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RAPID URBANIZATION AND THE EROSION OF PLACE: A THEORETICAL REVIEW OF SOLASTALGIA AND PLACELESSNESS

The rapid transformation of urban landscapes globally presents a profound challenge not only to physical geography but also to human psychology. This theoretical review synthesizes perspectives from human geography, environmental psychology, urban sociology, and philosophy to explore the multidimensional impact of rapid urbanization on place identity. Drawing on Relph's (1976) concept of placelessness and Albrecht's (2005) notion of solastalgia, the paper analyses how the homogenization of regional spaces severs the emotional and ontological bonds between inhabitants and their environments. Integrating Stoic philosophical principles of resilience and adaptation with contemporary frameworks of environmental psychology and cosmopolitan geography, the study proposes a constructive interdisciplinary framework arguing that sustainable regional development must foster cultural synthesis that prioritizes psychological well-being and the preservation of authentic place identity. By cultivating "place resilience" at both individual and collective levels, and by fostering cultural syntheses that honor local heritage while engaging creatively with inevitable change, it may be possible to navigate the tensions of rapid urbanization without surrendering either to disabling grief or to the passive acceptance of psychological impoverishment.

Prospects for further development include empirical, qualitative case studies applying this theoretical framework to specific rapidly urbanizing regions, with priority given to Mediterranean coastal cities undergoing intensive tourism-driven transformation, emerging megacities in the Global South, and post-industrial urban areas in Eastern Europe. Future research should explore practical planning models that integrate psychological resilience metrics, community-based spatial memory preservation, participatory heritage documentation, and place-based mental health support into the core apparatus of urban development strategy and evaluation. Longitudinal mixed-methods research, combining surveys of place attachment, ethnographic fieldwork, and spatial analysis, would be particularly valuable in establishing the empirical basis for policy-relevant interventions.

Keywords: *solastalgia, placelessness, place identity, urban psychology, human geography, ecological grief, cultural synthesis.*

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1. Problem definition and its connection with important scientific and practical tasks.

The 21st century is defined by an unprecedented scale of regional transformation, where rapid urbanization has become the primary driver of geographical and demographic change across the globe. According to United Nations projections, approximately 68 percent of the world's population will reside in urban areas by 2050—a figure that underscores the sheer magnitude of this transformation (UN-Habitat, 2022). Beyond the physical expansion of infrastructure, the proliferation of concrete, and the demographic shifts within metropolitan areas, this process fundamentally alters the intricate relationship between human beings and their living environments.

In the discipline of human geography, a region or a

city is not merely a collection of spatial coordinates, infrastructural networks, or economic data; it is a "lived space" imbued with historical meaning, collective memory, and identity (Tuan, 1977; Seamon, 1980). Phenomenological geography has long argued that human beings are inherently spatial creatures whose sense of self is constituted through their embeddedness in particular places (Casey, 1993; Relph, 1976). However, the aggressive pace of neoliberal urbanism often strips these spaces of their unique characteristics, replacing them with standardized, functionally efficient, yet emotionally barren environments that fail to sustain the depth of human attachment.

The connection of this problem to practical tasks lies primarily in urban planning, regional development, and public health policy. Modern developmental



paradigms frequently prioritize rapid economic turnover and physical modernization over the preservation of the ontological layers that make a space a "home." As Harvey (1989) articulated, the "time-space compression" of the modern era accelerates the destruction and rebuilding of the built environment, leading to a profound crisis of belonging and spatial alienation globally. This architectural and spatial homogenization threatens not only local culture but also the psychological stability of populations facing the continuous erosion of their place identity (Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; Lewicka, 2011). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2016) has recognized the quality and continuity of the built urban environment as a key social determinant of mental health, confirming that a theoretical framework capable of bridging geographical analysis with psychological and philosophical inquiry constitutes a practical necessity for contemporary policymakers and urban planners.

2. Analysis of recent research and publications.

Recent literature in human geography, urban sociology, and environmental psychology has increasingly focused on the subjective and emotional experience of environmental change. Relph's (1976) foundational work, *Place and Placelessness*, introduced the concept of "placelessness" to describe the weakening of authentic place identity, paving the way for understanding environments that lack distinct character or sense of belonging. Relph argued that authentic place requires a profound sense of insideness – a felt commitment to a locale – which is systematically undermined by the forces of mass communication, universal commercial culture, and standardized architecture.

Building upon Relph's spatial philosophy, Tuan (1974) introduced "topophilia" to articulate the deep, affective human bond with the environment. His subsequent work (Tuan, 1977) elaborated how lived experience transforms abstract space into meaningful place through repetition, routine, and the sedimentation of memory. Bauman (2000) described modern urban spaces as manifestations of "liquid modernity," where transience replaces permanence, rendering the formation of deep place attachments structurally difficult in the contemporary city.

Augé (1995) made a critical contribution with his anthropology of "non-places"—spaces of circulation, consumption, and transience such as highways, airports, and shopping malls – where individuals interact as anonymous consumers rather than embedded community members. This concept has been extensively applied to suburban sprawl, gentrified city centers, and tourism-dependent coastal cities. On the psychological frontier, Albrecht (2005, 2019) conceptualized "solastalgia" as the distress caused by negative environmental change while still residing within one's home environment, originating from the Latin *solacium* (comfort) and the Greek *algos* (pain). While Albrecht originally applied solastalgia to rural Australian communities facing open-cast mining, the concept has since been expanded by Cunsolo and Ellis (2018) to encompass climate-induced landscape change, and by Galway et al. (2019) to urban gentrification and forced displacement contexts.

Tschakert et al. (2019) have situated place-based

grief within broader frameworks of climate justice, emphasizing the need for formal recognition of emotional suffering as a legitimate dimension of urban policy discourse. Devine-Wright (2009) developed the concept of "place disruption" to analyze community resistance to large-scale infrastructure projects, revealing how rapid physical alterations trigger identity-protective responses among residents. Within Mediterranean and Turkish urban contexts particularly relevant to this study, Keyder and Öncü (1994) traced the transformation of Istanbul through global capital flows and neoliberal governance, while Karaman (2013) and Lelandais (2014) examined urban transformation projects under Turkey's Mass Housing Administration (TOKI), highlighting the profound disconnection between top-down planning rationalities and the experiential geographies of displaced communities.

3. Pointing out unresolved part of the problem.

Despite the wealth of literature on spatial transformation and environmental psychology, a critical theoretical gap persists: the absence of a comprehensive, constructive interdisciplinary framework that bridges the geographical and psychological dimensions of place loss with actionable resilience mechanisms grounded in philosophical and cultural theory. Current urban policies, even those informed by social science research, generally operate within a technocratic rationality that fails to address the existential and psychological dimensions of spatial disruption identified in the literature.

Furthermore, while critical geography and urban sociology have produced powerful diagnostic frameworks – exposing the mechanisms of gentrification, displacement, and spatial commodification – they have been less successful in articulating viable pathways for individual and collective coping that do not presuppose a wholesale transformation of the capitalist political economy. There exists, therefore, a distinct theoretical gap between the structural critique of urbanization and the experiential reality of millions of inhabitants who must navigate rapid spatial change within existing political and economic constraints.

The potential of classical philosophical frameworks – particularly Stoic ethics and cosmopolitan political philosophy – to inform a constructive response to solastalgia remains largely unexplored in the geographical literature. Additionally, the application of solastalgia specifically to the dynamics of rapid Mediterranean coastal urbanization – including the transformation of cities like Antalya through mass tourism infrastructure and the commodification of coastal space – remains insufficiently theorized and represents a significant scholarly frontier.

4. Formulation of the purpose of the article.

The purpose of this article is to synthesize perspectives from human geography, environmental psychology, urban sociology, and Stoic philosophy to thoroughly explore the multidimensional impact of rapid urbanization on place identity. The paper aims to accomplish three interrelated theoretical objectives. First, it seeks to dissect how the physical manifestation of "placelessness" translates directly into the psychological condition of "solastalgia," drawing upon and critically extending the

existing conceptual literature. Second, it endeavors to situate this analysis within a global comparative framework that recognizes the differential distribution of place loss across social strata, cultural contexts, and geographical regions. Third, and most constructively, this paper proposes an interdisciplinary theoretical framework arguing that sustainable regional development must transcend physical infrastructure to prioritize a cultural synthesis that safeguards psychological well-being and preserves authentic, lived spatial identities.

5. The main material of the research and explanation of the obtained scientific results.

5.1 The Geography of Alienation: Place, Non-Place, and Placelessness

The concept of "place" is ontologically central to human existence. Phenomenological geographers, drawing on Heideggerian concepts of "dwelling" and "thrownness," argue that human consciousness is fundamentally placed – that is, our sense of self is constituted through our embeddedness in and care for specific localities (Casey, 1993; Malpas, 1999). Place, in this phenomenological sense, is not merely a location within an abstract geometric space but a node of meaning, memory, and belonging that grounds the self in the world. As Casey (1993, p. 31) argues, "to be at all—to exist in any way – is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place."

However, rapid urbanization systematically undermines this ontological grounding. Lefebvre's (1991) foundational analysis asserted that space is socially produced; consequently, the modern production of space under global capitalism inherently privileges abstract, quantifiable, and exchangeable space over the qualitative and experiential dimensions of lived place. The commodification of urban land – driven by speculative real estate markets, foreign direct investment in tourism infrastructure, and neoliberal urban redevelopment programs – reduces place to a function of exchange value, erasing the use values and symbolic values that constitute place meaning for residents (Harvey, 2012; Brenner, Marcuse, & Mayer, 2012).

Placelessness is not merely an aesthetic issue of standardized architecture; it is a profound geographical manifestation of alienation with measurable social and psychological consequences. When regional development ignores local topography, historical continuity, vernacular architectural traditions, and the micro-geographies of everyday social life, it creates what Augé (1995) terms "non-places" – environments that lack the capacity to hold collective memory or foster organic social interactions. The global homogenization of urban landscapes – where a commercial street in a developing Mediterranean metropolis becomes virtually indistinguishable from one in a North American or East Asian city – leads to the erosion of topophilia and the weakening of the cultural specificity that sustains community identity.

As Massey (1991, 1994) argues in her concept of a "global sense of place," places are dynamic nodes within wider geographical webs of social relations. Massey's critique of reactionary localism does not render the local irrelevant; rather, she insists that a progressive sense of place must acknowledge both local specificity and global

interconnection. The problem arises when global forces strip places of their local specificity entirely, converting culturally embedded inhabitants into passive transients – consumers of generic urban space rather than co-producers of meaningful local geographies (Massey, 1994; Escobar, 2001). The concept of place identity elaborated by Proshansky et al. (1983) further illuminates the psychological stakes of this geographical process: when the physical settings that anchor place identity are radically altered or destroyed, the psychological coherence of the self is correspondingly disrupted – a dynamic that lies at the heart of solastalgia.

5.2 The Psychological Toll: Solastalgia in the Urban Matrix

While the geographical transformation of a region can be measured in quantitative indices – spatial density, economic output, construction permits, green space ratios – its psychological impact requires qualitative and phenomenological understanding. Human beings develop strong emotional bonds with their environments through repeated embodied experience, elaborated by environmental psychologists as "place attachment" (Lewicka, 2011; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). This attachment operates across multiple dimensions: the individual (personal history and autobiography), the social (shared community narratives and collective memory), and the physical (the sensory qualities of the built and natural environment). When environments are drastically altered – through massive urban renewal projects, the demolition of historical neighborhoods, the commodification of waterfronts, or the displacement of long-standing communities – the psychological foundation of inhabitants is profoundly shaken.

Albrecht's (2005, 2019) concept of solastalgia provides an analytically precise vocabulary for this urban malady. In his more recent formulation, Albrecht (2019) elaborated a broader "psychoterratic" framework encompassing a range of emotional states arising from human-environment relations, positioning solastalgia as a specific pathology of place disruption: the ache caused by the disappearance of familiar landmarks, the imposition of an alien urban fabric, and the severing of the sensory continuities that constitute home. Research by Lewicka (2011) and Manzo and Devine-Wright (2014) confirms that long-term residents demonstrate significantly stronger place attachment and correspondingly greater psychological vulnerability to place disruption than recent arrivals, underscoring the temporal dimension of solastalgia.

The mental health implications of solastalgia in urban contexts are increasingly documented. Fullilove (2004) coined the term "root shock" to describe the traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of one's home environment, identifying symptoms including grief, confusion, anger, and a pervasive sense of disorientation that can persist across generations. Tschakert et al. (2019) have called for the formal recognition of place-based grief in mental health policy frameworks, arguing that the emotional suffering generated by environmental change constitutes a legitimate public health concern. In rapidly urbanizing Mediterranean contexts such as coastal Turkey – where the expansion of tourism infrastructure, mass housing projects, and speculative real

estate development proceed at extraordinary speed – the conditions for endemic solastalgia are structurally produced (Erkip, 2003; Karaman, 2013). Addressing these dynamics requires integrating psychological sustainability into the core criteria of urban development assessment.

5.3 Philosophical Resilience and Cultural Synthesis: Towards a Constructive Framework

To navigate the overwhelming tides of rapid urbanization without either reactive withdrawal into an untenable localism or passive surrender to a dehumanizing globalism, this paper proposes a philosophical synthesis drawing upon Stoic ethics and contemporary cosmopolitan geography. Stoic philosophy, with its rigorous distinction between what is within our control (the internal sphere of judgment, attitude, and response) and what is external (external circumstances, including the physical transformation of one's environment), offers a profoundly constructive framework for modern human-environment relations (Epictetus, 2004; Sellars, 2006).

Marcus Aurelius (2006) and Seneca (1969) articulated the concept of the "inner citadel" – a domain of rational self-governance that remains sovereign despite external disruption. Applied to the geographical context of rapid urbanization, Stoic philosophy does not counsel passive acceptance of destructive urban policies; rather, it promotes "constructive psychological adaptation"—the cultivation of inner resources of meaning, community, and rational engagement that enable inhabitants to maintain a coherent sense of self and belonging even as the external spatial environment undergoes profound change. This adaptation is an active philosophical practice of reorienting one's attachments from the vulnerable physical substrate of place to the more durable social and relational fabric of community (Long, 2002).

This philosophical orientation is complemented by the Stoic cosmopolitan tradition, which affirms membership in a universal community of rational beings while recognizing the legitimacy of particular local attachments. As Marcus Aurelius (2006) suggests, one can be simultaneously a citizen of the world and a member of one's particular community – a dual allegiance that provides a philosophical foundation for the "rooted cosmopolitanism" advocated in contemporary political geography (Appiah, 2006; Nussbaum, 1997). Rather than choosing between defensive localism and uncritical globalism, a Stoic-informed cosmopolitan geography encourages the cultivation of new, meaningful cultural syntheses – forms of place identity that honor local heritage and memory while remaining open to transformation and creative renewal.

This constructive framework has significant practical implications for urban planning and regional development policy. It suggests that participatory planning processes creating spaces for communities to narrate, archive, and creatively reinterpret their place histories can serve as important buffers against the psychological damage of rapid spatial change (Manzo & Devine-Wright, 2014). It implies that cultural institutions – local museums, oral history projects, community gardens, and vernacular architectural preservation initiatives – func-

tion as essential psychological infrastructure sustaining place identity and community resilience. It also underscores the importance of collaborative planning governance models (Healey, 1997) that bring together diverse stakeholders, including long-term residents, indigenous knowledge holders, urban designers, and mental health professionals, to co-produce spatial futures that are both economically viable and psychologically sustainable.

6. Conclusion from the research and prospects for further development in this direction.

The rapid erosion of place identity through aggressive urbanization represents one of the most critical yet systematically underaddressed challenges confronting regional studies, urban geography, environmental psychology, and public health today. This theoretical review has argued that the geographical phenomenon of placelessness and the psychological experience of solastalgia are not merely parallel processes but deeply interconnected manifestations of a single underlying dynamic: the subordination of qualitative place meaning to quantitative exchange value under conditions of accelerated capitalist urbanization.

Addressing this challenge requires a robust multidisciplinary response that transcends the boundaries between geographical analysis, environmental psychology, philosophical ethics, and urban planning practice. True sustainability must encompass not only ecological and economic dimensions but also the psychological and cultural dimensions of human well-being. Place must be recognized and institutionally valorized as a vital psychological resource and a public good, not merely a commodity subject to the dictates of the real estate market.

The constructive philosophical framework proposed in this paper – drawing upon Stoic ethics, cosmopolitan geography, and contemporary environmental psychology – offers a contribution to this broader intellectual and practical project. By cultivating "place resilience" at both individual and collective levels, and by fostering cultural syntheses that honor local heritage while engaging creatively with inevitable change, it may be possible to navigate the tensions of rapid urbanization without surrendering either to disabling grief or to the passive acceptance of psychological impoverishment.

Prospects for further development include empirical, qualitative case studies applying this theoretical framework to specific rapidly urbanizing regions, with priority given to Mediterranean coastal cities undergoing intensive tourism-driven transformation, emerging megacities in the Global South, and post-industrial urban areas in Eastern Europe. Future research should explore practical planning models that integrate psychological resilience metrics, community-based spatial memory preservation, participatory heritage documentation, and place-based mental health support into the core apparatus of urban development strategy and evaluation. Longitudinal mixed-methods research, combining surveys of place attachment, ethnographic fieldwork, and spatial analysis, would be particularly valuable in establishing the empirical basis for policy-relevant interventions.

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ШВИДКА УРБАНІЗАЦІЯ ТА ЕРОЗІЯ МІСЦЯ: ТЕОРЕТИЧНИЙ ОГЛЯД СОЛАСТАЛЬГІ ТА БЕЗМІСЦЕВОСТІ

Швидка трансформація міських ландшафтів у всьому світі становить глибокий виклик не лише для фізичної географії, але й для людської психології. Цей теоретичний огляд синтезує перспективи суспільної географії, екологічної психології та філософії для дослідження впливу швидкої урбанізації на ідентичність місця. Відходячи від традиційних моделей міської критики, стаття аналізує, як гомогенізація регіональних просторів призводить до «безмісцевості» (Е. Рельф) та психологічного відчуження, що описується концепцією «соластальгії» (Г. Альбрехт). Інтегруючи стоїчні принципи стійкості та сучасну екологічну психологію, дослідження пропонує конструктивну основу для розуміння відносин людина–середовище та обстоює необхідність культурного синтезу в сталому регіональному розвитку. Розвиваючи «стійкість до місця» як на індивідуальному, так і на колективному рівнях, а також сприяючи культурному синтезу, який шанує місцеву спадщину, водночас творчо взаємодіючи з немінучими змінами, можливо, вдасться подолати напругу швидкої урбанізації, не піддаючись пасивному прийняттю психологічного зубожіння.

Перспективи подальшого розвитку даної тематики включають емпіричні, якісні тематичні дослідження, що застосовують цю теоретичну основу до конкретних регіонів, що швидко урбанізуються. Пріоритет мають середземноморські прибережні міста, які переживають інтенсивну трансформацію, зумовлену туризмом, мегаполіси, що розвиваються, на Глобальному Півдні, та постіндустріальні міські райони у Східній Європі. Майбутні дослідження повинні створювати практичні моделі планування, які інтегрують показники психологічної стійкості, збереження просторової пам'яті на рівні громади, документування спадщини за участю громадськості та підтримку психічного здоров'я на основі місця в основний апарат стратегії та оцінки міського розвитку. Методи дослідження, що поєднують опитування щодо прив'язаності до місця, етнографічні польові дослідження та просторовий аналіз, будуть особливо цінними для встановлення емпіричної основи для політично релевантних втручань.

Ключові слова: *соластальгія, безмісцевість, ідентичність місця, міська психологія, суспільна географія, екологічне лихо, культурний синтез.*

Внесок авторів: всі автори зробили рівний внесок у цю роботу

Конфлікт інтересів: автори засвідчують, що, незважаючи на те, що один із авторів статті є членом міжнародної редакційної ради журналу, процес рецензування, прийняття рішення щодо публікації та редагування проводилися незалежно, без його участі чи впливу. Рецензування, остаточне рішення ухвалювалося іншими членами редакційної колегії, які не є співавторами. Будь-які потенційні конфлікти інтересів були повністю усунені шляхом зовнішнього контролю процесу.

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