

# About place and its relational agency. A conversational approach to place

As I invite you to embark on an intellectual journey through the pages of this book dedicated to the phenomenon of place and the conversational approach to this phenomenon, I bear in mind the words of the introduction to the work *Senses of Place* written nearly three decades ago by Feld and Basso (1996). Researchers were already pointing out that the idea of place and its meaning was a well-recognised phenomenon, both by scholars and practitioners. In this regard, the mentioned authors signalled in their preface that great understanding and care are needed to ensure that the words they wrote in 1996 make a significant contribution to an already existing body of knowledge.

I am fully aware that in juxtaposing successive phrases in this publication nearly thirty years after the referenced work edited by Feld and Basso (1996) and more than half a century after the canonical thought written down by Yi Fu Tuan (1974), I am setting a very difficult task for myself. Many researchers have already explored this phenomenon before me and they have repeatedly answered the question of the sense of place, pushing the frontiers of knowledge of this socio-spatial phenomenon. The researchers' quest has evolved from a structural static referring to opposing poles of cognition towards a relational dynamic binding together views that seemingly cancel each other. The result of these inquiries is my proposal of a conversational concept of place, capturing it as a causal relational partner of human and non-human beings.

The book consists of three parts. In the first one I review the cognitive perspectives that allow for a discussion of the sense of place. In my opinion, these foundations consist of sociological paradigms: phenomenology and symbolic interactionism, as well as the concept of agency and the critical approach. The second part of the book is related to the author's selection and presentation of concepts of place and commentary on these selected approaches. A set of concepts of place is formed by:

- Archetypal approach towards relationship between the human being and place: "sense of place"
- Pragmatically about place - the idea of "placemaking"
- Overwriting content in place
- Place animated by code?
- Place agency and self-determination
- Place entangled in an assemblage of relationships

Finally, the third part of the book, i.e. chapters 3 and 4, is devoted to the presentation of the conversational concept of place and to pointing out empirical examples of the interpretative possibilities of this concept. As the summary of a book is governed by its own rules, and one of the key rules is the need for choice and abstract, I have decided to skip parts one

and two entirely. The Anglophone literature is replete with studies exploring the question of place and the paradigms that allow us to conceptualise place. In this English-language section, I devote practically its entirety to the presentation of the views contained in chapters 3 and 4, which present the idea of a conversational concept of place and empirical examples demonstrating my reasoning.

As I have already mentioned, many interesting and cognitively important thoughts have been poured onto paper about place and countless opinions have been formulated on that subject. This observation applies to both the conceptual and empirical aspects of the issue. For almost 50 years now, an enormous cognitive explanatory power has been exercised by the phenomenological approach, which I have taken the liberty to call archetypal in chapter 2. In essence, it is through this approach that contemporary studies of *place attachment*, *place as assemblage*, or planning-oriented and pragmatic *placemaking* have developed and been constituted as separate thoughts. From a certain point, as it were, in parallel, in the geo-ethnographic and later also in the geohumanist and posthumanist currents, researchers began to explore place constructed through an ontology of *Indigenous Groups*, which also draws on an archetypal *sense of place*. Undoubtedly, also the changing everyday life of humans on Earth, technological developments and entry into the digital age, as well as the dynamics of degradation of the Earth's environment, have in recent decades forced theses to be formulated in the geo-digital and environmental currents respectively. Each new or slightly modified current and approach make it possible to broaden the knowledge of the sense of place and explain its character from an increasingly in-depth perspective.

Understanding the phrase “place as a socio-spatial phenomenon” in conversational terms goes beyond the asymmetrical relationship: human (causal subject) - place (material resource, space) and evolves towards the term “place as a relational phenomenon having a sense” (Larsen, Johnson 2016). In the case of the three-vector dialogue with place, the object of my inquiry is not only a socio-spatial phenomenon, but also an emergent, self-determining entity, co-creating the phenomenon of place through the relations that happen around, because of and with place. This is because place has its own sense, entangled by relationships with human beings and more-than-human beings in a shared “natural” and materially built-up world (Whatmore 2002; Ingold 2018; Luther 2020; Perrotti 2020). Human and more-than-human beings and geographically and biotically defined places as well as material and digitally transformed objects are linked by relationships that are not of a general and underdetermined nature, but in my view are communicative in nature.

Place exists self-determiningly in its dynamics of events and has a causal, though not always intelligible, conversational relationship with other beings - a dialogue. Place is not only a human-made idea, but also an entity that exists outside of the human being (Larsen, Johnson 2016). For the most part, however, geography used to distinguish and differentiate between human-animated place and purely materially and physically defined space. In the contemporary literature on the subject (e.g. Whatmore 2002, 2008; Peil 2014), it is possible to find suggestions according to which geographical concepts honouring a simple place-space dichotomy have, for many decades, stiffened and limited cognition of the world, depriving one of the chance for self-determining interpretations of “place without humans”, “place beyond humans” and “place beside humans”. Naturally, humans embody places with their behaviour. As Obrador explains, referring to Baerenholdt's thoughts:

The building of sandcastles is one of the most characteristic set of social practices through which the beach takes shape and gains expression. 'Through the sandcastle', Baerenholdt et al (2004: 3) explain 'the space and materiality of the beach is domesticated, occupied, inhabited, embodied. The sandcastle transforms the endless mass of white, golden, fine grained or gravelled sand into a habitat; a kingdom imbued with dreams, hopes and pride'" (Baerenholdt et al. 2004: 3; Obrador 2012: 52).

However, is this beach thus animated, brought back to life or endowed with a non-existent agency? I am convinced that it is a self-determining and causal place before humans begin to embody it in a set of social practices.

Let us recall an example visualising place that exists outside of the human being, but also eludes physical space. Imagine the sandy beach of Padre Island on the Gulf of Mexico, the splashing waves of the Gulf's waters and the foamy water rushing in and out of the beach, in the peculiar tidal rhythm of this geographical area. It won't be a finished, closed picture if we don't create in our mind the blowing wind, the distinctive smell of the sea breeze, the birds trying to glide in the wind, the clouds and the glare of the sun visible from a certain point on the beach. On the beach, we can imagine smaller sticks and larger logs washed out of the water, but also distinctive holes in the sand that tell us that crabs have taken up residence there. Sensing dusk, the crabs emerge from their burrows and begin their nightlife. Is a human being essential in this description? Will the place not exist without a human being, its perception and the knowledge built up with its mind and passed on? Indeed, as Tuan would have it, without the stigma of social interpretation, will the patch of beach evoked in the example become a space and location without its own identity and causal character? Finally, will it stop sending and receiving messages without humans? The entrance of a human being on the beach will naturally change this interactive arrangement, but it will not animate it. A person will add certain content, modify found place, most likely pass on the content experienced and worked through in the mind, start naming certain relationships. The user will create a certain secondary image and mark this place with their presence. The human being, however, will be only one of the entities entering into a conversational arrangement with more-than-human-beings. And place will be one such entity. When a human participant in this scene enters the beach, they will begin to perceive the stimuli sent by place. They will modify them with their "physical footprint on the sand" but they will also be influenced by place. A specific dialogue will be initiated. This dialogue is most often unconscious. However, when a human being dips their feet into the ocean water, feels the force, rhythm and pulse of the waves and senses the wet sand being washed out from under the feet, then the dialogue often becomes a realised fact. Can the outlined scene be reduced merely to the phenomenological experience of specific impressions by humans and the transmission of these impressions to others in a process of negotiation of meaning?

The situation will of course become more complex in the built-up environment. In such an environment, such as an urban environment, we are confronted with places filled with human-made matter. On the surface, therefore, it is difficult to speak of an extended dialogue with place. At most, analyses can be carried out on the content of the messages contained in the material aspect. The possible dialogue comes down to a designer (planner, architect) - user relationship and is clearly human-centred and human-focused. However, this is only a seemingly correct statement. In the built-up environment, an approach that explains the sense of place through the prism of a multi-level dialogue or conversation

reveals the depth of the relational sense of place. The human-place communication relationship becomes more complex, but not without a vector containing the content of the self-determining biotic and geographical environment.

In my opinion, there is no doubt that dialogue with place is a multi-vector relational activity. Three communication vectors can be distinguished in the process of conversation with place (Fig. 1 – page 111). For the sake of narrative clarity, these will be sketched from the perspective of person ‘A’:

1. Communication as exchange of meanings “in place”, dialogue in the “in place” vector.
2. Communication as exchange of meanings “about place”, dialogue in the “about place” vector.
3. Communication as exchange of meanings “with place *explicite*”, dialogue in the “with place *explicite*” vector.

In conclusion of the conceptual framework of the conversational sense of place presented in the book and the discussion of paradigms and concepts that allow for the development of a relational concept of dialogue with place, I can put forward two theses:

1. Place has its own self-determining sense, made up of biotic and geographical components. This essence is not reducible to individual components and exists emergently. This thesis has been articulated in the literature for some time, as I have mentioned often in this chapter and the previous ones, referring to the views of, for example, Johnson and Larsen. These researchers perhaps most clearly and unambiguously articulate views on a kind of *self* of place. Highly critical views, or even views called radical (Pickerill 2019), are articulated by researchers and activists led by Bawaka Country (Bawaka Country et al. 2016). Both the achievements of Larsen and Johnson (2013, 2016) and the Bawaka Country group researchers are linked to a very advanced conceptual ontology of *Indigenous Groups*. However, this current is receiving interest from the geographical community which goes beyond the study of the relationships of *Indigenous Groups* (Adams, Kotus 2022).

2. Place, in its self-determining sense, maintains a relationship with other entities that can be described in terms of a three-vector conversation with the human being. It could be said that the sense of place emerges from these relationships, and that the vectors of communication “about place”, “in place” and “with place *explicite*” describe the complex human-place relationship. The “with place *explicite*” communication vector directly describes the self-determining sense of place and reveals the communicative direct human-place relationship.

The subjectivity of place or rather the causality of place does not reduce the self-determination of human beings. Rather, I would write that self-determining place, through its relationship with subjective human beings, is in a state of development of its emergent self. In the next chapter, I will try to cite examples of the human-place conversational relationship, placing the emphasis primarily on illustrating the thesis of communication “with place *explicite*”.

It is certainly much easier to present the conceptual assumptions of the conversational approach and develop theories of dialogue with place than to cite examples of this type of relationship, especially occurring in the third vector of communication “with place *explicite*”. This happens because both I, as researcher and author of the descriptions, and the reader of these words have become accustomed to interpreting places around us as “developable space” for humans. We are certainly capable of perceiving, interpreting, producing, pro-

cessing and imagining places, but are we able to assume the position of a communicative partner in the dialogue with place? Many human beings still find it difficult to imagine the self-determining and causal position of animals and plants, and I set out to illustrate the thesis of the causal, relational, conversational sense of place.

In the empirical subsections that follow, I juxtapose the theoretical assumptions formulated so far with the relationships observed in actual places. When discussing specific cases, I focus more on extracting the relational content contained in the “with place *explicite*” communication vector. It is this area of the human-place relationship that is explored in this book and fills the cognition of the sense of place with new threads.

I decided that the description of the cases should follow a certain pattern as far as possible. This will perhaps make it easier to understand and get into the idea of a conversation “with place *explicite*” and to compare different situations. The downside of this is that such a case-by-case presentation can be alienating with the appearance of an overly schematic treatment of the complex issue of dialogue with place. In each of the cases cited below, the conversational exchange of meanings “with place *explicite*” is described through such features of the relations that form the dialogue with place as dynamism, strength and firmness, specificity and expressiveness, literalness and reciprocity of the human-place relationship.

In selecting successive cases, I wanted to build a continuum of places from completely undeveloped and as natural as possible, to very intensely built-up and seemingly without their relational sense contained in the biotic and geographical environment. The adoption of a conceptual figure showing a continuum of places from completely undeveloped to fully developed is not a random or merely orderly decision. This type of position relates directly to the philosophical assumptions made by Latour (1993, 2014), as well as to the anthropological critique of the Cartesian way of explaining the dual world (Ingold 2000, 2016, 2018, 2021a, 2021b). With the assumptions of the whole book and the contents of chapter 3 in mind, it can be argued that it is conversational practices (realised in the three vectors of communication) that define and establish what is “an intensely urbanised environment with varying expressiveness of the participation of the biotic sphere”.

As a result, the conversational nature of the place is presented by me in different categories of environment and different types of cases contained in between:

- 1) **the predominance of an undeveloped environment, with a natural biotic and geographical character:**
  - case 1 (referential): “Dialogue with place” evoked experimentally in the natural environment of Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado and a coastal beach in Hel Peninsula;
  - case 2: “Dialogue with place” evoked by a human being in the natural environment using the example of cave drawings in Big Bend National Park in Texas;
  - case 3: “Dialogue with place” in the natural environment illustrated by the example of a rock in the Enchanted Rock State Park in Texas;
- 2) **the predominance of the built-up environment, with varying expressiveness of the contribution of the biotic and geographical realms:**
  - case 4: “Dialogue with place” in the natural environment in a built-up area illustrated by an entry on the Shoal Creek Trail in Austin, Texas;
  - case 5: “Dialogue with place” in the built-up environment involving more-than-human beings illustrated by the Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin, Texas;

- case 6: “Dialogue with place” in the built-up environment illustrated by the Upper Crust Bakery in Austin, Texas.

In the Anglophone summary, only case 1 - the referential case - is translated. Each of the presented places was a participant in my geo-ethnographic research and, using Bawa-ka Country’s radical approach (e.g. 2016), a co-author of this research. On the one hand, I was phenomenologically experiencing these specific spaces, observing, trying to feel and penetrate the world of these places, and on the other hand, I wanted to look at them from as self-determined perspective as possible for them. In yet another perspective, this place sometimes began to speak to me through its self-determination. In this second and third approach, I gave place the field of activity and was a participant in the meeting and the dialogue. Consequently, I returned to the selected places and I spent many hours in them during my six-month fellowship at the University of Texas in Austin. I have often tried to approach the idea of dialogue with place very critically and with a great deal of disconfirmation. Each time, however, as long as I rejected the preconceptions, beliefs and experiences of my lived world, the place causally self-determined. Sometimes the manifestations of the place agency in relations with me or other human beings occurred very quickly and were even immediately noticeable, in other cases place agency and the self-determining character of its self in a dialogue relationship with a human being became apparent over time or was a record of the past.

In the examples presented in the book that illustrate my exploration and discovery of dialogue with place, I have chosen to adopt different narrative perspectives: from the first-person formula to the passive voice traditional in scientific description. In my opinion, dialogue with place can be effectively perceived and described by looking at specific events, behaviours and interactions and experiencing places in spite of everything. Hence, the first-person perspective mentioned and the method of autoethnographic description often appear in the description. Sometimes, however, I draw attention to certain generalisations and abandon the first-person narrative in favour of the passive voice often found in science. For the sake of formal order, the examples are summarised in two subsections. However, I would not want those reading the following examples to get the impression that I am implying with this purely tidying up procedure a dualism of thinking about the “natural - built-up” environment. I would like to reiterate a thought expressed a little earlier that my view of the nature-culture question is processual, or even relational, and that the examples themselves (inseparable) mark the existence of an “undeveloped - developed” continuum.

In view of the fact that the English-speaking reader only gets a summary of this book, I present here only one empirical example illustrating a conversation with place I have called referential.

**Case 1 (referential)** *Fig. 5. Illustration of a conversation “with place explicite” at the Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado (1A) and on the beach in Hel Peninsula (1B) - case Photo by J. Kotus*

“Dialogue with place” evoked experimentally in the natural environment of the Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado and a coastal beach in Hel Peninsula, Poland.



I have called the opening case of my empirical inquiry, according to methodological canons, a field experiment (the literature also uses the term *quasi-experiment*). These are two situations triggered by me as a researcher. I call them referential because:

- they are carried out following the rules of the field experiment, i.e. on the basis of a “laboratory” evocation of a conversational situation;
- they are intended to depict the situation of dialogue with place in an illustrative, vivid and reasonably indisputable way, particularly in the communicative relations taking place between a human being and “place *explicite*”.

In both natural places, through my intervention I wanted to evoke situations in which the relations of conversational dialogue “with place *explicite*” are revealed. My intention was to make the communication relationships contained in the third vector as explicit as possible.

The dialogue was arranged in two different locations: on a dune and on a coastal beach. Both places have their own names, are both biotically and geographically specific and socially recognisable and stigmatised. In both cases, there are extensive “about place” and “in place” communication relationships. Forgetting for a moment the proper names, the social narrative of the two places and the social interactions taking place in the places, I would like to turn my attention to the relational exchange of meanings in the axis of the human dialogue “with place *explicite*” and look for the relational essence of place in this exchange.

As I have already mentioned, the conversational encounter or otherwise exchange of meanings between me and the places was provoked by me. To do this:

- for the field experiment, I deliberately chose places capable of maintaining conversational relationships with human beings relatively expressively, dynamically and as far as possible uncontested;
- I induced a relation of dialogue clearly visible to the outside observer and evoking an almost immediate response from the place;
- in both places I made a *Place* inscription in the sand, which was my (symbolic) provocation of a dialogue “with place *explicite*”;
- I recorded environmental changes induced by local geographical factors that occurred in a very short time (beach) or a relatively short time (dune) in response to my activity, which was the placement of an inscription in the sand.

In summary, I can conclude that in both evoked cases the conversational relations of the human being “with place *explicite*” are **dynamic**. These are, of course, communicative relationships understood in a way that is peculiar but does not break with the definition of communication. Following the considerations of Deleuze and Guattari (1994), they are defined as a kind of exchange of meanings. In this distinctive but very real sense of conversation, in a very short time the waters of the sea make their presence felt on the sand and respond to human intervention. The environmental response is, in the most general scenario, expected and predictable. However, local conditions such as the strength of the wind, the shape of the bottom of the coastal zone or the size and liveliness of each wave affect how quickly, at what rate, the inscription I made will be altered by the forces of the natural laws of the place or even disappear. In the photographs illustrating the environmental response (Fig. 5 – page 128–129) the inscription made in the so-called wash zone fades under the influence of wave activity. It fades in a slightly different manner in the subsequent tests performed. Naturally, the environmental activity of place is expected and can evoke impressions, experiences, feelings in the mind of the observer. As a result, the human subject will acquire

knowledge and beliefs through a process of phenomenological experience. However, the human-place relationship that occurs goes beyond the human experience of the situation and, in my view, illustrates a relationship of reciprocity with another causal entity that is called place. The relation of dialogue takes place between two subjects: the human being and the interacting environmental subject, the emergent and relational essence of place, irreducible to its components: the beach, the wind or the dynamics of the sea water. The place responds to human action in a self-determining and causal way, independent of the will of the human interaction partner. The experimentally provoked human-place relationship on the dune follows a similar pattern. In this case, the relationship of a kind of dialogue is a little more drawn out. Despite everything, however, it can be called an immediate and opening exchange of meaning with a human being. The artefact, which has been evoked on the sand, disappears within minutes. The response of the environment is unexpectedly visible and dynamic. The force and direction of the wind, the slope and the underlying geomorphology determine the dynamics of this response and co-create the relational essence of the site.

In one place the causal forces of tides, wind and sea condition, in another wind and erosion processes create very dynamic environmental responses of place to human activity. It is easy to envisage a continuation of this relationship through the further involvement of both dialogue partners: a human being and place.

The **strength and firmness** of the relationship is also perfectly evident in these experimentally provoked dialogue relationships. In both examples, it is clear that there is not only a dynamic, but also a strong and firm environmental response from the place. The observed strength of place is downright compelling. In fact, I am not able to avoid the response of the place and stop the triggered relationships. Naturally, I may anticipate, fail to notice, ignore or even deny this effect of the place, but this does not change the essence of the fact that in the case of both the beach and the dune there is a strong reaction of the place.

The two examples evoked can also help to illustrate the **specificity** and **expressiveness** of the human-place relationship. These relationship characteristics are linked to specific geographical locations of the sites and local conditions. Naturally, both cases were chosen by me deliberately. To illustrate the dialogue with place, I selected a very large, specifically located dune and a particular stretch of coastal shoreline. Thus, in the first, referential study, I wanted to present as clearly as possible a point of view that takes into account the relational essence of place and its causal and self-determining character (Larsen, Johnson 2016). The presented places maintain a relationship with the human being on their own laws of nature, conducting a peculiarly defined dialogue with them. These places are unique in themselves through their geographical features and biotic environment. It is therefore easy to outline the specificity and expressiveness of the relationship. In the case of the dunes, this is related to the genesis of their continuous formation, one might say, endless structuring. The huge dune complex is located near the mountains of the Sangre de Cristo. The Medano Creek flows periodically from this area, which is responsible for very specific erosion processes and sand deposition in this particular location. The dunes in question are specific and distinct through the geographical and biotic environment that makes up the place. The second place, the coastal headland, is similarly specific and distinctive. The distinctive winds and tides of the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Gdansk play their part in shaping the bottom and the beach.

The exchange of meanings illustrated by the two field experiments is **literal**. In these situations, we are not just dealing with sense-making and human-centred interpretations of



the situation. *Quasi*-experimental examples of exchange of meanings leave no doubt about the objectivity of states of affairs and interactional exchanges understood as sequences of reciprocal reactions. Environmental responses to human action occur immediately. Naturally, the environmental partner does not make intentional, strategic choices. Place does not think, process or interpret. However, having participated in both experiments as a human partner in this dialogue, I had no doubt that there was a literal relationship between me and the place.

Finally, both cases have, in my opinion, the attributes of a relationship of **mutual exchange** of meanings. Again, I must stipulate that place does not interpret our activity. There is no realm of conscious action. It would be nonsense to ask about the intentionality of this conversational transaction from the perspective of place. On the other hand, however, the same place receives and reproduces our signals and sends, in this case very quick, feedback. My intervention in the place is processed, or subjected to change, and the place forces me into behaviours that I perform against my will. In a sense, the geographical and biotic environment is more self-determining than the most advanced artificial intelligences currently suspected of having such capabilities. The bio- and geosphere learns our responses and adjusts the reactions, not based on human-written codes, but on its own laws. There is therefore no reason to discuss giving self-determination to machines and overlook the relational, environmental sense of place. In the situations under consideration, there is an exchange of meanings between self-determining partners. For purely technical reasons, my two examples illustrate a closed communication sequence. However, in both cases, one can easily imagine the dialogue unfolding over time. The causal activity of the human being will influence the shape of the response sent by place, and this will provoke the human being to act in this way and not in another. Any human response will be more or less conscious, deliberate and reflective. Any feedback of place in this two-way relationship, although it will not be a conscious interpretation of human actions, will have the characteristics of causal self-determination.

Naturally, there are also relationships in both places, which are contained in the other two conversational vectors “about place” and “in place”. The sum of these relationships influences the final shape of the dialogue with place in general. As I mentioned in the introduction, the illustrations of conversation I have chosen “with place *explicite*”, the beach and the dune, have specific names. *The quasi*-experimental dune is located in the Great Sand Dunes National Park, Colorado, and the coastal beach is in the Hel Peninsula, Poland. When I give these names and locations, both places can immediately be associated with specific areas. If we associate Colorado or Hel, the places come alive in our imagination through, among other things, our mediated experience, descriptions heard in stories, films, songs or information read about these places in books. The proper names alone can provoke images in our mind - Great Sand Dunes National Park, the state of Colorado, the Baltic Sea or the beach in the Hel Peninsula. For many people, these names contain a huge emotional charge, even though they have not encountered these areas directly, because, among other things:

- they are potentially interesting, intriguing geographic names; the name the Great Sand Dunes National Park can spark the imagination;
- they can build “cinematic” associations and images, e.g. of the Hel Peninsula as the end or beginning of Poland, despite not having experienced the area directly;
- they evoke memories of films watched, or stories from books read, set in one place or another.

Besides, both places “exist” both in the opinions posted online and in the stories told by people in face-to-face encounters. This is a huge body of knowledge about the Great Sand Dunes National Park and the beach on the Peninsula, which is linked to the “about place” communication relationship.

No less important communication relationships occur in the “in place” vector. Both on the coastal beach of Hel and in the Great Sand Dunes National Park, we will meet people with whom we will interact more or less directly. Observations of people, brief conversations with them and more binding interactions will be the relationships that co-create both places. We may not realise it, but our behaviour in place and our interactions within it co-create the sense of place. It is a well-known saying that “places are made by people”. This colloquial phrase does not convey to us the full knowledge of the relational essence of place, however, it does contain the information that individual and collective behaviour influences the dialogue with place. To use an example, we can imagine what a huge impact a smiling Colorado National Park ranger encountered right at the start of a visit will have on a Polish tourist’s perception of the Great Sand Dunes. Presumably, this ranger will be dressed in the traditional uniform of the American Park Service familiar to us from films, if only about the famous Yogi Bear. This interaction will certainly influence the perception of the place. The social context of such a meeting and the content of this relationship will become an important building block of the essence of the place. However, this will not be the only relationship shaping the sense of place located in the Great Sand Dunes National Park, although it is certainly very significant in building a dialogue with the place. Perhaps accounts “about place” and “in place” will create such a sense of place that its relational existence and essence will be dominated by socially given senses. The social stigmatisation and stereotyping of place will drown out relations of dialogue “with place *explicite*” but will not remove them. The latter, although imperceptible, will be an ongoing relationship.

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My primary aim in both the book and this English-language summary was to show a way of thinking that allows us to look at place firstly as a partner in dialogue with a human being, and secondly as a partner who is connected not only by mutual conversational relations, but in these relations is or comes very close to a position of causal being. By juxtaposing examples along the axis of a continuum of “undeveloped - developed” places, I sought conversational relationships in different environments. Probably not only in my opinion, it is much easier to talk about the relational, conversational sense of place against the backdrop of an undeveloped environment. Such places enter into expressive reciprocal relationships with humans and are clearly self-determining in these relationships. Sometimes the human participant in such an encounter themselves feels very strongly, keenly, even acutely, the self-determination of so-called natural places. I am of the opinion that both the experimental example and the other case studies that refer to my way of thinking at least reveal the depth of the sense of place that eludes unidirectional human perception and experience.

The cases of built-up places are much more complex. Such place is often very much filled with all sorts of messages sent by human beings. Its self-determining character is difficult to discern, while certainly the essence of the built-up place is described by the

communication relations contained in three vectors. When I use the term “communicative relationships”, I am referring to the dialogue or exchange of meanings taking place on two sides. It remains an open question in this case as to whose content place exchanges with us: the author who placed it, the users who modify it, or the kind of self-determining, emergent entity that the place itself is. In examples illustrating the dialogue with place, I have included case studies of places of which there are many in the landscape of our built-up areas. Counter-intuitively, there is a huge biotic sphere and, perhaps unconscious for us, but practically always existing specific geographical environment. Then, although the vector of conversation “with place *explicite*” becomes more multifaceted, the self-determining sense of place exchanging meanings with humans becomes apparent. Perhaps we can already say of such a place that it has a self and that it teaches us as humans, creates and speaks to us (Larsen, Johnson 2016). In my illustrations, I have tried to show this aspect of the sense of place and my way of inquiring into the dialogue taking place between a human being and place.

Nevertheless, I realise that a modern human being very often lives in an extremely built-up or even over-planned world. In the period in which I am writing these words, a debate has been taking place in the public sphere for several months about the so-called “covering Polish cities by concrete”, with the built-up central squares of Poland’s smaller and larger cities becoming a particular example. In these areas consisting of a mosaic of places, in a process of *nomen omen* called revitalisation (i.e. animation), the biotic and geographic elements of the place have been effectively replaced, filling them with human-made material creations. In short, places were “covered with concrete”. Consequently, there are some in our everyday life where the conversational relationship “with place *explicite*” will be very clearly dominated, perhaps filled entirely, with human-made messages. There are even places in our use that are extremely isolated and completely equipped with filled material creations. Such an extreme radical example would be the cinema room. Such a place, its sense is formed as in other cases by relationships: “In place” (with other movie-goers and staff), “about place” (opinions that exist about a particular cinema) and “with place *explicite*”. However, the latter are reduced to assemblage actor-network communication relationships in the human-material creations axis. There are no windows in the cinema room. It is therefore impossible, as if through a window in a railway carriage or a flat, to even look and observe the environment of non-human living beings and the geographical environment. In spite of this, in such an isolated place there will still be an exchange of human meanings with the place, and the human being, although the most causal in this relational arrangement, will not have a dominant position at all. Indeed, in such a situation, the causal sense of place referring to the relationship of the biotic and geographical environment with a human being will be suspended. Although perhaps the place in its material being will continue to be a causal partner in dialogue with a human being.

The human dialogue with place is variable along the “*place-moment*” axis (Massey 2005). We have an innumerable number of places with which countless people enter into a variety of relationships. Consequently, in a chapter similar to this one, an empirical one using case studies, many different illustrations of the dialogue taking place between a particular person and a particular place at a fixed moment in time could be evoked, each time of cognitive interest and somewhat different. In my opinion, the only constant of these relationships is the fact that there is a conversational framework described by three vectors.

Let me recall the thought of Peil (2014).

[...] originally may have been crucial in contributing to the understanding of the role of humans in earth processes, but paradoxically, the multiple usages may have reinforced the view of humans as external to the natural system and advanced the anthropo- and Eurocentric reductions of explanation to culture (Peil 2014: 37).

According to the Estonian cultural geographer, many existing approaches and concepts in geography, especially social geography, may have had a key role and contribution to make in explaining the co-ordinate role of humans in relation to other beings and the geographical world. Too often, however, these visions have entrenched the belief in the dominant role of human beings, reinforced the human-centred division of the world and perpetuated the great social antinomy: culture-nature (Badmington 2004; Castree, Nash 2004). The implication is that we have sometimes failed to take full advantage of the explanatory power of certain concepts to know the world cohabited and at hand. Peil is not isolated in her views. Geographers, including those focused on social issues, have for some time been drawing attention to the need to redefine the approach in the nature-culture axis and to reduce the distance and hierarchy in these apparently contradictory worlds or even to revise this antinomy (cf. e.g. Sack 1997; Whatmore 2002; Robin, Sörlin, Warde ed. 2013; Castree 2014; Escobar 2019). In spite of this, often even in the most recent and highly supportive concepts to explain the world, we do not get rid of the human-centred vision, if only through systemically defined *ecosystem services*, in which the environment performs functions towards humans and sustains life processes in various dimensions (Daily 1997/2013; Norgaard 2010).

In my opinion, the call for perceiving symmetry and greater congruence between culture and nature also applies to the phenomenon of place, both as a concept and as a creation, or rather an existing and self-determining entity. We seem to understand the genesis of place as a scientific construct and know its essence, know how to interpret it, and consequently even create places from scratch that “allow us to live” in a harmonious way (for humans) (Lyles-Chockley 2008). However, looking at a place from the perspective of its causal essence comes very hard to us. In my view, echoing Peil’s (2014) observation and Badmington’s (2004) postulations, Tuan’s thoughts from nearly half a century ago were hugely important, but they gave an incomplete account of the essence of place and, consequently, for several decades the human experience of place was the only narrative perspective. Perhaps this was because the phenomenological approach towards place formulated by Tuan and Relph was itself an innovative and critical take on the phenomenon in the face of established, scientific regional studies. In the first years, and perhaps decades, after the thesis of space and place and the experience of the latter was formulated, researchers delved into the world of phenomenological human experience towards space. Nevertheless, in an intellectual journey of nearly 50 years exploring the phenomenon of place, despite our preoccupation with our power and subjectivity as human beings, the understanding of place is evolving towards discovering its relational sense. This is occurring with the exhaustion of the research fields of experiencing and creating place itself, the increasing empathy and maturity, including

scientific maturity, of human beings, and observations of the increasingly rapid changes taking place in the *more-than-human world*.

As a result, among scholars dealing with the phenomenon of place, debates are increasingly taking place that ask whether place is merely a creation of our experience, equipped with human-oriented senses? Is place a socially produced and reproduced space? And can place be understood and explained through anthropocentric narratives of the natural and built environment? In response to these and other questions, the progressiveness of place, its relationality, agency and self-determination, and perhaps even the possession of a specifically understood *self* or sense, is noted in the successive concepts articulated over the last decades.

The conversational approach to the relational essence of place proposed in the pages of this book is located in the latter trend, based on the critical use of phenomenological and interactional prompts and concepts of causality formulated in the social sciences.

By invoking the idea of dialogue with place, I in no way wish to undermine the phenomenological experience of place. This is a very important direction of learning about the phenomenon of place scientifically grounded for decades. Nor do I mean to glorify environmental determinism or deny the value of culture. I do not want to suggest to readers the idea of nature without the human being or the human being without nature. Culture is not just a veil that can be removed, but neither is it a rule for understanding all aspects of human life on the planet and the universal and only tool for regulating that life. However, observing the scientific discussions taking place around the question of place, looking at the doings of pragmatic planners and urban planners, and experiencing on a daily basis the power and uniqueness of places in their biotic and geographical aspects, I decided to ask a question about the conceptual framework to describe and perceive the depth of the phenomenon. A conversational concept of place became the answer to my inquiries. I have assumed, with a clear rationale in the literature (Adams 2005), that communication is key to understanding the relational essence and existence of places. In this way, I was able to look at place conceptually and pragmatically as an entity enmeshed in a network of communicative relations, but also creating these relations itself. Through a communicative approach, the human-centred experience of place and the making of meaning is transformed into a more complex, two-way dialogue relationship with place. In a dialogue defined as a kind of exchange of meanings, place acquires an equal, initially symmetrical position. It is an emergent creation that is in a communicative relationship with humans.

From the first to the last paragraph, the content in the book is intended to develop the cognitive aspect of knowledge about place. I hope that the discussion I have led around the phenomenon of place has led to the discovery of its relational, conversational essence and has allowed us to look at *place* as a self-determining entity. I am also convinced that the issue of dialogue with place is an excellent prelude to the creation of new and more complete answers in terms of: firstly, concepts that already exist and are well established, e.g. the question of non-places; secondly, phenomena that are being dynamically discovered, e.g. the relationship between the material world and the virtual world, the biotic world and the geographical world; and thirdly, pragmatic actions, e.g. the problem of human life in artificially created environments that isolate human beings from the biotic and geographical world.