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Original article

Teachers's attachments to their place of work and their working locality. A case study of geography teachers in the Silesian Voivodeship (Poland)

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ABSTRACT

The authors of the article sought to answer the questions: do geography teachers feel a tie with their place of work, what is the strength of this relationship and what factors influence these declared ties with the place. A step towards knowing the answers is the declared subjective assessment of emotional relationships with such a place. To this end, surveys were conducted among geography teachers. Due to their profession, they are a social group having a wide range of influence on young people and their attitudes towards their local geographical environment. Organizational reasons (the ability to reach teachers of all schools through the information exchange platform between Board of Education and school heads – so-called the headmasters panel) decided to examine a selected group of respondents – geography teachers of the Silesian Voivodeship. Google questionnaire was used as an electronic form of data collection. The research was quantitative and only partly qualitative. The analysis of the obtained results gave an interesting view of the perception of teachers' relations with the place where their school is located – their place of work. Almost all respondents declared the existence of a territorial bond with their place of work. The workplace itself is an important factor in the formation and strength of these ties. The length of residence in a given place was also important, and its type (town or a village) and size were less important. For half of the surveyed teachers, it was difficult for them to indicate the distinguishing feature (symbol) of their place of work, regardless of whether they were inhabitants or commuters from elsewhere.

KEY WORDS: place attachment (territorial ties), geography teachers, distinguishing features of the place, symbolic places, questionnaire surveys

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1. Introduction

Human coexistence with their surroundings in geographical space takes on the nature of various types of relationships. One of the possible relationships is emotional and can arise between people and the place with which they are connected, either by living there or by working there. The emotional ties that connect a specific person with their place of employment, can affect their perception of the geographical environment and the relationships that occur there, and can

also have a significant impact on shaping their image of that environment. As SZKURŁAT (2004) writes, a bond with a place is a manifestation of positive human-environment relations and leads to spatial stability, which is of major importance for the socio-economic development of the area.

The basis for determining territorial ties is diagnosing the perception of the place by a person associated with this space. Perception of space through the prism of a specific person is extremely important – it is the man in space that lives and shapes it, guided by his knowledge of it, its

perception and emotional involvement (TUAN, 1987).

A special element of research on territorial ties is the factor influencing their strength and character. The dominance of the sociological and psychological approaches to this phenomenon generated special attention to socio-cultural conditions, such as the nature of the community in which a person lives, neighborly relations, etc.. Among geographers, attempts were made to determine the impact of the surrounding geographical space on the level of territorial ties. Among others SZKURŁAT (2004) examined the diversity of the level of territorial ties of young people in the largest cities in Poland and identified the factors that affected them, and PYTKA (2011) made a successful attempt to determine the rank of individual environmental features in the process of shaping the character and strength of territorial ties of youths within their own region.

The authors of this study set themselves three goals. Firstly, to answer the question of whether geography teachers feel ties with the place where they work, secondly, what is the strength of this type of relationship, and thirdly, what factors affect the declared ties with the place where the respondents work. Is the strength of their relationships with the place of a selected group of respondents (geography teachers) influenced by the fact they live in a given place (including residence time) and in a settlement unit (e.g. a village or town)? These issues have become the subject of the research undertaken. Identification of declared ties between teachers and their surrounding space can help in developing educational strategies for young people, by taking into account these relationships and focusing education on building positive relationships with the place. The applied nature of the research, especially in the context of the broad educational impact of teachers on the younger generation, can also help in planning forms and methods of school education about their own region and homeland.

2. Territorial ties with a place as a subject of geographers' research – a review of the literature

The notion of territorial ties defines the relationship between man and the surrounding environment or a specific place that has a positive emotional charge (see, among others, LOW & ALTMAN, 1992; WILLIAMS ET AL., 1992; MOORE & GRAEFE, 1994; GIULIANI & FELDMAN, 1993; SZKURŁAT, 2004; BROWN & RAYMOND, 2007). The concept of territorial and place attachment first appeared

in scientific studies in the field of environmental psychology (HIDALGO & HERNANDEZ, 2001). In human geography, according to WILLIAMS & VASKE (2003), this phenomenon is often referred to as place dependence. Other studies include the concepts of topophilia (TUAN, 1974), residential satisfaction (FRIED, 1982), and neighborhood sentiment (HARLAN ET AL., 2005). More descriptive concepts are used in Polish scientific literature such as: territorial identity, regional identity, rooting or territorial ties (REMBOWSKA, 2002; SZKURŁAT, 2004; PYTKA, 2011).

Territorial ties are the subject of research undertaken in various scientific fields, but for a long time they were the domain of psychological and sociological sciences. Interest in this issue increased at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s in various fields of social sciences (TAYLOR & GOTTFREDSON, 1985; LEWICKA, 2008, 2011). Research was conducted, in sociology (e.g. ZNANIECKI, 1931, 1938; SZUMAKOWICZ, 1983, 1986; MALIKOWSKI, 1984; BOKSZAŃSKI, 1989; SZCZEPĀŃSKI, 1999; GUSTAFSON, 2002), in spatial planning (BEATLEY, 2004) and philosophy (e.g. CASEY, 1997). Human geography, which developed at the end of the 20th century, also included these interests. This subject in geography was initiated by Y.F. Tuan's research in the 1970s. Initially, research was conducted mainly in Western European and US research centres (e.g. TUAN, 1974; RELPH, 1976; CRESSWELL, 2004). In Poland, this research trend appeared in geography in the mid-1980s, and was fully developed by the late 1990s (e.g. RYKIEL, 1985, 1999; BARTNICKA, 1986, 1989; LIBURA, 1988, 1990, 1991; PRAWELSKA-SKRZYPEK, 1990; REMBOWSKA, 2002; MORDWA, 2003; SZKURŁAT, 2004, 2007; JĘDRZEJCZYK, 2004; RODZOŚ, 2006, 2011; AWRAMIUK, 2009; PYTKA, 2011; DACY-IGNATIUK, 2019).

The interdisciplinary nature of this issue has resulted in the emergence of numerous scientific concepts describing the theoretical aspects of territorial ties, as well as the cause of multiple thematic threads undertaken in empirical research. A review of the literature tends to separate two main directions of the research into the phenomenon of human relationships with their territory. The first of these focuses on the process of forming territorial ties. It presents the results of research on the configuration of various phenomena that shape the nature of the human-environment relationship (e.g. ZNANIECKI, 1931, 1938; OSSOWSKI, 1967; WALLIS, 1967; RYBICKI, 1972; HAY, 1998; PRETTY ET AL., 2003; KYLE ET AL., 2004). The second research direction is the problem of the role of territorial ties in the context of shaping various human attitudes towards their

surrounding space (MALIKOWSKI, 1984; PAYTON, 2003; SZKURŁAT, 2004; LEWICKA, 2005, 2008; WALKER & RYAN, 2008; GROSS & BROWN, 2008; BOĞAÇ, 2009).

Part of the concept assumes that ties with a specific territory are connected by mutual conditions with other phenomena of this type, such as: ties with a social group, sense of spatial identification, territorial identity, dependence on place and sense of place (e.g. LALLI, 1992; JORGENSEN & STEDMAN, 2001; STEDMANN, 2002; KYLE ET AL., 2003; GROSS & BROWN, 2008). SZKURŁAT (2004) claims that the sense of territorial and social identity is interrelated and depends to some extent on the same factors.

In defining territorial ties, SZKURŁAT (2004) pays special attention to the issue of human attitudes towards their territory, consisting of the cognitive, affective and behavioral components. One of the conditions for the bond is the positive emotional charge of this attitude (LOW & ALTMAN, 1992; WILLIAMS ET AL., 1992; MOORE & GRAEFE, 1994; SZKURŁAT, 2004). As claimed by ZNANIECKI (1931), followed by many sociologists and geographers writing on this subject, territorial ties benefit the person who feels them, as well as the place in which they are felt. Following PYTKA (2011), it is worth quoting the statement that there is a multilevel structure of territorial ties: the level of human feelings and the level of human activities that interact with him. According to RODZOŚ (2006), a bond with a specific geographical environment, place and community gives a person a sense of stability and security.

Understanding the relationship between man and the space close to him and their conditions is important from a cognitive and application point of view.

3. Purpose, scope and methods of the research

The aim of the study was to attempt to determine the degree of development of ties of geography teachers with the place in which they work and the factors influencing these ties. Research on territorial ties, which are not only an emotional phenomenon, require the use of specific methods. Recognition of this phenomenon with its proper understanding can occur thanks to the interpretation of signs it is expressed, externalized and objectified (JĘDRZEJCZYK, 2001). These signs of externalization are therefore certain indicators of territorial ties. To assess the strength and nature of the ties between the teachers surveyed and the place where they work, two indicators were used.

The first was the respondent's self-assessment of the place, and the second was the indication of places that distinguish the area and symbolic places. The basic method used in the research was the survey method. A questionnaire was prepared consisting of 20 questions (16 closed and 4 open), and respondent's particulars (gender, years in work, place of work and place of residence, degree of professional promotion). To collect information, the information exchange platform between Board of Education and school heads - so-called the headmasters panel) was used. After obtaining the approval of the superintendent authorities, the questionnaire survey was sent with a covering letter explaining the purpose of the study from the Board of Education in Katowice to the directors of all schools in the Silesian Voivodeship. Therefore, an electronic form of data collection through a Google questionnaire was used. At the stage of statistical analysis of the collected data, spreadsheet functions were used, including a correlation analysis. Qualitative analysis was used to answer open-ended questions that required a subjective assessment from the respondent.

4. Results

The study was conducted between August 20th and September 15th, 2019. Answers were obtained from 557 teachers – 471 women and 86 men from around a possible two thousand geography teachers (full or part time) employed in schools in the Silesian Voivodeship. It should be noted that the survey covered people from schools who are only in their primary workplace. Over 80% of respondents had the highest degree of professional promotion – a qualified teacher, only 10 people were trainee teachers (i.e. beginners in the profession). ¾ of surveyed achieved their qualifications as a geography teacher at Master's degree. In the study group, the majority of teachers had a lot of work experience – over 60% of respondents had work in education for over 15 years (Fig. 1).

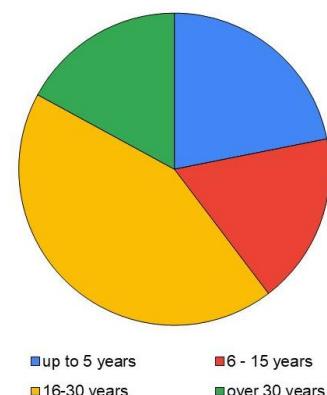


Fig. 1. Years of time employed as a geography teacher

The vast majority of the respondents (over 75%) worked in primary schools, and others were in secondary education. Only 7 respondents (less than 1.3%) indicated a vocational school as their main workplace. As many as 68% of teachers, in addition to teaching geography, also teach other subjects at their primary school. Most of the schools where the surveyed teachers work are located in towns, mostly in large ones, with over 100,000 residents. 25% taught in rural schools. For 67% of respondents, the community in which they work is also where they live. Only 10% of teachers commuted to work from remote locations which were not directly adjacent to the municipality in which their school was located.

4.1. Self-assessment of ties with the place

In response to the question "Do you feel connected with the place where you work" almost all respondents answered in the affirmative (Fig. 2). Although there was no major difference between

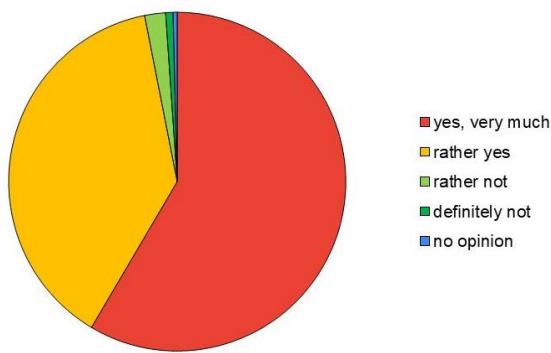


Fig. 2. Distribution of answers to the question "Do you feel connected with the place where you work?"

the assessment of women and men, women were slightly more decisive in this respect: 59% of women and 56% of men answered "yes, very", while 38% and 39.5% respectively gave "rather yes" answer. A slightly greater diversity of respondents gave the answer to the question about determining the degree of an existing bond. A large majority of respondents declared the existence of a very strong or strong bond (76.8% in total), however, every fifth respondent described the bond with the town in which he works as "average" (Fig. 3).

Fig. 4 shows the distribution of responses by women and men. Analyzing the data, it can be seen that men are slightly more firm in their decisions – less often than women they indicated a neutral answer ("medium" bond), and more often the other answers (including "negative" – a weak and very weak bond). The distribution of answers to the third of the questions – about the main factors which decides of territorial ties' strength – is interesting (Fig. 5).

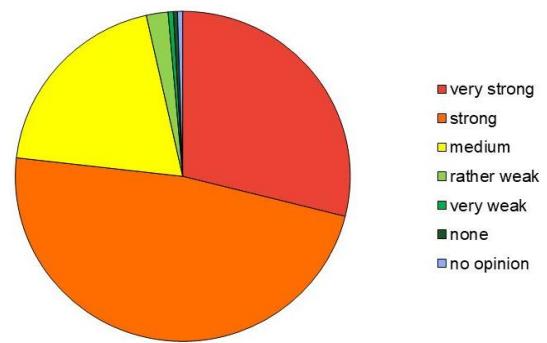


Fig. 3. Degree to which a relationship was felt with the place of work (distribution of answers to the question about the degree to which a relationship was felt with the place in which the respondent works)

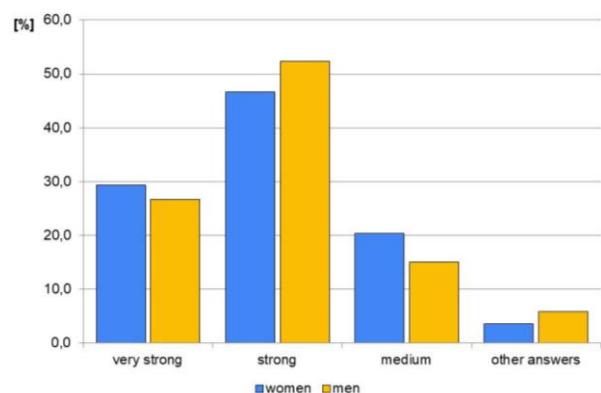


Fig. 4. The distribution of answers between genders to the question about the degree of relationship with the place where the respondent works

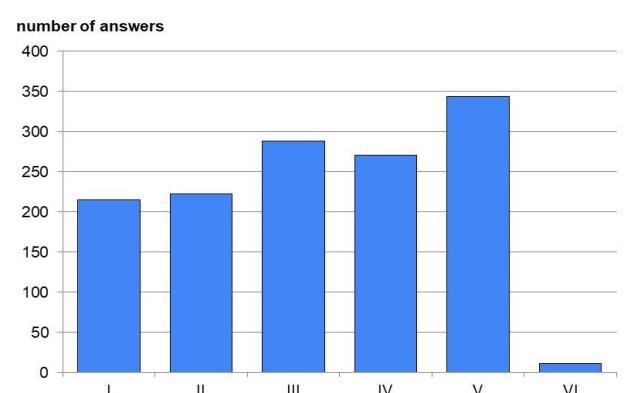


Fig. 5. Distribution of answers to the question "In your opinion, what affects the strength of the relationship with the place where you work?" Explanations to the chart: I – I was born here; II – there are places here which are important for me; III – my family that I feel connected to lives here; IV – people who are important to me live here; V – my workplace is important to me, I like working here; VI – other answers

The largest number of respondents indicated a positive attitude to their workplace as the main factor shaping the strength of their relationship with the place in which they work. Family relationships were second, and relationships with other people were third. The existence of important places in their surroundings and an attachment to the place due to its being their place of birth was less important. Among other answers were: individual attachment to the region, natural wealth or emotional attachment (e.g. declared love of the mountains).

4.2. Places that distinguish the area and symbolic places

One of the indicators of the formation of territorial ties is the recognition of characteristic

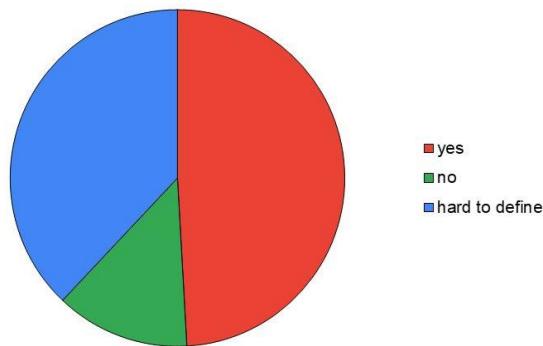


Fig. 6. The distribution of answers to the question "Is there something in the place where you work that makes it stand out from the others?"

Among the symbols of the places where the surveyed teachers worked, cultural objects predominated: monuments, museums, religious buildings – churches, monasteries, and shrines. "Places" were mainly represented by green areas (landscapes, parks and urban green areas, nature reserves) and cemeteries (in particular Jewish ones). In several statements, educational places appeared, e.g. nature trails. In one case, traces of iron ore mining were given as being symbolic of the town.

When analyzing the respondents' statements, significant dependencies could be seen. It was observed, as was expected, that people declaring strong ties with a place easily identified such places in space. A directly proportional relationship existed between the declared strength of territorial ties and the respondent's ability to indicate a characteristic (distinctive and symbolic) place for a given locality.

Teachers who chose the affirmative answer to the question about the elements distinguishing the city, in over 80% of cases, made a similar choice in answer to the question about symbolic objects

places in space that distinguish a given space and symbolic places (objects) (SZKURŁAT, 2004; PYTKA, 2011).

The question of the existence of a factor that distinguishes a place of work turned out to be a challenge for almost 38% of the respondents, less than half of them could indicate this distinguishing feature (Fig. 6). As distinctive elements of the analyzed place, both characteristic places (e.g. monuments, churches, shopping centres, recreational facilities), natural features (topography, fauna and flora) as well as elements constituting genius loci (space friendliness, historical uniqueness) were indicated. It was easier for respondents to indicate places or objects symbolic for a given place. 62% of respondents indicated such places without any problems. Only 25% had trouble with this (Fig. 7).

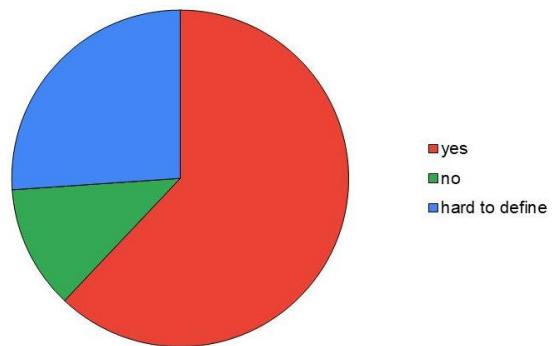


Fig. 7. Distribution of answers to the question "Are there symbolic places/objects in the place where you work?"

and places. In turn, a large group (45%) of respondents who do not see the elements that distinguish a given locality can indicate its symbolic places. It was noted that similar values (81% and 46%, respectively) were recorded for those teachers who were residents of the place in which they work, so these teacher's place of residence was not important.

The question arises as to the reason for this incompatibility. Perhaps it has to do with the subject's knowledge. Symbolic places are an important element of space, and are important for both residents and people associated with them in a different way. Symbols of space are spoken of in the TV media, and described in the local press. As a consequence, this knowledge is preserved in the collective memory, from which it is easy to recall them. In the case of distinguishing elements it is not always possible to use such knowledge. In order to be able to indicate the "something" that distinguishes a given area, it must first be noted. Similarly, in the era of general business and chronic shortages of time, to focus

on the environment is often considered to be insignificant and, as a result, this reduces the quality of the perception of the environment.

A correlation analysis was used to be able to define the factors affecting the declared relationships between geography teachers and the place in which they work. The answer in each category was assigned a numerical rank, and then the correlation coefficients between the selected pairs of variables were calculated. The level of significance of the calculations were checked by using the Student's "t" test and only those results that were characterized by a high degree of significance ($p < 0.001$) were accepted for further analysis. In light of the conducted analyzes, it was observed that the level of the declared bond (both its very existence and strength) was influenced by two factors among the respondents: the teacher's residence in the community in which the school in which they worked was located and the duration of their residence in the area, and these relationships were directly proportional to one another. The size of the town and its population size, as well as the type of settlement (city or village), or the type of administrative unit, were not relevant for forming the bond.

5. Discussion of results and conclusions

The aim of this research was to determine the strength and nature of the territorial ties of geography teachers with the place in which they work. Analysis of the collected data made it possible to present several conclusions.

The geography teachers surveyed declared the existence of territorial ties with the place in which they work, while the workplace itself was an important factor determining the developing and strength of these ties. This was an important observation. A teacher's place of work is a school – an institution where young people are constantly influenced by adults. A positive perception of the school as a workplace favours the development of the student-teacher relationship, and as a result will have a positive impact on the effectiveness of the teaching process (MUSIAŁ, 2016).

The conclusions regarding the factors influencing the formation of territorial ties are interesting. In our research, elements related to the size of the town, or its administrative status, were not relevant for this process. It was observed that both in small places (villages, small towns) and large cities, the level of formation of territorial ties is similar.

An important factor in bond formation was whether or not the respondent lived within the

community in which he worked. Only $\frac{2}{3}$ of the geography teachers surveyed met this criterion. Therefore, for over 30% of these teachers, building relationships with their workplace was difficult. This provides an interesting area for discussion on regional education, in particular on the subject of the direct surroundings of the student. The role of the teacher cannot be overestimated in the teaching process. Contemporary trends in education emphasize the changing role of the provider of knowledge to being a guide to young people in the learning process; however, it is still the teacher who is the "key" to the student acquiring competences. In the new geography core curriculum of Poland (ROZPORZĄDZENIE..., 2017, 2018) for all individual educational stages, great emphasis is placed on exploring the student's local environment and learning about it. It is important for the future functioning of a young person in its environment, to be aware of their local community, and to be responsible for its development. GAJOWNICZEK (2014) showed that the declared positive ties between teachers and the community in which they work correlated with the involvement of students in their local environment. A teacher who has no connection with space is not a good guide for a student who needs to explore their own space.

More attention should be paid to the importance of exploring "local space" when educating future geography teachers. One of the important factors of the lack of connection with a place is the lack of knowledge about this place. Understanding place, next to the emotional attitude towards it, is very important for the emotional formation of a young person as it prevents superficial, stereotypical perception of place. Therefore a teacher should have knowledge about this place, feel a connection with it, understand the sense of local education and adopt an appropriate attitude in order to carry out educational activities related to the place where the school is located. Only then will the process of learning about their nearest surrounding be effective and valuable for students.

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