

# The Relationship between Inhabitants' Sense of Belonging and their Residency Period, Former Place of Residing and Housing Tenure in Ali Mendjeli New Town (Constantine-Algeria)

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to determine the factors that influence the inhabitants of Ali Mendjeli new town sense of belonging. In this paper, we shed light on the three main factors cited by these inhabitants in our interviews with them. These factors were given as justifications for having or lacking a sense of belonging. The first factor which is long term of residence was cited as an essential aspect for having a sense of belonging. The second factor is the former place of residing; it represented the main reason for lacking the sense of belonging. Finally, housing tenure includes both: having and lacking a sense of belonging. A sample of 151 respondents who moved to Ali Mendjeli between 2000 and 2022 was asked about their sense of belonging through semi-structured interviews. Statistical package for social sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0) was used to perform statistical analyses. The results obtained indicate that there is no association between sense of belonging and duration of residence, former place of residing and housing tenure. This article proposes that the feeling of belonging in Ali Mendjeli calls for further research on other factors that might be associated to the sense of belonging.

**Key words:** Sense of belonging. Ali Mendjeli new town. Residency period. Former place of residing. housing tenure.

## INTRODUCTION

New towns of this era were a tool for reconstruction and resource extraction, for population resettlement and territorial dominion. They were a solution to the afflictions of the big city (Wakeman, 2016). In 1987, Algeria's National Planning Scheme recommended the establishment of new towns in the Hauts Plateaux and South. Meanwhile, "new towns", local emanation was launched, that is the case of Ali Mendjeli, near Constantine (Ballout, 2014).

Ali Mendjeli (Constantine) was a new town as a result of a voluntary policy. This new town was built to relieve the congestion in Constantine's city center. Ex-nihilo creation has been sparked by a number of circumstances, including the city's progressive saturation, the proliferation of slums around the center, rising housing demand, a scarcity of urbanizable and buildable land, landslides, and houses threatening the demolition of Constantine's ancient city...etc. For twenty years Ali Mendjeli has been experienced a strong expansion and population growth, with an increasing rate of 7.55% and a positive migration balance with 5.83% of growth according to the General Population and Housing Census of 2008. At the beginning, it was conceived on a surface of 1200 hectare, to spread out today to 2341 hectare, without forgetting that the surface of the agglomeration foreseeable by the horizon 2030, will be of 3357 hectare.

However, a quarter century after its effective launch, the new town included frank inflections on the social, economic and environmental level. Focusing on the sociological plan, there are pioneers, newcomers and a generation who was born in the new town, all of them have a different former place of residence (from the centre, pericentre, periphery.....). Furthermore, they have varying length of stay in the new town. They also have different status of ownership of housing in the new town. Current research on new towns is focused on their urban planning, evaluation, urbanization process, development... The majority of study on feeling of belonging focuses on the sense of belonging experienced by immigrant individuals. Few studies in the field of urban planning have focused on the sense of belonging among inhabitants to the new town.

Our research has three questions: (RQ1):Is the sense of belonging to the new town of Ali Mendjeli, associated with the long term of residence in the sample studied? (RQ2):Does the former place of residence influence the sense of belonging among inhabitants of Ali Mendjeli new town; (RQ3) How did housing tenure affect sense of belonging among inhabitants to Ali Mendjeli.

H0: There is no association between sense of belonging and (age, residency period, former place of residence and housing tenure).

According to our null hypothesis, it is no association between sense of belonging and (residency period, former place of residence and housing tenure).Our alternative hypothesis are: H1long term of residence is related to the sense of belonging. Whenever, the length of residence was long, the feeling of belonging will be greater. On the other hand,H2among inhabitants, those who's their former place of residence is closer to the city center have no sense of belonging than others away from the center. H3 hypothesis suggests that for those who are owners of their homes they have a greater sense of belonging than others who are renters or residents for a short time.

Our paper add to the existing body of knowledge, on people-place relationships by investigating factors, that may contribute to the formation of a sense of belonging, among individuals in a new territory, known as new towns. The following, is how this article is structured: The first section provides a summary of the literature review, which will summarize the literature on sense of belonging and their relationship with long term of residence, housing tenure and the former place of residing. The technique will be explained in the second section; in this one, we will offer the case study, data collecting, analysis, and the research approach. The findings of this study are presented in section four, accompanied by a discussion of the findings. In the final segment, we reach a conclusion.

## **Literature Review**

The need to belong is one of the important needs in psychology, where it refers many researchers, such as Maslow,Hagerty,Patusky, Morley and others. As explained in many studies and research, the importance of belonging and its relationship with many variables.Several studies have been offered to explain the feeling of belonging. Despite the fact that the literature covers a wide range of such research, this paper will concentrate on four issues that appear consistently in the literature. These themes are: how researchers from many fields conceptualized the concept of sense of belonging, the relationship between long term of residence and sense of belonging to a place, the influence of housing tenure choice and the feeling of belonging among inhabitants, and the impact of previous place of residence and their quality of life on the feeling of belonging.Regardless of the fact that the literature discusses these themes in a wide range of contexts, this paper will be focusing on their relation to urban studies.

## **Sense of Belonging**

The theme of sense of belonging within the field of urban studies addresses the relationship between the humans and the space surrounding them (Morley, 2001). In this context, human geographers were the first to put a sense of belonging to a place on the agenda. They took a phenomenological approach to place in order to give value to the personal experiences and emotional bonds people could have with places(Relph, 1976). According to Jones (2009) sense of belonging has been explored in education, psychology, sociology, and social-psychology, and has also been examined in psychiatry, nursing, geography, anthropology, and religion to name a few. It is a concept that is closely related to other psychological, educational, and sociological concepts that are widely accepted and studied. On the other hand, (Navy, 2020)showed that sense of belonging is a basic human need. While, sense of belonging is related to the multidimensional concepts of sense of community and place attachment (Pipitone & Jović, 2021). Moreover,sense of belonging is recognized as an important determinant of psychological and physical well-being(Hagerty & Patusky, 1995). Consequently, the sense of belonging to a place thus refers not only to the emotional but also the behavioral bonds between people and places, which in recent literature includes at least three perspectives. These perspectives, which form the framework for this paper and guide the exploration into place and belonging are: first the personal dimension, in which emotional bonds to place develop through everyday life experiences and practices in that place, which can then be further constrained or enhanced by second: structural and functional factors characterizing the place and finally discourses surrounding the place and its status (Cresswell, 2004).

## **Long Term of Residence**

Many researches related to new towns believe in the healing role of time against a weak person-place relationship in such cities (Goldar & Daneshpour, 2015). Sense of belonging increase with the length of time a person lives in a place (Hay, 1998a, 1998b). Puddifoot (1994) suggested that 98% of participants, who felt they belonged to their current community, mentioned long-term residence as a reason for feelings of belonging. Also Length of residency affects sense of belonging (Bailey, Kearns, & Livingston, 2012). As well as the length of residency and homeownership are also considered positive predictors of the sense of belonging. The overall best direct predictor of place attachment was neighborhood ties, followed by direct and indirect effects of length of residence. One of the most often reported positive predictors of place attachment is length of residence in the area. And Length of residence in a place is one of those variables that consistently turn out as direct predictor of place attachment (Lewicka, 2010). Longer length of residence was associated with higher attachment to the neighborhood (Toruńczyk-Ruiz & Martinović, 2020).

## **Housing Tenure Choice**

Housing tenure is widely accepted as an influential factor on neighborhood satisfaction in developed countries, where tenure choices are largely dichotomous (homeowner or renter) and are subject to market forces (Toruńczyk-Ruiz & Martinović, 2020). Moreover, housing related decisions – residential mobility, tenure choice, location, and dwelling type – are components of long-term lifestyle and mobility decisions (Ben-Akivai, Bowman, & Gopinath, 1996). Then home ownership has been recognized by most of the literatures as the preferable tenure compared with the renters. It has been the housing policy of the Hong Kong Government to promote home ownership to increase the sense of belonging of the Hong Kong people (Chan, 2012). According to Harkness and Newman (2003) and (Mallett, 2004) renters may experience a lower status in the community and therefore, less sense of belonging. Furthermore, a tenant, unlike a homeowner, is often unable to adapt the rental dwelling to suit their needs and express their personal style, and coupled with a lack of security, reduces their sense of belonging. Therefore, tenure type has been closely associated with a sense of belonging with homeowners experiencing more positive outcomes than renters (Smith, 2011). As well as, insecure tenure and frequent residential mobility can deplete their sense of stability and place attachment to both dwelling and community, as well as their ability to age well in place (Craciun & Flick, 2014). The difference in housing tenure affects sense of place in the community (Arifwidodo & Chandrasiri, 2013).

## **The Impact of Previous Place of Residence and their Quality of Life on the Feeling of Belonging**

Sense of belonging is a concept related to quality of life (Kitchen, Williams, & Gallina, 2015). Usually, the center is well-developed, and has a higher level of facilities and infrastructure, while shortages and a poorer infrastructure, sometimes bordering on marginality, characterize the periphery (Oppong, Ironside, & Kennedy, 1988). According to Huriot and Perreur (1995) the idea of center, as in geometry evokes first of all a privileged position. But a center is also a place of strong of population, economic activities, culture and power. The center-periphery structure generated by a combination of the two previous criteria is a source of inequalities, asymmetries, polarization and domination. Since the beginnings of the literature on territorial issues, the center-periphery model has been predominant and the concept of center is considered one of the most important in spatial economics and geography. The center, with its privileged position, would be the master and regulator of territories located on its periphery (Dumont, 2017). In addition, residential buildings therefore impact on residents' quality of life (QoL) through their physical conditions as well as by the neighbors that they have attracted and the wider community wherein they are situated. Through these layered impacts of dwelling, neighbours and community, housing may also affect residents' sense of belonging or attachment to the place (Ng, Kam, & Pong, 2005).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Context of the Study**

The new town of Ali Mendjeli is located on the plateau of Ain El Bey about 15 kilometers in the south of the city center of Constantine (see figure 1 and figure 2). According to General Population and Housing Census of 2017 Ali Mendjeli new town had 420 945 people. The new town's plan encompasses 1500 hectare and is expected to house a population of around 300,000 people. However, the new town currently occupies 2341 hectare, and the agglomeration's surface size is expected to reach 3357 hectare by 2030.



**Figure 1.** Constantine's location in Algeria. Source: Authors treatment following google earth (2021).



**Figure 2.** Ali Mendjeli location in Constantine metropolitan Source: Authors treatment following google earth (2021)

## Method

A total of 151 respondents with distribution from four age groups who arrived in Ali Mendjeli new town between 2000 and 2022 were asked about their sense of belonging to Ali Mendjeli. The research data was obtained from inhabitants of Ali Mendjeli new town from January 2020 to September 2021. The sample was made up of people who were chosen at random using a snowball technique. In order to measure the sense of belonging to the new town of Ali Mendjeli, the respondents were asked “Do you feel Ali Mendjelois? As a result, we were able to collect four different sorts of responses to the key question: Yes, No, A little, Neutral.

We examined four variables from the semi-structured interview survey data. Other questions were included in the survey. These were respondents' length of residence in the new town, ownership status of their current dwellings, and their residential origin before arriving in the new town.

The statistical studies were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 25.0, a statistical tool for social sciences. The association between sense of belonging (residency period, region of origin, and housing tenure) was investigated using the chi-square test for independence. Using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulation, we examine the relationship between sense of belonging and a variety of characteristics. We've offered two hypotheses for each characteristic associated with a sense of belonging in this way.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

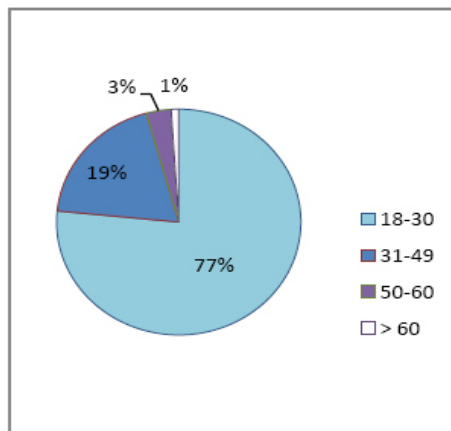
From the table below, it shows the distribution of the answers, when we asked respondents the following question: Do you feel Ali Mendjelois?

**Table 1.** Sense of belonging among inhabitants of Ali Mendjeli new town

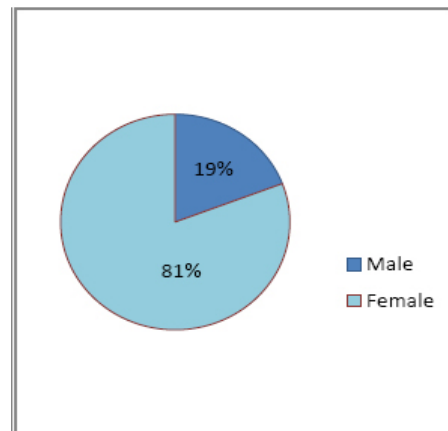
Do you feel Ali Mendjelois?	Yes	No	A little	Neutral	Total
Responses	65	77	3	6	151
	43%	51%	2%	4%	100%

semi-structured interviews survey. Source: Authors

The results are presented in two sections: first, data on socio-demographic characteristics (Age, Sex). Secondly, crossing between (length of residence, former place of residing, housing tenure) and sense of belonging.

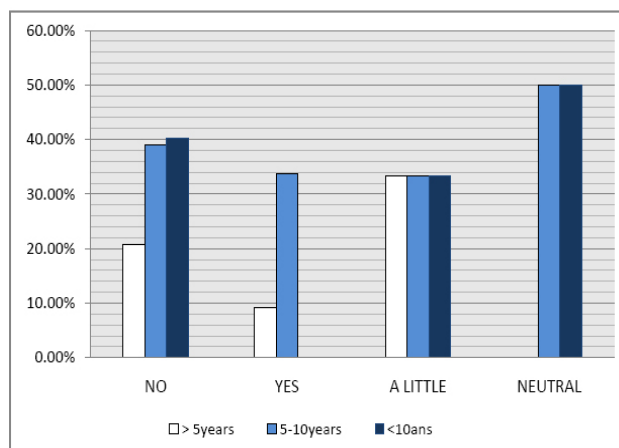


**Figure 3.** Distribution of respondents by age group.  
Source: Authors



**Figure 4.** Distribution of respondents by gender.  
Source: Authors

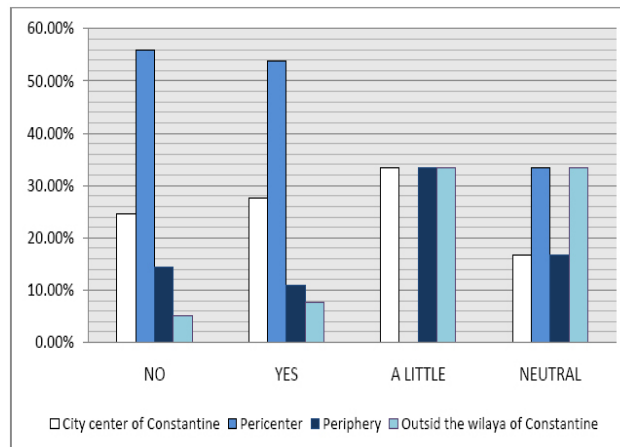
The pie charts (figure 3, figure 4), gives information on the percentage of inhabitants of Ali Mendjeli new town that composed the survey, based on their gender and age groups. Overall, females have a significant higher rate of respondents, than that of males. Young respondents are more prone than other ones. It is apparent that the young age group which involves people aged from 18 to 30 has the highest rate of respondents. However, the middle age group which consists of people aged between 31 and 49 is in the second place. The oldest age group constitutes the lowest rates of respondents.



**Figure 5.** Sense of belonging among inhabitants by years lived in the new town. Source: Authors.

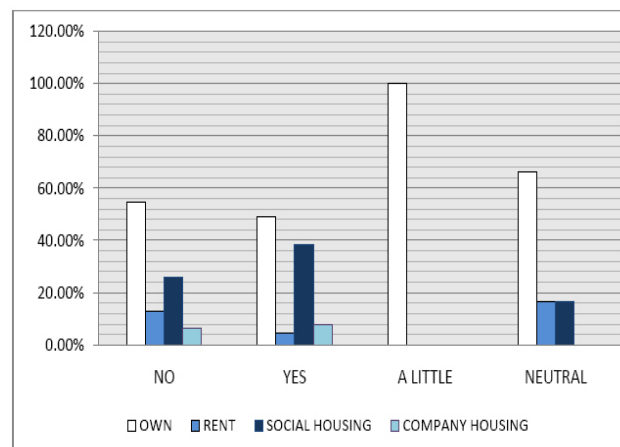
From (figure 5), the bar chart reveals that among old inhabitants who have lived in the new town more than 10 years, 40, 30% said that they haven't a sense of belonging to Ali Mendjeli new town, with this way slightly decreased to 39% among inhabitants who have lived in the new town, between 5-10 years. However, a significant decrease to 20, 8% among new comers who have lived in Ali Mendjeli less than 5 years. On the other hand, among inhabitants who have declared that they feeling sense of belonging to the new town with 41, 10% among old inhabitants then this proportion dropping to

33,8% among those who have lived in Ali Mendjeli between 5-10 years and a decrease of proportion to 9,2% among new comers. In the third type of response, the bar chart shows that identical proportion 33, 3% of inhabitants categorized, their little sense of belonging to the new town across the three time-periods. The neutral response, is divided between inhabitants who have lived in Ali Mendjeli between 5-10 years and old inhabitants.



**Figure 6.** Sense of belonging among inhabitants to Ali Mendjeli by the former place of residing. Source: Authors.

The given bar graph (figure 6) presents proportions of inhabitant’s sense of belonging by their residential origin before arriving in the new town. As can be seen, the majority of respondents are from the pericentral zone, for both the yes (53,8%) and no (55,8%) answers. On the other hand, inhabitants coming from outside the wilaya of Constantine, touch the lowest point in yes/no responses. Moreover, the proportion of inhabitants of the city center of Constantine comes in second place for having or lacking the feeling of belonging to Ali Mendjeli new town. In terms of the response “a little,” the bar graph reveals that the proportions are the same across all categories of prior residence. Except for those who live in the pericentral area, they aren’t present in this scenario. The neutral answer, is equally divided between the inhabitants coming from outside the wilaya of Constantine and the inhabitants of the pericenter with 33,3 %. Absolutely the same for inhabitants of the periphery and the city center of Constantine with 16,7%.



**Figure 7.** Sense of belonging among inhabitants to Ali Mendjeli by the housing tenure. Source: Authors.

The provided bar graph (figure 7) illustrates that when we talk about the inhabitants who own their homes, whatever the answer (see figure 7), it has a higher proportion of answers. Moreover, the answer “a little” is used only by the inhabitants who are owners of their housing. Comparatively the inhabitants who are renters or those who have a company housing which are less present in this situation. Furthermore, the bar chart shows that the answer proportion among social housing beneficiaries is in the second place after the proportion of the owners. From table (1): the response to above question 43% of those surveyed expressed their sense of belonging and said “Yes”, while 51 % replied with “No”, 2% said “a little” and a further 4%, were out of subject and remained unanswered.

The majority of the respondents who said “Yes” justified their feeling of belonging by the long term of residence in the new

town: “Yes, I think I feel the sense of belonging. I arrived in the new town when I was three years old, so I grow up here” (Imane, 20 years old, veterinary student, arrival in the new town in 2003).

Similarly, another respondent justified her sense of belonging: “Yes I’m feeling I’m used to it, I’ve been living in this city for almost eight years” (Aya, 22 years old, student in dentistry, and arrival in the new town in 2013).

Respondents who said “No” explained their refusal sense of belonging by their housing tenure or their former place of residing.

“No, I’m a renter; I haven’t my own home in this town, so I don’t have any sense of belonging” (Soumya, 31 years old, architect, arrival in the new town in 2016).

Another respondent justified her lacking sense of belonging by his former place of residence: “No, I don’t think, I have the feeling of belonging, I’m bent l’bled (the daughter of the center), it seems to me like a big douar (country side)” (Farida, 35 years old, unemployed, arrival in the new town in 2020).

The above testimonies led us to analyze the relationship between sense of belonging, and number of variables. We asked respondents about their age, gender, duration of residence in Ali Mendjeli new town, former place of residing and their housing tenure.

The relationship between belonging to the new town of Ali Mendjeli and three other characteristics obtained in the survey was studied. The main results obtained are from a descriptive statistic of cross tabulation on the IBM SPSS software version 25.0.

In this section, we looked at the relationship between respondents’ length of residence in the new town, former place of residence, housing status and sense of belonging. The main results obtained from the relationship between sense of belonging, age group, length of residence, former place of residing and housing tenure. Obtained from a descriptive statistic of cross tabulation on the IBM SPSS software version 25.0.

**Table 2.** Chi-square tests. Source: Authors following SPSS.

		Residency period			X <sup>2</sup>	
		< 5 years	5-10 years	> 10 years		
Sense of belonging Are you feeling Ali Mendjelois?	<b>No</b>	20,8%	39%	40,3%	<b>0,287</b>	
	<b>Yes</b>	9,2%	33,8%	56,9%		
	<b>A little</b>	33,33%	33,33%	33,33%		
	<b>Neutral</b>	0%	50%	50%		
		Former place of residing				X <sup>2</sup>
		City Centre of Constantine	Pericenter	Periphery	Outside the wilaya of Constantine	
Sense of belonging Are you feeling Ali Mendjelois?	<b>No</b>	24,7%	55,8%	14,3%	5,2%	<b>0,218</b>
	<b>Yes</b>	27,7%	53,8%	10,8%	7,7%	
	<b>A little</b>	33,3%	0%	33,3%	33 ;3%	
	<b>Neutral</b>	17%	33%	17%	33%	
		Housing tenure				X <sup>2</sup>
		Owner occupied	Location	Social housing	Company housing	
Sense of belonging Are you feeling Ali Mendjelois?	<b>No</b>	54,5%	13%	3,7%	4,9%	<b>0,455</b>
	<b>Yes</b>	49,2%	4.6%	0,0%	7,1%	
	<b>A little</b>	100%	0%	0,0%	2,2%	
	<b>Neutral</b>	66%	17%	17%	0,0%	

From the above table (2), results obtained allow us to reject our alternative hypothesis and validate the null hypothesis, that it is no association between sense of belonging and (residency period, former place of residence and housing tenure). No significant association between sense of belonging and residency period  $\chi^2 (0,426) = p > 0,05$  then, No significant association between sense of belonging and former place of residing  $\chi^2 (0,467) = p > 0,05$  and No significant association between sense of belonging and housing tenure  $\chi^2 (0,517) = p > 0,05$ . This indicates that the variables are independent.

In this way, the findings contradict the study's conclusion of Goldar, M., & Daneshpour, S. A. (2015) on the healing role of time against a weak person-place relationship in new towns. Similarly, the work of Hay, R. (1998), on the direct correlation between length of residence and having a sense of belonging. By the same token, the results obtained are in direct conflict with the work of Harkness, J., & Newman, S. J. (2003), who said that renters may experience a lower status in the community and therefore, less sense of belonging. Correspondingly to Smith, K. M. (2011), the housing tenure is associated with a sense of belonging, with homeowners reporting better outcomes than renters. The findings are also opposing with Kitchen, P., Williams, A. M., & Gallina, M. (2015), in their study on sense of belonging to local community among Canadian immigrant, which said that sense of belonging is related to quality of life.

## CONCLUSION

This article aims to determine the relationship between sense of belonging and residency period, previous residence, and housing tenure. Surprisingly, the research discovered that long-term of residence is not a factor in pioneers, old inhabitants, or newcomers having or lacking a sense of belonging to Ali Mendjeli new town. Despite, the fact that the majority of respondents stated that they feel like they belong in their new location because they had lived there for a long time. On the other hand the former place of residing did not indicate a significant relationship between sense of belonging and the previous place of residence, regardless of whether it was located in the center, pericenter, peripheral, or outside the wilaya of Constantine, according to the findings. Furthermore, the housing tenure has no impact on residents' feelings of belonging to the new town, whether they are owners, renters, social housing recipients, or those who own a corporate house. According to our null hypothesis, there is no association between sense of belonging and (residency period, former place of residing and housing tenure). As limitation, the question of Ali Mendjeli new town's sense of belonging, requires researches into other factors that will be related with sense of belonging. Furthermore, a bigger survey sample size would have permitted a more thorough analysis of the three criteria chosen to influence inhabitants' sense of belonging.

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