The Ties That Bind: Exploring Place Identity and Attachment Among Digital Nomads

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Research Article

Keywords: place identity, place attachment, psychological well-being, life satisfaction, digital nomads

Posted Date: March 20th, 2024

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-4004495/v1

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.
Abstract

Place identity and place attachment are central concepts in environmental psychology that are especially relevant in the current era of enhanced international mobility. Recently, Georgia has emerged as a hotspot for 'digital nomads.' This mixed-methods research undertakes a comparative analysis of place identity and place attachment among Georgian residents and ‘digital nomads’ connected to Georgia. Study 1 focused on qualitative analysis through 16 in-depth interviews, comprising both Georgian participants and international digital nomads. This phase aimed to understand personal experiences, adaptation strategies, and the impact of mobility on place identity and attachment. Themes from these in-depth interviews were categorized into past, present, and future perspectives. The qualitative insights revealed significant factors that shape place identity among people on the move, including cultural, social, and environmental elements, as well as participants' past experiences and future aspirations. In Study 2, quantitative analysis was conducted with a sample of 176 individuals, using an online self-report questionnaire. The quantitative results highlighted the relationships between place identity, place attachment, and psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

Introduction

In the context of rapid globalization, “place” has become one of the central concepts in social psychology research (e.g., Alirhayim, 2023; Sobhaninia et al., 2023; Dixon et al., 2022). The modern, digitalized world is marked by simplified international mobility, and therefore, individuals have greater opportunities than ever to leave their countries, travel, and move beyond their place of origin. Nevertheless, this ease of mobility hasn’t devalued one's native environment, which remains a significant object of emotional attachment (Kohlbacher et al., 2015).

Definitions of ‘place identity’ and related concepts

Sometimes people develop a strong emotional connection with certain places, which, in turn, plays an important role in shaping their identities. In order to describe this part of self-perception, environmental psychologists usually use the term 'place identity,' which is considered a part of personal identity and describes how people perceive themselves in relation to specific environmental characteristics (Hernández et al., 2007). Place identity is a complex and dynamic construct, classically defined as “an incorporation of place into a broader concept of the self”; “memories, concepts, interpretations, ideas, and feelings associated with a particular physical environment” (Proshansky et al., 1983, p. 60).

There are various theoretical models related to this construct, and researchers focus on different aspects of it in the definitions, such as a sense of belonging to a place (Dixon et al., 2023), connection with society (Sobhaninia et al., 2023; Aton & Lawrence, 2014), interpersonal aspects of identity (Leary & Tangney, 2013), sense of satisfaction with place (Lewicka, 2011) and cognitions formed as a result of psychological connection (Lewicka, 2011). Despite the diversity, these definitions are united by a common theme: the affective component of place identity.
This multifaceted nature of place identity, reflected in its diverse definitions, often blurs its distinction from related concepts like ‘place attachment,’ ‘sense of place,’ or ‘place dependence’ (Peng et al., 2020). For example, place identity is sometimes considered one of the dimensions of place attachment (Ujang & Zakariya, 2015). Other authors categorize both ‘identity’ and ‘attachment’ under the broader construct of ‘sense of place’ (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001).

In the present study, however, ‘identity’ and ‘attachment’ are approached as closely related yet distinct concepts. Specifically, place identity is considered one element of self-identity that reflects our perceptions and emotions related to a certain place. On the other hand, place attachment is interpreted as a strong emotional bond with a place, which significantly influences an individual's behavioral intentions (Ramkissoon et al., 2013).

**Place identity in the context of mobility**

Considering the complex process of forming a place identity, it is particularly interesting to consider its connection in light of the simplified migration tendency. When an individual moves from one place to another, their sense of belonging can be threatened (Lewicka, 2011). Developing an identity related to a new place requires considerable emotional investment for which people typically employ various strategies (for example, engaging in local cultural activities and broadening their social networks).

Studies show that the formation of migrants' place identity during a relocation is determined by factors such as cultural background, language proficiency (Peng et al., 2020), duration of stay in the new location (Hernández et al., 2007), and the ease of integration with a new society (Kohlbacher et al., 2015). However, it is not clear whether the process of mobility weakens their attachment to the place of origin, continues to exist simultaneously with a new place identity, or strengthens the connection with the old place. Some authors, like Adhikari et al. (2022), suggest that migration can increase attachment to the place of origin, while Vidal et al. (2010) indicate that mobility might reduce existing place identity.

It is worth noting that the process of migration is often not necessarily voluntary and is linked to conditions such as natural disasters, wars, social problems, or the pursuit of better educational opportunities (e.g., Massey, 2015). However, with the growth of digital technologies, an increasing number of people are choosing to relocate not out of necessity but to experience new environments and discover new cultures (Hannonen, 2020). These individuals are known as ‘digital nomads’ and their lifestyle is often associated with remote work and a flexible schedule. For digital nomads, the concept of ‘belonging’ may be fluid, which is why they represent a unique case in the study of place identity.

**Digital Nomads: A new paradigm of place attachment**

People who live a nomadic lifestyle often choose their destinations based on factors like favorable geographic location, affordable living conditions, and authentic culture. Considering that Georgia largely meets these criteria, this country has become a hotspot for digital nomads over the past decade. This shift towards destinations like Georgia suggests an interesting trend among digital nomads.
According to Beaumont (2019), the traditional ethnic and cultural identities of nomads are being replaced with a more global identity, less tied to any specific place or environment. This may mean that digital nomads have more cosmopolitan attitudes and are less attached to places such as countries and cities. However, the process of living in a new place may still impact their place identity and they may even develop an attachment to it, especially if the place meets the needs of the individual and provides favorable conditions for a long time stay (Anton & Lawrence, 2014).

Predictors of place identity & place attachment

The duration of residence in a new location is one of the strongest predictors of place identity and place attachment. In particular, living in a new place for a long time is positively correlated with feelings of attachment (Hernández et al., 2007). This raises a question about the time required to develop a new place identity and how changing a place of residence affects the future self-concept, especially for digital nomads who might inhabit a location like Georgia temporarily.

Other than time, some people experience place attachment as a result of close ties to a community or neighborhood (Kohlbacher et al., 2015; Lewicka, 2011). For others, it may be the physical characteristics of a place (e.g., architecture, infrastructure, and nature) (Lewicka, 2011), owning a house in that place (Brown et al., 2003; Anton & Lawrence, 2014), cultural or religious belonging (Lewicka, 2011), or the opportunity to take on new adventures and having a physically stimulating environment (Hannonen, 2020). In addition, socio-demographic variables such as age, social status, and education are also considered determinants of place attachment (Jansen, 2020; Anton & Lawrence, 2014).

Positive and negative results

Depending on the determinants of an individual's place identity, its subjective results vary. For example, if an individual values social connections and a particular place provides a sense of belonging to them, place identity may result in satisfying social relationships (Tartaglia, 2013). Similarly, the development of a positive place identity is often linked to an improved overall quality of life (Brown & Raymond, 2007). Place identity is also a source of positive emotions for individuals when they find themselves in a place they're emotionally attached to (Hashemi et al., 2023). Other positive outcomes include relaxation, comfort and safety, personal growth, freedom, and connection with nature (Scannell & Gifford, 2017). Consequently, it's not surprising that a strong place identity often correlates with positive mental and physical health outcomes (Tartaglia, 2013), contributes to a sense of a coherent self, and helps individuals to control and find meaning in their environment (Korpela, 1989).

On the other hand, place identity and place attachment are associated with several negative outcomes as well. Notably, the term “attachment” has a more negative connotation in clinical psychology and is associated with negative outcomes such as psychological distress (e.g., Crugnola et al., 2021; Imran & Jackson, 2022). Given this, it is somewhat natural that place attachment is accompanied by negative
consequences such as difficulty adapting to a new environment (Fried, 2000), close-mindedness, and negative emotions (e.g., homesickness and sadness) (Hosany et al., 2017).

Place attachment becomes particularly maladaptive when it prevents people from making pragmatic decisions about their future. For example, a strong attachment to a place can lead individuals to remain in the same location even in the face of natural disasters (Jansen, 2020). Conversely, a lack of attachment to one's home can also have detrimental effects. Individuals who do not feel connected to their living environment tend to view it negatively, which is associated with increased stress levels and health problems (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982).

In order to cope with these negative effects of place identity and attachment, people use various strategies, including action-based coping strategies, such as relocating to a place that reduces financial burdens or offers better opportunities, and discursive coping, such as rationalizing the return to location with practical circumstances. These strategies are effective both in coping with social stigmatization and in resolving internal conflicts (Pedersen & Therkelsen, 2022).

**Present study**

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the concepts of place identity and place attachment among ‘digital nomads’, we employed mixed methods design. First, we explored these concepts through a qualitative study and conducted in-depth interviews with the community of ‘digital nomads’ in Georgia and the local population. Then, we tested the associations between place identity and attachment on the one hand and psychological well-being and life satisfaction on the other hand through a quantitative study.

To guide our exploration, we formulated the following research questions:

- What are the primary factors that motivated individuals to leave their places of residence?
- What strategies do individuals use to adapt to new environments, and how do these strategies differ between locals and digital nomads?
- Which locations are identified as 'significant places' by the participants?
- What is the impact of a changing environment on the future self-concept?

In analyzing the interview transcripts, we structured our analysis around three temporal dimensions: the past, the present, and the future.

**Study 1: Qualitative Analysis**

**Methods**

*Data Collection and Interview Structure*
To gather in-depth data about place identity and attachment among both Georgian and foreign residents in Georgia, we conducted semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were developed based on the Psychological Place Attachment Scale (PPAS; Li et al., 2013) and the Sense of Place Scale (SoPS; Domingues et al., 2021). Following a pilot interview, the interview guide was refined and some questions were added.

Participants

A total of 16 interviews were conducted, including 3 face-to-face and 13 via online platforms like Zoom and Skype, based on the preferences of the respondents. The interviews ranged in duration from 25 to 70 minutes. The participants were selected using the snowball sampling technique, where initial participants recommended other potential participants.

The participant group consisted of 10 women and 6 men, with ages ranging from 20 to 62 years. Interviews were conducted in two languages: 9 in Georgian and 7 in English. A key criterion for participation was a history of long-term residence in multiple locations. This included Georgians who had lived in various locations within and outside of Georgia, as well as foreigners residing in Georgia.

Ethical Considerations

Participants did not receive any tangible benefits or compensation for their involvement in the study. Prior to each interview, participants were required to sign an informed consent form. Participation in the study was strictly confidential.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Profession</th>
<th>Interview Language</th>
<th>Significant Place</th>
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<td>Georgian</td>
<td>Istanbul</td>
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<td>Home</td>
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<td>Kutaisi</td>
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<td>Sales; Hospitality</td>
<td>Georgian</td>
<td>Childhood friend's house (Tskaltubo)</td>
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<td>PR, IT, Psychology</td>
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<td>Home, Georgia</td>
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Results

The qualitative data was organized into three distinct temporal categories – past, present, and future. Below, the findings and discussions are presented according to these temporal dimensions.

Past: Reasons for leaving the place of origin

After the interview analysis, several primary reasons emerged for participants leaving their place of origin. The most frequently cited motivations included a quest for novelty, a need for new experiences, and general dissatisfaction with their current lives.

A common narrative among those identifying as digital nomads was a desire for adventure, often triggered by reaching the end of a certain life stage. For others, specific objectives like travel, exploring historical sites, or professional aspirations played an important role in their decision to move abroad.

Social influences and prior expectations also significantly impacted participants' decisions to relocate. Some were inspired by family members' experiences abroad (as in the case of P13, who was motivated by a sibling's account of the 'FLEX' program in America). Others cited a childhood characterized by frequent moves as a catalyst for her own nomadic tendencies:

Since my childhood, it has become a need for me to change the place and environment often. As soon as I get used to the environment and realize that everything around me becomes a comfort zone, I want to run away (P6).

Interestingly, getting to a new place of residence is sometimes determined by chance, while staying is sometimes determined purely by the characteristics of the place.

Despite the specific reasons that made people leave their place of origin, almost all participants had some pragmatic reason for their decision to leave. Among them, a large part came to Georgia to get an education or to simplify working conditions. As for the digital nomads, the main reasons were financial availability, less bureaucracy, and an attractive nature and climate. The participants were certain that they would leave their country sooner or later because they considered personal growth impossible otherwise. P3, for instance, spoke of choosing risk over stability: "I could have stayed in Tbilisi and been stable, but stability is not what I am looking for... It's hard but I think it's important to take risky steps in life to get something" (P3).

Conversely, for some, the decision to move, while voluntary, was also seen as a response to internal pressures and discomforts. P16, for example, described his move as a way to escape a sense of dissatisfaction and discomfort:

I left because of dissatisfaction. If you are comfortable, you don't want to leave that place. If you don't know the meaning of life, if you have inner anxieties, and if your future is uncertain, you cannot physically
be comfortable (P16).

Present: Adaptation strategies in new places

The study participants had different strategies for adapting to a new place, depending on their departure motives, priorities, and challenges of integrating with new places. The main adaptation strategies include building local contacts, socializing in general, and finding comfort with oneself.

Socializing and local engagement

Digital nomads often employed social strategies such as attending local events, joining expat social groups, and meeting people through social platforms (e.g., Facebook, Tinder, WhatsApp) for networking.

Physical resemblance to the local population was noted as a facilitator of adaptation. For instance, Participant 9, who studied in Russia, found her physical similarity advantageous: “Almost no one thought that I was not Russian. When I told them that I was not, they did not believe me” (P9). Similarly, P15, an Iranian studying in Georgia, observed that looking somewhat Georgian eased her integration process.

Exploring and understanding the place

Another important strategy for adapting to a new place is getting to know it. Participants reported that exploring the city and engaging in public life simplified integration: "Communication with locals is necessary for integration if you want to live in that society. Humans are social creatures and it is impossible to do otherwise. But if you are just a visitor, then it changes the whole picture." (P4).

Participant 3, who moved to Georgia, also found that interacting with locals was vital when starting anew in a different location. Interestingly, the fact that people knew nothing about them in a new place didn’t make adaptation easier, but it made the process more interesting: "When I was coming from Tbilisi, I used to repeat something like this - I’m going to a place where I don't represent anything - it was an interesting new page" (P3). Therefore, for some people, the place itself and its characteristics are more important in terms of adaptation than socialization.

Forced and natural adaptation

Some participants actively pushed themselves out of their comfort zones as a means of adaptation. Some participants made a conscious effort to socialize more, even in less desirable situations, while others emphasized creating a comfortable living space as essential for adapting. However, it seems that comfort is not created on purpose, it happens naturally, and adaptation also takes time: "You don't think about comfort on purpose, but comfort is a survival mechanism. I found that no matter how terrible a
situation you get into, you can adapt everywhere over time" (P16). This quote points out that time is an important factor for adapting to a new place.

**Language and support systems**

Language proficiency was also perceived as one of the integral factors in adapting to a new place, alongside having a physically comfortable environment and a significant other next to them.

Despite fluency in foreign languages, forming deep connections with locals remains a significant challenge. To cope with this problem, foreigners try to learn the Georgian language, and Georgians try to actively communicate with foreign-speaking people. Communication problems with locals are most likely one of the reasons why individuals abroad try to stay in touch with people they know virtually and rarely physically.

**Purpose-driven adaptation**

Having a specific goal, such as pursuing education or volunteering, was found to simplify the process of adaptation, as it sometimes lessened the need for deeper integration with locals. Nevertheless, most participants indicated that adaptation often happened naturally, without deliberately developing a specific strategy to adapt to a new place.

Alongside natural adaptation, some individuals engaged in introspection and self-development as part of their coping strategy, which was described as more “artificial” and “forced” than natural. As P10 notes, "I was observing myself internally and reflecting. I worked hard on myself to find out my own emotions and to do something that I have never tried in the past."

**Maladaptive coping**

Alongside the various adaptive coping methods, the study also revealed instances of maladaptive strategies. A notable example involves the denial of reality as a coping mechanism. As some participants shared, they tried to deny reality during difficult times:

When I got into so much trouble and hardship, I deluded myself. I think the evolutionary survival mechanism got involved - I convinced myself that I was happy and that's why I came here. Later, I found out this wasn't the case (P16).

This highlights the complex psychological responses individuals may use when facing the challenges of adaptation to a new environment.

**A Significant Place**
We developed the concept of a 'significant place' during the interview process, which describes a location that has a special emotional and personal importance to an individual beyond its physical or geographic characteristics. This concept was important in understanding participants' place identity and attachment.

Participants shared experiences and memories tied to specific locations. The most common themes were their home, a country, or a city of origin. Furthermore, they named places related to their childhood, a place to which they feel a strong emotional connection and belonging, and a 'transformation place' that changed their perception of self.

**Home**

The concept of 'home' is central to the participants' perception of a significant place. Whether it's with or without family members, provides absolute comfort, or fulfills basic needs, a home is often the first thing that comes to mind for participants. This can be explained by the considerable amount of time spent there and the fact that the most important memories and experiences for them are related to their homes.

However, the emotional connection with home is not always straightforward. Some participants expressed ambivalent feelings. For instance, P2 prefers solitude and is protective over her personal space, despite feeling an attachment to her family home: "I get angry when someone says something negative about it." Similar to her, we noted the elements of a humanization of the house in others’ narratives as well, as they attributed human characteristics to their homes.

In some cases, the attachment to the home is similar to the classic ambivalent-disorganized style of attachment (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). An illustration of this is P9, who experiences a persistent longing for home even when away for short periods, yet encounters negative feelings upon returning. Their attachment is not to a specific physical place but to the abstract concept of 'home' itself.

On the other hand, for some, 'home' is less about the physical space and more about the people within it. Memories of family and loved ones contribute significantly to their sense of home. One of the reasons for this could be that the place is unstable and can change at any time, but the connection with the people is constant.

**Hometown**

Apart from home, the participants name their hometown as a significant place which is especially common for those not originating from the capital. This connection to their hometowns is often described in deeply emotional and personal terms that transcend geographical or physical attributes.

For instance, a participant from Kutaisi, one of the cities in Georgia, reflects on their inexplicable bond with their hometown:
I don't know how rational it may sound, but Kutaisi is a place where I'm just happy to be. If I don't do anything and just sit in Kutaisi, it's enough for satisfaction. When I go to Kutaisi, from the moment I enter the city, I already feel excitement and happiness, which cannot be rational (P3).

Similarly, another participant from a smaller Georgian town acknowledges their subjective bias towards the hometown and attributes attachment not just to its physical attributes but more to their own emotional connections and memories associated with it: "Tskaltubo is objectively beautiful, but I am subjective when I say that it is a good city because it is connected with my emotions and memories" (P4).

**Country of origin**

Some participants expanded the notion of a 'significant place' to their entire country of origin. Unlike their views on cities, in this case, respondents could maintain objectivity when discussing their country. Interestingly, some expressed mixed or even negative feelings about their country, yet still considered its significance in their lives.

Most participants believe that ties formed in childhood are particularly deep and irreplaceable. However, one can also establish a similar relationship with other countries over time and moreover, they can have a negative attitude towards the country and be attached to it due to the memories. This indicates the possibility of developing a place identity without having an attachment to it.

Both Georgian and foreign participants often consider their countries to be significant places. Frequently, they explain this connection not by the place itself but by the people and experiences associated with it. As they say, "We are not our country. We are a combination of experience and country" (P12). Therefore, country of origin as a part of place identity is based on familiarity, experiences, and personal history - factors that make the native country a significant place in people's lives.

**Childhood place**

Even though home and hometown are often closely associated with childhood memories, we consider 'childhood place' as a distinct category since respondents identified certain childhood-related locations as the significant place separately from their hometown or home.

One of the examples of such a place is a childhood friend's old house in the hometown - a place that is accompanied by more vivid emotions rather than the city of origin. Another example, recalled by a Georgian participant, is specific areas in Tbilisi as crucial childhood places for self-expression that still have a significant impact.

Childhood places also hold significance for participants from other countries as well. For instance, an Australian respondent who considers his current city of residence, Brisbane, to be the most comfortable place, named a Vietnamese village as a significant place - a village where he spent his childhood. In this
case, the attitude towards Vietnam as a country is more neutral and place identity is linked to Australia, but emotional attachment is linked to this childhood place, which could be explained by viewing this place as a link to his family and a motivator to give back to the community that watched him grow up. (P12).

**Transformation Place**

The concept of a ‘transformation place’ was developed uniquely from our interviews. This concept can be defined as a location where individuals have experienced significant personal growth or change, despite the duration spent there or the initial reasons for their visit.

For example, one of the participants considers an island in Indonesia as such a place. Even though they visited this palace only once, it helped to find a purpose in life and led to a personal awakening: "When I started the journey, I was looking for meaning - I wanted to find out who I was because I didn't believe in anything and I felt lost. I felt something in that place, I felt connections" (P14).

Another participant, a Georgian digital nomad, spoke of Istanbul as a transformative place. Living there for several months, he formed deep connections with the city, not just through its vibrant culture and experiences but through how it reshaped his feelings and memories. Interestingly, his emotional attachment to Istanbul is so strong that he prefers not to return, fearing that a revisit might lead to a negative sense of nostalgia, which will impact his memories of the initial experience (P1).

**Emotionally resonant place**

Beyond childhood, culturally significant, personally transformative, and other places discussed, participants identified certain locations as important due to an emotional connection. This notion of an 'emotionally resonant place' reflects the essence of these places.

Some Romanian respondents residing in Georgia are great examples of this, since they described Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, as a significant place. They pointed out specific cultural and lifestyle similarities between Romania and Georgia but found Tbilisi a distinct place that provides a sense of calmness. In this case, the physical characteristics of a place and its connection with society and culture are some of the factors that determine place attachment.

Surprisingly, people can develop an attachment to an emotionally resonant place in just one day. In such cases, individuals feel an immediate connection with the city and the people. As P8 notes, “The way I feel here and the vibe I get from this city is different - I've never felt anything like that in another city.” This close emotional connection can be explained by having similar mentalities, thought patterns, and personality characteristics as the locals.

**Future**
**Ideal future**

Constant travel, change, and a dynamic lifestyle are integral parts of life for the majority of respondents, and at first glance, their future should also be dynamic. However, it turns out that people who often change their primary residence tend to seek stability and their future aspirations often center around finding a permanent place to call home. The 'ideal future' usually represents the characteristics of the significant place respondents named.

The major aspects identified in the description of the ideal place include favorable physical and climatic conditions, pragmatic features, and opportunities for personal or professional growth. While some respondents seek a static home, others imagine a dynamic future, often in places where they have never lived. Nevertheless, the influence of their place of origin remains significant and many individuals prefer locations that align with their cultural and religious values.

Respondents, particularly those from non-Eastern countries, often cannot imagine living in places vastly different from their cultural background. For instance, the Australian participant (P12) anticipates frequent moves due to his profession but prefers to stay close to his family in order to maintain familial ties. On the other hand, Georgian participants displayed a greater openness to exploring new places. For example, P3 expressed an openness to all possibilities, regardless of the geographic location:

I don't have a definite plan. I'll go and see - maybe this city and I won't get along, maybe I'll move and stay there forever, who knows. It is difficult for me to imagine myself in the future in a geographical context, but I am open to all possibilities (P3).

Several participants expressed a preference for larger cities, valuing the availability of diverse activities and resources. Regardless of the characteristics of the ideal place for the future, the future self is associated with stability — a single place to return to after traveling.

Across the board, the desire for stable 'headquarters' is a recurring theme, even among those without concrete future plans. Stability, in this context, means a place for emotional and financial investment while facing life's uncertainties:

It [the change] gives me a lot of anxiety, but also a bit of excitement. So for me, I really want stability. I want to be able to call a place home. I need that because it's been way too many years of just floating around everywhere and I really wanted to know that there is a place that I can call home where I can finally invest a little more energy and also, like, financially, to make myself comfortable in (P10).

Having such a 'headquarters' will help individuals continue their journey with less anxiety and more peace of mind. Therefore, they believe that a combination of long-term stability and dynamic daily life is possible and are looking for a place that satisfies both of these components.

For digital nomads, while long-term stability isn't always a priority, a sense of peace remains vital. As a result, they view settling in their own country as a more emotionally sustainable option since adapting
abroad requires extensive emotional resources. However, they still remain open to new opportunities.

**Hypothetical future**

At the end of the interview, we asked the participants to imagine themselves in a hypothetical future where their lives were in danger. When asked how they would behave if something threatened their lives, people with at least a minimal degree of place attachment imagined returning to their place of origin. They would stop all current activities, forget their goals, and return to their loved ones. Although this behavior may be due to a priming effect, as discussed by Higgins et al. (1977), since the previous interview questions activated their place of origin, it still provides important information about their sense of place attachment.

The main pattern while imagining a hypothetical threatening future is, on the one hand, neglecting long-term goals and spending time with significant others, on the other hand - looking for new challenges, traveling, and gaining more experience. However, in certain instances, individuals showed an ambivalent attitude toward the hypothetical future and expressed a desire to stay with their loved ones, as well as embrace new experiences during the potentially limited time remaining in their familiar surroundings.

Risky behaviors and adventure-seeking are especially common for digital nomads who do not consider returning home to their family in a threatening situation. For instance, P14 says, "If this disease gives me only 5 years to live, I will stop everything, take all the money I have and get as much out of life as I can". This is what distinguishes them from people with other lifestyles who have a strong place attachment.

**Study 2: Quantitative Analysis**

In addition to our qualitative research, we conducted a quantitative analysis to further explore how place identity and place attachment are related to participants’ psychological well-being and life satisfaction.

As a part of the quantitative part of the research, we introduced Georgian versions of two established instruments for place identity and attachment, which will contribute to continuing future research in the field of environmental psychology.

**Methods**

Quantitative data was collected from 176 participants, ranging in age from 18 to 81 years (M=29.88; SD=11.3), through a bilingual questionnaire. This questionnaire was provided in Georgian for local Georgian-speaking participants and in English for foreign digital nomads with experience living in Georgia. The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms.

To recruit participants, we utilized social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Reddit, specifically targeting groups relevant to our study population, such as ‘Expats in Tbilisi’ and ‘Tbilisi Digital Nomads.’
This method allowed us to reach a diverse sample, including 96 females (54.5%) and 80 males (45.5%). Among them, 126 filled out the Georgian-language questionnaire, while 50 responded to the English version.

Eligibility for Georgian-speaking participants was based solely on Georgian citizenship. In contrast, foreign participants were required to have a minimum of one month of living experience in Georgia. Their origins were diverse, including the USA, Canada, Australia, Western and Eastern Europe, Africa, the Caucasus, and Russia.

Regarding participants' ethnic backgrounds, a majority identified as white (69.4%), and others were African American, Latino, Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern, Jewish, and Dagestani.

**Research instruments**

Considering that up to now there haven't been any place identity research instruments adapted in Georgian, we developed Georgian versions of the Psychological Place Attachment Scale (PPAS; Li et al., 2013) and the Sense of Place Scale (SoPS; Domingues, Gonçalves, & Jesus, 2021). Independent translations of these questionnaires from English to Georgian were prepared, followed by reverse translations to ensure accuracy and validity. Content validity was verified by expert evaluations, and a pilot study with 20 participants was conducted to assess the reliability of the scales.

**Psychological Place Attachment Scale (PPAS)**

The PPAS, based on the definition by Scannell and Gifford (2017), measures place attachment including affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. The affective component addresses emotions related to a place, the behavioral component focuses on behaviors maintaining proximity to a place, and the cognitive aspect involves memories and knowledge related to a specific place. The original English version of PPAS comprises 30 items, and for our study, the Georgian version maintained the same structure and order.

**Sense of Place Scale (SoPS)**

The SoPS was used to measure identity related to the current place of residence of participants. This scale, based on a 4-dimensional model (place-people-time-self), includes 32 statements across these dimensions. It assesses emotional satisfaction (place), feelings of unity and belonging (people), the importance of time spent in a place (time), and the role of place in individual self-perception (self). The Georgian version followed the same structure as the original, with high internal consistency noted in both the total score and the subscales.
**Psychological Well-Being (PWB) and Satisfaction With Life (LWLS) Scales**

Research indicates a significant statistical correlation between place attachment and identity on one hand and psychological well-being and life satisfaction on the other hand (Scannell & Gifford, 2017; Rollero & De Piccoli, 2010). Therefore, we incorporated measures for psychological well-being and life satisfaction in the quantitative part of our study.

For assessing participants’ psychological well-being, the Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB; Diener et al., 2009) was used. This self-report scale comprises 8 statements designed to gauge an individual’s overall sense of psychological well-being. The Georgian version of this instrument was already adapted and validated for use in Georgian scientific research (e.g., Martskvishvili & Lagidze, 2022).

To evaluate life satisfaction, the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985) was employed. This scale conceptualized as a component of subjective well-being assessment by Diener (1985), evaluates respondents’ overall life satisfaction. It consists of 5 statements rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The Georgian version, an accurate translation of the original, is noted for its high reliability and validity.

<p>| Table 2 |
| Descriptive statistics and reliability indices of instruments in a pilot study |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>α</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Place Attachment</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>94.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>35.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>24.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>16.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>17.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total score</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>100.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Well-Being</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>42.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>20.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Results**
Table 3
Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of study variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Psychological Place Attachment</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>11.73</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sense of Place</td>
<td>100.35</td>
<td>18.58</td>
<td>.345**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Place</td>
<td>35.66</td>
<td>8.85</td>
<td>.294**</td>
<td>.868**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. People</td>
<td>30.10</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>.415**</td>
<td>.721**</td>
<td>.528**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Time</td>
<td>16.90</td>
<td>6.30</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>.600**</td>
<td>.254**</td>
<td>.285**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Self</td>
<td>17.67</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>.362**</td>
<td>.798**</td>
<td>.678**</td>
<td>.501**</td>
<td>.273**</td>
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<td>7. Psychological Well-Being</td>
<td>42.68</td>
<td>7.59</td>
<td>.219**</td>
<td>.281**</td>
<td>.286**</td>
<td>.216**</td>
<td>.156*</td>
<td>.151*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>20.26</td>
<td>6.78</td>
<td>.154*</td>
<td>.224**</td>
<td>.321**</td>
<td>.251**</td>
<td>-.069</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.626**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p ≤ .05; **p ≤ .01

Table 3 presents the results of the correlational analysis that revealed statistically significant relationships between psychological place attachment and two key variables: psychological well-being and life satisfaction. These two variables are also positively correlated with the total score of sense of place and its subscales.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Place Scale</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>.253</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.295**</td>
<td>.078, .427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>.162</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>-.133, .457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>-.078, .287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>-.189</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>-.121</td>
<td>-.504, .126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>4.72***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total score</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>.281***</td>
<td>.056, .173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>14.87***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Psychological Place Attachment Scale

| Total score | .141| .048| .219** | .047, .236 |
| R²        | .48 |     |      |             |
| F         | 8.74** |     |      |             |

*Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.*
Table 4
Predictors of life satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sense of Place Scale</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>.298</td>
<td>.077</td>
<td>.389**</td>
<td>.147, .449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>.278</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.185*</td>
<td>.023, .533</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>-.185</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>-.172*</td>
<td>-.342, -.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>-.253</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>-.181</td>
<td>-.525, .019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.016</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td>8.13***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total score</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.224**</td>
<td>.028, .135</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological Place Attachment Scale</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total score</td>
<td>.089</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.154*</td>
<td>.004, .175</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>R²</strong></td>
<td>.024</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td>4.25*</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

After the correlation analysis, multiple linear regression analysis was used to test whether place attachment and sense of place predict psychological well-being and life satisfaction (see Table 4).

The regression analysis revealed that the 4-dimensional (place-people-time-self) model of sense of place explained 10% of the variation in PWB (R² = .1; Adjusted R² = .079), F(175) = 4.76, p < .000). Of these four dimensions, 'place' emerged as a significant predictor of well-being (β = .25, p < .01). The overall sense of place score explained 7.9% of the variance in well-being and was identified as a significant predictor (β = .12, p < .001) (see Table 3).

In the context of life satisfaction, the 4-dimensional model explained 16% of the variance (R² = .16; Adjusted R² = .14), (F(175) = 8.13, p < .001). Among the dimensions, place (β = .30, p < .01) and people (β = .28, p < .05) are positive predictors of life satisfaction, while time is a negative predictor of life satisfaction (β = -.19, p < .05). The overall sense of place is a statistically reliable positive predictor of life satisfaction (β = .08, p < .01) and explains 5% of the data variation (R² = .05, Adjusted R² = .045), (F(175) = 9.17, p < .01) (see Table 4).
The regression analysis of the models of PPA and PWB (see Table 3), on the one hand and PPA and SWLS, on the other hand (see Table 4), shows that place attachment is a statistically significant predictor of each variable. In particular, place attachment explains 4.8% of the variation in psychological well-being data ($R^2 = .48$, Adjusted $R^2 = .042$) ($F(175)=8.74, p<.01$) and is its statistically reliable predictor ($β = .48$, $p<.01$). Similarly, PPA explained 2% of the variance in life satisfaction data ($R^2= .024$, Adjusted $R^2 = .018$, $F(175)=4.25, p<.05$) and positively predicted life satisfaction ($β = .09, p<.05$).

Preliminary discussion

Study 2 demonstrated a significant relationship between psychological place attachment and both psychological well-being and life satisfaction. This pattern holds true for the overall sense of place score as well as its individual dimensions. These findings confirm that emotional bonds with a place are indeed integral to an individual's mental health and overall life satisfaction. However, the strength of these correlations is weak, suggesting that additional mediating factors, which were not quantitatively examined but emerged in the qualitative part of our study (e.g., sense of safety and stability, local community attitudes, cultural mismatch), might influence this relationship. These variables could impact the connection between place identity and PWB and LS, as well as place attachment and PWB and LS either simultaneously or separately, which indicates the need for more comprehensive future research.

Psychological attachment also showed positive correlations with well-being and life satisfaction. This outcome suggests that respondents predominantly perceive attachment in a positive light and focus less on potential negative aspects such as adaptation difficulties or adverse nostalgia effects.

Furthermore, the regression analysis established that the sense of place, along with its four-dimensional model, serves as a predictor for both well-being and life satisfaction. This outcome likely reflects the respondents' adaptation and integration into their current residence, which is not surprising given their tendency to frequently change locations. This mobility implies that in cases of dissatisfaction, respondents have the option to relocate to places where adaptation may be easier, thereby potentially enhancing their life satisfaction and well-being.

General discussion

As a result of qualitative and quantitative data analysis, we obtained in-depth information about the perceptions of "place," the lifestyle, life satisfaction, psychological well-being, and adaptation strategies of digital nomads and other migrants who frequently change places.

The qualitative data, structured into past, present, and future temporal categories, reveals factors affecting place identity and attachment. These include community acceptance, cultural values, language barriers, and duration of stay, consistent with earlier studies (e.g., Peng et al., 2020; Hernández et al., 2007; Kohlbacher et al., 2015). Contrary to earlier studies that highlighted the physical aspects of a place (Lewicka, 2011), cultural and religious affiliation, owning a house in that place (Anton & Lawrence, 2014),
and a physically stimulating environment (Hannonen, 2020), our findings suggest that respondents often prioritize the concept of home and the challenges associated with being in a new place, instead of owning a house.

The adaptation strategies of digital nomads and other migrants moving to a new place can be divided into two groups according to Lazarus' and Folkman's stress coping strategies (1984): problem-based coping strategies, such as meeting local people, attending expat events, and exploring the environment; and emotion-based coping strategies, like self-reflection, working on internal conflicts, and stepping out of comfort zones. However, some participants also used maladaptive strategies, such as avoidance or passive adaptation. Remarkably, participants often rationalized their return to their place of origin by convincing themselves that an inner conflict was resolved or by explaining withdrawal in terms of financial savings, which according to Pedersen and Therkelsen (2022) is an action-based coping strategy.

The study identified both positive and negative outcomes of place attachment. Consistent with Tartaglia (2013), we found that place attachment is positively related to life satisfaction and well-being. This supports the notion that establishing place attachment improves the quality of life (Brown & Raymond, 2007) and elicits positive emotions (Hashemi et al., 2023). Conversely, the study uncovers the adverse effects of attachment, such as feelings of instability and mental health issues associated with a lack of attachment (Stokols & Shumaker, 1982), which is consistent with the findings about the ambivalent nature of place attachment and its potential psychological impacts (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012; Li & Fung, 2013).

The differences between Georgian and foreign respondents are especially insightful. Georgians emphasize the duration of stay more in developing place identity, while foreigners display stronger psychological attachment and higher life satisfaction. This might be attributed to the diverse backgrounds of the foreign participants and the higher quality of life in their home countries. While language barriers are perceived differently by the two groups, Georgians are more adept at establishing connections with foreign speakers due to their proficiency in English.

In terms of place attachment, the study also revealed a significant difference between digital nomads and other expats. In particular, for digital nomads, the sense of home is less important, and they can experience life satisfaction even without having such a single significant place.

**Conclusion**

This research holds significant practical relevance for digital nomads and other voluntary migrants, who frequently experience challenges during the process of relocating. Understanding both the internal, personal dynamics and the external, physical, and social elements of these transitions can greatly aid in making their moves more efficient and less stressful. Similarly, migrants leaving their home countries voluntarily can benefit from insights into others' experiences, which might potentially ease their adaptation processes in new environments.
Theoretically, the study's value is underscored by the development of Georgian versions of the Sense of Place Scale (SoPS) and the Psychological Place Attachment Scale (PPAS). These tools fill a gap in the Georgian scientific community for reliable and valid measures of place identity and attachment and pave the way for their use and further refinement in future studies.

**Limitations and future implications**

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. Conducting interviews in English, though all participants were fluent, may have restricted the expression of nuanced perspectives due to language differences. Moreover, the study’s focus on digital nomads who visited Georgia, primarily from Eastern European and Middle Eastern countries, limits the generalizability of the findings to the entire digital nomad population. Additionally, the uneven selection of Georgian and English-speaking participants poses challenges for comparative analysis. However, the concept of ‘digital nomad’ implies a global, geographically independent identity. Therefore, the basic patterns identified in the study may be similar for people living the same lifestyle in different parts of the world.

The study's findings pave the way for several future research avenues. The presence of low but significant correlations suggests that the relationship between place identity, attachment, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being might be influenced by additional mediating variables. Future studies should focus on potential mediators like the sense of security, cultural value compatibility, career satisfaction, and local community attitudes.

Exploring the dual nature of place attachment, which can have both positive and negative consequences, is another critical area of interest. Intriguingly, participants emphasized the need for a 'home' feeling rather than the physical aspect of a house, prompting a more comprehensive exploration of both emotional and practical facets of place attachment. Lastly, investigating the parallels between place attachment and adult attachment styles, especially given the observed patterns of ambivalent place attachment, could shed light on the broader implications of attachment dynamics in adult functioning and well-being. This exploration might reveal how the negative and positive outcomes of place attachment correlate with various adult attachment styles.

**Declarations**

**Competing interests**

The authors declare that there are no competing interests associated with this manuscript.

**Funding**

The authors have no financial or proprietary interests in any material discussed in this article.

**Consent to participate**
Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

**Ethics approval**

Approval was obtained from the ethical committee of scientific research of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, faculty of psychology and educational sciences. The committee granted its approval on February 15, 2023. This study was performed in line with the principles of the APA Ethics Code.

**Data availability**

The participants of this study did not give written consent for their data to be shared publicly, so due to the sensitive nature of the research, supporting data is not available.

**Author contributions**

All authors contributed to the study design and conception. Material preparation, data collection, analysis, and the initial draft of the manuscript were conducted by N.L. (MA). Project supervision, development of the content analysis plan, and review and editing of the manuscript were performed by E.P. (PhD). All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

**Acknowledgments**

We are grateful to all the individuals who participated in our interviews and surveys. Your openness and thoughtful perspectives have been invaluable to the success of our research.

We sincerely thank Giorgi Svanishvili for providing constructive feedback, endless support, and valuable suggestions throughout the entire process of the research.

We would also like to acknowledge Mónika Cosma for her willingness to help us recruit interview participants and Hieu Truong, whose effort in facilitating our survey distribution was crucial.

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2014.10.007


