Understanding identity construction in urban environment through a triadic interdisciplinary lens

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Abstract: *The increasingly mobile society of this global era is facing a plethora of issues pertaining to identity constructions studied by various disciplines in social sciences. From an architectural perspective, comprehending identity constructions in urban environment has become increasingly complex as cities are largely characterised by diversity, deterritorialisation and displacement. In this context, the paper argues that identity construction in urban environment needs to be addressed through an interdisciplinary perspective that allows a deeper understanding of the multifarious factors that influences it. These factors and their inter relationships with social, cultural and personal aspects defining identity processes remain difficult to capture, often due to a parochial disciplinary approach to identity studies. Identifying significant concepts in human geography, social psychology and phenomenology, this paper examines how these concepts, when synthesized, prove instrumental in studying the complexities of identity construction in relation to the urban environment. The paper explains that meaning, experience and place-relation are three main aspects which play an important role in understanding the identity constructions of people. The paper suggest that this triadic interdisciplinary lens enables the constructive bringing together of these three aspects for identity research, which otherwise remain incoherent or loosely connected due to disciplinary boundaries .The paper concludes by highlighting how the integration of relevant concepts from the three disciplines complement each other and offer new disciplinary insights in understanding identity concepts and theories.*

 Introduction

In the recent years issues and questions on 'identity' have occupied a central position in the field of social sciences. Erik Erikson explained the difficulty in probing the concept of identity as 'the more one writes about this subject, the more the word becomes a term for something as unfathomable as it is "all-pervasive"'(Erikson, 1994, p.9). Erickson's statement is particularly important in the present context where identity is increasingly fluid, contingent and changing over time as opposed to the historical notions grounded in specificity (Woodward, 2002). Explaining the various ways of conceptualising identity is beyond the scope of this paper and identity here is discussed as being both relational and contextual which was developed in Erikson's(1950, 1968) works and identity is understood to always involve mutuality between the individual and his or her world. Erikson also suggests that there is an existence of a whole range of systems that deals with the fundamental way in which the inner experience of the individual is linked to the structure in the outside world. Erikson's conception of identity opens up several trajectories for investigating the implicit factors influencing people's identity construction and negotiation in the dynamic contemporary urban context. Cultural theorist Stuart hall emphasises that due to the major changes in the structural properties of contemporary societies 'the very concept we are dealing with- identity- [is] too complex , too under developed and too little understood in contemporary social sciences to be definitely tested'(Hall & Gieben, 1991, p.274)

Hall's concerns on the identity complexity can be seen as the result of globalisation that has greatly impacted the way people identify themselves with their environment. The increasingly mobile societies of this globalised era are facing a plethora of identity issues that is discussed in different disciplinary platforms. With geographical boundaries becoming more permeable, distances reduced and cultures no longer having a territorial base, there is an emergence of a place which is more non-physical in nature

and where identities remain obscure. As social psychologist Jan art Scholte notes,

> Globalization has tended to increase the sense of a fluid and fragmented self, particularly for   persons   who   spend   large proportions of their time in supraterritorial spaces, where multiple   identities readily converge and create lost souls. Hybrid identities present significant   challenges for the construction of community. How can deep and social bonds be forged   when individuals have multiple and perhaps competing sense of self- and indeed often feel   pretty unsettled in all of them? (Scholte, 2005, p.253)

Scholte's description shows the extent to which the transformation of people's spatial relation with urban environments defines the complexity of identity constructions.Identity is caught in a labyrinth of multiple and overlapping layers of urban fabrics which are socio-cultural, economic, cultural and political.

It is argued here that the various disciplines approaching identity studies fail to address this complexity and, in particular, do not take into consideration the context – that is, the physical setting. This could potentially result in a skewed understanding of the notion of identity, which adds to the existing complexity. Harold Proshansky et al. (1970) explain that physical cognitive structures are more complex than social and personal cognitive structures. Being subtle, they tend to be remote from the awareness of the individual, because physical settings are "backdrops" against which events occur. Apart from the affects of disciplinary boundaries, this is one of main reasons for the role of the physical setting in identity studies being so far overlooked, as they are largely conceived as 'backdrop'.

Manuel Castells (2004) observes that all identities are constructed: the complexity lies in understanding how, from what, by whom and for what are they constructed. Castells (2004) notes how identity construction involves multifarious factors:

The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations.(p.7)

Each discipline's approach comprehends the above factors within its own disciplinary conventions. Fundamentally functioning to represent society and culture(Kaminer, 2011) , architecture is an all-encompassing discipline that has been largely challenged by identity issues that plague urban societies today. The reason for this can be attributed to two major factors. Firstly, identity is caught in the diverse yet interwoven issues of multiculturalism, which inscribe differences at socio-cultural, economical and political levels. This in turn is spatially manifest, transforming the urban environment into places for contestation and/or negotiation in addition to the already entangled spatial experiences of people. Secondly, spatial disciplines such as architecture and urban planning are accused of foisting exaggerated attention on visual experience and, in addition to which the designed environment is increasingly suffering from what Edward Relph (1985) refers to as stuffing one's own genius into somebody else's loci. All these factors have not only made the relationship between people and the urban environment more fragile, but have also made the notions of identity negotiations and constructions more difficult for architecture to comprehend and address independently,.

Hence, from an architectural perspective, the need for understanding the notion of identity construction amidst the complexity of spatial practices in multicultural societies requires an interdisciplinary study which will be set out below. This paper consists of two parts. The first part examines three disciplines and identifies appropriate concepts which are pertinent for studying identity constructions in this way. The disciplines chosen and discussed below are different but they are potentially significant together in terms of the interfaces which connect them with human and place relation concepts which is enriching for architectural understanding of identity construction. The second part explains how various disciplinary

concepts which, when synthesised offer valuable insights for identity construction in relation to place experiences in the urban environment.

Human Geography

Embracing both physical and human worlds, geography arguably comes closest to the all-encompassing nature of architecture. Geography is a rich domain of study for many disciplines as it contains multifarious approaches, philosophies and foci for understanding the world. Geographers work with varying scales of spaces which Helen Couclelis (1992) notes in a form of hierarchy of spaces; mathematical, physical, socio-economic, behavioural and experiential space, spanning both objective and subjective understandings. Particularly of interest to this discussion are the latter three categories of spaces. Socio economic space, the relative space defined by "social and economic activities and relations […] analysed to offers insights about the interplay between social relations and spatial structures"(Couclelis, 1992, p.223). The relevance here lies in viewing space as a "social production which is constituted, reproduced, and changed by social relation, and in turn constrain[s] the unfolding of such relation"(Couclelis, 1992, p.223). This enables one to examine identity issues by considering the various factors which determine peoples' social and spatial relations. Behavioural spaces offer a rich domain for studying people's response to environments based on their perception of world. According to behavioural geography, "individuals function in a subjective world- a world in the head"(Couclelis, 1992, p.226). This perspective immediately puts people in the forefront of research, which is crucial when studying urban environments. Various approaches are developed to study these behavioural spaces, the most popular being observation of spatial choices and time geography.

Understanding the spatial choices of people and groups produces rich data sets which can be used to identify "the relationship between the spatial behaviour on the one hand and socio economic and other personal

characteristics on the other"(Couclelis, 1992, p.226). Another significant approach in studying behavioural space is time geography developed by Swedish geographer Torsten Hägerstrand in the mid-1960s in his research on human migration patterns in Sweden. Time geography studies reveal deep structures of all kinds of interactions and transaction between people and environment (Pred, 1977a). In doing so, this approach "specifies conditions for virtually all forms of interactions" (Pred, 1977a, p.211) involving people. A time geographic approach can be especially significant in studying the urban context since "when events are seen located together in a block of space-time they inevitably expose relations which cannot be traced" (Pred, 1977b, p.210). Finally, the experiential space is the "space human beings actually experience before it is passed through the filters of scientific analysis, embracing all the intuitive, unanalyzed, or unarticulated forms of spatial understanding" (Couclelis, 1992, p.227). In these spaces are embedded by far the most subtle and complex meanings of human actions and interactions. Dealing with space, which varies from pure space of formal symbols to more affective qualities allows plethora of concepts to emerge in terms of peoples' relation and experiences with these diverse spaces. The profundity of geographical conceptions of space arises due to the complex interconnectedness of these categories of spaces. Focussing more specifically towards an experiential understanding of people and place interaction (that greatly influences identity formations) human geography intensely relates to identity studies.

The main strength of geography, from which this research draws insights, lies in its "deep conviction that environmental and human processes create the reality in which humankind lives, and that those processes are key to understanding the complexity of places"(Knight, 1992, p.9). Geography spans a range of spaces and it was human geographers who first studied how space was enriched with human experience and meaning. Human geography considers people and place relationships to be deep and profound which is an essential condition for existence. Particularly significant for this research is understanding of people-place concepts through the works of humanist geographers Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph.

Tuan's thinking of human-place relationships resonates with his intuitive understanding of human geography. Tuan (1990) created the term 'topophilia' for the affective bond between people and place, which he notes though as a concept it is diffused, it is as vivid and concrete as personal experience. Tuan's works were pioneering in situating place more clearly as a humanized space, while providing a broader understanding of relationship between space and place (Castello, 2010) . In *Segmented World and Self* (1982) his analysis is towards a deeper understanding of the link between human consciousness and spatial structures. In *Dominance and Affection* (1982) his attention moves to the aesthetic exploitation and mistreatment of nature. Throughout his work there is a consistent exploration and reflection on what it is to be human, that is a 'Being-in-the-World' (Heidegger, 1962), and human environment relationships are explicated as not merely objective and material, but also affective and moral. Tuan's work echoes Heidegger's phenomenological understanding of human experience and physical world which were instrumental in capturing the essence of human experience. Tuan's writings capture "the inherent tensions and ambiguities that exist just beneath the apparent concreteness and certainty of the customary rhythms of everyday life"(Entrikin, 2001, p.430).These concepts of everyday experiences become highly pertinent today in understanding and defining "places of urbanity"(Castello, 2010, p.21) .

Similar notions of a need for deeper and meaningful experience with places are found in Edward Relph's works. If Tuan revealed what is place and place experience, Relph was the first to bring out the issues of placelessness in studying people and place relationships. Relph's (1976) seminal work *Place and Placelessness*, addressed the lack of sense of place caused by uniformity of places. Relph emphasised that the "meanings may be rooted in physical setting but it is a property of human intentions and experiences" (p.47). Among all empathetic approaches towards people-place studies, one of the most significant contributions is Relph's different modes of place experience which he explained through the concept of "insideness" and "outsideness"(Relph, 1976, p.49). Relph discussed seven

modes of insideness and outsideness based on the extent of one's experiential involvement with places. David Seamon (1996) observed that "the value of these modes, particularly in terms of self-awareness, is that they apply to specific place experiences yet provide a conceptual structure in which to understand those experiences in broader terms" (p.7). Understanding of insideness-outsideness in one's experience will help in discerning how strongly one identifies with that place. Furthermore, the theory delineates various modes of experiencing places, from profound alienation (existential outsideness) to complete commitment to a place which is unselfconscious (existential insideness). This is significant for its immediate relevance and conceptual depth in understanding people's place experiences in everyday urban spatial encounters.

Human geography comprehends the world as one created by human perception, intention and behaviour (Knight, 1992) which offers a rich understanding of reciprocal relationships between people and place. It is particularly relevant to the study of spatial experiences in the contemporary environment, which is characterised by a combination of both intrusiveness and lack of boundaries; technological symbolic systems of a high level of complexity (Stevens, 1996). Identity is how we make sense of ourselves, and geographers have argued that the meanings given to a place may be so strong that they become a central part of the identity of the people who are experiencing them (Rose, 1995). In this context, human geography offers a rich platform for developing a broader scope of place conceptualisations, grounded in people's experiential understanding. Human geographic concepts of studying people and places move us towards accepting "existence and importance of structures, mechanisms and forces beyond immediate observation" (Eyles, 1985, p.4). This enables an in-depth understanding of people's relationship with the physical world: as Tuan noted "knowledge of the earth elucidates the world of man... to know the world is to know oneself" (Tuan, 1971, p.185).

Social Psychology

Identity is a concept that occupies a prominent place and is central in the literature of social psychology. There, it has been theorized and discussed under two major schools of thought, namely Social Identity Theory and Identity Theory. These theories approach the multilayered and multidimensional concept of identity from different perspectives. The discussion here aims towards a broad understanding of these concepts and delineates only some aspects of the theories which are particularly relevant to this research study.

The social and environmental conditions of people influence their perception of themselves and others, which slowly becomes part of their identity. Henri Tajfel (1982) describes social identity as the individual's knowledge of belonging to certain social groups, as well as the emotions and values this conveys to him or her. Social identity is shaped by the group or entities to which one belongs, and is also responsible for producing group behaviour. Different self-images are produced by self-concepts and their combinations, which are of utmost importance to the individual. According to some situations, certain parts of one's identity will be dormant and other parts dominating based on the group which one identifies one's self with (Turner, 2010). Social Identity Theory assumes that people are attracted towards a group which presents itself with positive characteristics and tend to avoid groups with negative traits; mainly because of the motivation one feels when being part of a positive group. If people cannot leave a group, they will deny the negative characteristics of the group, or reinterpret them as positive self-concepts (Tajfel, 1981). Though the physical environment is largely overlooked in most of the identity theories in social psychology, Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) have noted that social identity theory is easily transferable, and can be further developed to include aspects of place. Social Identity Theory clearly emphasises the importance of positive esteem and concludes that people prefer places with physical symbols that enhance their self-esteem (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996).

Identity Theory has its roots in George Herbert Mead's (1962) framework, which emphasized that society shapes one's self which in turn shapes one's social behaviour. Through his framework, Identity Theory tried to understand the various concepts of society and self. Identity Theory has developed in two different directions which are closely related. The first focuses on examining "how social structures affect the structure of self and how structure of the self influences social behaviour, whereas the second concentrates on the internal dynamics of self-processes as these affect social behaviour" (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 292). According to Identity Theory, the core of an identity is the categorisation of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role, and its performance (Burke & Tully, 1977). These expectations and meanings are developed as a set of standards based on which people act in any environment. To compare it with the previous theory, Social Identity theory examines 'category-based' identities which relate to ethnicity while Identity Theory deals with 'role-based' identities such as parent or child, in terms of category-based identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000a). The significant idea which Identity Theory reinforces is that "in the absence of specific information about skills and performance levels relevant to the task, participants in a group that seeks to solve a collective problem will draw upon cultural memory contained in previous status and esteem allocations to obtain information about possible resources available for the task at hand" (Stryker & Burke, 2000b, p.292).This idea, especially with 'information' delineated, can be enriching when applied to understanding people's spatial behaviour in the urban environment. Drawing Social Identity Theory closer towards this research is the fact that, "recently identity theorists have drawn meaning from relationship between persons and resources (things that sustain persons and interactions) as central component in identity processes" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p.225). Underlying the concept of resources is the crucial role of the physical settings in the identity processes. Both of these important theories in social psychology unravel multifarious factors that define and influence one's identity formation. However the role of physical settings or place relationships remains implicit in both.

Another theory which illuminates a wide range of identity issues pertaining to the focus of this research is the Identity Process Theory. Glynis M Breakwell's Identity Process Theory adopts an approach which aims to understand the concept of identity in relation to place, addressing how and why places become salient for identity concepts. In this theory, identity is seen as a "dynamic social product which is the result of the interaction of individual's memory, consciousness and organized construal with the physical and social structures" (Hauge, 2007, p 43), becoming both a structure and a process. Blurring the distinction between social and personal identity, the structure is manifested through thought, action and affect but a differentiation is introduced between the content and value dimensions. The content dimension, containing both personal and social identity, is hierarchical but not static, and the value dimension contains the positive or negative value of these categories.

Breakwell proposes that "identity should be conceptualised in terms of a biological organism moving through time which develops through accommodation, assimilation and evaluation of the social world" (Breakwell, 1986, p 24). This process of accommodation, assimilation and evaluation depended on three principles, namely distinctiveness, continuity and self-esteem. The first principle of identity is the 'desire to maintain personal distinctiveness or uniqueness' (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996, p 207). Breakwell states that aspects of identity derived from places we belong to arise because places have symbols that have meaning and significance to us. People's associations with a specific city or area enable them to differentiate themselves from people from other parts of the town. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996) similarly found compelling evidence that "people use place identifications in order to distinguish themselves from others" (p 207). In this way, place is considered in a similar way to a social category and therefore place identifications can be thought of as comparable to social identifications (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996).

The need to maintain continuity of the self-concept is considered as the second principle of identity formation. Twigger-Ross and Uzzell (1996)

discuss this concept of continuity as two distinct types: first, place-referent continuity, where place acts as a referent to past selves and actions that helps in maintaining a link with that place providing a sense of continuity to their identity; and second, place congruent continuity which refers to the maintenance of continuity through characteristics of places which are generic and transferable from one place to another. The third principle self-esteem "refers to a positive evaluation of one's self or the group with which one identifies; it is concerned with a person's feeling of worth and social value" (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996, p 208). Breakwell later introduced a fourth principle, self-efficacy, which is defined "as an individual's belief in their capabilities to meet situational demands" (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996, p 208). That is, when people believe that they are able to carry out their chosen activities in that environment.

According to Breakwell, continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy and self-esteem are to seen as the guiding principles in understanding identity formations. Various studies in social psychology have explored these principles/motives that are crucial in forming one's identity. One theory which integrates the previous theories on motives of identity is the Motivational Identity Construction Theory. This theory identified six motives for identity construction; Distinctiveness, Meaning, Continuity, Belonging, Self-esteem, Efficacy. Recently Easterbrook and Vignoles (2012) substantiated Motivational Identity Construction Theory though a study which aimed to understand identification of groups developed over time. Integrating motivated identity construction theory with recent social identity research, the authors predicted which motives underlie identification with two types of groups: interpersonal networks and social categories. In a five-wave longitudinal study of social identity processes among 268 new university residents, multilevel analyses showed that motives involved in identity enactment processes--self-esteem, belonging, and efficacy--significantly predicted within-person changes in identification with flatmates (an interpersonal network group), whereas motives involved in identity definition processes--meaning, self-esteem, and distinctiveness--significantly predicted within-person changes in

identification with halls of residence (an abstract social category). The results of their study showed that all these motives changed over time.

The theory explicitly offers a valuable framework for studying the factors that are important for understanding people's identification with a specific group. But more significantly these identity construction motives, when interpreted for their spatial dimension, offer an interesting dimension for analysing the identity constructions of people in relation to places. Throwing light on the role of the physical environment in everyday contexts, group instincts and social and personal meanings associated with places, all of the described theories above in one way or another open up new trajectories for understanding the meaning embedded in identity construction and related processes.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology may be broadly understood as the unbiased descriptive study of whatever appears to the consciousness, precisely in the manner in which it so appears. Phenomenology was the first movement to understand human embeddedness in the environment and to make visible the environment (Moran, 2002). It emerged in the school of Fanz Brentano and was developed by Edmund Husserl. Husserl (1913) presents phenomenology as approaching 'whatever appears as such', including everything meant or thought, in the manner of its appearing, in the 'how' of its manifestation. Phenomenology which is "characterised as a way of seeing rather than a set of doctrines", aims to describe in "all its complexity the manifold layers of the experience of objectivity as it emerges at the heart of subjectivity" (Moran, 2002, p.2). This quality of interlinking objective and subjective aspects of human experience enables deeper understanding of identity construction in relation to place experiences. Another significant aspect of phenomenology comes from Husserl's (1913) approach to the structure of our everyday manner of human being in the world, termed 'the natural attitude'. This structure of natural attitude

revealed the world in a certain way while itself remaining concealed.(Moran, 2002) Phenomenology does not just involve a normal immersed attitude but requires different way of disengagement that enables one to understand the nature of experiences clearly.

This process of delineating and getting into the core of the nature of experiences was what Husserl (1913) called epoche or reduction. Hence Phenomenology goes beyond appearance, seeking the essence of the appearance.

> Phenomenology must bring to pure expression must describe in terms of their essential   concepts and their governing formulae of essence , the essences which directly make   themselves   known   in intuition, and the connections which have their roots purely in such   essences. Each such statement of essence is an a priori statement in the highest sense of the   word. (Moran & Mooney, 2002, p.66)

It has been described as "highly problematical if not impossible to define the essentials of phenomenology"(Spiegelberg, 1994, p.681) mainly due to these different interpretations of accepted doctrines such as intentional structure of consciousness, interpreted by Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau Ponty. One common objective of the phenomenological approach is "the enlarging and deepening of the range of our immediate experience"(Moran, 2002, p.42) by going "to the things themselves" (Husserl, 2001, p.252). Phenomenology as a method reduces the complexity of defining or interpreting the complexity of concepts that underlying it.

At this juncture it is useful to discuss the various steps of the phenomenological method formulated by Herbert Spielberg in his renowned work *The Phenomenological Movement*. Spielberg identified the following seven steps which inform the phenomenological method. The different steps are explained briefly below to facilitate an understanding of phenomenology as a methods to study people experiences.

1. *Investigating particular phenomena:* Investigating particular phenomena, includes 3 operations, which are usually not clearly distinguished usually referred to as 'phenomenological descriptions'. Phenomenological Intuiting, is one of the most demanding operations, which requires utter concentration on the object intuited without becoming absorbed in it to the point of no longer looking critically. Phenomenological analysing traces the elements and structure of the phenomena obtained by intuiting, it does not in any sense demand dissecting them into separate parts. It comprises the distinguishing of the constituents of the phenomena as well as exploration of their relations to and connections with adjacent phenomena. Phenomenological describing- phenomenological description of the phenomena thus intuited and analysed goes usually and essentially hand in hand with the reseeding steps, its more affirming the connection between it.

2. *Investigating general essences*: General essences are conceived of as phenomena that differ from particulars.

3. *Apprehending essential relationships among essences*:Analysing an entity in itself acquaints us only with its components. It includes the discovery of certain essential relationships or connections pertaining to such essences.

4. *Watching modes of appearing*: phenomenology is the systematic exploration of the phenomena, not only in the sense of what appears (whether particulars or general essences), but also in the way in which things appear.

5. *Watching the constitution of phenomenon in consciousness*: the purpose of such a study is the determination of the typical structure of a constitution in consciousness by means of an analysis of the essential sequence of steps. A first illustration of such a constitution can be the experience of getting oriented in a new city whose picture gradually takes shape in our mind.

6. *Suspending belief in the existence of the phenomena*: this includes the systematic cancellation of all those acts by which consciousness

supposedly constitutes the phenomena. Itfacilitates genuine intuiting, analysing and describing of the given.

7. *Interpreting the meaning of phenomena*: unveiling of hidden meanings or at most of intuitive verifications of anticipations about less accessible layers of the phenomena, layers which can be uncovered, although they are not immediately manifested.

The first three steps have been accepted, at least implicitly and practiced by those who have aligned themselves with the phenomenological movement (Spiegelberg, 1994).These steps show how the complexities of people's experiences can be effectively studied and understood through phenomenological as a method and it is rarely considered as a potential means to study people and place interactions. Phenomenological philosophers believe that in our understanding of the individual's experience of the world we often reduce the ontological content of things into a formal and objective content malleable to scientific analysis. In this process we overlook what we cannot capture or comprehend without using objective methods. To overcome this insufficiency of scientific methods, Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980) suggests that phenomenological philosophy is an appropriate approach to answer the questions of the complex relation between person and world. He believes in the Heideggerian (2010) philosophy which allows the "thingness of thing" (p.142) to be revealed, presented and understood that so often is completely neglected by objective methods of systematic analysis like structuralism.

The most compelling aspect of phenomenology lies in describing in its own terms, "the essential and irreducible nature of the experience of consciousness in the world" (Moran, 2002, p.7). Phenomenological Philosophy, as Zaner has phrased it, would seek to explicate the

foundational presuppositions of every human engagement including necessarily itself… (its)   fundamental interest is always to bring out the inobvious, the taken for granted, the hidden, in short   the

foundational presuppositions without which the affairs in question would not be that   which they are…(it) is concerned to focus on 'essences', the invariant of all variations.   (Zaner, 1973, p.32)

Phenomenology's enduring contribution is its patient descriptive analyses of the phenomena of consciousness. Standing against the narrowing down of experience, phenomenology has a "rich understanding of the subjective and the relation between subjectivity and objectivity, whereby objectivity is an achievement or production of subjectivity" (Moran, 2002, p.9). Heidegger's significance to essence and Merleau-Ponty's body as interface mind and world, Satre's existence preceding essence and Spielberg's phenomenology as a method represent valuable insights which phenomenology can offer for understanding the complexity of identity construction through relationship to place which is propitious to this research.

Discussion and Conclusion

Comparing the historical and present context of identity formation, social psychologist Judith Howard (2000) points out

At earlier historical moments, identity was not much an issue; when societies were more   stable, identity was to a greater extent assigned, rather than selected or adopted. In current   times, however, the concept of identity carries full weight of the need for a sense of who one   is, together with an often overwhelming pace of change in surrounding social contexts-   changes in the groups and networks in which people and their identities are embedded and   in societal structures and practices in which those networks are themselves embedded. (p.367)

Today various issues of identity are largely related to increasing ambiguity in comprehending where one belongs to. Concepts of multi-territoriality(Petcou, 2002) and global sense of place(Massey, 1991) have

become common platforms of discussion on identity issues in urban living. The increasingly mobile nature of societies results in multiple identities that are fluid. In addition, the lack of spatial referents which provides valuable cues of identifying oneself in urban environments has created a strong sense of uncertainty deepening the questions of 'where' and 'how' people identify themselves with . Identity itself is caught in a labyrinth of diverse yet interwoven issues of multiculturalism, which inscribe differences at socio-cultural, economical and political levels. This in turn is spatially manifested, transforming urban environments into places for contestation and/or negotiation, resulting in a further entanglement of meanings, experiences and place relations that facilitates in constructing one's identity.
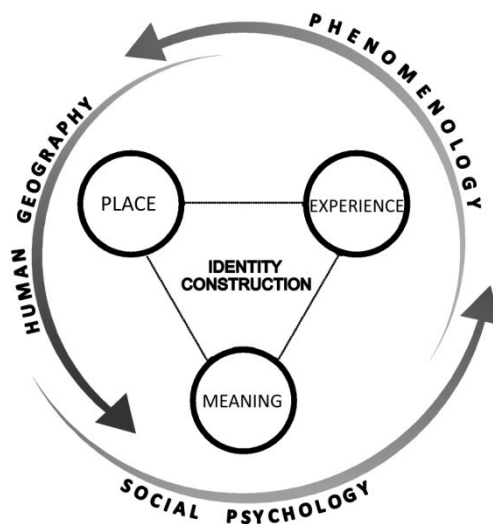

Fig.1 Significance of the three disciplines in studying identity construction

In order to disentangle these three aspects, the disciplinary contributions discussed above prove to be instrumental. All three disciplines have displayed the potential to delve into the nature of human experiences and

existence, offering different perspectives. For instance, Phenomenology's particular attention to the essence of experiences enables one to reveal the unique nature of human encounter with world and the kind of objectivities normally encountered there. Similarly Human Geography's empathetic approach towards the profound relationship between people and place throws light on the implicit yet strong reciprocal impact of this relationship on identity itself. Finally, Social Psychology's identity theories prove to be complex but enriching when interpreted from a spatial dimension and is valuable for studying identity construction in this context.
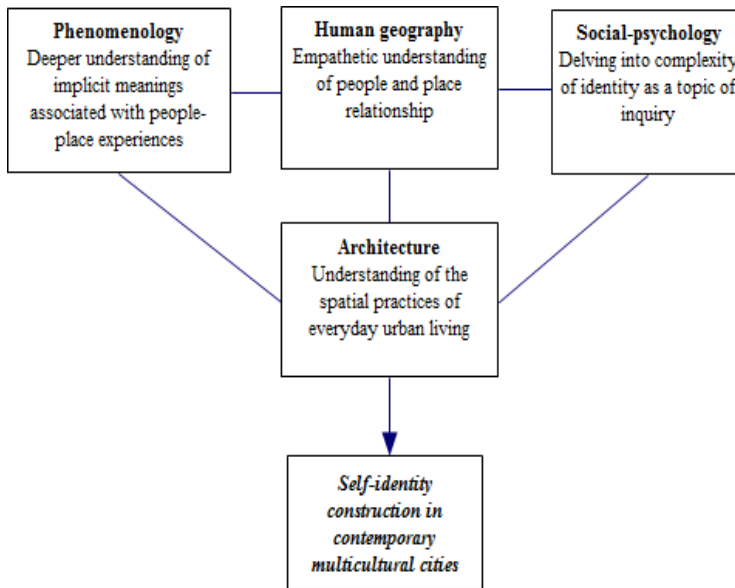

Fig 2. Disciplinary choices for identity construction study

It is suggested that these three disciplines, when synthesised could provide the required depth of understanding for the dimensions of meaning, experience and place-engagement which are difficult for architecture to grasp independently. The significant aspect of studying Identity constructions through this triadic lens is that it not only facilitates in understanding these dimensions in-depth, but more importantly enables in

bringing them together. This allows for a symbiotic relationship between disciplines for instance, by including the place-relation as one of the factors for understanding identity in social psychology, delving into structures of experience in people-place relationship in human geography, considering social and personal meanings in phenomenology offers different disciplinary understanding of identity.

The illustration (Fig 2) shows how seeing through this triadic lens facilitates the study of identity constructions and creatively unravels various aspects of identity construction for an architectural understanding. By showing how these disciplines can facilitate in studying meaning, experience and place relation, this paper suggests that comprehending the process of identity construction and/or negotiation in contemporary urban societies invariably requires the coalescing of these three disciplines. The need of the hour is an amalgamation of relevant and significant concepts of these disciplines which enable the understanding of complexity of identity construction.

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