones are the home and the neighborhood. Of course, we usually carry out most of our biological functions at home. Whereas in the past people used home more intensively, the domestic sphere has been spreading spatially in modern times. It is increasingly common to enjoy second homes or to go to a recurring destination to spend weekends and holidays. Multi-residence and multi-local living are concepts that embrace these developments. New family forms put into question the consistency of the home sphere. For example, many children of divorcées live in two parental houses. On the other hand, many young people and many recently arrived immigrants share their dwellings with unfamiliar or even unknown persons. In these cases, they probably do not call their dwellings 'home'.

Something similar has happened with what we used to call neighborhoods. Recent changes to our mobility patterns, fluctuations in the activities we carry out, and the changing structure of our cities have put into question the spatial range of our familiar surroundings. Places are now open meeting points of different interactions rather than closed, bounded spaces ([Creswell, 2004](#)). Therefore, trying to define what the 'place' to which we are attached is may be difficult. It depends on the characteristics of each person, on the activities he or she performs, on the historical moment they live in and on the current stage of their life cycle. It makes sense that people who have lived in or traveled to more places throughout their life may experience, if not less, a more complex and multifaceted attachment ([Gustafson, 2002](#)). For instance, migrants may feel that they are more emotionally connected to their birthplaces than their place of residence. On the other hand, people that move frequently, since they are more likely to have been renters, might not have developed an attachment to all their places of residence.

Thus, place attachment is a subjective perception as much as a social behavior that, from a scientific point of view, is of interest to environmental psychologists, social and cultural geographers, sociologists, demographers, or architects. This attachment may be a feeling, similar to when a hiker walks through their favorite natural spot once again, but often relates to the presence of a group of people that is appreciated by the individual: family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, or study mates. In short, we feel

attachment for a community (family, neighborhood) with whom we share a physical location (housing, district of the city). In English, both the word 'home' and the 'neighborhood' concept perfectly fit the two dimensions described. On another level, we can also feel attachment to a country and the human group that inhabits it ([Laczko, 2005](#)). This is the emotional foundation of nationalism. In addition, place attachment can include past or far away locations as well. Thus, no two individuals feel the same degree of place attachment in relation to the same physical and social contexts.

However, this diversity is not chaotic and we can look for some kind of rationality that governs it ([Lewicka, 2011](#)). If place attachment is an individual feeling, the person is the optimal scale to approach it from a socioeconomic point of view. The important thing is that differences in how place attachment is felt are not random. They correspond to objective individual features, such as age, sex, household position, social level, migratory status, and tenure of the dwelling, among others.

The analysis of the heterogeneity<sup>1</sup> of place attachment behavior benefits from the exploration of data that connects a subjective measure of place attachment with socioeconomic variables, beyond personality or psychological factors. When this data is available, through large-sample survey microdata, we can move from individual data to population generalizations. The move to a quantitative perspective can provide explanations that are essential for the development of social policy. Adding an international comparative dimension, as in the case of this contribution, is of paramount interest.

### **A Comparative Measure of Place Attachment in Europe**

Large sociodemographic surveys have been developed in Europe. These surveys enable comparisons between European countries, particularly in the European Union (EU), which represents the study area. The European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) is the best choice for the purpose of this work since it is carried out regularly in 33 European countries, including all EU members (28). An EU think tank, the Eurofound, is responsible for carrying out the survey and the last edition was in 2016.<sup>2</sup> Remarkably, it includes a wide range of subjective questions on personal circumstances and welfare policy issues. There is one question about satisfaction with housing and another on satisfaction with the local area. One departs from the assumption that these two questions assess the intensity of place attachment at the individual level, contributing to the ongoing methodological debate ([Lewicka, 2011](#)). The respondents have to give a score between 1

(very dissatisfied) and 10 (very satisfied) regarding satisfaction with their dwelling and with the neighborhood (local area). Using these rates, one can calculate average indicators of satisfaction for any relevant social category and compare them.

The survey's sample (30,809 respondents) is representative at the EU and national scales. National versions share questionnaires and methodological procedures. Researchers can look for EU aggregate trends and intra-country differences in behavior, but also analyze inter-country divergence.

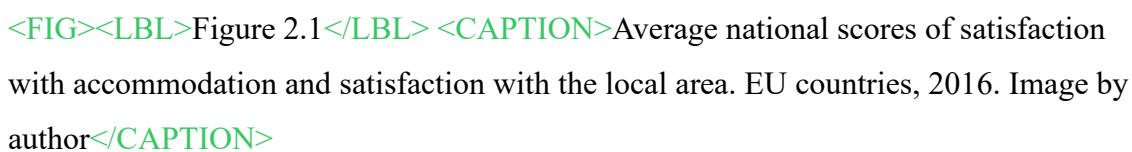
The literature on place attachment has guided the selection of the sociodemographic and socioeconomic variables for the analysis. Sex and age are, of course, fundamental variables. Household position, migration status, commuting time, employment status, and educational level complete the individual profile. At the same time, the research has explored certain characteristics of the household level that, according to the literature, are also important to explain place attachment—household structure, tenure of the dwelling, and household income. Unfortunately, the EQLS survey does not have any question on the length of residence, which the literature finds as one of the most explanatory factors of place attachment. This factor will be partially subsumed by other variables: housing tenure, age, type of household, or migratory condition.

Since the survey includes questions about the quality of housing and neighborhoods, it is possible to explore if place attachment correlates with the physical features of residential environments. Additionally, the survey contains data about the frequency of contact with the family network, friends, and neighbors, which are the central social dimensions behind place attachment. Previous works on place attachment, such as contributions from Latin America, stress its relationship with housing vulnerability ([Pinto & Cornejo, 2018](#)). They assume that place attachment promotes the long-term survival of the most disadvantaged social groups. The research also investigates this idea in order to see if housing security and place attachment interact. For this purpose, an EQLS question captures the subjective risk of losing home for economic reasons in the following six months.

### **Heterogeneity of Place Attachment in European Union Countries**

The average rating of European Union residents' satisfaction with their houses is 7.7 (out of 10) and of satisfaction with their neighborhoods is 7.8. These are relatively high scores, which confirm recurrent results of the literature ([Lewicka, 2011](#)). The average

accommodation satisfaction score is the same as in the 2012 wave of EQLS ([Glatzer et al., 2015](#)). Indeed, people tend to be quite satisfied with the place where they live, quite steadily over time.

However, the aim of this contribution is to explore the heterogeneity behind these average scores. Twenty-one percent of cases rated housing satisfaction poorly—below 7 out of 10. Regarding neighborhood attachment, 21 percent of people also value their neighborhood below 7. The fact that the percentage of individuals dissatisfied with both housing and neighborhood is the same suggests that people tend to be similarly satisfied with both dimensions. This confirms that housing and neighborhood are interconnected dimensions of place attachment. In 72 percent of cases, both ratings are identical or similar (one-point difference at the most). In 43 percent, they match exactly. 

**<FIG><LBL>Figure 2.1</LBL> <CAPTION>Average national scores of satisfaction with accommodation and satisfaction with the local area. EU countries, 2016. Image by author</CAPTION>**

**<ATTRIB>Source: European Quality of Life Survey 2016 data</ATTRIB></FIG>**

[Figure 2.1](#) shows the relationship between average housing and neighborhood satisfaction scores at the national scale. As a preliminary conclusion, heterogeneity between countries is higher than the heterogeneity found later by this research between socioeconomic categories. The institutional context, the policy traditions, the housing system, as well as the historical vicissitudes of the housing stock and of the urban developments are different in every single nation, even region, of Europe. National, and even in some cases regional, governments continue to have exclusive policy competences on housing and urbanism. These two policy fields are not included in the common social or economic policies of the European Union. This contextual heterogeneity can determine differences among but also within nations in the intensity and factors related with place attachment. Each country context strongly influences, for all its residents, both residential and neighborhood satisfaction. For instance, the socioeconomic development of the country relates positively to the average housing satisfaction showed by its inhabitants.

Indeed, Northern and Western European countries have the highest satisfaction scores, whereas Eastern and Southern countries have the lowest. In relation to housing satisfaction rate, out of the 14 countries of the EU that are below the European average, nine are part of Eastern Europe and three of Southern Europe. Of the 14 countries remaining of the 28, only five are from Eastern or Southern Europe. Regarding

neighborhood satisfaction, the regional hierarchy of countries is not so rigid. Out of the 14 countries with the lowest scores, six are from Eastern Europe and four from Southern Europe. Out of the 14 countries with the best scores, five are from Eastern or Southern Europe. In fact, old cultural differences among countries, besides deep differences in systems of values and representations of the world, are also important to explain international differences. Although EQLS data do not allow exploring these macrostructures, it remains an open field for further analysis.

Housing satisfaction and neighborhood satisfaction diverge in Eastern European countries. The five countries with the largest gap are in Eastern Europe. Normally these countries report low housing satisfaction and higher neighborhood satisfaction. The Baltic countries and Poland are clear examples. In this region, the development of place attachment as a joint experience at different spatial levels is, at best, difficult.

The internal deviation of scores around averages is higher in Eastern European countries, which have the weakest political and welfare systems. Socioeconomic variables are analyzed later, but it can be anticipated that the socioeconomic heterogeneity of place attachment is also the strongest in Eastern countries. On the contrary, two countries show quite a low internal deviation of scores: Finland and the Netherlands, two of the most advanced and egalitarian countries in Europe. It is evident that the higher the internal social equality the stronger the place attachment will be and the lower the internal heterogeneity. To sum up, any analysis of place attachment in Europe has to be focused on a national perspective.

### **Place Attachment, Housing, and Neighborhood Problems**

After introducing and discussing the meaning and measurement of place attachment, an important question emerges. Does the perception of place satisfaction correspond to the existence of real problems in the house or in the neighborhood? In other words, how important are the physical aspects in the social—physical equation of place attachment ([Stedman, 2003](#))? This issue can be approached while using questions of the EQLS survey about problems in the house and neighborhood ([Fornara et al. 2009](#); [Harlan et al. 2005](#)). Once again it is important to consider that the respondents' answers are subjective views and should not be considered as objective measures of real problems. Nevertheless, it may be interesting to contrast both types of responses.

Europeans do not find many problems in their homes, as seen in [Table 2.2](#) (below). In fact, only 5 percent find many or too many structural problems in their

dwellings, while 24 percent report some problems and an overwhelming 71 percent do not report any problems. It is important to take into account that the survey asks about serious problems. In fact, the survey measures the quality of the building itself. For instance, the survey does not ask about the dwelling's functionality for the household. Instead, the functionality assessment of the dwelling is captured in the question on housing satisfaction. On the other hand, regarding the neighborhood, the survey does ask questions about functionality: safety, services, etc.

There is a negative correlation between residential satisfaction and the perception of problems. The average of residential satisfaction decreases as the problems reported grow. This is true for both dimensions of place attachment (house and neighborhood), but particularly for the first. Nevertheless, while intense, correlation between satisfaction and perception of problems is not perfect. Some 22 percent of people are poorly attached to their houses (<7 points) and, at the same time, they do not declare any physical or structural problems. Thus, we find some incongruence in the answers—many dislike their houses, even though they have no structural or physical problems. Regarding the neighborhood, the incoherence between satisfaction and problems is even greater. Around 24 percent of individuals have incongruent opinions, more or less equally in both directions.

Do all the countries of the European Union have the same level of coherence between place attachment and perception of problems? In general, in the Nordic and Western countries, place attachment is more consistent with the number of problems in the dwelling or in the neighborhood. As said, Eastern and Southern countries are more internally diverse, and again show a notable incoherence between satisfaction and perception of problems. Particularly in these countries, it is important to focus on other elements, beyond the actual problems of the dwelling or neighborhood, to understand place attachment.

### **Exploring the Socioeconomic Profile of Place Attachment in the European Union**

Although most of the heterogeneity of the European population in terms of place attachment can be explained by the country of residence, a socioeconomic profile of place attachment is still well defined. [Table 2.1](#) shows average scores for a set of social and demographic factors at the EU aggregate level for the two dimensions of place attachment, housing and neighborhood. Surprisingly, some variables, such as age and sex, are not relevant. Their heterogeneity is not significant when there is control for other

socioeconomic or residential variables. Men and women show quite similar levels of place attachment. Place attachment scores grow slowly with age, but this trend is partially explained by the exposure of young individuals to unfavorable housing or income positions. In addition, age has a positive influence on the length of residence that in turn, according to the literature,<sup>3</sup> influences housing and neighborhood satisfaction.

<TABLE-WRAP><LBL>Table 2.1</LBL> <CAPTION>Average scores of place attachment by main socioeconomic factors.</CAPTION>

<TABLE>Satisfaction with ...			Satisfaction with ...			
			Neigh			
			Housi	borho	Neigh	
			ng	od	ng	
<b>Age</b>	18-34	7,5	7,6	<b>Tenure</b>	Owner, outright	
	35-64	7,7	7,8		Owner, mortgage	
	65+	7,9	7,9		Other	
<b>Sex</b>	Female	7,7	7,8	<b>Settlement</b>	Tenant, private	
	Male	7,7	7,7		Tenant, social	
					7,1      7,2	
<b>Household</b>			Countryside/ Small			
<b>Id</b>		8,0	8,0	<b>Condition</b>	7,8      7,9	
	Couple					
	Couple w/children	7,7	7,8			
<b>Type</b>	Other	7,6	7,6	<b>Type</b>	7,7      7,8	
	Single	7,6	7,6		7,5      7,5	
	Singleparent					
		7,2	7,5	<b>Migrant</b>	7,7      7,8	
<b>Income</b>	1 Lowest	7,1	7,5	<b>Labor condition</b>	7,4      7,6	
<TABLE>Satisfaction with ...			Satisfaction with ...			
			Neigh			

Housi ng			borho od		
quartile	2	7,6	7,6	Unemployed	6,9
	3	7,8	7,9	Other status	7,8
				<b>Commute</b>	Short (<45
	4 Highest (no response)	8,1	8,0	g	min)
		7,8	7,7		7,8
				Time	Long (>45 min)
					7,7
					7,7
<b>Total</b>		<b>7,7</b>	<b>7,8</b>		

</TAB>

LE>

<ATTRIB>Source: Author. Data from European Quality of Life Survey

2016</ATTRIB></TABLE-WRAP>

Whether the respondent is heading the household or not is irrelevant for place attachment. The structure of the household is much more significant. For instance, place attachment for couples is strong, particularly in mature couples without children. These types of households are often more stable and have been in the same dwelling for a longer period of time. The remaining household types are less stable, such as singleparent households, and have lower place attachment. The type of housing each type of household lives in could be behind these differences. Homeowners appear more attached to their homes and neighborhoods than renters. Homeownership implies a

robust residential stability and, on the other hand, owner households have probably been able to choose their dwellings. The same applies, to a higher degree, to mortgaged owners. Mortgaged households are more housing satisfied but tend to average neighborhood satisfaction. Therefore, personal involvement in the choice of housing is positively associated with housing satisfaction ([Bolan, 1997](#)). When renting a house, people are less able to choose the ideal characteristics and the right location. One could expect difficulties in being attached to a rented house. In addition, rental agreement in conjunction with length of residence affects place attachment. The physical quality of the rental stock tends to be worse. According to the EQLS survey, there is no difference between the private and social rent sector, with both categories registering low housing satisfaction—a distinction that is particularly relevant in Europe. Moreover, social housing residents are unsatisfied with their neighborhood,

which shows that social housing is often located in more segregated locations with a negative connotation.

Besides household stability and housing tenure, we can also expect a positive association of place attachment with household income. Households with higher income are better able to select their dwelling and tend to be homeowners. In a four-quartile income classification, there is a difference of 1 point in the housing satisfaction average score between the highest and lowest quartile. However, neighborhood satisfaction is less affected by household income. In the case of employment status, the relationship is as expected with the unemployed feeling less place attachment on average.

If feeling attached to a place is also a consequence of selecting the right home, being a migrant should have a negative effect on place attachment. On average, migrants have spent less time in their dwelling, their income level is low, they are more likely to be renters, and so on. However, place attachment of migrants is quite high. Average scores of migrants' housing and neighborhood satisfaction are less than half a point lower than the rest of the population. Place attachment of migrants is surely not so dependent on residence length or other permanence traits ([Kaltenborn & Williams, 2002](#)).

Whereas literature highlight commuting time as an important explanatory factor, analysis of EQLS data offers inconclusive results. The EQLS allows differentiating long commuters (more than 45 minutes of commuting time) from short commuters (less than 45 minutes). At first glance, differences in place attachment between these two categories are almost inconsequential. A deeper analysis of the data shows a nuanced picture. Long commuting is more associated with lower place attachment in the case of some vulnerable categories, especially among low-income workers, people in social rent or rent-free housing, and immigrants. Long commuting appears to accompany other notchosen characteristics of housing and neighborhood to explain their low scores.

At the same time, wealthier individuals, who have higher place attachment as seen before, have quite similar housing and neighborhood satisfaction scores as to the case of rich countries. Wealthier people are more negatively affected by bad characteristics of housing and are more inclined to rate their neighborhoods accordingly.

Basic demographic variables, such as age and sex, are not very sensitive to place attachment, while household income or variables related to housing, family, and job stability create more heterogeneity. Most characteristics associated with individual instability and insecurity go hand in hand with a lower place attachment. Summing up

our exploration so far, we can draw up a profile of people who are more place attached: regardless of sex, they live in a couple, with economic stability, are homeowners (thus, not very young), and are born in the same European country of residence, preferably living in a Nordic or Northwestern European country.

### **Does the European Place Attachment Socioeconomic Profile Apply to All Countries?**

Does this profile repeat in every country of the European Union? Is there a shared European socioeconomic pattern of place attachment? Or rather, is this aggregated trend a mechanic average of very distinctive national performances? In most countries, the differences between men and women are low. In some countries, place attachment of women is slightly higher. These are Nordic countries (Sweden and Denmark), Western Europe (France and Belgium), or those Eastern European countries that have evolved more towards western standards (Poland or Slovenia). A small increase of place attachment with age is evident, especially in the countries where women have better place attachment. However, Eastern European countries have an opposed age profile. This is likely the result of a cohort change; new households are adopting the same more positive behavior as the rest of Europe.

In almost all countries, migrants are less satisfied with their place of residence. It is interesting that the average scores of migrants seem ‘adjusted’ to the general level of the country, allowing for small negative differences in relation to native individuals. This means that migrants in countries with the strongest place attachment (Nordic Europe, for example) have a higher average score than the natives’ scores in countries with lower overall attachment (e.g. Eastern Europe).

Couples are more attached to place than the rest of households, regardless of the country and of the regional welfare or housing systems. On the other hand, singleperson households and, especially, single-parent households are the least attached. This dichotomy, if anything, is clearer at the country level than in the European Union overall. However, different household types mean diversity of tenure types. This is the real factor behind place attachment heterogeneity by household type. All European countries replicate the positive association of homeownership with place attachment, especially regarding house satisfaction, but heterogeneity is stronger than at the EU aggregate level. Renters are less attached to place, even in those countries where private and social rent sectors perform better.

All countries reproduce the positive relationship between income and place attachment found at the European level. Although place attachment of the poorest households is low in most countries, social polarization of place attachment is most intense in the Eastern European countries and, surprisingly, in France. By contrast, the egalitarian Nordic countries Finland and Sweden have the lowest social polarization by place attachment.

To summarize, the socioeconomic profile of place attachment is shared by all EU countries but it is better drawn at the national scale, particularly regarding income heterogeneity.

### **Place Attachment and Social Contact**

There is a positive relationship between the frequency of contact with social networks and place satisfaction. The EQLS survey contains two questions about face-to-face social contact: frequency of face-to-face contact with family and relatives and frequency of face-to-face contact with friends and neighbors. Both dimensions are related positively with the average scores of housing and neighborhood satisfaction. There is a slight tendency for housing satisfaction to be more sensitive to variations in family contact, while contact with neighbors and friends benefits neighborhood satisfaction. However, these are marginal trends, with both dimensions of place satisfaction interacting with both dimensions of social contact.

When the two dimensions of contact are combined in a conjoint social contact variable, interaction with place satisfaction increases, especially in terms of house satisfaction. [Table 2.2](#) shows the results. When the person does not have at least weekly contact with family, friends, or neighbors, the average score of the house drops to 7.3. However, when the person sees them daily, or almost daily, the rate goes up to 7.8. In the case of neighborhood satisfaction, the range goes from 7.4 in the worst case to 7.9 in the most favorable.

In fact, most survey respondents report that they keep very frequent contact with family, friends, or neighbors. Most countries replicate this trend. Being in constant contact with kin and relations, a general trend, is necessary to endorse the links that people establish with the close spatial context. The lack of daily contact influences a lack of integration in the residential context. What varies between countries is the intensity of social contact. Indeed, in the countries of Southern Europe, the daily social contact is either the most frequent category (Portugal, Greece), or the second after

weekly contact (Italy, Spain). Therefore, in this region, the preference for frequent social contact favors place attachment, although place satisfaction indicators of these Southern countries are lower. France is an odd case because it goes in the opposite direction of the rest of the EU countries, particularly regarding house satisfaction. Even controlling for other variables, such as geographic origin, income, age, or level of urbanization, households with more social contact have worse average scores for housing and neighborhood.

Socioeconomic characteristics of people qualify the relationship between social contact and place attachment. In the most vulnerable categories, social contact is more important. For example, single people have a much higher neighborhood satisfaction if they enjoy daily social contact. Housing satisfaction of free renters is higher if they keep daily contact with family members, possibly because someone in the family network has provided the home. On the other hand, place attachment of couples varies little in relation to social contact, maybe because that contact is not essential for the welfare of the household.

<TABLE-WRAP><LBL>Table 2.2</LBL> <CAPTION>Average scores of place attachment by place problems, social contact, and housing insecurity</CAPTION>

<TABLE>Satisfaction with ...      Satisfaction with ...      Hous Local      Hous Local  
ing area      ing area

<b>Problem s of dwelling</b>	Moderate/	5,4 6,8 6,9 7,3 8,1 8,0	<b>Face-toface contact w/family</b>	Every day or almost At least once a week	7,8 7,8 7,7 7,8 7,5 7,6
	Major				
	Few problems				
	No problems				
<b>Problem s of neighbor hood</b>	Moderate/	7,0 7,2 7,8 7,7 8,1 8,0	<b>Face-toface contact w/friends or neighbors</b>	Every day or almost At least once a week	7,8 7,9 7,7 7,7 7,5 7,4
	Major				
	Few problems				
	No problems				
<b>Housing</b>	Very insecure	6,5 7,0			

Insecurity area	Intermedia	Satisfaction with ... ing area	Satisfaction with ... ing area	Hous Local	Hous Local
Intermediate	7,0	7,2			7,8
Secure	8,0	7,9	Total		7,7

<ATTRIB>Source: Author. Data from European Quality of Life Survey

2016</ATTRIB></TABLE-WRAP>

### Place Attachment and Housing Security

Place attachment increases with social contact, as this is an important source of vital security, mainly for vulnerable households. Another dimension of vital security is housing security. The EQLS survey has one question on subjective residential security, defined as the perceived probability that the household loses the dwelling because of affordability problems in the short term of six months. According to [Eurofound \(2018\)](#), every household that is unsure that it will not lose its home suffers from residential insecurity. This includes those who say that they will certainly lose their home, for example, because they have already been evicted. Therefore, respondents have varying degrees of housing security, listed from most to least: those who are completely sure of staying at the same dwelling in six months (76 percent), those who are more or less afraid of losing their homes (20 percent) and, finally, those who are completely sure that they will lose their houses (4 percent). The European geography of housing insecurity coincides with the regional divisions that have already appeared along this contribution. Respondents from Southern Europe, especially Spain and Portugal, and Eastern Europe, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Croatia, are the most insecure.

The higher the housing insecurity is, the lower the place attachment, particularly in relation to housing as seen in [Table 2.2](#). People who know they will lose their home have an average score for housing satisfaction of 6.5. If they are solely afraid of home loss, the average score is 7.0. Individuals completely secure in their homes score 8.0. Of course, in relation to neighborhood satisfaction, the correlation is lower. Average scores go from 7.0 to 7.9 from less to more secure respondents. In the most insecure countries, heterogeneity of housing satisfaction of insecure versus secure persons is much wider than in the most secure countries. In Southern and Eastern Europe, housing insecurity is higher, and it has a worse impact on place attachment. Unlike social contact, spread

housing insecurity of the Mediterranean and Eastern countries does hamper aggregate place attachment.

According to EQLS data, housing insecurity hinders place attachment in all kinds of individuals. However, this is particularly true in the case of the most vulnerable categories. Young people, single-parent households, low-income households, or renters who declare that they are very likely to lose their homes have a very low attachment with their residential contexts. Negative circumstances reinforce each other.

### **Place Attachment: A Fragile Resource**

This contribution has analyzed place attachment in Europe using two measures: satisfaction with housing and satisfaction with the neighborhood. In broad terms, people tend to value both dimensions with similar intensity. It is difficult to hold contradictory opinions about individual relationships with the closest spatial spheres. The results confirm the multi-scale nature of place attachment and how people see these complex contexts in a single perspective.

Place attachment is a subjective feeling that grows in relation to a real residential environment. Housing and neighborhood satisfaction are higher in the absence of problems in both dimensions. Whereas the existence of problems goes hand in hand with a low place attachment, it is not uncommon to find persons who are not place attached even when they do not have physical problems in their home or neighborhood. This absence of environmental determinism feeds interest in analyzing the socioeconomic aspects of place attachment.

The next step in the analysis was to learn that European residents have quite a high degree of place attachment. Only one-fifth of cases evaluate their relationship with their houses or their neighborhoods negatively. If place attachment is a subjective indicator of the quality of life, it is a positive result. In spite of their relevance, differences between European countries do not change this broad picture.

Nevertheless, international heterogeneity reproduces almost exactly the economic and social inequalities between European nations. Northern and Western countries' populations show a better place attachment than their Eastern and Southern counterparts. While these international differences are quite significant, it would be interesting to confirm whether the average national score differences in place attachment correspond, as argued throughout this contribution, to differences in living conditions, or if cultural norms could affect place attachment models and standards

instead. Maybe Southern and Eastern populations are more careful in evaluating place attachment, rather than less place attached.

The data show that the more egalitarian a country is, the higher the average score of place attachment. Moreover, the internal divergence of place attachment values is lower in countries with high place attachment. That means that the socioeconomic profiles of place attachment are best drawn in Eastern and Southern countries, where place attachment is the lowest. Beyond the differences in intensity, all countries share the main traits of a common socioeconomic profile of heterogeneity. In all countries, persons with higher place attachment are homeowners, with higher income and a labor occupation. Socioeconomic status is directly related to the intensity of place attachment. Sociodemographic variables are less important; however, place attachment tends to increase with age (not in some Eastern European countries) and to be higher in couples than in other household types. Therefore, place attachment is associated with life stability. Sex of the person does not seem to be a relevant variable in most countries.

Economic and life course stability and social contact contribute to place attachment. The relationship between place attachment and social contact is more significant in the case of housing satisfaction. The most vulnerable categories—old people, single parents, low-income households—are more reliant on social contact in order to increase their place attachment. Similarly, Eastern and Southern European countries are more sensitive to the impact of social contact. Clearly, informal help structures are deeply needed by these social groups, particularly in those mentioned countries, as a substitute for sound public policies.

Finally, housing insecurity, or the fear of losing the home because of affordability problems, is linked to a lower place attachment. While logical, it is astounding to find evidence for this relationship due to the recent increase of structural housing insecurity in European societies. At the individual level, not being place attached as a defense mechanism in order to better process an eventual loss of home, or being attached to a place as a mechanism to help people fight against precarious rental contracts or eviction threats, are very suggestive possibilities. These considerations open the discussion of the psychological processes underneath these associations.

The results have highlighted that place attachment is not only a psychological feeling but also a social resource. Place attachment is a tool to manage social and economic resources that are rooted in local contexts. Socioeconomic diversity is crucial. Wealthy persons are more easily attached to their houses and neighborhoods because

they choose them according to their financial means and their preferences. For them, place attachment is an extra benefit of housing choice, almost a commodity. They buy place attachment, but maybe do not need it. The other side of the coin is vulnerable households. They are unable to buy place attachment. They are often unable to choose where they live. When they succeed in being place attached, they surely have done it almost from scratch to acquire a resource: being close to friends and family, keeping their dwelling located in neighborhoods with enough services at the expense of paying more rent, and so on. International differences in Europe reproduce this broad contrast between richer, egalitarian, state social policy centered countries (Nordic, North Western) and poorer, heterogeneous, family welfare centered countries (Eastern, Southern) ([Clark et al., 2017](#)).

Social precariousness and vital uncertainty have increased in the last decades, representing structural traits of contemporary societies ([Lorey, 2015](#)). In this context, place attachment is at risk if the relationships found in our study keep stable in the future. Reinforcing place attachment could be a way of strengthening the future resilience of individuals, households, and of course communities. Its positive effects on urban planning, risk management, and community development are worth it. </BODY> <BACK>

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘heterogeneity’, used throughout this contribution, refers to the differences in intensity, in this case of place attachment, between different individuals or between different categories of the same socioeconomic variable.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys>. <sup>3</sup> See [Lewicka \(2011\)](#).