

Original Article

Place Attachment Dynamics, Settlement Characteristics, and Residential Satisfaction in Post-Relocation Bajo Community: A Comparative Study of Government-Assisted Housing and Self-Help Housing in Mekar Village and Bajo Indah Village, Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi

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Abstract - Settlement relocation of Bajo people is a common adaptive strategy applied to respond to environmental degradation, development pressures, and sustainability vulnerabilities. However, its implementation often ignores the affective and sociocultural aspects of local communities, especially in the context of coastal communities such as the Bajo tribe. This study examines the relationship between settlement characteristics, place attachment, and Satisfaction with living in two relocation schemes: government-assisted Housing and self-help housing. With a comparative-quantitative approach, the study involved 140 respondents ($n = 70$ per location) and used the Pearson correlation test to analyze the strength of the relationship between variables. The results of the analysis showed that in government-assisted Housing built on the sea, there was a positive and significant correlation between settlement characteristics and Satisfaction with living in ($r = 0.394$; $p < 0.001$). In contrast, in government-assisted Housing located on land, a negative and significant correlation was found between place attachment and Satisfaction with living in ($r = -0.316$; $p = 0.008$). These findings indicate that the dynamics of place attachment are not universal, but are highly dependent on the spatial configuration and origin of the relocation. Therefore, relocation planning must holistically consider affective, spatial, and social dimensions to achieve post-relocation sustainability.

Keywords - Place attachment, Coastal relocation, Bajo, Satisfaction, Settlement characteristics.

1. Introduction

Relocation of coastal communities is now a primary strategy in dealing with climate change, urbanization, and infrastructure development pressures. However, its implementation often disrupts the relocated communities' social structure, spatial identity, and ecological relations, as happened in the Bajo community in Southeast Sulawesi. [1], emphasize that non-contextual relocation has a high risk of eliminating place identity and damaging spatial continuity that has been built from generation to generation. Place attachment theory, [2-5] explains that attachment to a place is formed through emotional relationships, experiences, and social functions attached to living spaces. In the context of maritime communities, places of residence are not only physical, but also contain symbolic, spiritual, and economic values that are integrated into everyday life [6-9].

When relocation does not consider these characteristics, the risk of decreasing Satisfaction and adaptive resistance becomes inevitable, [10-12]. Bajo people who were relocated to government-assisted houses above the sea tended to show higher Satisfaction when the characteristics of the settlement were close to their traditional structure. In contrast, people who lived in self-help houses on land experienced spatial and social conflicts because the new place did not represent the sea-based housing pattern that formed their collective identity.

This indicates that the mismatch between spatial configuration and symbolic meaning of space has the potential to weaken place attachment and affect perceptions of the quality of the new settlement. Relocation is not merely a technical process of moving



residence, but rather an intervention into a complex social and spatial system. Therefore, this study departs from the urgent need to understand how place attachment and settlement characteristics contribute to Satisfaction in the context of coastal community relocation. This study offers theoretical and empirical contributions to building a more adaptive and community-based relocation model.

The Bajo people are known as a maritime ethnic group whose lifestyle, social structure, and settlement configuration are entirely dependent on ecological connectivity with the sea. When they are relocated to areas that are no longer directly connected to the waters, there is a disruption to the value system, way of life, and deep-rooted spatial relationships. [1, 6, 13-16] the form and function of traditional settlements are largely determined by the ecological and cultural interactions of the community with its environment. In the context of coastal communities, living spaces function as an extension of the marine livelihood system, clan social structures, and spiritual relationships with nature. Studies by [17-20] also show that severing ecological connectivity through land relocation can trigger degradation of community ties, loss of spatial identity, and decreased adaptive resilience. For the Bajo people, stilt houses above the water are a place to live, a family dock, an economic production space (repairing boats, drying seafood), and a symbol of social identity.

Research on coastal community relocation has expanded significantly over the past two decades, particularly in the context of climate change, development policy, and community resilience. Studies in Bangladesh, Fiji, and the Pacific Islands show that relocation failures are generally caused by neglecting local communities' cultural and psychosocial dimensions. In Indonesia, studies by [21-24] show that coastal community relocation often prioritizes physical-technical approaches without considering community attachment to place and spatial orientation.

Various studies have also examined the relationship between settlement characteristics and residential Satisfaction, such as those conducted by [25-27], Bonaiuto et al. (2003), which showed that the compatibility between built space and local lifestyles is a key determinant in shaping perceptions of comfort and Satisfaction. Meanwhile, the dimension of place attachment has been extensively studied in the context of migration, land use change, and gentrification [3], but generally remains limited to urban or homogeneous suburban communities.

In the coastal context, several studies highlight that place attachment can be either a facilitator or an obstacle to adaptation, depending on the spatial and symbolic compatibility between the new space and old values. Research by [28] in coastal communities in Pakistan shows that when relocation does not facilitate access to the sea or support the economic functions of families, place attachment becomes a source of dissatisfaction.

However, no previous studies have directly examined the simultaneous relationship between settlement characteristics, place attachment, and residential Satisfaction in a single empirical model, particularly in the context of the Bajo community, which has experienced two different forms of relocation—government-provided Housing and land-based self-help housing. Previous studies have tended to examine these variables separately or in culturally and geographically distinct contexts, such as urban communities (Ramkissoon et al., 2013), migrant communities [29], and disaster refugees [30].

The novelty of this research lies in: (1) A comparative-quantitative design that compares two forms of actual relocation within the same ethnographic community. (2) The use of simultaneous analysis of three main variables: settlement characteristics, place attachment, and residential satisfaction. (3) A focus on traditional coastal communities, namely the Bajo people, who have been largely overlooked in spatial-affective relocation studies. Thus, this research fills an empirical gap in community-based maritime relocation studies and expands the theoretical scope of place attachment and spatial characteristics in shaping post-relocation satisfaction perceptions.

When they are relocated to static, homogeneous, and sea-separated land houses, the meaning structure is broken. The data from this study show that in self-help houses on land, attachment to high places is negatively correlated with Satisfaction with living. This reflects cognitive and affective conflicts due to the difference between the new space and previous spatial experiences based on the sea. The benefits of the Bajo community's living space are highly dependent on ecological continuity with the sea, not only in terms of livelihood, but also in forming social and psychological relations. Therefore, a residential relocation model that ignores the ecological and cultural dimensions has the potential to fail functionally and affectively. A deep understanding of the Bajo community's ecological-spatial system is a primary requirement for contextual and sustainable relocation design.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Design and Research Location

This study uses a descriptive-comparative quantitative approach to analyze the relationship between settlement characteristics, place attachment, and residential Satisfaction in the Bajo community after relocation. This design was chosen because it allows researchers to objectively measure differences and relationships between variables in two relocation contexts and provides a comparative basis for understanding the socio-spatial dynamics.

The research location focused on two residential areas that represent two different relocation approaches in the coastal region of Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi. The Government Assistance Houses are located in Bajo Indah Village, Soropia District, Konawe Regency. This settlement is the result of a formal government relocation

program, built on the sea using concrete stilt houses with a uniform design. The area was designed using a centralized approach and facilitated by state institutions without full community participation.

Rumah Swadaya is located in Mekar Village and Soropia Subdistrict, Konawe Regency. This settlement was formed independently by the Bajo community as a form of adaptation following their initial relocation. The dwellings in this area were built on land, following a flexible spatial logic in line with the community's economic capabilities and local customs. There was no architectural intervention from the government, so the spatial configuration developed organically and unstructured.

The two locations were chosen because they share similar demographics but differ significantly in terms of physical aspects of settlement, relocation approaches, and community relations with the built environment. Comparing these two contexts provides an opportunity to evaluate how spatial characteristics and place attachment influence the level of residential Satisfaction among maritime communities experiencing displacement.

2.2. Population and Sample

The population in this study was all heads of households living in two relocation areas for the Bajo community in Soropia Subdistrict, Konawe Regency. The population included communities living in government-provided Housing in Bajo Indah Village and communities that built their own houses in Mekar Village. Sampling was conducted using stratified purposive sampling, which involves selecting samples based on differences in settlement characteristics as strata. Respondents were selected based on the following criteria: (1) household heads or household members who have resided in the relocation site for at least two years, (2) have direct experience in the adaptation process to the new Housing, and (3) are willing to provide information through a structured questionnaire.

The number of samples used in this study was 140 family cards, consisting of 70 respondents from each location: government-assisted houses and self-help houses. This number was considered sufficient for correlation analysis and comparison of two contextually different but demographically equivalent groups. This approach was chosen to ensure that variations in results could be explained by differences in settlement characteristics rather than by differences in sample size between locations.

2.3. Measuring Instruments and Scales

The research instrument used was a structured questionnaire with a 1–5 Likert scale, where 1 indicated the lowest level of disagreement or dissatisfaction, and 5 indicated the highest level of agreement or Satisfaction. This questionnaire was developed based on a review of theory and validation from previous studies relevant to the context of coastal settlement relocation and studies on place attachment.

There are three main variables in this study, each measured through several indicators:

- **Settlement Characteristics** (independent variable) Measured through indicators of physical condition of houses, accessibility to marine resources, spatial order, building materials, and availability of social space. This subscale adapts instruments from Rapoport (1982) and is reinforced by the study of Ujang & Zakariya (2015).
- **Place Attachment** (intermediate variable) Measured based on the dimensions of person, place, and psychological process as formulated by Scannell & Gifford (2010), covering aspects of emotional affection, symbolic meaning of home, and desire to remain in that location.
- **Residential Satisfaction** (dependent variable) refers to residents' perceptions of comfort, functionality of the house, social integration, and cultural relevance of the living space. This instrument refers to the evaluative model of Amerigo & Aragones (1997) and is modified based on the context of traditional coastal communities.

Each statement in the questionnaire was validated through expert judgment and tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha test. The results of the validity and reliability tests showed that all items had high internal consistency and were suitable for use in further statistical analysis.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study was conducted using a quantitative statistical approach with SPSS software. The analysis aimed to test the relationship between variables, compare dynamics between locations, and assess the consistency and feasibility of the measurement instruments.

First, Pearson's correlation test was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. This test was chosen because it is suitable for measuring the linear relationship between two interval or ratio variables. The analysis was conducted separately in two locations, namely government-assisted housing and self-help housing, to see the differences in relational patterns between settlement characteristics, place attachment, and residential Satisfaction.

Second, a descriptive comparison was conducted between the two location groups to identify differences in average scores and distributions between the main variables. This analysis reinforces the contextual understanding of the different dynamics of relocation in spatial design and location.

Third, to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's alpha was tested for each variable subscale. An alpha value > 0.70 was used as the minimum threshold to indicate that the items in the instrument had adequate internal consistency and were suitable for use in further analysis.

Overall, this analysis technique enabled researchers to build a comprehensive and empirical understanding of the functional relationship between settlement characteristics, place attachment, and residential Satisfaction among the Bajo community after relocation.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Correlation Test Results – Self-Help Housing

Table 1 shows that Pearson's correlation analysis results on the group of respondents living in self-help

houses in Mekar Village showed two important findings. First, there is a significant negative correlation between settlement characteristics and residential Satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.282$ at a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

Second, a stronger negative correlation was also found between place attachment and residential Satisfaction, with a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.316$ at a significance level of $p < 0.01$.

Table 1. Results of pearson correlation test between settlement characteristics, place attachment, and satisfaction with living conditions

Location	Variable	Settlement Characteristics ↔ Satisfaction	Place Attachment ↔ Satisfaction
Mekar Village (Self-Help Housing)	Correlation Coefficient (r)	– 0,282	– 0,316**
	Significance (p)	0,018*	0,008**
	Interpretation	Negative, significant	Negative, highly significant
Bajo Indah Village (Aid House)	Correlation Coefficient (r)	+ 0,394**	0,16
	Significance (p)	0,001**	0,185
	Interpretation	Positive, highly significant	Not significant

This finding indicates a tendency that the higher an individual's attachment to their place of residence, the more critical their attitude toward the physical condition and quality of the settlement, thereby impacting a decrease in residential Satisfaction. In the context of the Bajo community, attachment to one's home is not solely based on physical comfort but also on the alignment of the living environment with their way of life, access to the sea, and the continuity of social relationships.

Since self-built homes are typically constructed on land with limited infrastructure and no direct access to the sea, residents who have a strong emotional connection to their previous settlement's memories often feel that the current environment fails to meet their cultural and ecological expectations.

These results reinforce Lewicka's (2011) idea that place attachment can function ambivalently: as a reinforcer of social stability in a suitable space, but also as a trigger for psychological dissonance when there is a discrepancy between the expected value of the space and the actual conditions encountered.

Attachment to previous living experiences—which were maritime, communal, and open—is not fulfilled in a self-help housing environment that is spatially and socially fragmented.

Thus, relocation that does not consider the cultural and ecological orientation of the community has the potential to create incongruous spatial attachments, where new homes become symbols of loss rather than acceptance. This explains why place attachment in the context of self-

built homes is negatively correlated with residential Satisfaction.

3.2. Correlation Test Results – Aid House

Figure 1 shows that the Pearson's correlation test results on the group of respondents living in government-assisted Housing in Bajo Indah Village showed a positive and significant correlation between settlement characteristics and residential Satisfaction, with a value of $r = +0.394$ at a significance level of $p < 0.01$. Meanwhile, the relationship between place attachment and residential Satisfaction was not statistically significant ($r = +0.160$; $p = 0.185$), although the direction of the relationship remained positive.

These findings confirm that the physical and spatial characteristics of the aid houses, which are built above the sea and use concrete stilt house structures, are more compatible with the maritime habits of the Bajo people.

These dwellings closely resemble their traditional spatial configuration—houses facing the sea, with access to boat moorings, and physically and socially connected to the clan. This compatibility contributes positively to perceptions of comfort, functionality, and Satisfaction with living conditions, although an affective attachment to the place has not yet been significantly formed.

Within the framework of Rapoport's (1982) and Ujang & Zakariya's (2015) theories, these findings indicate that the compatibility between spatial form and local life orientation significantly impacts residential Satisfaction, even before emotional attachment is fully established.

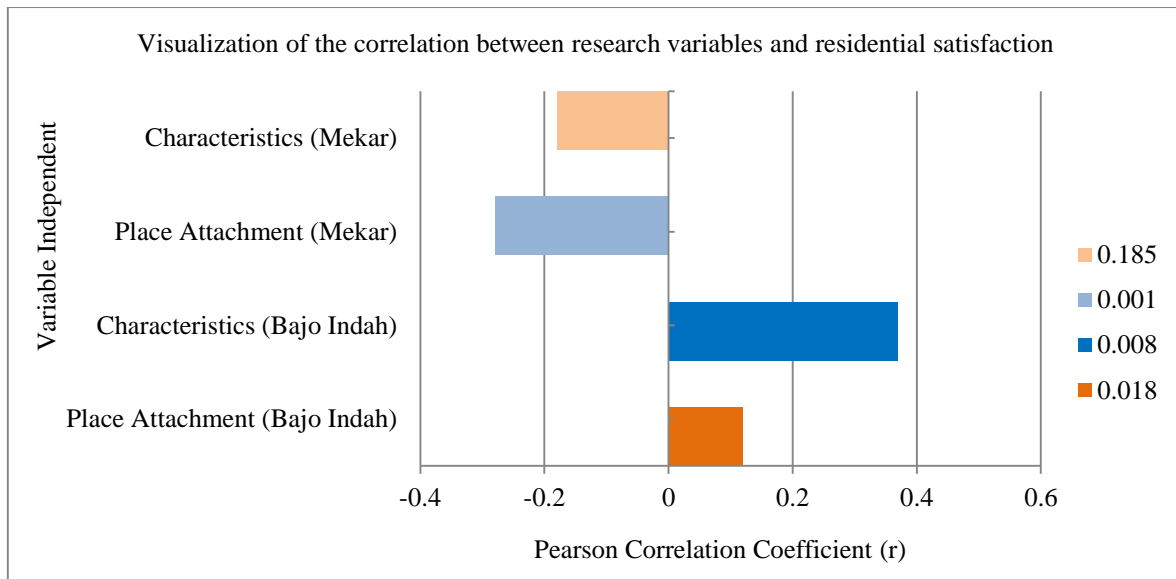


Fig. 1 Visualization of the correlation between settlement characteristics and place attachment to residential satisfaction in two relocation sites for the bajo community

According to Scannell & Gifford (2010), place attachment develops over time, through experience, and through social symbolization of space. Therefore, the low contribution of place attachment in this model does not mean that relocation has failed emotionally, but rather indicates that the attachment process is still in its early stages and, so far, is primarily mediated by the physical and functional suitability of the settlement.

In general, these results show that spatial designs that are in harmony with the cultural and ecological structures of the Bajo community can produce high levels of residential Satisfaction, even though emotional attachment is not yet fully established. This reinforces the importance of community-based design principles in relocation projects, where success is determined not only by the technical feasibility of the buildings but also by how well the space represents the way of life and sense of place of the relocated community.

Differences in Patterns between Aid Houses and Self-Help Houses. The results of the study show fundamental differences between the patterns of variable relationships in aid houses (Bajo Indah Village) and self-help houses (Mekar Village). In subsidized Housing, the physical characteristics of the settlement, which resemble the traditional structure of the Bajo community—namely, stilt houses above the sea with direct access to boats and marine economic zones—promote higher levels of residential Satisfaction, even though emotional attachment to the place has not yet been strongly established. Conversely, in self-built houses constructed independently on land, it was found that the higher the residents' attachment to their place of residence, the lower their residential Satisfaction, indicating a conflict between spatial memory and actual physical conditions.

Place Attachment as a Facilitator and Disruptor of Spatial Adaptation. These findings reinforce the conceptual

position that place attachment is ambivalent, depending on the appropriateness of the spatial context. In symbolically and functionally appropriate spaces, place attachment enhances adaptation and residential comfort. However, in relocation contexts that obscure or sever the meaning of space, place attachment can become a source of psychological dissonance, as residents cling to memories of the old space in a new environment that does not support them. This aligns with Lewicka's (2011) and Hidalgo et al. (2023) perspectives that place attachment is not always a positive predictor in drastic spatial changes but can amplify adaptive resistance if the replacement space fails to accommodate the cultural values embedded in the original space.

Implications of Community-Based Spatial Planning. The differences in the roles of place attachment and the influence of physical characteristics on residential Satisfaction indicate that post-relocation settlement planning must be contextual, participatory, and based on local values. Relocation should not be viewed merely as the fulfilment of physical housing needs, but as a process of reconstructing living spaces that contain social and symbolic meaning.

This requires active community involvement in determining new spaces' form, orientation, and function, so that place attachment can grow naturally and support post-relocation social sustainability. In the context of the Bajo community, this means considering maritime orientation, communal structures, and spatial flexibility as non-negotiable elements in design. Thus, this study offers a conceptual contribution that the interaction between place attachment and settlement characteristics is dynamic and contextual, so that relocation strategies must be built with a deep understanding of the affective-spatial relations of the target community.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that the relationship between settlement characteristics and residential Satisfaction is contextual, depending on the spatial configuration and proximity to the cultural structures of the resettled community. In government-assisted housing areas designed to resemble the traditional floating settlements of the Bajo community, physical settlement characteristics have a significant positive relationship with residential Satisfaction. Conversely, in self-help housing areas on land, high place attachment is negatively correlated with residential Satisfaction, reflecting affective conflict toward the new space that does not represent the community's spatial memory. These findings emphasize that place

attachment is not a universal entity that always has a positive impact, but is greatly influenced by the extent to which the new space can accommodate the symbolic, functional, and affective dimensions of the community's previous life. In the context of coastal community relocations like the Bajo, place attachment can become a source of dissatisfaction if not considered in the design of new settlements. Therefore, post-relocation settlement design must be built on a deep understanding of the community's value structure, spatial identity, and collective affections. A participatory, adaptive, and community-based relocation model is key to creating a living environment that is physically suitable and socially and psychologically sustainable.

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