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Exploring multiple dimensions of attachment to historic urban places, a case study of Edinburgh, Scotland

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with people's attachments to historic urban places they experience in their daily lives. The topic has received growing emphasis in the realm of heritage studies, given its importance to the conservation and management of historic urban environments. Drawing on qualitative data collected from thirty in-depth interviews carried out in Edinburgh, Scotland, I explore the multiple ways in which (known as dimensions in place attachment literature) people develop attachments to historic urban places: from a kind of autobiographic attachments which were grounded in their everyday living and memories, and those of their families to intellectual attachments wherein they showcased their deep appreciation for the attributes that define a historic place. I also seek to demonstrate a class-specific nature of attachments at the intellectual level, adding a politicised view to the complexity of the phenomenon. In so doing, I demonstrate the many ways in which historic places are important to people's enjoyment of lives in the city, and the various roles the history of places and/or their historic attributes played in forging such attachments. I conclude the paper with discussions on findings related to the current state of knowledge in place attachment research and implications for heritage practices.

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1. Introduction

The focus of this paper is on the ways in which people form place attachments to historic urban places they experience in their daily lives. Place attachment¹ refers to the emotional bond people develop with places (Low and Altman 1992). Place attachment has proven benefits to people's psychological well-being (Scannell and Gifford 2017). Place changes which disrupt (or are believed to disrupt) place attachment threaten such well-being, causing subsequent emotional responses like anxiety, grief, sadness or loss (Frid 1963; Brown and Perkins 1992; Fullilove 2004). In cases of unsympathetic place changes induced by proposed developments, disruptions to place attachment may also prompt people to engage in civic actions to resist the proposals (Manzo and Perkins 2006; Devine-Wright 2009). This is very commonly seen in urban(ising) settings such as the redevelopment of a historic urban area or the demolition of a historic building. Understanding people's attachments to historic urban places, anchoring and objectifying changes in a way as to enhance rather than disrupt place attachment is of immense importance to the conservation, planning and management of urban heritage (e.g. Wells 2017; Madgin et al. 2018; Madgin 2021; Madgin and Lesh 2021).

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Environmental psychology is the core discipline of place attachment research, but research dedicated to understanding attachment to historic places in this main strand of literature is thin. The most straightforward evidence to look at is the place attachment dimension – a term used to operationalise types of attachment or the reasons for them. Different typologies and terminologies of place attachment dimensions have been defined to suit the requirements of research objectives; there is a lack of consensus about how the concept should be structurally interpreted (Lewicka 2011; Hernández, Hidalgo, and Ruiz 2014). Among these is a place identity dimension, which accounts to a large extent for the ways in which people form attachments to historic places. Place identity defines a sense of affective attachment derived from an individual's understanding of the physical world and its properties in which the person lives that shape their self-identity (Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff 1983). It is one of the two dimensions comprising the renowned two-dimensional construct of place identity and place dependence (Williams and Roggenbuck 1989). Historic places provide foundations for people to construct their personal and group identity, whether this is through their unique historic features, the cultural and symbolic meaning they carry, the historic associations to which they have been assigned, or their heritage status. In Devine-Wright and Lyons's (1996) study, for example, iconic historic places in Dublin such as the Dublin General Post Office are remembered by Irish people as places representing patriotism, democracy, independence and freedom, and as places associated with a sad history of Ireland's independence – and thereby of significance in maintaining Irish people's national identities. Hoang, Brown, and Kim (2020) found the prestige associated with the World Heritage designation of Hoi An (Vietnam) was a powerful source of residents' identity that helped nurture special meanings and blend them into a distinctive form of place attachment.

This, however, is not to say that other attachment dimensions do not explain the ways in which people develop attachments to historic places. The place dependence dimension (mentioned above), for example, highlights a type of functional attachment that rests on the qualities of a setting in satisfying people's goals and activity needs (Stokols and Shumaker 1981). For Wells and Baldwin (2012) and Wells (2017), to experience spontaneous fantasies² provoked by the aged appearance of historic places which forge attachment was a unique activity need that could not be fulfilled as well in a new, modern environment.

Alternatively, we could look at studies on predictors of attachment – i.e. factors that influence the nature and degree of attachment. For example, Lewicka (2008) found positive relationships between residents' place attachment and their declared interest in city history and historic knowledge (measured as the number of famous city persons, important events, and old street names that one knows). Here, if a city is viewed as a historic place, then interest in history might explain why one would develop attachments to historic places.

Meanwhile, historic places may appear to be the focus of attachment for a reason that is barely related to their history and/or historic attributes. For example, attachments to a historic place may develop from social reasons, which would usually be coined as a social bonding dimension – social attachment associated with 'meaningful social relationships that occurred and were maintained in specific settings' (Kyle, Graefe, and Manning 2005, 156). A historic place may also serve as the marker of a significant period (e.g. childhood) in one's life journey to which the person feels attached – one of many examples in which attachments are grounded in memories (Lewicka 2014).

Many of these conclusions, however, can only be drawn at the hypothetical level, making the material hard to use as a body of evidence. None of the established typologies of attachment dimensions was developed specifically to conceptualise attachment to historic places. There has been a lack of understanding of the ways in which people form such attachments and the ways in which the history of places and/or their historic attributes played a role in forging such attachments. The research presented in this paper was therefore undertaken to further explore these questions.

2. Data and methods

The data which inform this paper were collected from thirty semi-structured interviews that I conducted in Edinburgh, the capital city of Scotland; they were carried out as part of my doctoral research dedicated to exploring the same subject matter as in this paper.

Edinburgh was chosen for the research for various considerations. The one which is relevant to the discussion in this paper was the distinguishing atypical characteristics of the city that made it a good instrumental case (Flyvbjerg 2006), that is: the concentration of both heritage and residential population in and around the city centre. More specifically, over seventy-five per cent of the buildings in Edinburgh had been listed and were in better condition than most other historic cities in the UK (Edinburgh World Heritage 2017) whilst the proportion of residents living in inner suburban areas is the highest in Scotland and third outside London across the UK (The City of Edinburgh Council 2013). The arguable proximity to historic places and history that people could experience in their daily lives generated the assumption that deep emotional attachments to the historic environment exist within this city. It thus maximised the possibilities of obtaining rich data.

Interviewees were selected from a pool of sixty-seven respondents to a survey (carried out in 2018 also as part of my doctoral research³) who indicated willingness at the end of the survey to take part in a follow-up interview. The survey participants were members of nine local civic associations in Edinburgh,⁴ followers of the Lost Edinburgh Facebook group, and members of North Edinburgh Arts. Hence, the thirty interviewees were also from these groups. This number of interviews was determined by considering the data saturation point when the conversation began to offer no new questions, directions or insights.

The selection of those groups followed two prescribed selection criteria.⁵ They encompassed a few circumstances that were expected to generate enough data or more data on the subject matter. They are: a) attachment can motivate civic engagement (in various forms, see for example, Devine-Wright 2009; Craggs, Geoghegan, and Neate 2013); and b) attachment is positively related to interest in place history and historical knowledge (Lewicka 2008).

The pool of interview participants was to some extent a subset of the large survey sample. It shared some common characteristics with the survey sample which had a disproportionate percentage of people claiming degree-level educational attainment and homeownership in comparison to the overall residential population in the city. I thus made an effort to balance this bias when selecting the interview participants; not for the purpose of drawing a generalisation based on a sample that would be representative of the overall population, but to reach variations in data and to enable detailed explorations of the central theme and puzzles (Ritchie et al. 2014) – searching for contrast insights as I became aware of a class-specific nature of attachments to historic places occurred at an intellectual level. The selection was otherwise strictly random. Key characteristics of the interview sample are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Key characteristics of the interview sample.

Age	in years	22–75
Gender	Male	18
	Female	12
Education	Non-degree level education	5
	First degree	7
	Higher degree	18
Homeownership	Rent	3
	Owned	27
Ethnicity	Scottish	19
	Other British	8
	Spanish	1
	Canadian	1
	American	1
History of living in Edinburgh	Newcomer	17
	Born and raised in Edinburgh	13

All interviews were conducted face-to-face at places chosen by the participants from July 2018 to April 2019 following ethical approval.

Interviews followed more or less a common format, starting from an introduction, followed by questions exploring attachment, historic urban places, meaning, the city and life in the city. Interviews lasted for about between thirty minutes to almost two hours. They were audio-recorded and transcribed; all interviewees were anonymised and given pseudonyms. Transcripts were coded following Braun and Clarke (2006).

2.1. Defining historic places

This paper moves beyond the long-standing focus on the physical fabric of a historic building, monument or site to embrace the term *place* and to consider all characteristics and attributes of a place that can contribute to the making of its meanings. It was thus an intentional aspect of the methodology to allow the participants themselves to decide what counts as a historic place. They were thus able to talk *freely* (and did) about their attachments to whatever they considered to be historic places. As will be shown, people talked about attachments to famous heritage sites in the city. They also talked about connections with other, less well-known places that they viewed as historic. It was with such a *free* definition of historic places that the multiple dimensions of attachment were revealed, and the impact of class stood out, which the rest of this paper turns to.

3. Results

3.1. Attachments to historic places

3.1.1. Autobiographical attachment

A consistent narrative, evident in all interviews, concerned attachments to historic places with which people have a personal association. This was expressed in three distinct ways. First, many participants described attachments to a kind of *lived-in* historic place or places – around which they organised their present lives. Such places were, in a narrow sense, specific historic places that were part of everyday living and where they spent a lot of time. In a broader sense, the city of Edinburgh as a whole and the neighbourhoods participants lived in were all *lived in* historic places. Second, participants expressed attachments to historic places in which they had spent significant parts/moments of their lives in the past, including, predominantly (though not limited to) attachments to historic places where they spent time as a child, teenager and/or parent with their offspring, as well as defining moments in their lives such as a first date, wedding, or retirement party – about which people had happy memories. Third, participants who had a family history in Edinburgh also expressed a strong sense of rootedness in Edinburgh or a historic neighbourhood in the city to which they had family connections.

Such autobiographical attachments, arguably, as remarked by a participant, was ‘not necessarily about the history of the place’ (Patrick) primarily. Nor was it even necessarily about the historic fabric of the place. Rather, it was about personal autobiographical or genealogical associations. Nevertheless, these associations did help people to personalise the place’s history and to feel connected to the history and the place itself, as Bob mentioned when talking about his attachment to his childhood place:

I’ve gone back as an adult to Lauriston Castle, which is a local castle, um, to Silverknowes [his childhood place], um, and the, the story of the castle, I feel a bit of an attachment to, and I feel part of that story because I, because you know, I know, I know the history of the castle and the people that lived in the castle; they died and left the castle to Edinburgh Council, and I then played in the gardens, and so I view myself as part of that, that story (Bob).

This was also demonstrated in Martin’s emotionally heightened laments about the changes that happened to the Usher Hall which he associated strong family connections with:

Because both my family and my personal history, it has a deep emotional attachment to me. And when I see old buildings are being damaged or defaced or altered, it does make me feel quite sad and angry sometimes. For example, the Usher Hall, which is on Lothian Road, um, you know, a beautiful old building, uh, and so they decided to modernise part of it. And on the outside, they've made some alterations which are incredibly ugly, I feel. And I do feel like, because it has changed so much, so from, when my, parents, grandparents, great grandparents, great-great-grandparents were alive, then I do feel that it's, it's sort of like almost an insult to the continuation of their memory in a way (Martin).

3.1.2. *Nostalgic attachment*

Very often, when reminiscing about the past, participants also expressed a sense of loss caused by changes they experienced in various aspects of their lives, such as lifestyle, values, identity, moral sense, community sense, politics, and so on. This opinion was most often expressed by those middle-aged and older people who were born and raised in Edinburgh. Elle, approaching her seventies, said she felt 'really, really sad' at the loss of the 'Scots language', which she described as being a part of the identity change of her neighbourhood resulting from transformations in demographics and class. In such discourses, attachments took the form of nostalgia in which things were viewed as having been better in the past than they are in the present.

3.1.3. *Attachment associated with restorative experience*

All participants also consistently discussed attachment to historic places that they used for restorative purposes. Dominating this discourse were appreciative accounts of restorative encounters with nature experienced in the city's open (publicly accessible) green spaces, ranging from the widely celebrated Princes Street Gardens, Royal Botanic Garden, and Holyrood Park to more locally enjoyed parks, cemeteries, and other green spots. Specifically, participants stressed the value of these places to their lives for being essential oases in the city where they could go to experience nature (trees, birds, the river's flow, fresh air, the changes of seasons, etc.), which gave them respite from the dizziness of the city, to have calm and peace, to decompress and to wind down.

Here, similar to most autobiographical attachments, most of these green spaces in Edinburgh are rich in history themselves and some are also surrounded by historic buildings, but it was not primarily their historic aspects to which people felt connected. Rather, it was their natural or naturalistic elements.

Yet attachment to restorativeness was not limited to *natural* historic places. The *built* historic places seemed to have created the same opportunities as well. Mary, for example, talked about how older buildings gave her a sense of 'permanency and past' as well as familiarity and comfort that she needed but 'wasn't getting elsewhere'. In fact, historic places were rated as one of the most restorative categories of places in a few studies (see review by Weber and Trojan 2018).

Sometimes, people's attachments to restorative *built* historic places were closely linked to their personal memories. Consider Clair's rumination on a powerful connection she felt with a specific spot in the city centre. It demonstrated a fundamental difference from attachments derived from restorative experiences of natural environments which were much more commonly perceived.

The city centre for me is as if it has some kind of energy. I cannot explain it because I think it's more, you know, energy. It's um, I don't know. But sometimes when I go or I have been feeling a bit low, and I have gone there and I have seen the Castle, um, Cockburn Street, when I see that, and sometimes I, I, I felt my eyes watering, because I feel so connected to that place and I don't really know why. I don't remember, I don't have that image from Princes Street to Cockburn and the Castle and, I don't remember that from the first time [I arrived in Edinburgh], but now it's something that it's like if it charged my batteries. It's hard to explain. It, I love that place (Clair).

3.1.4. *Attachment, visual exposure and aesthetic experience*

It was very common for participants to praise the beauty of a historic place or the picturesque quality of the city – mainly its historic centre – when they talked about their attachments. This was

especially the case when they talked about their attachments to panoramic places like Calton Hill, North Bridge, and some other, less well-known viewpoints in and around the city, which have high visual exposure. People kept emphasising how beautiful a place Edinburgh is to live in and how 'lucky' they were to live in it, expressing a strong sense of pride and gratitude. Participant Lynn's evocative description of her attachment to North Bridge was a good example of this. The wonderful view of central Edinburgh features a series of historic landmarks that evoked recollections, retrospections and reflections on her life.

It is one of those sorts of special places. I don't spend like a lot of time there. I used to cross it back and forth because I, because I lived in [north of Edinburgh] and then my then-boyfriend now-husband lived over in [south of Edinburgh]. And so I was going back and forth quite a lot, and I just love the view of the city from North Bridge. It's my favourite place to go and just have a look at the city, because you have the Balmoral Hotel, you can see the Castle, you can see, um, Salisbury Crags and Arthur's Seat, the Scotsman Hotel, all of the Old Town, all of the New Town. It's just one of those really spectacular viewpoints that always kind of takes my breath away, you know. And I'm still like, all the time I can go, I can walk past it every day and still be like, it kind of always is that moment for me that, this is like a really special place to be able to live in. Whenever I do end up walking past it, I do take a moment to like let it sink in a little bit, and wow. I really am lucky to live here (Lynn).

Most of the time, attachment arising from aesthetic experience seemed to be just a visual matter, yet compelling evidence was found in this study that such is not exclusively the case. Rather, it can be conditioned by culture, identity, social norms, value judgements, and so on, which have explicit associations with history. Consider the following narrative, which was also from Lynn, explaining why she felt historic buildings were beautiful in comparison to contemporary architecture:

It's just, a beautiful thing, um, to look at. And it makes me feel like I live in a place that has a history and has a past, and that people were thoughtful about the buildings and creating something that looked beautiful, which maybe isn't necessarily how I feel, yeah. it's probably not how I feel people approach architecture now so much these days (Lynn).

Think about, also, Martin's emotional judgement about the 'incredibly ugly' modernisation made to the Usher Hall (previously quoted). These examples offer intriguing clues about the influence of value judgements where the historic designs trumped many unsympathetic modern designs in terms of aesthetics.

In an insightful though unusual example, Matt's knowledgeable interpretation of his attachment to the 'beautiful and appealing' Georgian New Town revealed a possible influence that a person's cultural identity could have on their (aesthetic) taste for historic design:

I certainly find this um, this eighteenth-century Georgian style or architecture very beautiful and appealing. I mean that's just culturally how a lot of people in Britain say that. It's not the only kind of architecture there, but it's been, we've been uh, brainwashed to think of those proportions, the neo-classical proportions of house design, the proportions of the windows, how they start larger on the ground floor, they get slightly smaller, uh, all these neo-classical things. I find it an unexpectedly pleasing environment in which to move around. It's not the only kind of built environment I find delightful. I like the Old Town as well. But there is a kind of rational grandeur to this which is attractive. It feels like a city that has tried to impose an architectural order on the brain of the people who live in it, you know. This is totally a product of the Enlightenment, and it was completely filled from the 1760s onwards as it extended downhill with doctors and lawyers, and rational people who had been trained [in] a thing. And this architecture can reflect them (Matt).

3.1.5. Imagination and attachment at the intellectual level

Historic places evoke imagination. This is apparent from the following narratives. They all describe scenarios in which the speakers projected their present lives into the past, where they obtained a sense of joy, gratification, pride and admiration.

My wife and I enjoy music, particularly in places to go for concerts and the, the churches. [...] Um, so, you know, places like Greyfriars, St Giles Cathedral of course, on the, um, on the Royal Mile, these big, really ancient landmarks are really special. And I just love, uh, being in them and just feeling part of that history. Just

knowing how many hundreds of years these have been there and the building has hardly changed in that time and thinking who else has been in here (Simon).

So I think if I, if I wasn't from Edinburgh and I visited it, I would still find it very aesthetically beautiful, the architecture. I would still like it. But obviously, I've had a different kind of sentiment. Um, because one thing I love about Edinburgh is the fact that like I was saying, the Georgian architecture, much of it stayed the same. So people like Robert Louis Stevenson, you know, these sort of, uh, these great figures in history, his house is still there on Heriot Row and someone lives in it now. And I find it's fascinating that you can live in the same house as one of these, sort of, these really historical figures who had such influence in Edinburgh at a time. [...]. So just thinking walking in and out of these buildings and thinking, you know, Robert Louis Stevenson, Adam Smith or David Hume, or, uh, you know, these incredibly influential historic characters well-known for another world going into the same sort of buildings as you and, um, even some of the pubs, um, so the taverns back then are pubs now, obviously with different names and things, but, um, they're still used as taverns today, pubs today. And I find that, you know, incredible, that you could drink in the same place as one of these guys (John).

[W]here I live now is halfway between where Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was born, the writer of Sherlock Holmes, and where R L Stevenson went to school and he's a famous Scottish writer. Do you know Stevenson? So these things mean a lot to me. The fact that I've, I mean I've worked with literature all my life, nineteenth-century literature, that's been my, my job and my interest if you like, but German literature. But I would say that these three figures and the places related to them are, are very close to what I feel about living here. So they're, they're sort of literary, cultural, I mean, I was just amazed that I end up living in a house halfway between Conan Doyle and R L Stevenson every night. I mean that's, that's really good. And Scott, I've always liked, because if you look at the statue, he's a very kind, humane man. I mean, irrespective of what his writing, was like or is like, um, he's just a very positive figure in Scottish culture and for me. So these are, I would say these are important places and that's why they're important. And living here, you are kind of at the heart of that cultural history of, of, well, of Edinburgh, but of Scotland more generally, really (Lorraine).

These narratives illustrate that historic places have a magical allure that could give people the experience of time-travelling – to imagine, think of, and sense the history – thereby fostering a special bond between the person and the place which would not normally develop in a modern setting.

Sometimes, such bonding, as shown in John and Lorraine's narratives, was welded to some specific history, which involved an intellectually engaged recollection of a known piece of history (the history of the Scottish Enlightenment). These intellectual engagements brought their attachments, in John's words, to a 'different', if not deeper, level than attachments derived from aesthetic experiences. They demonstrated a close identification with the places, history and culture, and a strong sense of pride.

Matt's narrative presented above was also a telling example of such attachment at the intellectual level. His knowledgeable association of neo-classical architectural style with the Scottish Enlightenment and a cadre of educated people ('doctors and lawyers and rational people') suggested highly intellectually engaged thinking.

Intellectual engagement in attachment was mostly seen among people who claimed a deep interest in history or whose work was related to heritage in some way, as exemplified above by Lorraine's narrative: 'I've worked with literature all my life, nineteenth-century literature'. These people often showcased their rich knowledge of the history of places and deep appreciation of their historic attributes such as their historic features, (perceived) historicity, World Heritage status, and so on. The presence of such intellectual attachments was most distinct among people who worked in heritage-related fields. These people's enthusiasm and love for heritage were enacted as if second nature. As Naomi, an interviewee who had a degree in archaeology and worked in that field, said: 'for me, I love, because I suppose, because I am an archaeologist, I can't walk through a landscape, whatever landscape, without looking at the little spots in the archaeological features'.

People's attachments at the intellectual level also manifested in behaviours. Several participants were deeply committed to their voluntary roles in civic or residents groups that have a focus on the local environment, history, heritage and conservation. They all highlighted the importance of preserving historic places and history. They all waxed lyrical about what they had been doing and

felt proud of what they had achieved, demonstrating a sense of fulfilment, pride and self-esteem. They also told many stories about previous campaigns that had been launched by people aiming to protect their beloved historic environment. For a few of them, it was this involvement that led to attachment.

3.2. *The class-specific nature of intellectual attachment*

Manzo (2003) argues for the importance of including a *politicised* view of place attachment – locating the discussion of place attachment in a larger socio-political context – in order to *adequately* understand the phenomenon, especially for attachment to public places (such as most of the historic urban places considered in this paper). In this section, I engage with this view by presenting the explicit hints in the interviews I observed about the impacts of education and class on intellectual attachment. Here, education should not be considered narrowly as referring to professional training in a heritage-related subject area, such as Naomi's archaeology degree, but broadly as a function of class origin.

A compelling piece of evidence was that some participants (raised in wealthy families and were privately educated) associated their love of history (and the history of Edinburgh in particular) with being taken to museums, art galleries, theatres, concerts and ballets when they were of school age.⁶ Taking these cultural activities was perceived as a *privilege* that enabled them to see Edinburgh differently from the way others did. Such privileges owed to one's parental social status exemplified the influence of what Bourdieu terms *habitus* – the embodiment of social structures in individuals⁷ – on intellectual attachment. Further examples of this include the way that John described his love of Georgian architecture: 'I'm extremely grateful for being raised in that kind of environment. And, and so Georgian architecture, it's always very familiar to me'; and Lynn's comments on the demographics of a conservation charity she volunteered at: 'Quite a few of the people who I know [in the volunteer group] live in heritage property themselves, [...] not necessarily in Edinburgh, but most of them'.

The fact that a few participants also talked about their 'Friends' memberships of museums and art galleries further drew my attention to the relevance of cultural engagement patterns in indicating social stratification as revealed in many related works on art consumption, education and class (e.g. Bourdieu, Alain, and Schnapper 1997; Bennett et al. 2009; Walker et al. 2022). For example, engaging extensively with Bourdieu's social theory and the concept of cultural capital,⁸ Bennett et al. (2009) found that people in the UK who have relatively high incomes and are well-educated tended to undertake more cultural activities such as going to theatres, galleries, stately homes, classical music concerts, and so on (see also Le Roux et al. 2008). These all further added to my argument for a class-specific nature of intellectual attachment.

4. Discussions

Drawing on qualitative evidence, I have presented various ways in which people develop attachments to historic urban places they experienced in their daily lives. Though not exhaustive, they were nonetheless the most prominent ways in which such attachments could be formed that I found in the data. I have also sought to demonstrate a class-specific nature of attachment at the intellectual level, adding a politicised view to the complexity of the phenomenon. Some findings in this research reinforced or added to the observations drawn from the literature discussed at the beginning of this paper. Meanwhile, new insights were generated that advanced our understanding of this under-explored area and added further insights into its emerging importance in heritage studies and practices, as discussed below.

The five broad themes I adopted to structure the research findings can be viewed as five different dimensions of attachment to historic urban places: autobiographical, nostalgic, restorative, aesthetic, and intellectual. They were quite distinguishable from each other, as can be seen from the

contrast between the class-specific intellectual attachment and a very personal autobiographical attachment. Yet, they were also at times not mutually exclusive, demonstrating the complexity of attachment phenomena. For example, the way Clairra found the central Edinburgh restorative had an association with her personal memory, and Matt's appreciation of the aesthetic quality of the New Town was intellectual. They could also offer a hitherto unavailable approach to thinking about the operationalisation and measurement of attachment to historic places, and may thus serve as a stepping stone towards larger-scale quantitative research.

There were some occasions when historic places appeared to be attached for reasons that concerned less or little about their history and/or historic attributes such as those of the various autobiographical attachments, restorative attachments to 'natural' historic places, and even aesthetic attachments if beauty was not conceived as a unique quality of a historic place/view that a modern environment would be less likely to possess. Yet, there was also telling evidence on the roles that places' history and/or historic attributes played in forging and/or upsetting such attachments, as demonstrated in Bob's personalisation of Lauriston Castle's history and Martin's emotional comments on Usher Hall's changes amongst many other examples. Together with intellectual attachments, they demonstrated the many ways in which historic urban places were important to people's enjoyment of lives in the city and how they were embedded in the terrain of everyday urban life, creating meanings and experiences.

Such meanings or experiences may be difficult to explain but is nevertheless powerful ('I cannot explain it because I think it's more, you know, energy. It's um, I don't know'. [Clairra]). As has shown in this research, and the work of others (e.g. Madgin et al. 2018), it was sometimes such ineffable attachment that has driven people's passion, commitment and determination to become involved in a wide variety of civic actions (e.g. civic associations, civic campaigns) to protect the historic environment. Arguably, it is partly thanks to these civic engagements that UK cities such as Edinburgh can retain that longstanding beauty and pride that we all enjoy but perhaps now take for granted. It is important that people working in the realm of heritage- and conservation-related policy or decision-making consider the emotional values of historic places manifested in attachments beyond traditionally valued assets such as the age value and the architectural and historical interests.

The findings also revealed the pivotal role historic fabrics of historic places might have played in intellectual attachment, as suggested by narratives like 'the building has hardly changed' from Simon or 'much of it stays the same' from John. This is inspiring as it revealed a possible relationship between attachment to a historic place and its (perceived) authenticity rooted in materiality. The latter has been a long-standing focus of conservation – though it is receiving an increased number of challenges (e.g. Madgin et al. 2018).

Looking at the impact of class on intellectual attachment is only one of the many ways (e.g. to consider gender and racial differences, see Manzo 2003; Manzo and Perkins 2006; Whittington 2020) to engage with the debate on the political dimension of place attachment phenomena, but may nevertheless be the most relevant one in a contemporary context that is witnessing a return (if ever really went away) of social inequality to the public eye (Savage 2015). The tentative but solid evidence of a class-specific nature of intellectual attachment reminded us how people were connected to historic urban places, and how they felt about and appreciated the connections were more than personal matters. Rather they were influenced by the larger context of the everyday sociality and politics in which they lived and were living in. To further demonstrate this, I found striking contrasts between what was viewed as *historic* by people from contrasting socioeconomic conditions and the *distance* between such historic places and their lives both socially and spatially. For example, for people like Ann, a single mother who lived in a deprived neighbourhood, historic places were those visitor attractions (e.g. the Castle, the galleries) at the centre. 'You do all that, and then you revisit them now and again, but you can't base your life around just being a tourist, can you?'. Whereas people from affluent neighbourhoods like John and Matt often demonstrated a broader knowledge of the different bits of history in (and around the edges of) the city and

conceived them as a pleasing environment to be around all the time. These findings further added to my observation of the impact of class on intellectual attachment, highlighting the risk of including only the experience of people with class-related advantages when considering using (as well as how to use) place and attachment as a framework to challenge the status quo in heritage practices and, in particular, if it is to carry the socially progressive potential.

Moreover, how the influence of class was manifested through Bourdisean cultural capital was important to notice too. In fact, in referring to Bennett et al.'s (2009) work, Lewicka (2013) found that in the Polish and Ukrainian contexts, actively attached people⁹ tended to have higher classic cultural capital (composed of interest in history, pleasure drawn from reading, and classic cultural tastes). However, the study did not engage in any discussion about social class. I therefore call for more engaged research on these themes and argue that we should not only embrace the concept of place attachment but also recognise that the economically deprived groups could have their own cultural capital that they may wish to term heritage and feel attached to, which is just as valid as a middle- or upper-class person's heritage and attachments. It is therefore also important to develop effective methodological approaches to access, uncover or even build such attachments.

This research has also revealed a few insights into future studies on topics in the wider area of place attachment research. The first relates to how attachment could rise out of restorative experiences, and in particular, the fact that it is not only nature that restores people. This theme is largely underexplored in the literature. Even research on restorative environments has mainly been concerned with natural places, rarely referring to built environments (Weber and Trojan 2018). The second insight concerns the ways by which place attachment is associated with aesthetic experience, and how such associations may extend to culture, identity, class, value judgements, etc., beyond visual responses. Only a few quantitative studies of the attachment – aesthetic association could be found (e.g. Bonaiuto et al. 1999; Jaśkiewicz 2015), and none offers insights discussed in this paper. This might be because aesthetic experience is a complex psychological process on its own, and aesthetic experience as an academic concept is specified only vaguely in relevant subject areas. Nevertheless, the emerging prominence of this theme during this study identifies this knowledge gap and highlights the need for more research. Moreover, there could be a complex link between attachment and restorative and aesthetic experiences, given that viewing something beautiful could be intrinsically restorative. Early evidence of this could consider the aesthetic attachment obtained at panoramic places as found in this research together with evidence in the literature that panoramic places are a top-ranked type of restorative urban environment (see Weber and Trojan 2018). With what has been learnt, it should be possible to set up some more precise hypotheses concerning these themes and to set out to test them.

Notes

1. In this paper, I try to distinguish between the singular and plural forms of attachment. I use the singular (attachment) to refer to the abstract concept of attachment as a phenomenon, for example 'place attachment research'. I use the plural – such as in 'attachments to historic places' – to refer to one's specific attachments to places in reality.
2. Wells (2017) defines spontaneous fantasy as spontaneously stimulated imagination of hypothetical pasts (life, people, moments, and things in another world) upon encountering an aged landscape or building element.
3. The survey and the interviews made up a mixed methods design I applied in my doctoral research (see Wang 2021b for details). I chose to report the interview findings only in this paper because qualitative data showed its strength in capturing a greater diversity and richness of attachments people have with historic places as well as their nuances in-depth. Moreover, qualitative approaches, as argued by Manzo and de Carvalho, are essential in exploring 'less well-understood and emergent aspects of place attachment' such as 'place experiences that are not captured in existing measurement tools' (2021, 111), which is exactly a case for the focus of this research.
4. These nine civic associations were the Broughton History Society, the Cockburn Association, Dean Village Association, Grange Association Edinburgh, Inverleith Society, Edinburgh Old Town Development Trust, The Colinton Amenity Association, Portobello Amenity Society, and The Cramond Association.

5. It also has a theoretical concern which however is beyond the remit of this paper (see Wang 2021a, 2021b for relevant discussions).
6. Many art galleries, museums and theatres in Edinburgh (as is often the case in the UK and worldwide) are situated in high-profile historic buildings.
7. Habitus is one of Bourdieu's most influential yet ambiguous concepts. It is, in his words, 'a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class' (Bourdieu 1977, 86).
8. The collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, material belongings, credentials, etc., acquired through being part of a particular class (Bourdieu 1986).
9. People showed active involvement in community affairs (Lewicka 2013).

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I claim sole responsibility for all views and remaining errors contained in this paper.

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Data availability statement

For ethical reasons, supporting data cannot be made openly available.

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