Abstract
Using abductive reasoning, we combine existing literature and field-based work to offer a new explanation of local opposition to renewable energy (RE) developments, challenging the widespread notion of NIMBY, providing a better understanding of the place attachment (PA) construct and proposing a comprehensive model hinging around the pivotal role of place attachment, perceived project outcomes (PPOs) and associated symbolic meanings in explanatory accounts of public responses to proposals for change. Results indicate opposing patterns of association between PPOs and PA leading to the emergence of two kinds of supportive and oppositional responses and make available a more holistic structure of one’s attachment to a development site that could be embodied within a customer experience framework.

Keywords: Not in My Backyard (NIMBY), Place Attachment (PA), Symbolic Meanings, Public Responses, Local Acceptance, Customer Experience

Introduction
In line with the needs of most of the countries around the world with regard to tackling climate change phenomenon and increasing reliance on renewable energy sources (Soderholm & Pettersen, 2007), the study of social acceptance has gained even more in importance, since it has been considered as the cornerstone of success in any energy project the same as in the adoption of new technologies. Yet, when it comes to renewable energies, both correlated matters of social and public acceptance have failed to meet the required attention (Sauter & Watson, 2007; Wüstenhagen et al., 2007), research on their particular issues is still in its primary phases, and most of the efforts made in this direction tend to cover only specific cases or technologies (Del Rio & Burguillo, 2009; Llera et al., 2010). Still, even though various opinion polls have shown favorable attitudes towards expanding clean energy sources (McGowan & Sauter, 2005), proposed energy schemes were most of the time confronted with local opposition, ending up either being postponed or cancelled (Toke, 2005). The aforementioned dissension between general public support and local resistance facing the implementation of renewable energy (RE) developments has been for a long time explained by and referred to as a “Not in my Backyard (NIMBY)” oppositional tactic (Toke, 2005), but has proved to be discrepant with reality in several instances.

Hence, understanding public acceptance requires much more than the mere comprehension of public opinion and necessitates a deeper knowledge of the way in which attitudes are formed and shaped (Heras-Saizarbitoria et al., 2011; Walker, 1995), which is also a process of constructing meaning highly influenced by a number of information sources.

Therefore, an alternative framework is needed questioning both the explanatory utility and the empirical

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support of the NIMBY concept and setting a new explanation that takes into account the existence of emotional attachments instead of limiting it to the negative effect of spatial closeness. Simply put, an in-depth understanding of local opposition will show us how place attachment (PA) will be interacting with the locals’ interpretations to generate emotional, attitudinal and behavioral responses in explanatory accounts of the success/failure of RE developments. Furthermore, a review of the PA literature suggests that even though the concept has been broadly defined and discussed in theory and across a diversity of academic disciplines (Kyle et al., 2004), the majority of current empirical research - with the exception being Debeñedetti and his colleagues’ study (2014) - did not take into account the wider context within which the PA concept operates, nor did they address its structure in a holistic way. Although implied in different settings: parks and recreation landscapes (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2002; Kaltenborn, 1998; Kyle et al., 2003; Stedman, 2002; Vorkinn & Riese, 2001); protected areas (Kaltenborn & Williams 2002; Walker & Chapman, 2003); neighbourhoods and communities (Mesch & Manor, 1998; Shumaker & Taylor, 1982), most of the research investigating the issue of person-place bonding have exploited the same conventional 8-item scale in accordance with Williams and Roggenbuck’s (1989) measure and proposed explanations only by making use of previously established structures. How can we explain local opposition to RE developments while putting aside the logic of the NIMBY syndrome? How does place attachment contribute to predicting public responses towards proposed wind power developments, among local residents? What is the meaning of the “place attachment” concept within specific contexts of land use changes? Under which circumstances can place attachment lead to public acceptance of wind energy projects?

**Literature Review**

**Beyond Nimbyism “Literature on Disruption to Place Attachment”**

**Place disruption:** Deepening understanding of the impact of change resulting from the implementation of large scale RE projects is of growing concern for researchers. Such an impact is either referred to as a “threat” to place identity (Bonaiuto et al., 1996) or “disruption” to place attachment (Brown & Perkins, 1992). Studies within literature of place disruption were centralized on explaining the way in which changes relative to the physical aspects of any location can turn the social networks into explicit or apparent and affect symbolic meanings associated to that place. This would be obvious through the appearance of certain negative emotional responses (grief, loss, … Fried, 2000), followed by the emergence of coping behaviors like place protective actions. Coping behaviors provide evidence for the fact that individuals get used to the transformation of their neighborhoods or get more familiar with it over time. That’s why people need to go through the further steps (pre-disruption, disruption and post-disruption), and the way in which they will behave in response to a changing environment will follow a process of “matchmaking” as it was described in the “cognitive mapping” model proposed by Passini (1992). When situated in a recognizable environment, individuals make comparisons between their actual sensations and the sensations they should have in similar contexts. If there is a match between both sides, newly established attachments will be there; if there isn’t any equivalence, opposition to change will be raised.

**Place attachment:** Studying human bonding to certain places and the ensuing feelings that emerge from these relationships lies at the core of the environmental psychology aiming at giving a sense to human behaviour by setting common roles capable of fitting everyone and predicting their reactions when confronted to given situations (Altman & Low, 1992; Knez, 2005; Manzo, 2003). A concept that is likely to transmit such social connotation is “place attachment”. In defining this term, three elements must cumulatively exist: the emotional link, the meaning of the site, and the interaction between the person and the place where they live. The definition developed by Milligan may well serve to cover the three aforesaid aspects as it advances place attachment as an emotional link established by local inhabitants by assigning meaning to and interacting with a particular place. Although the definition seems to be quite comprehensive, there is still no consensus on its definition, methodological approach or even name (see Appendix 1).
The Role of Place Attachment in Predicting Public Responses to Proposals For Change

From a theoretical perspective, a proposed conceptual model (Figure 1) was built on a combination between the input-processes-output model of team performance (McGrath, 1964), from which it took the form of structure, and Devine-Wright’s (2009) framework articulating the stages of psychological responses over time to a place change. In general terms, the model highlights the role of socio-demographic characteristics as a part of the inputs in addition to the coupled role of place attachment and perceived project outcomes as intermediating factors in explanatory accounts of local acceptance or opposition falling into three parts of emotional, attitudinal and behavioral responses. The whole phenomenon begins with the identification stage, in which the trigger event of land use change becomes acknowledged by local residents. From this point, depending on one’s gender, age, income and educational level, an interpretative process will be executed by adopting specific symbolic meanings for the proposed project (as indicated by the perceived project outcomes) and for the place as well (as indicated by place attachment). If compatible, the evaluation of change will be regarded as enhancing the place. If not, it will be regarded as

![Figure 1. The Role of Place Attachment in Predicting Public Responses to Proposals For Change As Related to the Success/Failure of RE Projects](image)

![Figure 2. Stages of Psychological Response Over Time to Place Change](image)

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4 Devine-Wright (2009) has developed an alternative approach to what is commonly known as the “NIMBY” explanation, in which sites of development are no longer treated on the physical side alone and conceived as “backyards” but as “places” with which citizens construct emotional bonds.
disrupting the setting. Ultimately, public responses will be likely to appear as outcomes for the evaluation stage. Individuals will show either favorable or unfavorable emotions, respectively and positive or negative attitudes and will then choose an appropriate manner to cope with the proposal and will act accordingly either by supporting the project, or by opposing it and engaging in the “Nimby” type activities.

The dotted lines on the graph correspond to the logic of evolution of the different stages of psychological response over time to a place change.

**Methodology**

Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the necessity to generate in-depth data about the social acceptance phenomenon, an abductive logic was followed based on the combination of a literature review and fieldwork (case study). Qualitative methods of inquiry were chosen as the most convenient method to generate valuable information across a diversified sample of opinions, to explore the interpretive process of local opposition (Devine-Wright & Howes, 2010) and to realize how locals construe meanings and perceptions about their socio-physical environment (Bryman, 2004).

The research was conducted as follows. A literature review on disruption to place attachment was initiated toward building a conceptual model that highlights the mechanisms underlying the problem of local opposition to RE developments and facilitating the PA conceptualization within contexts of land use changes. Complementary to the first step, a case study based on the wind power station installed in Sidi Daoud (said to be the first project of its type in Tunisia) was conducted in order to confront theory to practice. Data were collected through semi-structured tape-recorded interviews, which were transcribed and then analyzed using content analysis. Finally, it was crucial to go back to theory in order to provide a theoretical basis for the additional dimension of PA and give an explanation to the new conceptualization of DS-based attachment experience.

**Data Analysis and Results**

**Place attachment:** Starting with 5 constitutive dimensions from the scattered literature on place attachment, the outcomes from the interviews enriched the information already gathered from the literature review and new themes emerged enabling a better understanding of the relations between Sidi Daoud inhabitants and their home land. While the majority of the replies were categorized under one of the pre-existing dimensions, some were not deemed to “fit” any of the themes currently included in the PA literature. However, these statements are still of equal importance since they might provide a more comprehensive understanding of the place attachment construct (Keaveney & Hunt, 1992, p. 167), making it a major limitation if the set of attributes which the researcher presumes will describe the PA concept (when applied to a context of land use change, and more precisely to a context of RE development) may not encompass the most salient facets or address it holistically.

For this reason, a sixth theme, to be precise “local or regional development”, has been added as an expansion to the former dimensions and is particularly relevant to the context of proposals for change and renewable energy developments. The local/regional development could be defined as the tendency of individuals from local communities to engage in projects aimed at improving the local economy, job creation, and increasing society’s living standards merely by making rational use of the current features of the area. The newly identified theme finds its origin in the citizen’s experience of engagement in the construction process, thereby justifying the recourse to the customer experience literature. Depending on their qualifications, local residents will choose to actively take part in the project’s development either by taking on manual or intellectual work. Here, a resident’s aptitude to perform this job is mainly attributable to their willingness to contribute to the development of their local region and this could be considered as another facet of human bonding to a particular place. To explain further, when the participants were asked
to describe their special links with, connections to, and own perceptions of Sidi Daoud as a place to live, their responses showed that local residents’ perceptions are built upon a complex set of impressions that go beyond those existing in the PA literature. Locals’ attachment to Sidi Daoud is also formed around their accumulated experiences in that place. Their impressions include a richness of detail that is made up of a set of interplays with the external rural environment and factors of personal experience attributable to the experimental marketing literature including sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioral, and social levels of experience (Brakus et al., 2009; Schmitt, 1999).

Situated at the junction between literatures on PA and customer experience and applied to a renewable energy context, a new concept, that is created in use for this paper and labeled “DS-based attachment experience”, is likely to be formed and will serve to make clear this area of ambiguity. DS-based attachment experience could be defined as a set of experienced ties acquired over time through continual interactions with a particular place. Person-place bonding arises from personal involvement at different levels of experience in which individuals construe meaning about their socio-physical environment (see Appendix 2).

**Conceptual Model**

With the conduct of the fieldwork and the analysis of the corpus of data, slight modifications were added to the proposed conceptual model (Figure 3) in order that public responses can be determined as the outcome of an implicit psychological process that consists in attributing meanings to both place and project and deciding on their correspondent degree of matching. Yet, symbolic meanings associated to the implanted project (in the particular stage of interpretation) and operationalized by the perceived project outcomes are likely to exercise an effect on place attachment either by interrupting or strengthening its related facets. Then, depending on the nature of the latter exercised influence, PA will either be linked to supportive or oppositional attitudes.

**Discussion**

The current paper aimed to intensify understanding of the “NIMBY” type oppositional tactics with reference to prior studies conducted by Vorkinn and Riese (2001) and Devine-Wright (2009, 2011), which implied the need to evoke terms of place disruption, place attachment, and more precisely, disruption to place attachment in order to get a full picture of public responses to proposals for change.

In line with studies addressing other kinds of land use changes (e.g. Nash et al., 2009; Stedman, 2002), like new housing, the essay does also value the role of “symbolic meanings” by elaborating a conceptual framework that underlines the logic of interaction between symbolic meanings related to both project and setting proposed for development as a determinant factor of local community acceptance. The findings showed differences between Sidi Daoud residents in

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![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)
their responses to the wind farm project and how resistance to local developments was caused by the lack of ‘matching’ between symbolic meanings in association with a RE project and those of a place of residence: A lack of ‘fit’ between a location known for its quiet and ‘natural’ wealth and a project that will threaten to turn the latter into an ‘industrialized’ noisy area and a negative relationship linking PA to supportive responses has emerged, in line with prior empirical investigations of Vorkinn and Riese (2001) Stedman (2002), and more recently the Devine-Wright and Howes’ investigation in 2010. On the other hand, the findings are illuminating in suggesting that proposals for place change do not necessarily disrupt the pre-established bonds (Devine-Wright, 2009). The implementation of the RE development resulted equally in a local acceptance among inhabitants who have interpreted the wind farm project as a beneficial novelty that will address some of the internal issues simply by providing jobs, resolving internal displacement problems, and so forth. Arising from this and Nash and his colleagues’ assertion (2009), the supportive nature of the participants’ responses indicates that it is not the actual form of the development proposals inducing change per se that is important but how these development proposals are interpreted and evaluated. Taken together, the textual analysis of the body of data demonstrates a moderating effect of the perceived project outcomes. Negative PPOs are likely to interrupt place-related continuity, distinctiveness, familiarity, attachment and symbolism for local people who feel closely related to Sidi Daoud, and to lessen their tendencies to accept the project. The opposite was the case for residents holding positive PPOs - for those residents, PA led to an increase in their tendency to accept the project.

Ultimately, responses towards the implementation of the wind farm project are varied, including indifference, negative attitudes and positive attitudes, which suggest the need to further investigate public responses in more than one social context and in more than one setting.

Yet, interpreting it from a customer experience research angle, the results denote how the implementation of specific forms of place change could affect the sensory features of a place by adding favorable as much as unfavorable views, sounds etc., or how the implementation of the wind farm might blur/keep alive past emotional experiences by altering one’s inner feelings and affective relations to the setting. In addition, to the changes that would impact either positively or negatively on the pre-lived relational experiences within social contexts, and finally how it would impact the cognitive processing of information when experiencing the new physical attributes of the environment. This proves how the PA construct - applied to an RE setting - or - as relating to a site for development - potentially overlaps with levels of customer experience and entails a personal involvement at levels of cognitive, physical, sensory, affective, and social (Schmitt, 1999; Verhoef et al., 2009). In other words, the results support that people’s attachment to places are not simply formed in terms of patterns of spatial features of the setting or in terms of purely emotional relationships, nor just as experiences arising from the ways locals engage with that place and its residents, but as an inseparable combination of these.

With regard to the practical implications, the findings are consistent with McLachlan’s (2009) assertion that development corporations offering renewable energy technologies have to place more emphasis on place-person bonding and associated symbolic meanings in order to better manage land use changes and increase chances of social acceptance among affected community members. In order to boost public acceptance, project managers have to be aware of the way in which newly implemented projects would interact with their contexts and how the planned design of the development would affect the relationship between local residents and their beloved places. Suitable RE developments need to be introduced in suitable contexts and this might be achieved through a number of procedures. It is crucial for managers to survey the external environment (including economic, political, geographical, ethical and cultural factors) and this diagnosis should alert managers to the particular aspects of locations that need to be taken into consideration when executing plans. The project’s implementation isn’t supposed to create radical changes such that local residents no longer recognize the places they have lived in and built emotional bonds with. Alterations of this type should be tackled beforehand by the use of appropriate appraisal instruments. In fact, managers need to start asking questions entailing reflection at the design stage such as: What types of external outcomes does the wind farm project involve? In which ways might it promote or damage the local environment (social, economic, physical or...
even symbolic features)? Is it supposed to blur historical memories or provide a sense of continuity to the self? etc. In other words, planning professionals, natural resource managers and all interested parties performing in RE development companies have to take symbolic meanings associated to places and pre-established affective connections into consideration when making a proposal for change. Project managers have to make sure then that congruent outcomes are transmitted to local residents.

Since the process of collecting data was done at a precise point in time, the assumed temporal ordering of public responses - involving emotions, attitudes and behaviors - is far from capturing its dynamic nature. The elaboration of the conceptual model was rather presented in a linear manner and only as shown in Figure 2. Nor can causal relationships be evidenced from qualitative research techniques. This affirms the value of potential searches to adopt a longitudinal design and to clarify in a better way, patterns of cause and effect relations between PA and public responses to RE developments (e.g. structural equation models). Even though the research provides evidence that local acceptance may result from place attachment in the case of positive interpretation and evaluation of perceived project outcomes, it should be noted that other factors might intervene to moderate the relationship. Potential studies could include other factors that appeared in the applied social science research on social acceptance of energy projects, particularly factors of procedural justice in decision making (Gross, 2007) and public trust in stakeholders (either in developers or in opposition groups.) (Walker et al., 2010). The findings also revealed that place attachment could be mapped around levels of customer experience, which may well serve as a starting point for future research and provide a theoretical framework within which the PA construct could be conceptualized (Figure 4).

![Figure 4. Experimental Framework For Place Attachment Dimensions](image)

**References**


### Appendices

**Appendix 1. Classification of Conceptual and Operational Definitions of Place Attachment As Identified in the Literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researches</th>
<th>Conceptualizations and operational definitions of PA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People in places: A transactional view of settings (Stokols &amp; Shumacker, 1981).</td>
<td>Place dependence - one dimensional “an occupant’s perceived strength of association between him or herself and a specific place…a two component process by which occupants assess the quality of the current place and the relative quality of comparable places” (Stokols &amp; Shumaker, 1981, p. 547).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The city and self-identity (Prohansky, 1978).</td>
<td>Place identity - one dimensional “those dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideals, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment” (Proshansky, 1978, p. 155).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Measuring Place Attachment: Some Preliminary Results (Williams & Roggenbuck, 1989). | Place attachment (a two dimensional model of identity and dependence)¹ Place dependence Place identity  
1 Place affect (Kals & Maes, 2002)²  
2 Social bonding (Kyle, Graefe & Manning, 2005)³  
3 Familiarity, belongingness and rootedness (Hammitt et al., 2009)⁴ (five dimensional model of place bonding) |
| Place attachment: Conceptual and empirical attachment (Carmen Hidalgo, Bernardo Hernández, 2001). | Place attachment - three dimensional Global attachment Social attachment Physical attachment |
| Toward a social psychology of place: Predicting behavior from place-based cognitions, attitude and identity (Stedman, 2002). | Sense of place - one dimensional (7 items) |
| Place identification, social cohesion and environmental sustainability (Uzzell, Pol & Badenas, 2002). | Place-related social identity - three dimensional Social cohesion Place satisfaction Place identification |
| Thinking like a park: The effects of sense of place, perspective-taking, and empathy on pro-environment intentions (Walker & Chapman, 2003). | Sense of Place - one dimensional (6 items) |
| Defining place attachment: A tripartite organizing framework (Scannel & Gifford, 2009). | Place attachment three dimensional (3P) Place: social, physical Person: individual, group Process: affect, cognition, behavior |
| Place attachment of Ngāi Te Ahi to Hairini Marae (Teddy, Nikora, & Guerin, 2008). | Continuity distinctiveness attachment symbolism familiarity⁵ |

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5 The same scale was retained for the following studies (Bricker & Kerstetter, 2000; Kyle, Absher, & Graefe, 2003; Moore & Graefe, 1994; Vaske & Kobrin, 2001) then tested for validity and generalizability across a variety of locations by Williams and Vaske (2003).

6 The elaborated scales have saved the two dimensions of place identity/dependence as their core.

7 Teddy et al., 2008 consider the classification is quite inclusive of all the sub-dimensions of place attachment.
### Appendix 2. The Development Site-Attachment Experience

#### First dimension: Continuity

**Place referent continuity:**

1) I remember sharing life-long past experiences in X.

2) X will always remind me of my past-self.

3) I kind of remember everything that has happened to me in X as if it were yesterday.

**Place congruent continuity:**

4) X is a place I knew I fitted in ever since I was a little boy/girl.

5) When I first moved on to Sidi Daoud, places looked so familiar to me.

6) It was too easy for me to get used to the place although I didn’t live here before.

7) I could strongly identify myself around places in X.

**Obligation and maintenance:**

8) I must continue keeping our own culture, traditions and customs alive for future generations.

9) I have to contribute to preserving our own identity and lifestyles.

10) I feel committed to the place.

11) I feel responsible to my children for making X a better place for living.

12) Even with the existence of better places for living, I would never consider moving away from X.

**Reconnection:**

13) It wasn’t difficult for me to acclimate again to the style of life in X, it’s like something lying dormant inside.

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#### Third dimension: Attachment

**Connection:**

25) I feel connected to X.

26) It is important for me to maintain my connection with X and the people living in it.

27) It's quite important for me to recognize my origins, where I came from and to be able to tell my kids and their kids where they hail from.

**Participation:**

28) I maintain my contact with X by attending societal occasions (family gatherings, weddings, ...).

29) I maintain my contact with X by doing my job.

30) Even with the absence of tangible contact, I still feel spiritually attached to X.

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#### Fourth dimension: Symbolism

31) Particular persons and related memories are evocative remainders of X.

32) Thinking about X takes me back to a variety of feelings (joy, sadness, pride, ...).

33) The physical area that X occupies and different reminiscences related to that space are significant remainders of X.

34) I believe X has exercised a powerful influence on my personality.

35) Living in X reflects the way I behave.
Appendix 2. The Development Site-Attachment Experience (Devamı)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future:</th>
<th>Fifth dimension: Familiarity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14) I wish that X would perform a role in my future life and my children’s lives.</td>
<td>36) I have a close association with the people of my social group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) I would love my sons and grandsons to relish similar experiences as I did in the past.</td>
<td>37) I have a close acquaintance with the land, the buildings and the vista in X.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Second dimension: Distinctiveness</strong></td>
<td>38) I do feel at ease in expressing my thoughts and beliefs in X in ways I could not do elsewhere.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Uniqueness:</strong></td>
<td>39) The informal, free and intimate social intercourses in my daily life in X make me comfortable in ways I could not be elsewhere.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16) This place is very special to me.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>17) X is characterized by certain attributes I personally believe to be rare elsewhere.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18) There is no such a place like X.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19) What I do feel for X makes it different for me.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Comfort:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>20) Being surrounded by people I know instead of strangers makes me feel secure and comfortable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21) Knowing every inch of X makes me feel comfortable in ways I could not be elsewhere.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Belonging:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>22) In other places, you are just a temporary visitor, but in X you are part of the place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>23) X is where I belong, where I have roots in.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relational tool:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>24) It’s easier to form relationships, communicate or interact with people when I’m in X than in other places.</td>
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<tr>
<td>40) Participating in the construction of the project will enable me to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life in X.</td>
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<tr>
<td>41) Participating in the development of the project will help sustain our own traditions, customs and family heritage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>42) My choice of participating in the completion of the project was partially based on my desire to stay in close proximity to the place.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>43) The completion of the project will guarantee a better life for my children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>44) I don’t mind having to make personal sacrifices for the best interest of the region.</td>
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<tr>
<td>45) Our interests as individuals should not take precedence over the interests of the community as a whole.</td>
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