

Towards the Contextualization of Place Attachment Theory - The Case of Dahab, South Sinai, Egypt

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Abstract For many years, place attachment has been explored from various perspectives resulting with many definitions and approaches. This research works on further understanding the theory of place attachment with focus on the town scale which was barely mentioned in literature. The research also presents an exploration of the context through the lens of place attachment. Dahab, the focus of the empirical section of this research is a small town located in South Sinai in Egypt. Dahab's economy is based on tourism industry and has been recently the focus of development as a strategic plan was published in 2024. This research works on contextualizing the place attachment theory in Dahab, through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the residents and visitors. Factors from literature were used to categorize the information, and then various themes were identified, analyzed, and correlated to one another and to literature. As a result, the paper concludes with a comprehensive understanding of the place and a list of contextualized themes that adds to the understanding of the place attachment theory. Some of the results and relationships adhere to literature and others are new contributions of this study. These results also help in the understanding of Dahab which could aid decision makers and planners in approaching the town. This study explores a small sample of participants hence the results could only contribute to the understanding of place but not to decision making. Yet, the study could take part in designing a contextualized

survey to measure the important aspects and characteristics of place that cannot be changed and the unimportant ones that could be change without affecting the users' sense of place. Therefore, future research could work on involving the visitors and residents experience of place attachment within the urban design and development processes.

Keywords Place Attachment, Sense of Place, Contextualization

1. Introduction

Dahab is a small coastal town in South Sinai in Egypt that is dependent on the tourism industry, with an extraordinary nature, both physically and demographically. Through pilot interviews conducted between 2020 and 2024, the participants expressed the presence of a special experience and an unexplainable bond that is directly related to the sense of place of Dahab. It should be noted that the state introduced Dahab's strategic plan to the public; putting Dahab back on the map of development. Therefore, any change in the physical environment might impact the experience of individuals which by subordination might impact the unique perspective of Dahab. The current status of development of Dahab shows the potential contribution of this research in further

understanding the context, hence maintaining the sense of place of Dahab.

2. Research Objective

A strong sense of place is created when people experience a strong bond towards the place, in which this sense of place does not just include the physical characteristics of the place but also the non-physical aspects [1]. This shows that the people-place bond differs from one place to another and from one person to another. However, individuals might agree on certain aspects and factors that contribute to the sense of place. Dahab is going through major development; hence exploration of the people-place bond will add more knowledge and understanding of the context and place attachment on the town scale.

The study starts with a thorough literature review covering the concept of place attachment and relevant terminologies and theories. The research then explores place attachment in Dahab as a part of an exploratory process that works on understanding the experiences, views, and emotions of people towards a place through collecting qualitative data using in-depth semi-structured interviews with residents and visitors. The research concludes with two overlapping and intertwining main aspects that contribute to place attachment in Dahab: 1) physical environment; 2) social environment; those together results with affective aspects that lead to town attachment. Those main aspects consist of several sub-aspects that will be discussed in this research.

3. Place Attachment: Definitions, Approaches and Characteristics

3.1. People & Places

The study of the feelings people experience towards places has been the interest of many fields such as human geography, sociology, urban planning [2,3], philosophy [2], environmental psychology, community psychology, cultural anthropology, and architecture [3]. However, the studies on people-place relations are restricted to topics related to definitions and relating concepts to one another, such as sense of place, place dependence, rootedness, place identity, place satisfaction, and place attachment [3]. This study explores the people-place relation mainly from the lens of place attachment. Accordingly, the following section focuses on the literature related to place attachment and the relevant concepts to it.

3.2. Place Attachment

There are various definitions of place attachment. Relph [4] defined place attachment as deep and strong

involvement of people with places. It represents the emotional bonds and experiences between people and places [5,6,7,8], places where people feel safe and comfortable [7] through the activities of life [9]. Brown et al. [10] defined place attachment as the positive bonds that form between people and places resulting from behavioral, cognitive, affective ties between individuals or groups on various levels. Place attachment consists of both psychological and social processes in a physical context [10]. It is a complex concept and phenomenon [5] accompanied with the desire to stay close to the place [6] and to be related to a place throughout their lifetime [9]. Place attachment is viewed in several ways; as a multidimensional process that links between people and places based on their needs [11], as a simple one dimensional structure [2], or a two dimensional process that includes place identity and place dependence [12].

Although the topic of place attachment was covered in various fields, literature has always expressed the concern of vague relation between the various concepts of place [3,8]. The concept of place attachment relates to and overlaps with several ideas and concepts such as, place dependence [2,13,14], place satisfaction [2], place identity [14], sense of place [2,5,13], topophilia, rootedness, environmental embeddedness, community sentiment and identity [5], community attachment, and sense of community [2]. The following section explores some of the concepts and their relation to place attachment as mentioned in literature.

3.3. Sense of Place

The sense of place was defined in many ways by scholars due to its relation with various concepts such as; perception issues, identity and social attachments [15]. According to Giuliani, Hay in 1988 measured the intensity of sense of place through measuring several aspects including place attachment [16], hence considered place attachment as part of the sense of place. Jorgensen and Stedman [14] defined the sense of place as a multidimensional construct consisting of beliefs of self-place relationship, feelings, and a specific behavior towards the place; which represent place identity, place attachment, and place dependence respectively. Later, Stedman stated that the sense of place included a physical setting, human activities, social processes, and psychological evaluations [17]. Brown et al. [10] defined sense of place as the place meanings, attachment, and satisfaction that are based on social ties and place characteristics. While Hashemnezhad et al. [15] defined the sense of place as the subjective perception and feelings people form towards places, in addition to the impact of the external objective environment. This research starts by following Stedman's perspective of the sense of place including place attachment, place identity, and place dependence, focusing mainly on place attachment; however, the empirical study might lead to the

development of this view.

3.4. Place Identity & Place Dependence

Place identity is another concept that refers to the bond people form with places [8]. There are three views of defining place identity; the first view as explained by Kevin Lynch defined place identity as what gives the place individuality or uniqueness from other places in which the place is identified by [18]. The second view by Relph [4] is that identity includes the experience, vision, mind, and intention of the person equally as the physical appearance of the city or landscape, adding that Ian Nairn (1965) stated that the number of identities is as many as the number of people who use this place. Relph [4] also added that since people identify places individually, those identities combine into a common identity due to experiencing the same objects and activities in addition to being culturally taught to look for specific place qualities. The third view is that it is a cognitive mechanism that works on self-identification and constructing self-image in relation to belonging to a place and includes elements related to the public image of the place through their interaction with the place [1,9]. Also similar to place attachment, the more the time spent in the place the stronger the place identity becomes [9] and it may differ according to the scale of places [8]. Place identity includes dimensions that define an individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment [14]. In literature, researchers have agreed that the concept of place identity and the concept of place attachment are related [19].

Place dependence on the other hand, refers to a functional attachment [12] represented in the relationship individuals have with a specific place, where that place offers the characteristics and conditions necessary for them to pursue their needs and goals [1,12], in which the person relies physically [12] and socially and is dependent on this specific place for overall well-being [1].

3.5. The Relation between the Different Concepts

Literature has discussed the people-place relationship concepts in various approaches, relating place attachment to concepts such as sense of place, place identity, and place dependence. Brown and Werner (1985) cited by Hernandez et al. [7], discussed place attachment and place identity without differentiating between them. While Lalli [20] stated that one term includes another, general place attachment was considered as part of the definition of place identity. Bonnes and Secchiaroli [21] stated that although there is an overlap and similarities between place attachment, place identity, and place dependence, however each has unique characteristics. Jorgensen and Stedman [14] viewed place attachment as a component of sense of place along with place identity and place dependence. Some researchers also stated that place attachment contributes to the development of identity [6,22].

Hashemnezhad et al. [15] stated that place attachment is part of the sense of place. Other researchers addressed place identity and place dependence as part of place attachment [23,24].

Furthermore, literature has discussed the dimensions that form place attachment; Riger and Lavrakas [25] identified two dimensions when studying neighborhood attachment which are physical rootedness as the physical dimension and social bonding as the social dimension. Also as cited by Hidalgo and Hernandez [6], Taylor et al. (1985) identify rootedness and involvement as the physical dimension and local bonds as the social dimension. Low and Altman [5] stated that place represents the context where interpersonal, community, social and cultural relations exist, in which people are attached to those relations, not just the physical environment. Wächter presented four dimensions of place attachment; place identity, place dependence, ambient bonding, and social bonding [26].

3.6. Place Attachment Measurement

There are many ways for understanding the concepts of place. According to Lewicka [8], there are three components of place attachment; affective, cognitive, and behavioral with focus on the emotional component. While Scannell and Gifford [27] defined the components of place attachment into person which includes cultural/ group and individual, place which includes social and physical, and process which includes cognition, affect, and behavior.

Literature on measuring place attachment was explored on various scales and types of places such as residential and recreational and in various ways. In regards to scale, researchers have mainly explored attachment to home, neighborhood, and city. For example on the scale of neighborhoods, as cited by Giuliani, Gerson, Stueve and Fischer in 1977, it measured neighborhood attachment through measuring the social involvement and the affective attachment [16] while Riger and Lavrakas [25] also measured neighborhood attachment through measuring the social bonding and physical rootedness by analyzing survey data collected through telephone interviews. Lalli [20] measured attachment to a town through measuring the general sense of being at home in the form of belongingness or rootedness. As cited by Giuliani [16], Churchman and Mitrani in 1997, it measured the level of attachment at three levels; country level, city-neighborhood level, and building apartment level through questioning people about attachment to the place, satisfaction level, feelings about leaving the place, and feeling of belonging.

In addition to the scale of place, many factors impact place attachment; some are related to place such as size, scale, and physical characteristics. While other factors are related to people such as the social and economic status, residence length, mobility, age, sense of security, and social relations [3]. Time is considered an important factor

for place attachment, the longer the time spent in the place, the stronger the attachment becomes [10,28] and the stronger the local ties are [28]. According to Hashemnezhad et al. [15], place attachment affective factors are; physical factors, social factors, cultural factors, personal factors, memories and experiences, place satisfaction, interaction and activity features, and time. Place attachment is also related to environmental variables such as appropriation, residential satisfaction, attention to neighborhood and behaviors related to the environment [9]. Place attachment is also affected by the sociopolitical context. Laws and regulations impact place attachment by protecting and easing home ownership and maintaining neighborhood quality [10]. Accordingly, in order to understand the attachment to a place, all variables, features, and characteristics including physical characteristics, social characteristics, and laws and regulations should be explored.

Scholars mainly explored place attachment through qualitative and quantitative research using interviews and surveys. Feldman [29] measured attachments to a type of settlement through in-depth interviews on country, city, suburb, and small town scale. Harris et al. [30] used questionnaires to measure home attachment. Eisenhauer, et al. [31] used open-ended survey questions in exploring the activities people do in places they are connected to. Lewicka [8] investigated the memory of residence place and its relation to place attachment and place identity using both qualitative and quantitative analyses of survey questions of rating on a 5-point scale, open ended questions, and collecting socio-demographic data, and ranking objects. Also in a study by Lewicka [2] participants were asked to mark the items that accorded with their feelings to study the relation between place scale and intensity of attachment. Scannell and Gifford [32] investigated the psychological benefits of place attachment through analyzing four open ended questions that included; describing the place, reasons for feeling attached, reasons for going to this place, and the experienced benefits from being connected to this place, using a qualitative coding scheme. Khaidzir and Kamal [1] used a seven-point Likert scale survey to measure the sense of place and categorized the outcomes into place identity, place attachment, and place dependence. Obradović [23] quantified and analyzed emotional experiences and two dimensional place attachment of sacred journeys using online surveys that measured place attachment through rating place identity, place dependence, satisfaction, emotional experiences, and destination loyalty on a 1-5 scale supported by demographic data.

4. The Empirical Study

4.1. Background of Dahab

Dahab is one of the nine sectors in South Sinai situated

along the Red Sea coast between Sharm El Sheikh and Nuweiba (maps 1 & 2). Dahab in pilot interviews was described as a unique town that radiates exquisite energy. It has a distinctive nature that includes both the sea and the mountains making it one of the top ranked destinations in the world for water sports. Hence, the tourism industry in Dahab is the main source of income. Accordingly, the demographic structure in Dahab is diverse; Dahab is dwelled by three groups. The Bedouins, nomads that became settlers between 1979 and 1988 [33] still lead a life with a tribal structure. The second group is the migrated population from other countries that came to settle in Dahab. And finally the third group includes the Egyptians who move from all over Egypt. Also according to pilot interviews, individuals expressed a special bond that ties them to Dahab, a bond formed through their experience of Dahab, and a bond of an emotional connection and attachment.

Notably, on June 13th, 2024, the Dahab City Council convened a public meeting to unveil the latest strategic plan for Dahab. This highlights the importance of understanding the bond between the people and the town.

4.2. Methodology

After the thorough literature review covering the concept of place attachment and relevant terminologies, the research explores place attachment in Dahab to understand the experiences, views, and emotions of people towards a place through collecting qualitative data using interviews. The research uses in-depth interviews with residents and visitors, as used previously by researchers such as Feldman [29]. The questions are semi-structured to give participants the space to express their perspectives freely. The outcomes from interviews are analyzed using a thematic analysis method; the outcomes were categorized into aspects and then themes are extracted using inductive coding from the interviews.

The interview questions were designed based on literature and similar empirical research. The information was extracted through interviews with residents including newcomers and Bedouins and visitors including constant visitors and second home owners. According to Hidalgo and Hernandez, the data acquired by questionnaires related to place attachment included sociodemographic characteristics [6]. Therefore, the interviews started with questions related to the participant's current status, demographic characteristics and background. The interviews then explored the participants' relationship with Dahab through a set of questions targeting their experiences and emotions towards the place. The questions presented in literature focused on issues and concepts related to positive and negative emotions towards the place. According to Brown et al. [10], positive emotions related to places include security, pride, order, continuity, and identity. While negative emotions related to places include chaos, shame, drudgery, violence, and alienation.

Therefore, the interviews explored the experience of the interviewees with Dahab through questions related to their bond towards Dahab using keywords that were extracted from relevant literature (see appendix A).

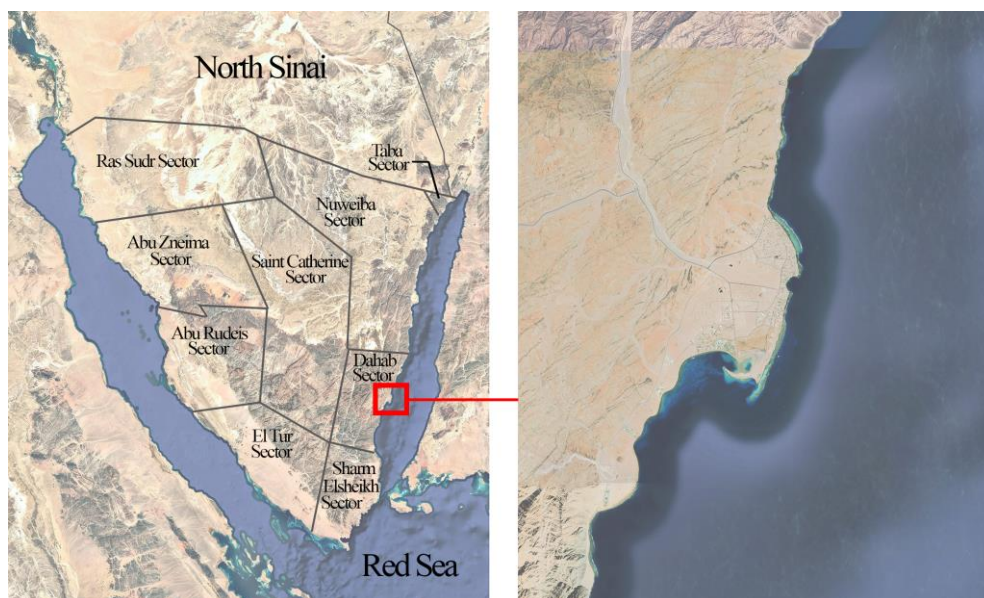
The sample of interviewees was selected through a snowball sampling and was divided into two main categories. The residents' category consists of newcomers including migrated Egyptians and foreigners and the Bedouins who are the original residents. The visitors' category includes constant visitors and second home owners including both Egyptians and foreigners. Non-consistent and first time visitors were avoided according to literature, as the length of stay is a factor that

impacts the attachment [9,10,28]; and also non-consistent visitors' perspective is usually shallow [35]. The targeted sample was also above the age of 18 years.

According to the Information Centre in Dahab, the official numbers for the population in Dahab are as follows; 3,156 Egyptians and 6,000 foreigners. However, pilot interviews with residents revealed that several residents do not officially reside there. Accordingly, the residents targeted in the interviews are not necessarily official residents but permanently live in Dahab. The interviews were conducted with 32 participants, 17 residents and 15 constant visitors; the sample of the participants is diverse, in gender, age, type, and nationality (tables 1 & 2).



Map 1. The location of South Sinai in Egypt based on Google Earth illustrated by author (2024)



Map 2. The nine sectors of South Sinai based on [34] and Google Earth (2024) with focus on the town location in Dahab sector illustrated by author (2024)

Table 1. Sample size and classification

Sample categorization	Residents			Visitors		
	Egyptians (Bedouins)	Egyptians (non- Bedouin)	Foreigners	Second home owners		Constant visitors
				Egyptians	Foreigners	Egyptians
Sample size	7	7	3	6	3	6
	17			15		
Total number	32					

Table 2. Sample of participants to show diversity

Participant	Type	Gender	Age	Occupation	Education	Country of origin
S.S.	Original resident	Male	20	Scuba diving guide	High school	Egypt (Bedouin)
M.F.	Original resident	Male	80	Bedouin Sheikh	-	Egypt (Bedouin)
M.H.	Second home owner	Female	66	Unemployed	Bachelors	Egypt
M.S.	Second home owner	Male	37	Photographer	Bachelors	Egypt
C.Z.	Newcomer resident	Female	36	Teacher	Post-graduate	Belgium
A.E.	Newcomer resident	Male	40	Business owner	Bachelors	Egypt
K.Z.	Newcomer resident	Female	30	Business owner	Bachelors	Russia
H.H.	Newcomer resident	Male	52	Government official	Bachelors	Egypt
R.E.	Second home owner	Male	72	Retired	Post-graduate	England

5. Analysis of Findings

The data collected from the interviews were rigorously examined and several aspects were found quite revealing on the nature of place attachment in Dahab.

5.1. Inductive Coding

During the interviews several aspects and terminologies were repeatedly mentioned by the participants. The key topics and aspects were extracted from transcribed interviews creating an inductive coding system that was presented in 12 categories; feelings, safety and security, natural environment, built environment, rootedness, place identity, lack of restrictions, lifestyle, time, community, culture and heritage, and services and infrastructure.

5.2. Themes Extraction

Themes were then extracted from the key topics and aspects presented within the 12 categories, resulting with 13 themes that were grouped into 5 groups; physical environment, social environment, affective aspects, state, and lifestyle. The next section explores the themes in detail.

6. Extracted Themes Analysis from Interviews

The following section presents the themes emerging

from interviews and explains the factors and terminologies that people use to describe their bond with Dahab. Several themes overlap, hence some themes are mentioned as complementing themes in a main theme and later the complementing themes are discussed as main themes. The themes are grouped into 5 groups based on topics; physical environment, social environment, affective aspects, the state, and lifestyle and well-being. Some participants took pictures of the places they talked about, which were added to support the themes.

It should be noted that during the interview, certain keywords were repeatedly used in describing Dahab. The first term is simplicity which is a general term that has been associated in the interviews by almost 75% of the participants with various elements; simplicity of Dahab, simplicity of life, simplicity of people, simplicity of architecture, and even simplicity of everything. Simplicity was even mentioned in association with managing daily life plans.

Similar to simplicity, the general term freedom was frequently used by the participants on its own and in relation to other terms; freedom of movement; no physical boundaries and no access times for beaches and mountains, freedom of looks as no societal etiquettes, freedom of use, no fees, public spaces, and variation of options of spaces.

6.1. Physical Environment

6.1.1. Small Town Size

The small size of town was mentioned by many

interviewees; such as community size, community relations, mobility, time, well-being and activities. In literature place size and scale were also mentioned with relevance to place attachment [3].

In the interviews, K.Z. expressed feeling anxious after staying in Dahab for a long time, stating; “Dahab is very tiny and you cannot easily go anywhere you like”. She elaborated that the issue is not only with the size as an independent factor but also with mobility and ease of going out of Dahab, adding “you feel like you're in a very small circle and in a very small place. And sometimes I feel stuck here a little bit”. But she emphasized her solution is to miss Dahab. A.J. shared the same point of view adding; “after a while you're like, I need to go and see something... just long enough that I start to miss it... sometimes you can't appreciate something until you miss it.” Both K.Z. and A.J. have good financial means which allows them to leave and return. In contrast, H.H. described Dahab as “an open prison”, feeling unable to leave the town and return due to his financial and work constraints. Bedouins, as the original settlers, find peace in the surrounding mountains. Despite these feelings, none of the interviewees indicated that the small town size impacts their attachment to the town or their desire to stay.

M.H. pointed out that the small town size makes moving around Dahab easier. K.Z. also mentioned that because of the small town size, the traffic density is low and it does not take time moving from one area to another.

A small town size also embraces a small community size, hence less options for community relations especially if the individual is not open to being exposed to different communities. This issue will be discussed thoroughly in the community section.

6.1.2. Built Environment

Infrastructure issues were mentioned when discussing the built environment. All participants discussed that any change in the built environment should target fixing the existing structures and infrastructure, not building new ones.

In general, the built environment in Dahab was associated in the interviews with simplicity. S.I., a second home owner described Dahab as a modern simple town, natural, not fake, not complicated and not extravagant. M.H. and Y.N., second home owners, noted that the architecture of the town and the aesthetics of buildings are basic and simple which reflects an overall simplicity image

of the town.

Part of this simplicity is related to the minimal intrusion of the built environment on the natural environment. People associated this experience with the term freedom. S.S., a Bedouin, explained that there are no physical barriers on the beach or anything that restricts access to water (image 1). Y.N. agrees with this point of view adding that this increased her bond with the nature environment and Dahab.



Image 1. Assalah beach area, open access to water, picture taken by author (2024)

Participants had varying perspectives on their residences. Newcomers prioritized location and affordability over building quality. They mentioned the increase of real estate prices for outdated structures. Newcomers also added that despite the issues with the infrastructure, it does not impact their emotional bond towards Dahab. As for the Bedouins, the culture plays an important role in their built environment, as they have a specific clustering system for their houses in order to provide privacy to the household, in addition to the one floor units, high windows, and fences supported by the narrow pathways.

Several participants mentioned the uniqueness of the narrow pathways between the clustering units. Y.N., S.S., S.W., and K.Z. mentioned that it is a great experience to walk through those pathways knowing that at the end of it is the sea (image 2). Many participants also mentioned the passages that frame the sea view; A.J. described it as a source of comfort penetrating the concrete structures (image 3). M.W. also suggested that if any development would take place, the design should leave the open waterfront. Agreeing with this, a lot of participants mentioned the use of beachfront empty plots located between the coffee shops (image 4).



Image 2. Showing the passages that lead to the sea, picture taken by author (2024)



Image 3. Showing the framing of the sea view from the street, picture taken by M.W. (2024)



Image 4. Showing the use of empty plots located by the sea, picture taken by author (2024)

Several participants also mentioned that the simplicity of the built environment is part of the identity of Dahab. Y.N. narrated her first impression about Dahab; “as soon as you get by the sea it is different, with the light structures and natural materials being in harmony with the sea”. Materials play an important role in the identity of Dahab, especially the wood used to build the last floor of houses and in the light wooden structures aligned by the sea that represent an image embedded in the memories of many. S.W. added that the natural and simple materials build the identity of Dahab.

6.1.3. Natural Environment

Contrasting with the built environment, participants expressed a strong emotional connection to the natural environment in Dahab, because the sea and the mountains were mentioned by all interviewees. S.S., a Bedouin, stated that his identity is shaped by his upbringing near these natural features. Y.N. highlighted that her strong bond with the natural environment is a key aspect in her relationship to Dahab, while K.Z. and M.W. cited it as one of the main reasons they moved to Dahab. The weather enhances the role of the natural environment in Dahab and supports outdoor activities all year around. Participants also mentioned that a lot of Europeans move to Dahab for the good weather all year around.

A.E. and H.H., both newcomers explained that the open horizon with the sea and the mountains made them feel comfortable as they grew up in areas with open landscapes and greenery. H.H. also added that his favorite area in Dahab is an open high area overlooking the sea. Y.N. has a house located directly by the sea; she explained that the open horizon viewing the sea and the mountains comforts her.

Participants highlighted the importance of direct contact with the natural environment. S.W. And A.H. stated the simplicity of using the beach without any barriers (image 5) and A.H. agreed with this point of view. While H.H. expressed that going to the beach is the most affordable thing he can do with his kids. Y.N. added that there are no barriers between her and nature and S.S. described it as freedom in dealing with nature.



Image 5. Lagouna beach area, showing freedom in use of space, picture taken by author (2024)

Another element that was mentioned was the palm trees located along the promenade by the sea, as part of Dahab's identity. H.H. and A.E. mentioned that the palm trees remind them of old Dahab (image 6). Trees and bougainvillea were also mentioned by Y.N. and K.Z. as elements that contribute to the image of the town (image 7). Also as previously mentioned the ratio of exposure of the natural environment in relation to the built environment impacts the experience of individuals towards the town.



Image 6. Showing greenery and palm trees located on the promenade mentioned by participants, picture taken by author (2024)



Image 7. Showing trees and bougainvillea in narrow pathways mentioned by participants, picture taken by author (2024)

The marine life in Dahab is unique; many visitors are attracted by the rich marine life. Many participants added

that most of the people who live in Dahab are aware of the importance of preserving marine life, but many visitors are unaware and destroy elements that take centuries to form. Participants mentioned the necessity of raising awareness around Dahab to avoid the destruction of the natural environment.

6.2. Social Environment

6.2.1. Community

One of the most important themes mentioned was the community; the diverse, friendly, and small community. Community attachment has shown to play an important role in the attachment to the town. K.Z. as a newcomer highlighted the importance of the community in making her feel welcomed. K.Z. narrated; "when I came, it was like the true local community... I remember that I felt like home". Part of her first impression was built by her contact with who she called locals; locals in this context are Russians and Ukrainians who have been living in Dahab for years.

K.Z. also added that the community supports projects initiated by the community members and helps small businesses thrive. Newcomer M.W. expressed the importance of the community and the communal activities in his daily life. S.W., S.I. and M.H., described the people as friendly, welcoming, and helpful. For M.W., the sense of community, rather than specific individuals, is the most significant aspect of his bond to Dahab. M.H., S.W., and S.I. related simplicity to the friendliness of the community.

S.S. expressed that all individuals who live in Dahab belong to the community of Dahab. In this context H.H. highlights the sense of responsibility individuals feel towards the place. A.J. added "a lot of people here, they choose to be here... they don't have to be here, they choose to. And within that, choosing to be here, it is this mix of, it's the people, it's the place and it's all the stuff together".

6.2.2. Cultural Diversity

Dahab, a diverse tourist destination, is home to a Bedouin community that understands the importance of tourism and accepts the presence of different nationalities, and also values their culture and privacy. Conversations with Bedouins often revolved around their heritage, history, and culture which subsequently express rootedness to the place. S.S. and M.B., narrated stories about Bedouin history, tribal structure, and the progression of Bedouin dwellings. M.B. shared his dream of creating a museum showcasing the original Bedouin tents. H.H. and S.W., also mentioned the necessity of preserving the historical and cultural identity of Dahab.

According to K.Z. and many others, cultural diversity is interesting and the small community encourages the people to know each other. People of different cultures in Dahab already have commonalities to start communications;

activities and their love of Dahab. K.Z. described being welcomed by the already diverse community, and this made her fit in easily. M.W. also confirms that the community makes people feel welcomed.

Participants like M.W. praised this diversity and thought that this diverse community makes Dahab special. While others like H.H. are rooted to their background, and prefer dealing with people of similar background. H.H. also added that Dahab lacks a different type of diversity; in this context, diversity is of individuals with various life experiences, yet with the same cultural background.

S.W. mentioned that the cultural diversity in Dahab also reflects on the restaurants and cuisines, giving Dahab a unique identity. While M.W. added that this diversity is reflected in the activities that bring people together.

6.2.3. Societal Etiquette

As mentioned earlier, Dahab has a very diverse accepting community and individuals radiate their behaviours and also absorb behaviours from others through interactions supported by acceptance of differences. This was reflected in the interviews as “freedom” which describes the lack of societal etiquettes in the way individuals dress and act which is constructed on the lack of judgment and acceptance of others.

6.2.4. Activities

Individuals expressed the presence of diverse activities that are supported by the unique natural environment. These activities greatly contribute to the well-being of the community. K.Z. stated; “What I like the most is that there are a lot of activities. You literally can do everything you want”. M.W. added that communal activities play an important role in his daily life and that the activities are the second most important aspect in his bond with Dahab after the community.

M.W. added that in events like Ramadan, people gather to eat together and celebrate. The community also gathers on a certain day during Ramadan and people eat together along a train of tables placed on the promenade. The community also used to host a market on Friday for people to sell any kind of products like home cooked food and handmade accessories.

Y.N. and many others stated that Dahab is the perfect environment to raise kids due to the availability of various activities; including basic activities such as swimming and hiking, as the context encourages outdoor activities. This is also supported by the sense of security and safety people feel towards the town. H.H. also added that the natural environment provides an affordable context for the kids.

As per several interviews, the community of Dahab is divided into sub-communities which are divided by activities; like the scuba diving community and freediving community. Accordingly, people interact with individuals who do the same activities. R.E. stated that; “I made friends through windsurfing, a common interest”.

6.3. Affective Aspects

6.3.1. Rootedness and Belonging

Participants mentioned the sense of rootedness and belonging in several occasions. Newcomers defined themselves as Dahabians, expressing belonging to Dahab and its community but they expressed being rooted to their hometowns. H.H. narrated that his roots are where his childhood memories are. Opposing to this statement, H.H. added that his kids resist the idea of leaving Dahab as they were born and rooted in Dahab. Similar to H.H., S.C. explained that he is rooted to his city of origin where he was born and raised. But when he was asked about belonging, he answered that he belongs to where his wife and kids are. Second home owners and constant visitors did not express rootedness to Dahab but they expressed a sense of belonging. K.Z., M.W. and others, highlighted the role of the community in making newcomers feel that they belong to Dahab.

Opposite to newcomers, the Bedouins feel rooted to Dahab S.S. explained that “Dahab as they call it (home); your home, your place, family home, where you lived and were raised and grew up. Your whole childhood and youth. I love Dahab. Dahab for the family is a sacred place that we cannot let go. It is hard to live somewhere else”. He also added that it is not just related to the people but also related to the place itself.

From the interviews, it seems that individuals are rooted to the place where they were born and raised. Yet N.N. presents a different case, as she was born and raised in Dahab but lived in a very enclosed circle of family members, she explained that she feels rooted to her parents’ hometown not Dahab. This shows that the upbringing of the individual, social ties, and memories play a major role in the feeling of rootedness to a place.

6.3.2. Safety and Security

A key theme that occurred in the interviews was the sense of safety and security, with all participants feeling safe in Dahab. Y.N., a mother of three, stated that she feels Dahab is safer than other places, emphasizing that the community increases her feeling of safety. Y.N. and M.H. stated that they feel safe enough to leave the house door unlocked. S.W. added that people feel safe enough to leave their belongings unattended at a seaside coffee shop without fearing theft. A.J., K.Z. and C.Z. also added that they feel safe in the streets of Dahab. However, R.E. raised concerns about children driving cars fearing bike accidents.

The sense of safety and security was mentioned as a reason that could lead to leaving Dahab, which is more related to place dependence. K.Z. stated that war or feeling unsafe is the strongest reason that could make her move out of Dahab. M.W. also stated that some newcomers who have been living in Dahab for years left due to the situation in Palestine fearing their safety.

6.3.3. Ownership

This topic was mainly discussed by the Bedouins as the owners of the lands of Sinai that have been passed on from one generation to another. The current issues with land and building legalization, are the high amount of money estimated per square meter for the houses and lands they already dwell on for decades. It is seen by the Bedouins as paying for their own property, a very high fee that most cannot afford. Speaking about land ownership, S.S. narrated that according to unofficial agreements with the state they own the lands of Sinai so they act accordingly.

As for E.D. a permanent resident who became a second home owner explained letting go of her dream house, the house she and her husband designed and built together was hard. E.D. stated that they have been in the legalization process for years and cannot sell the house without solving. Y.N. and S.I. also stated that they are still working on the legal documents for their houses.

6.4. The State

6.4.1. Services

An interesting conversation took place in a group that included 15,700 members till August 2024 from the Dahab community. The topic was raising children in Dahab, in terms of social life, education, and healthcare. Several participants agreed that kids below the teen years thrive in Dahab with various activities, international exposure and good education or home schooling. However, during the teenage years people consider moving to another place for a better education, as described by a foreigner education in Dahab as inadequate.

During the interviews, nearly 60% of the participants discussed education. C.Z. and M.Z. a Belgium/ Egyptian couple noted that currently they are not thinking about their infant's education but recognize better options in Europe. E.D. and her husband had to leave their home in Dahab to provide their daughter better opportunities in Europe. Y.N. and M.S., are second homeowners who reconsidered moving to Dahab after researching local education quality. This opinion prioritizes education even outside Dahab. While others feel that home-schooling and unofficial communal schools suffice.

A third opinion, mainly noted by Egyptians, is that education in Dahab is moderate. However Y.A., a former school teacher, along with some Bedouins, stated that the issue with education in Dahab stems from the teachers and the large number of students in each class. A.B., M.H.2, and S.A. further noted that the schools lack landscapes and recreational spaces.

Healthcare on the other hand, was mentioned by less than 25% of the participants. Participants only noted that the existing and the new hospital structures are convenient, but there is a manpower shortage, as a lot of doctors stay only temporarily. Bedouins also stated that they receive good state health insurance from the state. Despite its importance on well-being, healthcare does not impact the

bond individuals feel with Dahab.

6.4.2. Lenient Control

The state has a role in the freedom experienced by individuals. S.S. explained freedom as the lack of control on the use of the beach or mountains, stating; "here we have more freedom, we go to the mountains more and by the sea more. We can fish with no constraints. We go camping by the sea with no constraints. This is all freedom, no constraints." Y.N. added that part of what makes the experience in Dahab unique is the freedom in dealing with nature; explaining that there are no barriers between the person and nature.

6.5. Lifestyle and Well-Being

The easy and simple lifestyle in Dahab reflects the choices of its residents, supported by the physical and social environments and affective aspects. K.Z. described it as "very simple," contrasting life in the city. In Dahab, she appreciates the freedom to engage in activities without extensive planning. M.W. also stated that Dahab's physical environment and community both promote a healthy lifestyle. The nature, good weather, diverse community and variety of activities create a certain lifestyle; as he described the experience; "the vibe of the place makes you grounded". He compared life in Cairo, filled with concrete and pollution, to Dahab, where nature slows the pace and creates a more relaxed atmosphere. K.Z. noted that the lifestyle encouraged her to move there.

S.S. stated that the lifestyle in Dahab is a choice; a choice that a person gives up financial prosperity for, as described, a "simple" lifestyle that brings a person close to nature. S.S. even described this lifestyle using the term "freedom" as not being tied up to something major all day, living with no constraints. H.H. also stated that being out of the urbanized city and being in Dahab allow him to live a simple life while focusing on his family and the upbringing of his kids, life in Dahab lacks distractions.

Also for S.S. and H.H., the simplicity of life in Dahab was related to stress-free lifestyle. H.H. stated; "I cannot deny that life here is better, cleaner, easier, and the aspects of life are easier". Y.N. added that she and her husband have considered moving to Dahab but feared the feeling Dahab gives her; "living in a dream". She explained that the simple lifestyle scares her as she fears being too detached from the real world. S.W., described Dahab as a simple place, highlighting that Dahab is the place to visit if you want to detach from the stress of life.

7. Discussion

This part of the research discusses the relation between the different themes and aspects in relation to place attachment, relating the outcomes to literature and presenting the new themes (figure 1).

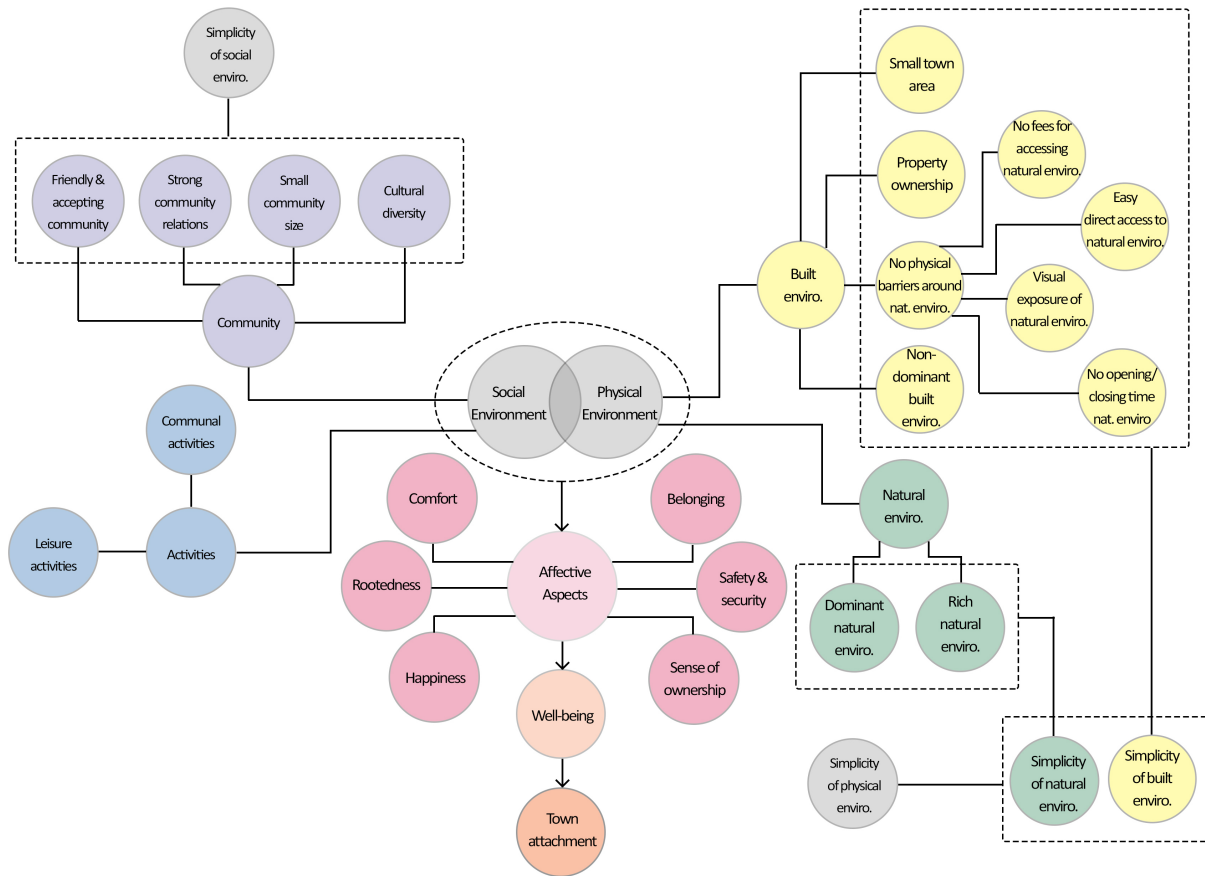


Figure 1. The diagram shows the relations between the different aspects and dimensions, illustrated by author (2024)

In the interviews, simplicity in Dahab was related to the aesthetics and the planning of the built environment, the lack of societal etiquettes, and generally the simplicity of living. This experience of simplicity leads people to feel comfortable hence affects their psychological well-being. According to literature, the feeling of comfort is positively related to place attachment [7]. This shows that the simplicity of the physical and social environments are positively related to place attachment. This concludes that change in the built environment aiming to upgrade Dahab, might impact the simplicity of both the physical and social environments. Consequently, these changes may impact individuals' well-being and attachment to the town.

Simplicity of the social environment was also related to town size. The interviews concluded that the social environment is an aspect that contributes to place attachment in Dahab. Since Dahab is small in size, the community is by subordination small in size. Therefore, the members of the small community accept and have to deal with one another. Literature mentioned a negative relation between community size and level of place attachment [3]. In addition to that, Dahab as a small tourist destination attracts diverse users and individuals understand the impact of the tourism industry on their economic well-being, therefore people tend to be simple and accepting in their social interactions.

The town size was also mentioned on its own, newcomers expressed that due to Dahab's small size they feel the need to leave for a short period of time and then come back again; showing that the town size is negatively related to boredom, yet boredom does not impact the attachment to the town. People tend to change places and come back to Dahab; this agrees with literature that feeling the need to stay close to the place is positively related to place attachment [6].

As per literature, newcomers are considered foreign to the existing community [3]. This might have been the scenario for Dahab 40 years ago, as a newly introduced tourism destination. The existing community in Dahab is already diverse and most newcomers have mentioned that the existing community encouraged them to move to Dahab. This opposes Lewicka [3]; some studies have shown the negative relation between neighbourhood diversity and place attachment relating it to the lack of interpersonal trust.

Two points of view addressed the relation between the small town size and diverse community. The first opinion explains the concern of some that exposure to diverse cultures and values may influence their lifestyle, leading them to seek a community with similar beliefs. Conversely, others view cultural exposure as beneficial, enriching their experiences. As cited by Relph [4], Alvin Toffler (1970)

stated that people may feel at home just because of the presence of the people with similar interests. In Dahab, common interests are presented in individuals with similar backgrounds in a few cases but mainly in the activities and relation to Dahab, making people feel that the place is home. Accordingly, community diversity does not impact place attachment as in Dahab people act as one community. The Royal Commission on Local Government in England as cited by Relph [4], stated that attachment to residence does not only increase with time but also with the interaction with the surrounding community.

The Bedouins recognize the importance of tourism to Dahab, accepting the diverse community on the town scale. Tourism research has raised the concern of the impact of visitors on the hosting community which might impact the well-being or identity of the community [17]. The Bedouins shield their culture from external influences, asserted their land ownership and expressed that visitors are usually aware of and respect the Bedouin culture. As for their neighbourhoods, they prefer to be surrounded by Bedouin neighbours to maintain the privacy of their families. Although community diversity is not recommended in the Bedouin neighbourhoods, it does not impact their attachment to Dahab as they feel rooted to the place.

Tuan [35] stated that visitors and native residents view the environment differently. As cited by Stedman [17], Hay (1998) expressed that outsiders experience a superficial bond to places and do not develop enough connection to form a strong attachment; even recurring visitors do not form a strong sense of place unless they consider the place their permanent home. Stedman [17] added that newcomers have a negative impact on the values of the existing community, shallow encounter with place, do not develop attachment, and accordingly threaten the character of place. Several other researchers who focus on the sense of place of recreational areas agree that tourists do not develop strong attachment compared to people who lived for a long time at the place [3]. Literature also added that the perception of visitors of the environment is not very significant as it is usually superficial, while the perception of the native residents is more complex [35]. However in Dahab, individuals that experience the place through the diverse community and activities have a deeper perception than individuals who deal only with the physical environment.

According to Gur and Heidari [36], the sense of belonging to a place increases with longer residence, when it is the place of birth, and involves participation in social activities and local events. This may be true in some cases, but in the case of Dahab, several participants expressed their sense of belonging quickly due to the community and social relations. One participant, born and raised in Dahab, expressed belonging to her hometown stating that she does not belong to a community and only spends time with family. This suggests that time spent in a place or being

there may not necessarily impact the sense of belonging, while social ties positively impact both belonging and place attachment. Gur and Heidari [36] also added that place attachment is positively related to the length of residence and property ownership and the time spent in place is positively related to social ties. This study has shown that the length of residence and property ownership strengthen place attachment but social ties represent the main aspect that impact place attachment, hence length of residence and property ownership support place attachment.

Participants expressed their sense of belonging towards Dahab, even after going back to their primary residence. This shows that time spent and the place being the primary residence are not necessarily the main factors of the attachment bond. In addition to that, Lewicka [3] confirms that individuals who buy a second home tend to feel that this place is theirs, similar to the existing community. This was confirmed in the interviews by second home owners. Hence, there is a positive relation between town attachment and property ownership.

Nature plays an important role in the perception of simplicity of the physical environment. As per the analysis of the themes, the natural environment was stated as the main aspect for place attachment. The natural environment being dominant over the built environment impacts the perception of people with Dahab. People deal directly with nature with no barriers or constraints, creating a strong bond between the people and the natural environment. The natural environment is also the primary aspect that impacts the psychological well-being of individuals. In the interviews, participants mentioned that the openness of spaces and the natural environment increases their feeling of comfort and peace of mind. In a study by Van Pattens and Williams [37] about the place meaning of second home owner, the authors extracted through interviews themes, one of which was "escape, back-to-nature and simplicity" and this theme was expressed by the interviewees as they escape modernity seeking refuge in nature, explaining that the natural environment plays an important role in their experience of place, while the concept of escape included physical and mental distancing from their daily life. In Dahab, interviewees highlighted the simplicity of lifestyle that is supported by the connection to nature.

Regarding safety and sense of security, the study agrees with literature that feeling safe is positively related to place attachment [7]. People tend to stay in a place where they feel safe and secure.

8. Conclusions

This study emphasized the importance of understanding the bond between people and places, exploring the aspects and dimensions that contribute to this bond on the town scale specifically in Dahab. Analysis of the interviews

revealed that the themes and aspects are independent as they are intertwined and overlap with one another in Dahab. A theme may serve as a main focus in one context while acting as a supporting theme in another. As per the presented diagram, participants agreed on three main aspects that make experiencing Dahab unique leading to place attachment; the physical and social environments together resulting with affective aspects in which all themes and factors are connected to each other whether directly or indirectly.

The analysis shows that psychological well-being is what most individuals seek in Dahab. During the interview, certain keywords were repeatedly used in describing Dahab, such as simplicity which describes and summarizes the psychological experience and perception of people towards Dahab. Simplicity of lifestyle which is supported by simplicity of both the physical and social environment is the general concept that leads to the psychological well-being and contributes to attachment of people to Dahab.

Simplicity of the natural environment plays an important role in experiencing Dahab. People discussed topics related to preserving the town, like fixing the sewage problems. Individuals also appreciate the natural environment, initiating activities such as clean ups. In addition to that, communal activities and the activities related to the natural environment encourage people to easily fit into a community, proving that the community has the power to draw people to a place or push them away.

In addition to that, the open and untouched nature of the place contributes to the attachment to Dahab supported by the freedom in dealing with nature, in addition to the simple and unplanned built environment that helps in simplifying life. This mixture of relations lowers the psychological pressures that are usually created in a more developed context.

As themes shift between main and sub-roles, they also alter their representations of place attachment, identity, and dependence based on individual perspectives. The

literature review indicates that sense of place stems from personal experiences, leading to varying perceptions of place attachment, dependence, and identity. The research highlights that the roles between the three concepts do not just overlap but also exchange depending on the person. For example education; for some people it is a priority that impacts decisions in life, overpowering any other aspect acting as an aspect of dependence. In other cases education could be insignificant and subsequently does not act as an aspect of dependence. Those aspects and their importance differ from one person to another.

This research is considered a step towards understanding the importance of place attachment and the way it could contribute to understanding a context. It is important to contextualize studies related to place attachment to understand the hierarchy and importance level of each aspect and dimension. In Dahab, as discussed, a small alteration in the physical environment could easily impact the psychological well-being of the user or the community ties. This shows the importance of this research during this phase of ongoing development, as any change in both the natural and built environments might directly impact the sense of place.

Declaration

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Participation in the interviews in this study was totally on a voluntary basis. Participants were clearly informed of the objectives of the study before consenting to participate and consenting for the interviews to be recorded and transcribed. All participants were above the age of 18 years old. The article does not identify participants in any way and does not contain any information that could reveal their identity. Any identifiable features of people were blurred in photographs presented in this article to preserve their anonymity.

Appendix

Appendix A. Interviews questions sample with both residents and visitors

Residents	Visitors
Name? Age? Nationality? Marital status? Occupation? Education level? Do you have children?	
If you have children, do they live in Dahab?	-
Previous city of residence?	The current city of residence?
Area of residence in Dahab?	Preferred area of accommodation in Dahab?
Year of first visit to Dahab? Year of moving to Dahab? When did you decide to move to Dahab? Why? What encouraged you?	Year of first visit to Dahab? Frequency of visiting Dahab? What is the average duration of your stay in Dahab?
Do you own or rent a property in Dahab? Do you own a property in another city?	Do you rent an apartment, stay in a hotel, or own a second home in Dahab?
Do you remember your first impression of Dahab?	
What do you love about Dahab?	
Where is your favourite spot in Dahab? Why? Describe it	
Do you usually visit the beach or the mountains more?	
Do nature play an important role in your relation to Dahab?	
Do you feel free wandering around and exploring Dahab?	
Which beach access do you prefer to use? Why?	
Did you make friends?	
Do you feel you belong to a community in Dahab?	
Do you get along with the diverse community in Dahab?	
Do you usually encounter people from a similar background to yours?	
Do you feel bored living in Dahab? Why?	
Do you do any sports activities?	
Are you involved in any communal activities?	
Do you like the area where you live? Why?	Did you ever consider moving to Dahab? Why?
Are you familiar with the neighbourhoods and the neighbours in your area?	
Do you think Dahab is a place to raise a family? Why?	
Do you feel safe and secure in Dahab?	
Would you encourage your friends to move to/ visit Dahab? Why?	
Is life stable in Dahab? Why?	
Do you plan to leave at a specific time?	-
What do you think about the built environment in Dahab?	
Are you satisfied with the services in Dahab?	
What do you think about the development of the promenade? Why?	
Would you like to be involved in any development process?	
Would you feel differently about Dahab if it changed?	
Would you still like to live in/ visit Dahab if it turned into Sharm El Sheikh? Why?	
What would make you move out of Dahab?	-
Would you be sad if you had to leave/ stop visiting Dahab?	
What would you change in Dahab?	
What change in Dahab will make you feel sad?	
In a few words, describe what makes Dahab special	

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