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Perception of Space and Sense of Place among Elderly Residents of the Solovetsky Village

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Abstract. Sensory-emotional perception of natural-architectural landscape is a collective phenomenon that depends on various factors. The natural and architectural space of the village of Solovetsky is distinguished by territorial isolation (island environment); marine type of natural and climatic conditions; consequences of the relatively late formation of the civilian population; rich religious history; location of special purpose places. In the conditions of the complex system of historical connections and the relative “youth” of the village, the population is in the stage of forming a “sense of place”. The architectural space of the settlement has been transformed many times and has not been characterised by a consistent linear development. Important transformational events were: the history of the monastery and its monastic services, the arrangement of the monastery space for the needs of the Solovetsky special purpose camp and the Solovetsky special purpose prison (1923–1939), further adaptation of the architectural space for the school of cabin boys and boatswains, a military unit, with subsequent transformation for civil settlement (1944). The transformational stages of architectural space are captured in the modern image of the village, which influences the formation of a “sense of place” among the population. This article examines and analyses the results of a survey of the elderly population of the Solovetsky village, identifying the features and patterns of sensory-emotional perception of space. Particular attention was paid to feelings of beauty, uniqueness, cleanliness, safety and friendliness among older respondents. The article concludes with recommendations for strengthening the “sense of place” — the psycho-emotional connection with the place of residence. These recommendations will improve the psycho-emotional climate in the village and the health of elderly residents.

Keywords: *sense of place, sensory-emotional perception, natural architectural space, Solovetsky village*

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Introduction

The concept of “sense of place” has a deep tradition of study since the 1970s. However, the study of the sense of place among the inhabitants of island territories with specific features of both natural and architectural landscape is a little-studied phenomenon. The present research in-

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cludes the study of sensory and emotional perception of the surrounding space by the elderly population of the village of Solovetsky, Primorskiy District, Arkhangelsk Oblast.

According to Western concepts, the three-dimensional model of “sense of place” is a composite product of “place attachment”, “place identity” and “place dependence” [1, Jorgensen B., Stedman R.]. For example, attachment to place is formed from a positive emotional connection of people with a place [2, Hummon D.M.; 3, Low S.M., Altman I.]. According to the second model, the sense of place is formed only through identification with the place and dependence on the place [4, Trentelman C.].

In addition to these two models, there are a number of personal concepts that reveal the very concept of “place”. I. Tuan believed that the sense of place is associated with interpretation, creation of symbols and meanings in interaction with the environment, living through life situations in contact with physical space. In his opinion, unidentified space becomes a “place” only when it is endowed with value [5, p. 6]. The closest to our understanding of the term “place” is the concept of E. Relph, who also considered “place” as the relationship between space and man — “phenomenology of place”, i.e. the interpretation of human experience of interaction with the surrounding space [6; 7]. E. Relph, describing the connection between space and place, explained that space includes many places. He notes that in order to study “place” and “sense of place” it is necessary to study people’s attitudes to space, i.e. the process of accumulating spatial experience [7, p. 44]. E. Relph also considered people’s identity with place. Personal experience shapes a place outside of space. By “place identity” he meant its “constant similarity and unity that allows this [place] to differ from others” [7, p. 45]. Identity is also determined by involvement and care for a place, living through certain life situations in contact with a place. One of Relph’s key ideas is that “human experience acquires different qualities of feelings” [6, p. 45]. His theory suggests that the accumulation of spatial experience is a long-term process that leads to a strengthening of the connection between a person and a place. R. Stedman, continuing the ideas of his predecessors, notes that “the transition from space to place presupposes a transition from the alien to the familiar, i.e. space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning” [8, p. 823]. The author records the connection between cognition and emotions.

Summarizing, it should be noted that different understandings of the term “place” are in many ways not mutually exclusive. “Place” is usually considered as a combination of three concepts: place as location means a spatial area or physical location; place as an action taking place in this place; sense of place — the subjective meaning of place, attachment to place, identity of place [9, Amundsen H., pp. 257–258; 10, Agnew J.]. One of the questions remaining open is how long it takes for a person to move from identifying a place to developing a strong sense of place — attachment to a place, which is based on sensory-emotional connections, obtained through experiencing positive emotions and accumulated experience. Researchers of the Arctic territories A. Bolotova and F. Stammerl came to the conclusion that attachment to places among the visiting population was formed “in proportion to the increasing importance and value of these places for

the biographies of newcomers” [11, p. 211]. The authors note that one of the places of attachment is the graves of ancestors. Accordingly, a strong attachment is formed already among the second generation of migrants: the second generation of migrants to the North of Russia cares for and looks after the burial places of their ancestors, and the attachment formed prevents their re-settlement to climatically more favorable regions [11, p. 211]. It is important to note that another factor in the formation of a strong sense of place — attachment to the space of the North — is the “solidarity of northerners” based on collective labor, which was widespread in these territories in the past: “deep knowledge of people with collective experience and the places where this experience took place creates strong social ties among the inhabitants of the North, as well as between people and places” [11, p. 213].

The Solovetsky Archipelago is a unique natural and architectural landscape with a rich history and the status of a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At the same time, the village of Solovetsky is relatively young, it was built in the 1990s (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Solovetsky settlement. Photo by R. Pshenko, 2023.

The natural and architectural landscape of the Solovetsky archipelago was formed under the influence of various factors. Firstly, it is worth noting the monastery, the “monastery walls” and the complex of outbuildings located outside the central monastery complex. The monastery was founded in 1420–1430 [12, pp. 5–6], it was and remains the main architectural dominant of the island and the historical and artistic background of the village and the archipelago as a whole. The outbuildings are currently under the jurisdiction of the monastery and are objects of cultural heritage of federal significance, but most of them are not suitable for use. It is worth noting that the remaining buildings of the monastery outbuildings are important elements of the architectural space of the village. These buildings include: the Salotoppenny plant (1842), the rigging barn (1838), the monastery power station building (1910–1912 and 1920–1930), the Beletskaya bathhouse (1717), the turpentine distillery (19th century), the monastery radio station (1915), etc. In addition to the economic complexes, residential and educational buildings have been preserved.

Thus, next to the monastery, there is a wooden building of the school for workers (second half of the 19th century) and the Nikolskiy building (1896–1898).

The second reference point for the formation of the natural and architectural landscape is the time of the existence of the Solovetsky special purpose camp and the Solovetsky special purpose prison (1923–1939). At that time, the monastery architecture was used for the needs of the camp/prison. Additionally, residential premises were built. In the southern part of the village, barracks and the administrative building of the workers' settlement of the Solovetsky special purpose camp (1928) have been preserved. Currently, the barracks and the administrative building are used as residential premises, a museum building and a store. After the prison was closed, the monastery premises were used to locate a school for cabin boys and boatswains. The civilian settlement was formed in 1944, the period of its formation is characterized by the construction of private houses, as well as the conversion of "camp architecture" to accommodate local residents.

Due to the fact that the formation of the Solovetsky settlement was of a heterogeneous nature and was conditioned by the work of the Solovetsky special purpose camp (1923–1933), the Solovetsky special-purpose prison (1937–1939), and the naval unit (1939–1991), a significant part of the local population are the descendants of employees and prisoners of the camp and prison, the second largest part of the population are the children of military men who served and lived on the Solovetsky Islands. The emergence, formation, and development of the architectural landscape of the settlement took place before the eyes of local residents. Accordingly, the elderly people living in the Solovetsky settlement are mostly the first and second generation of local residents. Identifying the formation of a sense of place among them is of undoubted research interest.

The hypothesis of this study was the assumption that, due to the late formation of a permanent civil settlement and the heterogeneous nature of the natural and architectural landscape, the modern period is characterized by a process of place identification, rather than the development of a strong "sense of place".

Research methodology

One of the modern approaches to the study of sensory-emotional perception of the landscape is emotional geography, which studies the emotional connection of a person with his place of residence [13, p. 31]. "Emotional geography", taking its origin from geographical sciences, focuses the object of research on the concept of "sense of place", which is associated with the space of a person's everyday reality; in other words, the space involved in the process of performing "daily rituals" [14, p. 574]. The methodology of this work is based on the concept of Russian researcher T.V. Zhigaltsova that a strong sense of place is the sum of such feelings as the feeling of beauty, cleanliness, safety, friendliness, uniqueness of the surrounding natural and architectural landscape [15, pp. 362; 379]. "Sense of place" in rural areas has deeper roots and a stronger attachment [14, p. 574]. It can be assumed that the island, isolated nature of the territory can enhance the sense of place.

The study of the emotional geography of the Solovetsky Islands became part of a large project “Creating sustainable communities taking into account the consequences of the transformation of the architectural and ethnographic environment of the island and coastal Arctic”, supported by the Russian Science Foundation. Comprehensive studies of the modern natural and architectural landscape of the Solovetsky Archipelago, as well as a retrospective view, are based on the memories of elderly residents collected during interviews in June 2023. The historical perspective is supported by archival materials from the Russian Ethnographic Museum, the Solovetsky State Historical, Architectural and Natural Museum-Reserve, and the Arkhangelsk Museum of Local History. In addition, the study included a field survey of the preservation of buildings and structures on the archipelago that are significant for the elderly local population.

The study sample included people from 45 years old (second generation) to 78 years old (first generation). The survey was of the “snowball” nature. The author notes the interest of the respondents in this study and the desire of the population to participate. In order to obtain a complete picture, the respondents included the monastery servants, museum employees and people living on the Solovetsky Islands seasonally. A total of 17 elderly and old people were interviewed, of which 6 respondents are the first generation of local residents who moved to a permanent place of residence; 7 respondents are the second generation of local residents who have lived on the Solovetsky Archipelago since birth; 4 people come to the Solovetsky Archipelago seasonally for 5 years in a row or more. The text of this article includes the answers of the respondents of the first and second generations.

The average duration of the survey was 30 minutes. The questions were divided into three semantic blocks and were open-ended without answer options, which allowed capturing a more complete opinion of the respondent. The first block of questions was related to the history and layout of the village. This block was a preparatory part in psychological terms, helping to dispose the respondent, prepare for an open dialogue, and encourage memories. The second semantic block of questions was related to the sensory perception of the natural and architectural landscape by respondents: a sense of beauty (aesthetic need), uniqueness (need for singularity, dissimilarity of the environment from others), cleanliness (need for a comfortable and healthy (clean) environment), safety (need for a safe and protected environment) and friendliness (need for communication and a conflict-free environment) [15, Zhigaltsova T.]. The third block of questions was aimed at expressing a personal assessment of the space that surrounds the respondents.

Research results

During the interviews, respondents did not identify themselves as indigenous people, but rather maintained a detached position, the position of a “guest”: “there is no indigenous population on Solovki, so they are not interested in changes, they are not ready to take care of the place

where they live”¹. Another respondent agrees with this opinion: he believes that the uniqueness of the Solovetsky settlement is that “there are many different historical layers on Solovki. It [the settlement — author’s note] was formed in 1944, the first layer is sailors and sailors’ families, then — the first museum workers ... These are all newcomers, there is no indigenous population here, and this is what makes it unique”². Researcher of the history and culture of the Solovetsky Islands V.N. Matonin also confirms this idea with the words: “there is almost no local population on Solovki, the rotation of local residents is extremely high”³. Thus, the respondents who have been living on this territory even for more than 15 years do not relate themselves to local residents; this indirectly indicates an unformed “sense of place”.

A stable assessment of space is imprinted in the aesthetic sense (the idea of the beauty of the natural and architectural landscape). During the survey, we asked to evaluate the aesthetic component of the village and the archipelago. We deliberately divided the question into “the aesthetic appearance of the village” and “the aesthetic image of the archipelago”. In the first case, we meant the anthropogenic architectural environment inscribed in the natural space: the development of the village, the monastery, residential and utility buildings, piers, hotels, Blagopoluchiya Bay, etc. The second question was focused on the archipelago as a whole: forest, coastline, village, monastery, islands (Anzer, Zayatskie Islands, etc.), Cape Pechak, dam, lakes and other objects. However, the survey revealed that the residents separate the monastery and the settlement. Most respondents who have lived most of their lives on the archipelago answered that the village is not beautiful: “The historical part is beautiful, the village part can hardly be called beautiful”⁴; “The village is ugly, unfortunately, but no one has bad memories of the island. About a bad life — yes, about the island — no”⁵. Respondents, who moved to Solovki relatively recently or come seasonally, look at the architecture of the village more positively and consider it beautiful. The respondents associated the uniqueness with the history and architecture of the Solovetsky Monastery: “It is unique only because of the monastery. Personally, I think so, because of these holy places, the sketes there, Sekirnaya Mountain”⁶; “There is no Kremlin like ours, made of wild boulders, of such stones”⁷.

The sense of cleanliness and the need to care for the surrounding landscape were deeply revealed in the conversation with the first-generation respondent. Working in the field of housing improvement and garbage removal, he emphasized that “the locals are not ready to care about the surrounding space”⁸. As was said above, researcher E. Relf associated the identification of a place

¹ FMA — Field materials of the author. Expedition to Solovetsky settlement, Primorskiy district, Arkhangelsk Oblast, June 2023. Interviewer no. 2 (second generation).

² FMA, Interviewer no. 10 (second generation).

³ FMA, Interviewer no. 13 (second generation).

⁴ FMA, Interviewer no. 5 (first generation).

⁵ FMA, Interviewer no. 13 (second generation).

⁶ FMA, Interviewer no. 5 (first generation).

⁷ FMA, Interviewer no. 3 (second generation).

⁸ FMA, Interviewer no. 4 (first generation).

with the manifestation of care for this place, accordingly, the absence of care speaks of the absence of identification of a place in one's perception of space: "No, the village is dirty. While I'm walking, for example, towards the cemetery... with a bucket and collecting [garbage] along the way, even with a bag, empty bottles... And the villagers litter there, well, and visitors, of course, too"⁹, "The village dump. Everything is simply buried there! There is a swamp nearby, groundwater, it washes away, and there are batteries and polyethylene... That is, this is probably the most painful point"¹⁰. The lack of cleanliness causes shame among the residents. A first-generation respondent, describing the area around the fortress walls, Blagopoluchiya Bay, explained: "It's a shame — it's the very center, it's very dirty there"¹¹. He said that he wrote a note on this matter in "Live Journal" to attract public attention. In this way, he showed his involvement and desire to participate in the life of the village.

The sense of security is perhaps the strongest feeling among the respondents surveyed. It is associated not only with the village, the archipelago, but also with the sea (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The White Sea. Photo by R. Pshenko, 2023.

During the interview, a guiding question was asked, the purpose of which was to identify the attitude to the sea as a source of danger, but none of the respondents consider the sea in this way. The population has only positive perception of the sea: "It is interesting to go to the sea every time, because it is different every time... I live in Komarovo, there is access to the sea nearby, a forest with mushrooms, peace and quiet"¹²; "We are happy with the sea. It is air for us, and water, everything"¹³. A first-generation respondent explained: "our children are accustomed to such a healthy fear [of the sea — author's note] from birth"¹⁴. Two of the respondents experience a feeling of anxiety about the sea, caused by the intense anthropogenic load that affects its flora and

⁹ FMA, Interviewer no. 5 (first generation).

¹⁰ FMA, Interviewer no. 10 (second generation).

¹¹ FMA, Interviewer no. 1 (first generation).

¹² FMA, Interviewer no. 2 (second generation).

¹³ FMA, Interviewer no. 8 (first generation).

¹⁴ FMA, Interviewer no. 8 (first generation).

fauna. One of the respondents defined the sea as an allegory — a connection with eternity and ancestors. Such an allegory is often found in the works of philosophers. For example, V.N. Toporov, considering the sea as a symbol, defined it as “a universal way of correlating essential and existential being, a paradoxical semantic structure in which the infinite is expressed in the finite, the eternal in the temporal” [16, p. 594].

The solidarity of northerners is based not only on collective labor [11, p. 213], but also on a *sense of community* in relation to each other. Only half of the respondents consider the residents to be friendly with each other. Interestingly, respondents consider the Beletskaya bathhouse to be one of the places that forms a sense of community on the Solovetsky Islands (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Beletskaya bathhouse. Photo by R. Pshenko, 2023.

The Beletskaya bathhouse is a building presumably built in 1717, located on the shore of Lake Bannoe (on the territory of the village) and part of the Solovetsky Monastery complex. At the moment, it is a historical and cultural monument of federal significance¹⁵. The bathhouse was built of boulders with small inclusions of brick¹⁶. It was actively used by the population of the Solovetsky village and was a public bathhouse. By the end of the 1990s, the bathhouse ceased to be used due to the need for repairs, which have not been carried out to this day. Older residents noted the importance of the public bathhouse for exchanging opinions and news: “There used to be a bathhouse, a common bathhouse. Everyone came there and talked”¹⁷; “We all went there, the whole village. It was closed only about 10 years ago. Now it is under the jurisdiction of the monastery”¹⁸; “For me, for example, and for many who have lived here for a long time, there used to be a good public bathhouse. Unfortunately, it is not used now. It is called Beletskaya bathhouse. You could say that it was a public place where people gathered and discussed certain issues”¹⁹. The population also notes the need for a bathhouse at the present time: “There is a bathhouse

¹⁵ Scientific archive of the Solovetsky Museum-Reserve. F.1. Inv.1. Arch. 657. Sh. 1.

¹⁶ Ibid. Sh. 2.

¹⁷ FMA, Interviewer no. 2 (second generation).

¹⁸ FMA, Interviewer no. 5 (first generation).

¹⁹ FMA, Interviewer no. 10 (second generation).

building here — the oldest in Russia — from 1717. Now it is closed and the pretext for its closure was repairs, since then it [the bathhouse — author's note] has not appeared, although there is a need for it" ²⁰. At the moment, the building is not in use, although it is in relatively good condition.

Thus, we can conclude that the architectural environment of the Solovetsky settlement does not satisfy the needs of residents of both the first and second generations for beauty, cleanliness, and communication. However, this is compensated by a sense of security on the one hand and ideas about the beauty and uniqueness of the surrounding natural landscape and the Solovetsky Monastery on the other. During the survey, respondents independently identified the problem of a weak "sense of place" on the Solovetsky Islands. This was explained by the constant change in the surrounding architectural landscape and the loss of places of attachment: "In conditions of geographic isolation, every visible object is associated with some emotions, moods, states. Each one reminds of the past. You feel comfortable in this space, but it can be very unpleasant and difficult when you suddenly discover that a new fence has appeared somewhere, something has been destroyed somewhere, something has been lost... The vector of changes is oriented towards loss" ²¹; "I am afraid to return to Solovki after a long absence, because it is unclear whether you will find what you wanted to see. Suddenly you discover that your favorite tree was cut down by an unknown person and for an unknown reason" ²².

It is interesting to note that, given the above results, when answering the last question of the interview, where respondents were asked to continue the phrase "for me, the village of Solovetsky is ...", two respondents who identified the problem of the indigenous population used the lexeme "homeland" to continue the proposed phrase. Thus, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a complex process of transition from identifying a place to developing a "sense of place", which takes more than one generation. To summarize, it should be noted that the hypothesis that the "sense of place" in the sensory-emotional perception of the natural and architectural landscape of the Solovetsky Archipelago by elderly residents is at the stage of formation, has been confirmed.

Strengthening the "sense of place" requires local work with specific places in the natural and architectural landscape, such as keeping graves and cemeteries clean and tidy. As noted above, researchers A. Bolotova and F. Stammmler named ancestral graves as one of the places of attachment, which form a sense of attachment among the second generation of migrants [11, p. 211]. This study confirmed these results: "Everyone has someone there [at the cemetery — author's note]" ²³. One respondent attributed the cemetery to a place of "reunification with loved ones" ²⁴. The difference in opinion is related to personal cultural and religious beliefs.

²⁰ FMA, Interviewer no. 13 (second generation).

²¹ FMA, Interviewer no. 13 (second generation).

²² FMA, Interviewer no. 13 (second generation).

²³ FMA, Interviewer no. 8 (first generation).

²⁴ FMA, Interviewer no. 2 (second generation).

In addition to ancestral graves, specific places that form a strong sense of place among the local population are places of pride [13, p. 34]. Respondents of the first and second generations noted the following places of pride: kindergarten, school, Anzer Island, fortress and dam. Among those elderly residents who live on the islands seasonally, the most common answer was “monastery”. In order to visualize the results of the study, quotes, as well as specific places and emotions named by respondents, were plotted on an interactive map of the Solovetsky Archipelago [17, Zhigaltsova T.].

In order to strengthen the “sense of place” and the psycho-emotional connection with the place of residence, it is necessary to pay attention to such problematic issues as the insufficient number of public places and events that contribute to strengthening ties between the population and the formation of a sense of community. Work to strengthen the “sense of place” and improve the emotional climate in the village requires the implementation of the following renovation policy, carried out by representatives of various fields of activity:

- restoration of the Beletskaya bathhouse;
- restoration of the main administrative building, which houses the administration, police, medical center, pharmacy, and library;
- construction of a club and provision of its operation for holding cultural events;
- creation of a council of representatives of residents of the Solovetsky settlement, ready for an open dialogue with representatives of the authorities, the Solovetsky Museum-Reserve, the Solovetsky Monastery, and with travel agencies.

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