

SENSE OF PLACE - DEFENSE OF PLACE

A CASE STUDY OF THE TORONTO ISLAND

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the dialectical relationship between sense of place (i.e., feeling of belonging in and having a deep emotional attachment to a place of personal significance and meaning) and defense of place (i.e., specific political, legal and other actions taken to protect a place that is threatened). That is to say, when a place to which a person or a group of people is strongly attached is threatened in some way, the sense of place may lead to and condition the nature of the defense of place; and, when a place is threatened and defended, that defense of place, in turn, conditions and influences the nature of sense of place. In this dialectical relationship between sense of place and defense of place, the concept of threat occupies a position of central importance as a catalyst to action and a continuing influence.

The phenomenon of sense of place may exist in the absence of a severe threat or any defense of place. But when defense of place is evident, sense of place is the foundation upon which that defense of place is built. Sense of place, therefore, is given a position of primary importance in this investigation. It is argued that sense of place is a subjective phenomenon and, based on the information collected for this study, that it is composed of six, inter-related major components which have been termed: sense of history, sense of identity, sense of community, sense of environment, sense of control and sense of change.

Because of the nature of sense of place, this study adopts, as much as possible, an experiential perspective - i.e., attempts to under-

stand the phenomena of sense of place and defense of place from the perspective of the experiencing individuals, using their own words and actions as clues to how they relate to their particular place. In addition, in order to explore the complex, holistic, multi-faceted nature of sense of place and its relation to defense of place, this study presents a detailed, case study of a particular group of individuals (Toronto Islanders) and how they have related to a particular place (Toronto Island), which has been subjected to a variety of threats over a long period of time. In order to accomplish these ends, a variety of data sources and techniques were employed, most notably a lengthy period of participant observation (which involved living on the Island for approximately four months and extensive visiting over a period of six years) and interviewing of both Islanders (over eighty hours of taped interviews) and politicians (over twenty hours of taped interviews). In addition, analysis of the voluminous documentary records was conducted.

Evidence is presented that Toronto Islanders have experienced a sense of place and have repeatedly defended their special place against outside threats to radically alter or destroy it. By devoting one chapter to each of the six major components of sense of place, this study defines each component, provides copious evidence that Toronto Islanders have experienced each component, analyzes the Island and Islanders in terms of each component and analyzes the dialectical links between each component and defense of place. This study, therefore, also demonstrates (by constant reference to detailed observations and comments from individual Islanders) how each general component of sense of place may be applied and analyzed in a particular place and may serve as a guide to future studies.

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