

# The Role of 'Sense of Place' in Cultural Heritage Conservation: The Case of Historic Cairo, Egypt

文化遺産保護における「場所の意味」の役割：エジプト・カイロ歴史地区を事例に

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## 1. Introduction

The SoP concept has been developed by famous human geographers,<sup>(1, 2)</sup> since the early 1970s and refers to the symbolic meanings or attributes an individual or a group holds to a particular place or region. It includes three overlapped sub-components: Place Attachment, Place Dependence, and Place Identity. Few previous studies have empirically investigated the significant relationship between SoP and human's behaviors in different contexts such as eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, and pro-environmental behavior.<sup>(3, 4, 5 & 6)</sup> The focus of most previously mentioned studies was directed to natural places (e.g., national parks, islands, landscapes) in Asia, Australia, and Europe. In the Middle East, the role of 'SoP' is highlighted in understanding the structure and character of heritage spaces in Iran, thus improving the quality of its architectural conservation based on a descriptive-analytical approach.<sup>(7)</sup> While, empirically, a significant relationship is found between SoP and the tourists' intentional revisits to specific natural destinations in Egypt (Fayoum and the White Desert).<sup>(8)</sup> Hence, in the field of cultural heritage conservation, the academic literature has fallen short of examining the SoP neither theoretically nor empirically, especially in North Africa and the Middle East.

The present study investigates the controversial case of 'Historic Cairo' in Egypt, a UNESCO world cultural heritage site since 1979, to fill in this gap. Despite receiving several conservation interventions by national and international actors, the historic center of Cairo has been deteriorated since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Also, the local people in Cairo's Historic quarters have contradicted behaviors towards conserving its cultural heritage. The author hypothesized that the previous conservation projects' approaches were inappropriate for a living cultural heritage site which is still inhabited and where traditional lifestyle, skills, and crats still exist. Also, it hypothesizes that the local people's behavioral intentions

towards the conservations of Historic Cairo are affected by their SoP, which is affected by their demographic and socio-economic characteristics (Figure 1). In this context, the academic purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of the controversial case of Historic Cairo and examine the role of SoP in formulating the local people's attitude and influencing their behavioral intentions towards the conservation/abuse of the historic buildings. The ultimate objective of this study is to identify the appropriate approach for an effective conservation of the living cultural heritage sites in the Middle East and North Africa, such as Historic Cairo, based on both theoretical and empirical analysis.

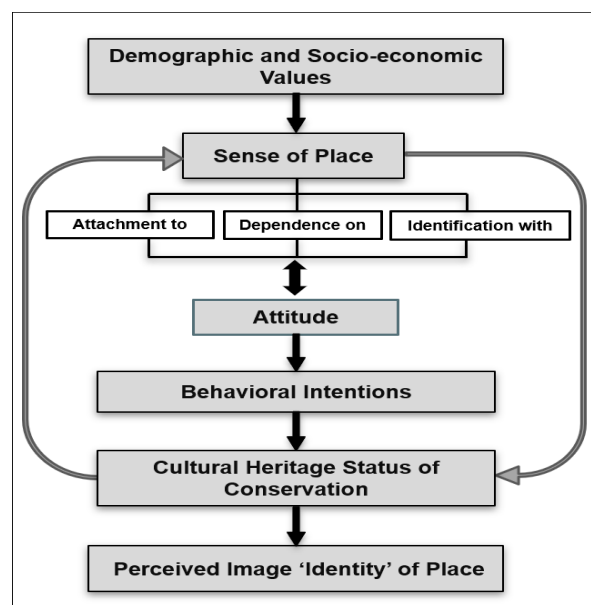


Figure 1. The conceptual framework of study.

Source: Edited by author

## 2. Methodological Framework

### (1) Study Areas

The study is limited to investigating the cases of the 'Al-Khalifa' and 'Khan El-Khalili' quarters, at the South and North of Historic Cairo, respectively (Figure 2). Both quarters have quite similar demographic and geographical features, while their socio-economic and urban features are quite different. The 'Al-Khalifa' quarter is an impoverished area, while the 'Khan El-Khalili' quarter is a famous touristic area. At the 'Al-Khalifa' quarter, the local people (residents/shopkeepers) are giving due attention to conserving specific religious buildings (e.g., Sidi M. Al-Anwar), and non-religious buildings (e.g., Shagaret Eddor). The 'Sidi M. Al-Anwar' is a religious building which consists of a mausoleum and a small oratory. It was built in 1012 by the Fatimid caliph 'Al-Hakim' who claimed that he once saw 'Sidi M. Al-Anwar', a descendant of the prophet's house, at that place in a dream. The building was renovated in 1780 by the local government and gains the local people's interest in its conservation. Therefore, it is well conserved compared to its similar neighboring historic buildings in the quarter. Similarly, the 'Shagaret Eddor' is a non-religious (memorial) building at the 'Al-Khalifa' quarter which consists of a burial dome that was built between 1246 and 1250 for 'Shagaret Eddor' (Tree of Pearl), the only queen of Egypt during its medieval Islamic history, for about three months in 1249. She was killed and buried inside her burial dome at the 'Al-Khalifa' quarter. The dome has unique historical and architectural values, since it is considered the oldest 'Ayyubid' dome in Egypt, and its main apse has the oldest mosaic pattern in the Islamic architecture of Egypt. In 1919, an unfinished mosque was attached to the burial dome, but never functioned as a mosque and currently serves as a community center of educational programs, crafts workshops, and summer camps, especially for the children and women. So that, the building gains the local people special interest and is well conserved compared to its similar memorial buildings at the quarter.

While, at the 'Khan El-Khalili' quarter, the local people (mainly shopkeepers) abuse or are indifferent to conserving historic buildings. The quarter comprises about 11 historic buildings that were built between the mid-13<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Most of these buildings are trade centers known as 'Khan' or 'Wekalat' (Caravanserais) rented for local/foreign merchants, in addition to other religious, memorial, and residential buildings. Since the medieval ages, the 'Khan

El-Khalili' quarter has been known as Egypt's specialized traditional market of the local handmade products. Currently, many historic buildings at the quarter have deteriorated and others are abused in business activities by shopkeepers.

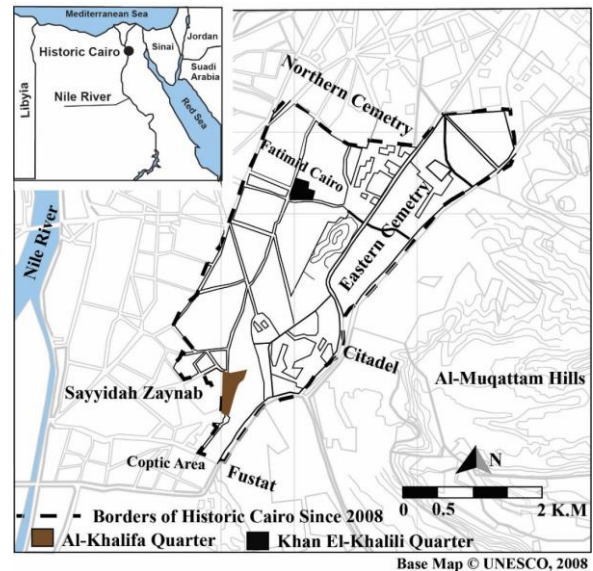


Figure 2. Geographical location of Historic Cairo and two quarters

Source: Edited by authors

### (2) Methods

The methodological framework consists of three systematic steps, which includes both qualitative and quantitative methods: a pilot survey conducted in December 2018 and 2019 based on direct observation, 50 questionnaires with a representative sample of local people at the 'Al-Khalifa' quarter, 11 semi-structured interviews with a representative sample of local people at the 'Khan El-Khalili' quarter, and semi-structured interviews with five stakeholders in both quarters. Upon this pilot survey, the current conservation status and the local people's behavior towards the cultural heritage in both quarters were identified. Secondly, an intensive literature survey of prime historical resources, conservation reports, and recent related studies on Historic Cairo is conducted to understand the historical background and the formal/informal conservation history of the historic buildings in both quarters. Finally, a sequential explanatory design, using quantitative and qualitative methods, respectively, is applied to examine the relationship between the local people's SoP levels and their behavioral intentions towards the conservation of the historic buildings in both quarters.<sup>(9)</sup> A total of 201 and 207 questionnaires were collected at the 'Al-Khalifa' quarter on the religious building and the non-religious buildings, respectively. While a total of 228 questionnaires were collected at the 'Khan

El-Khalili' quarter. Besides, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with a representative sample of local people at each quarter. The numeric data were statistically analyzed using the SPSS software for descriptive analysis and the Warp-Pls software for Structural Equation Models (SEMs). While the interviews were voice-recorded, transcribed, translated into English, then thematically analyzed.

### 3. Results

Theoretically, in Chapter 2, the author found that there are about 17 mega conservation projects that have been conducted in Historic Cairo since the early 1970s. However, only three conservation projects focused on improving the local people's quality of life and their integration in the implementation process, and thus, had positive outcomes and worldwide gratitude. Also, the author identified that the various challenges that constrain the effective conservation of Historic Cairo are, directly or indirectly, connected to shortcomings in the methodology or structure of the national management system.

Empirically, in Chapters 3 and 4, the author found a significant relationship is found between the local people's SoP and their positive behaviors towards conserving the religious and non-religious buildings at the 'Al-Khalifa' quarter and their negative behavior towards the historic buildings at the 'Khan El-Khalili' quarter. At the 'Al-Khalifa' quarter, SoP explains (39%) of local people's attitude, which can predict (14%) of their intentions towards the conservation of the religious building of 'Sidi M. Al-Anwar'. Similarly, SoP explains about (26%) of local people's attitude, which can predict about (39%) of their intentions towards the conservation of the non-religious building of 'Shagaret Eddor'. While, at the 'Khan El-Khalili' quarter, SoP explains about (25%) of the local people's attitude, which can predict about (21%) of their intentions towards the historic buildings' conservation. Actually, the previous values are considerable when taking into consideration the many other variables that have an influence on people's attitude (e.g., knowledge, culture, religion) and behavior (e.g., socio-economic values, physical and intellectual abilities) towards a particular place.<sup>(10)</sup> Surprisingly, at the 'Al-Khalifa quarter,' the author found that 'place dependence' has the highest degree of influence on the local people's attitude towards the conservation of the religious building. In contrast, 'place attachment' has the highest degree of influence on the local people's attitude towards conserving the non-religious building. The local people highly depend on the religious

building as a venerable place of various activities that meet their daily life needs, compared to the other similar religious buildings in the quarter. In comparison, the local people's attachment to the non-religious building has been constituted through childhood memories and direct connection with the building, especially after its adaptation as a community center and dispensary. These findings indicate the significant influence of the buildings uses on the local people's SoP sub-components. It aligns with the Venice Charter which endorsed this point clearly, when stating that "The conservation of monuments is always facilitated by using them for some socially useful purpose".<sup>(11)</sup> Interestingly, due to the touristification of the 'Khan El-Khalili' quarter, over the past 30 years, the local people have been replaced by newcomers who have divided rootedness and commodified relationships with the quarters' historic buildings. Therefore, the author found no significant relationship between the local people's 'place attachment' and their attitude and behavioral intentions towards the historic buildings, which explain their abuse and indifference to their conservation. Finally, interesting findings are released based on the correlation analysis between the local people's demographic and Socio-economic characteristics and their SoP towards the different types of historic buildings in both quarters. The author found a negative correlation between the people's residence/ working place location and their SoP level among all investigated types of buildings. It means that, the closer is the person's residence/workplace to a cultural heritage site, the stronger is his/her SoP towards that site. Also, it is found that the elderly people who received a low education level develop higher SoP levels towards the religious and non-religious buildings, but not the residential and commercial buildings, where both educated and non-educated residents/shopkeepers developed high SoP levels towards the buildings. Also, the people who live/work for a long time at a place, develop higher SoP levels towards its religious, residential, and commercial buildings, but not the non-religious building where both short-term and long-term residents/shopkeepers developed high SoP levels towards the building.

### 4. Conclusion

Overall, it could be concluded that: 1) The transition in local people's SoP plays a significant role in identifying the conservation status of the cultural heritage sites disregarding their type. 2) The 'local people centered approach' is the most

appropriate for conserving the living cultural heritage sites, such as Historic Cairo and similar historic centers at the Middle East and North Africa. Such an approach considers local people's socio-economic values and needs, which inevitably reinforce their SoP and positive behaviors towards the cultural heritage. While the intensive touristification of historic quarters negatively affects the local people's SoP, thus promoting the abuse and deterioration of the cultural heritage. 3) The closer is the person's residence/workplace from a cultural heritage site, the stronger is his/her SoP towards that site. 4) Using quantitative methods only is inadequate to assess the local people's SoP towards a cultural heritage site, and quantitative methods are needed to complement and interpret the numeric findings.

Finally, the author proposes the assessment of local people's SoP as a principal criterion for the future inscription of living world heritage sites by the global organizations such as UNESCO to ensure their sustainable conservation. Also, further research opportunities can be outlined out of this research such as assessing the local people's SoP at a living cultural heritage site, pre and post the recently implemented conservation projects at that site, based on a mixed-method approach (Qualitative and Quantitative) to ensure the projects' effectiveness and sustainable outcomes.

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