

---

# The meaning of sense of place: The community of Vredefort Dome and Parys, Free State

*T ERASMUS<sup>1</sup> AND EP DE CROM<sup>2</sup>*

## Abstract

The Vredefort Dome was declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2005. This status has led to an increase in tourism to the adjacent town of Parys and the Dome as well as an increase in developers that could change the character of the area. Therefore, the sense of place of the residents of, and tourists to the area requires consideration in order to find a balance when development takes place. Sense of place refers to the unique features that gives the area its character and the manner in which people relate to these features. This study investigated the participants' understanding of sense of place of the area under study. The participants consisted of residents and tourists from Parys and the Dome. The non-probability sampling technique, amongst other, was used. The qualitative research method was utilised to gather data which was analysed through content analysis. Thereupon, themes were identified and interpreted. The connotation the participants attached to sense of place was categorised into three broad themes: affective, anthropogenic and the physical environment. The participants showed a special awareness towards protecting the character, nature and history of the area. Sense of place is rarely considered when development is considered. The findings of this study could be used as a guideline for developers in the area. A better understanding of the relationship between place and the attributes individuals assign to Parys and the Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site may help the stakeholders to acquire enhanced approaches to address, identify and engage the community (both residents and tourists) in conservation and future planning processes to ensure the well-being of all concerned.

**Keywords:** Sense of place, place attachment, World Heritage Site, heritage, tourism, well-being, anthropogenic, environment

## 1. Introduction

The Vredefort Dome is the world's largest and oldest meteorite impact crater. It is accessible to visitors and rich in biodiversity, archaeological and anthropological remains (UNEP, 2006:1). It lies on the border of the North West and Free State Provinces. The Vredefort Dome was inscribed with UNESCO as a natural World Heritage Site (WHS) on 14 July 2005. On 26 May 2012, the government and landowners of the Vredefort Dome signed a

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: Ms T Erasmus, Tshwane University of Technology, Department of Nature Conservation, Private Bag X680, Pretoria, 0001. Email: tanya.erasmus88@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Dr EP de Crom, Tshwane University of Technology, Department of Nature Conservation, Private Bag X680, Pretoria, 0001. Email: decromep@tut.ac.za

Memorandum of Agreement, taking the area a step closer to becoming a new World Heritage Site, protected under South African law (SANews, 2012).

According to Reimold and Coney (2001), more than seven hundred publications have appeared during the last decade with some reference to the Vaal River, the scenic Vredefort Hills and the Vredefort Dome. Since 2005, there has been an increasing number of reports about the pollution of the Vaal River which has threatened the tourism industry. Tempelhoff (2008) posits that the future of the Vredefort Dome as a World Heritage Site was in danger of losing this status due to the sewage pollution of the Vaal River. In addition, the pollution of the Vaal River poses a great health risk to tourists and residents of the area (Van Riet & Tempelhoff, 2009:31). Apart from the polluted Vaal River running through Parys and the Dome area, not many aspects threaten the integrity of the area at present (Puren, 2010). However, the anticipated increase in tourist numbers and facilities serving tourism, will need to be regulated if this status is to be retained (UNEP, 2006).

The number of tourists to the Vaal River in Parys and the Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site (VDWHS) has increased significantly despite the polluted river. Gouws (2013:9) asserts that since 2005, with the inscription of the Vredefort Dome as a World Heritage Site, tourism has become a profitable industry in the area. With regard to the planned developments and growth in tourism, Puren, Drewes and Roos (2006) argue that natural and rural spaces (such as VDWHS) are under constant pressure to develop, especially in the developing South Africa. Schoeman and Van den Berg (2010:3) are also of the opinion that it is a 'constant struggle' to protect and improve the natural and cultural environment of such areas. Moreover, they hold that "extra care should be taken for the Dome environment and future development to blend into nature". The character of these natural areas must be maintained. Consequently, it is important to consider the sense of place of the communities, which include both residents and the tourists in these areas. Furthermore, the 'place image' of tourists and the residents is also a significant consideration, especially for place marketing.

No universal definition for 'sense of place' exists, although numerous academics and practitioners in various fields have contributed towards investigating this subject (Puren, Drewes, & Roos, 2006:191). Sense of place is also known as place identity. Various authors have defined sense of place according to their own understanding. Puren (2010:15) defines sense of place of an area which is unique to a place and gives a certain character or identity to it. Nanzer (2004) explained sense of place as the manner in which humans relate to, or feel about, the environments in which they live. According to Hague and Jenkins (2005), since the 1960s, various publications have emerged, which included related concepts such as *place*, *character* and *identity*, often used to explain sense of place in respect of conservation and the impact of development on existing areas. The psychological relevance of place (and sense of place) has been extensively emphasised in research (Day, 1999; Korpela, Hartig, Kaiser & Fuhrer, 2001; Holmes, Patterson & Stalling, 2003; Spencer, 2005). Since the area is awaiting its formal proclamation as a World Heritage Site, it has been noted with concern that sense of place is not taken into consideration in the National Heritage Resource Act of South Africa. According to Van Vollenhoven (2015:17-18), *cultural significance* is the determining factor in making any decision about the future of any heritage resource and this includes the area's (VDWHS) social-, cultural-, historic-, scientific-, and aesthetic values.

Place image refers to the mental pictures or perspectives that people hold of a place (Kotler, Haider & Rein, 1993) and is a key concept which underpins place marketing research. Place image is important for various reasons, such as, attract tourists and highly skilled employees,

encourage government officials and investors to fund and develop as well as promote civic pride among local residents (Stylidis, Sit & Biran, 2014). According to Stylidis, Sit and Biran (2014), place image studies have focused mainly on tourists to determine their tourism destination image to comprehend how it influences people's choice, experience and their behaviour associated with a tourist place. In addition, other stakeholders such as residents with their perspectives are equally insightful for development and marketing activities (Hall, 2008; Stylidis, Sit & Biran, 2014).

From the literature consulted, it can be inferred that sense of place is an important issue to consider with any type of development where communities are affected. Place image and sense of place is closely related, while place image focuses more on the branding and marketing of a particular place. Since people are unique beings and perceive experiences differently, they have different preferences towards their environment. Therefore, the experience of 'place' is likely to be private and distinctive from one person to the next (Bell, Greene, Fisher & Baum, 1996). To avoid landscape conflicts and enhance sustainable landscape development complying with tourists' and locals' requirements, the sense of place of members of both groups must be understood and evaluated with respect to differential meanings (Ewert & Stewart, 2004). With regard to the development that might be needed in the study area, the well-being of the environment itself has to be considered before over-development and globalisation takes place and possibly impact its sense of place. Future marketing in the area should benefit the sense of place and place image of the community. The area also has a rich history and heritage value. Therefore, the sense of place of the area should be included in the National Heritage Resource Act. In order for an area to be declared a national monument (or heritage area such as the VDWHS), it should be of cultural-, historical-, aesthetical-, and scientific or technological interest (Van Vollenhoven, 2003:27). The VDWHS meets all of the criteria of which sense of place could form part of the cultural value.

From the abovementioned it is clear the necessity exists to identify the sense of place of a certain area for both its residents and visitors as well as be aware the role it plays in the development and marketing of such an area for tourism purposes. The sense of place of a community also plays a part in the cultural value of the area. The objective of this study is, therefore, to get a better understanding of the meaning participants attach to their sense of place in Parys and the VDWHS as well as discuss the extent to which they experience such attachment.

## **2. Study area**

The study took place in Parys, which is situated on the outskirts of the VDWHS. The latter section was selected as the second area of study. This area is situated in two provinces, namely: North West and the Free State province (Figure 1).

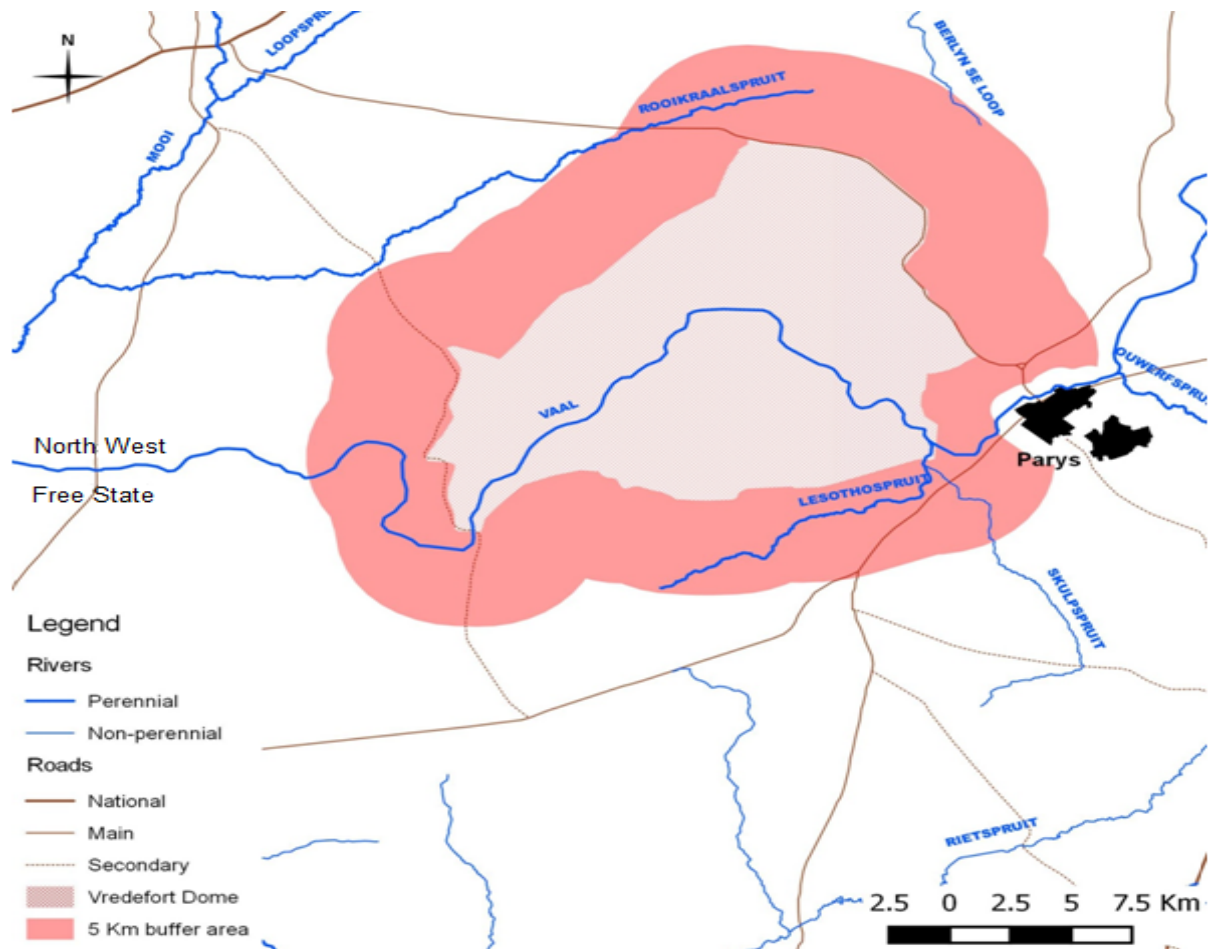


FIGURE 1: The location of Parys and the edge of the Vredefort Dome impact crater along the Vaal River (Lerm, 2014)

### 3. Methods

The qualitative research design was adopted to determine the sense of place of the participants who comprised tourists visiting Parys or the VDWHS and permanent residents of the respective areas of study. The respondents selected for the study were eighteen years of age and older. The non-probability sampling technique was used, that is, purposive, convenience and snowball sampling. Data was collected until saturation was reached. Primary data was collected through interviews, semi-structured questionnaires and photographs over a period of four years (2011-2014). Coding and content analysis were used to analyse the collected data (Jennings, 2001:84; Creswell, 2009:183). Triangulation<sup>3</sup> was used to enhance trustworthiness (Maree, 2012).

### 4. Results and discussion

In order to get a clearer understanding of the participants' sense of place, the study first endeavoured to determine the meaning of sense of place from the respective groups of participants. The participants comprised 60 tourists in Parys, 84 tourists in the VDWHS,

<sup>3</sup> Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meanings, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation (Stake, 2000:147).

194 residents from Parys and 34 residents from the VDWHS. Saturation was reached when no additional or significant data emerged.

#### 4.1 Meaning of sense of place

It was crucial to establish the participants' understanding of the concept 'sense of place', also referred to as 'place attachment' (Kaltenborn, 1998; Williams & Vaske, 2003; Legault, 2013). Pertinent dimensions of sense of place was identified by Gouws (2013:435) in previous research in this area of study. These were (1) the objective (cognitive) dimension, which includes the visual quality and character of the environment and (2) the subjective (affective) dimension that refers to the feelings and experiences in the environment which is more symbolic or psychological in nature (Gouws, 2013:436). The data gathered in this study revealed three main themes within the abovementioned dimensions with each theme consisting of different categories (Table 1).

**TABLE 1: Themes and categories emerging from participants' description of the meaning of sense of place**

Theme	Category	Verbatim quotes
Affective (Subjective)	1) Spiritual	<i>This is a good place to be, a place for spiritual fulfilment (Participant P27, 2013); ...just keep faith (Participant P2, 2013); ...to become deeply connected (Participant VQT64, 2013)</i>
	2) Psychological	<i>The feeling you have when you enter a space or area (Participant PQR33, 2012); ...a place where I can have peace of mind (Participant PQR34, 2012); A place where I am happy (Participant PQR52, 2012)</i>
	3) Attachment	<i>The longer I stay, the more I can't leave (Participant PIR1, 2011); ...feeling at home (Participant PQR37, 2012; Participant PQR62, 2012); I was born here and my life evolve around here (Participant PQR134, 2013)</i>
	4) Belonging	<i>Home is where the heart is (Participant PIR6, 2012); ...experiencing a sense of belonging (Participant PQR116, 2013); ...it is where I want to be (Participant VQR7, 2012)</i>
Anthropogenic (Objective)	1) Development	<i>One should develop this area...a World Heritage Site is there for people to see (Participant VIR6, 2012); ...develop to a certain level, blend it in with nature (Participant VIR9, 2012); Certain buildings has significant value in the area and its character (Participant P42, 2013)</i>
	2) Tourism	<i>It is very quiet and peaceful...must be fully utilised to attract tourists (Participant PQR39, 2012); ...it has a holiday feeling (Participant PQR69, 2012); The geology is an attraction that the tourists would like to learn more about (Participant P22, 2013)</i>
	3) Historical	<i>Conserve the history of this part of the country (Participant VIR7, 2012); It offers more about the historical events that took place in recent years (Participant VQT84, 2013); The San rock engravings are significant (Participant P25, 2013)</i>

	4) Well-being	<i>It is peaceful and quiet and little crime...you can raise children here (Participant PQR54, 2012); ...higher quality of life (Participant VIR7, 2012); ...a place where I can relax and rejuvenate away from the stress and noise of day to day life (Participant VQT43, 2012)</i>
	5) Human interaction	<i>Feeling at home with my family (Participant PQR175, 2013); Sense of place is also about who you see there...whether it is a tractor on the road or donkeys next to the fence (Participant VIR8, 2012)</i>
Physical environment (Objective)	1) Care for the environment	<i>The respect you show towards the area (Participant VQT39, 2012; Participant PQR102, 2013); ...keep the beautiful sounds of nature (Participant VIR9, 2012); ...the place should be kept in a good condition or maintained (Participant VQR27, 2013)</i>
	2) Natural features	<i>The unique character of the area consists of the plants, geology, topography and animal species (Participant VIR3, 2011); it is peaceful...it is magic! You can see the stars! (Participant VIR6, 2012); You can hear the birds during the day and during the night you hear the frogs and owls... it makes this area so special (Participant VIR9, 2012)</i>
	3) Use of senses	<i>Being in touch with nature and feeling the breeze wherever you are (Participants PQR171, 2013); There is a harmony between what is inside me and what I see around with my eyes and hear with my ears (Participant VIR11, 2012); ...being able to use all my senses (Participant VQT35, 2012); one could feel the fresh air and relax listening to the sound of the flowing water and the different bird calls (Participant P20, 2013)</i>

Each of the abovementioned themes will be discussed below:

#### 4.1.1 Affective

The affective aspects refer to the subjective dimension of sense of place which includes the symbolic values, feelings and emotions experienced by people (Gouws, 2013). These experiences are not the same for all individuals because two people will experience one situation differently and will not have the same feelings (De Crom, 2005). The affective theme is, therefore, divided into the following categories in order to explain the understanding of sense of place by the participants:

##### Spiritual

In this paper the term 'spiritual' is used as a category in the affective theme because the participants ascribe sacred feelings, rather than an exclusive religious meaning to it. A large number of the participants experienced spirituality on a deeply emotional level. Spirituality in this instance includes various aspects of the mind and soul and not necessarily refer to religion only, although religion is often included in the descriptions. The participants frequently claimed to have experienced a certain heightened sensory awareness during a spiritual

experience. This was also highlighted in studies undertaken of people's experiences in nature by Fredrickson and Anderson (1999:34) and confirmed by Sharpley and Jepson (2011).

In the current study the participants pointed out that certain landscapes and natural features had both a symbolic and spiritual meaning, for example, a participant gave the following description of a photograph taken during a walk in the area of the Dome:

*This small green tree is still standing strong among large trees. To me it shows that no matter how small one can be, you can still survive and make it among the stronger ones. It indicates confidence and willingness to me. Everything starts small and grows bigger and stronger, just keep faith (Participant P2, 2013).*

The vast open spaces and nature was symbolic of an 'open mind' and 'closeness to God' for the participants. They explained the area as "a place of solitude and thinking by yourself and your place in the universe" (Participant PQR118, 2013) and "to become deeply connected to the landscape, to one's Creator...touched by the area" (Participant VQT64, 2013). They also expressed that the feeling of spirituality, quietness and the 'enclosure of the outside world' was omnipresent. A participant felt that "it is a quiet place where I can be able to talk to myself, and to God, without seeing any person around me" (PQR128, 2013). These findings are supported by Gouws (2013:437) who also found that the residents in the Dome area felt that God was present in the landscape. Similarly, Roos, Coetzee and Puren (2011) established that the residents of the VDWHS placed personal symbolic meanings to the area which included spirituality.

Various participants associated their understanding of sense of place with spirituality. The landscape enables the participants to connect on a deeper level. The spiritual relationships indicates the potential, especially in rural areas, to reflect on the meaning of life (Roos, Coetzee and Puren, 2011). Mazumdar and Mazumdar (2004) confirmed that a reciprocal relationship exists between a location and spirituality.

The common theme that emanates throughout the examples is an expression of the sacred an environment can have. These spiritual experiences emerge through creating relationships with places or with elements in nature (Shaw, 2003). This is an important aspect to consider when development in this area of study is considered. Inadvertent development can have a negative impact on these relationships, with the concomitant opposite effect of what was initially intended.

### Psychological

The psychological relevance of place (and sense of place) has been extensively emphasised in research (for example, Korpela *et al.*, 2001; Holmes, Patterson & Stalling, 2003). The psychological category refers to the feelings and emotions that participants express in their understanding of sense of place. Emotions included positive and negative feelings, such as: being happy, feeling excited or hopeful as well as feelings of loneliness. Sense of place was portrayed as "the feeling you have when you, as a person, enter a specific space or an area such as the Dome" (Participant PQR33, 2012). This statement suggests that when one enters various areas, the feelings experienced at distinct localities will differ from each other. Each individual will also experience each locality differently (De Crom, 2005). Other participants stated their feelings as: "it is a place where I can have peace of mind" (Participant PQR34, 2012) and "a place where you feel that positive energy, a place that inspires you" (Participant VQT76, 2013). None of the participants in this study alluded to any negative feelings associated with the area, although some expressed concerns about the bad publicity due to

incidents of pollution in the Vaal River. However, positive emotions were expressed by the participants in statements such as "...happiness in an area where I feel at home", "...feeling good to be here", "...every time we plan a trip to this place, I feel excited" and "this is where I am very happy". In addition to feelings of happiness, excitement and feeling good, a study conducted by Roos, Coetzee and Puren (2011:78) refer to positive emotions experienced by participants of curiosity and hope in their study undertaken in the VDWHS.

### **Attachment**

The core concept, place attachment, is a positive emotional bond that develops between inhabitants and their environment (Stedman, 2003). It is well-known that residents within or 'inside' an area have a great sense of place or attachment to a location. "To be inside a place is to belong and identify with it and the more profoundly inside you are, the stronger is the identity with the place" (Relph, 1979). However, tourists can also develop an attachment to a place. As visitors interact with places, they may develop a bond that has been called place attachment (Budruk, White, Wodrich & Van Riper, 2008:189). In the current study, both the residents and the tourists referred to place attachment as an explanation of their sense of place. A resident from Parys expressed attachment as the meaning of sense of place as "the longer I stay here, the more I can't leave, it grows on me" (Participant PIR1, 2011). This is confirmed by Nanzer's findings (2004) that the longer a person stays in an area, the more attached he/she becomes thereto. Various residents in both Parys and the VDWHS mentioned that they were born in the area and therefore were attached thereto, for example: "I was born on the farm on which I now live and want to keep it in my family. This is my life" (Participant VIR4, 2011). This suggests that this place is a part of his/her life and that one grows fonder of the locality. The participants also referred to attachment as follows: "...the place where I can be myself and where I feel at home" (Participant PQR70, 2012) and "the comfort that I have towards the area that prevents me to move somewhere else" (Participant PQR58, 2012).

### **Belonging**

Belonging to a place is almost similar to place attachment in the sense that it is assumed that one has to be a part of the place in order to feel that one belongs there (Nanzer, 2004). The residents and the tourists in this research expressed that they belonged in the area and that this depicted their understanding of sense of place. After moving to surrounding areas, a resident, born in Parys, stated that "home is where the heart is" (Participant PIR6, 2012). This was an indication that he felt he belonged in this area and that his heart remained in Parys even when he had left town. In contrast, a new resident to Parys said: "I have found what I have been looking for; I am ready for marriage and looking forward to raising kids here" (Participant PIR7, 2012). This resident felt that Parys was the place where she wanted to be and start a new chapter in her life. Sense of place has also been explained as "somewhere that I think I can be proud to belong to" (Participant PQR40, 2012) and "being in harmony with nature, making you feel you belong" (Participant VQT39, 2012).

#### **4.1.2 Anthropogenic**

The anthropogenic theme forms part of the cognitive or objective dimension. The term anthropogenic refers to anything as the result of or induced by people. According to a resident in the area "the people aspect of sense of place is something one needs to give a lot of attention to" (Participant VIR8, 2012). The anthropogenic theme includes the following:



## Development

A number of participants indicated that sense of place represented some kind of development of the environment. In this instance development refers to any anthropogenic change to the environment. It may also refer to the “way in which the place operates” (Participant PQR133, 2013). This suggests that the infrastructure of an area may influence the sense of place of people. A resident of the VDWHS stated that “one should develop this area, because you cannot have a World Heritage Site that is inaccessible. It is there for the people” (Participant, 2012). Future development in the area should also be “invisible” (Participant VIR8, 2012) and should “blend in with nature” (Participant VIR9, 2012) in order to sustain the character of the area. The sense of place of people was also determined through certain historical buildings in the area. For example, the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Moederkerk* in Parys was significant since the town was establishment in the 1870s because of the church community.

## Tourism

Participants alluded to tourism or touristic attributes as their understanding of sense of place, for example: “It is a very quiet and peaceful place that one can live in and we have the World Heritage Site. It must be fully utilised to attract tourists and to create job opportunities” (Participant PQR39, 2012). The participants also referred to the “holiday feel/character of the area, the friendly people and socialising” (Participant PQR69, 2012). The geology of the area is also part of the sense of place and this can be used to attract tourists. A tourist commented as follows on a photograph of a rocky hill:

*When I took the photo I felt happy because it is uniquely bright in colour with the sun setting...and it is formed in a unique way. The upturned quartz rock is an important physical evidence of the meteorite impact. It is an attraction that the tourists would like to learn more about (Participant P22, 2013).*

Tourism and potential future tourist activities formed part of the meaning participants attached to sense of place of the area. These activities, events and attributes of the area were that which highlighted the identity and, therefore, a sense of place to the participants. A participant emphasised that the activities in the area should complement its peaceful eco-friendly and quiet atmosphere. He further explained that “people visit the area because there is nothing and no cell phone reception and this should be used to market the area. Use the beauty and 'old world charm'...” (Participant VIR11, 2012). Additional quotes from participants in this regard included: “The old mines should be used as a living museum where people do live demonstrations” (Participant VIR9, 2012) and “...the museum in Parys and the annual *Adventure Dome Festival* is worth experiencing” (Participant PQR69, 2012).

## Historical

Sense of place was also understood as the history or heritage of the area. For example, Participant VIR7 (2012) stated that “they must spend time to conserve the history of this part of the country as part of the World Heritage Site”. The cultural heritage goes hand in hand with the history of the area, and includes the abundance of rock engravings and signs of mining activities, together with historical sites and buildings. The following quote represents the value individuals assign to the cultural heritage of the area:

*The engraving of the San people on the rock shows that not only did people live in the area, but also that animals were abundant and water was available. It shows that these people communicated with each other by engraving pictures on the rocks. It brings much*

*peace in me that they were depending on nature and the fact that this place is still protected today (Participant P25, 2013).*

The historical and cultural heritage of the area are both also part of the tourism category and, therefore, important aspects of the participants' description of their sense of place.

### **Well-being**

The well-being of people refers to the enjoyment of people and the positive effect that the environment has on them, as seen from the various participants' explanation of sense of place. Studies have revealed that visiting nature is important to people because it is an effective way of relieving stress and improving ones well-being (Kaplan, 1992; Lewis, 1996). Many individuals experience nature as an environment where they can rest and recover from daily stress. In the frantic times that the majority of the world's population live in, there is a growing need for nature as a source of relaxation and recreation (Maas, Verheij, Groenewegen, De Vries & Spreeuwenberg, 2006). More than 100 research studies have revealed that outdoor recreation reduces stress (Ulrich, Simons, Losito, Fiorito, Miles & Zelson, 1991). By observing the ever-changing environment in nature, individuals cultivate a positive attitude, renewed attention, mindfulness and sensory awareness (Ulrich *et al.*, 1991).

The participants indicated that their understanding of sense of place relates to holistic well-being, that is, their mental and physical health. Well-being consists of various elements and the following phrases were selected to illustrate the participants understanding: "it is peaceful and quiet and little crime is present in the area... you can raise your children here" (Participant PQR54, 2012); "a higher quality of life on the farm..." (Participant VIR7, 2012); and "it is a place where I can relax and rejuvenate away from the stress and noise of day to day life" (Participant VQT43, 2012). The experience of nature and appreciation thereof expressed by the participants can be related to well-being in that people need to get away from daily life routine in order to experience and appreciate a more nature-based environment (Garst, 2005).

### **Human interaction**

A number of participants referred to sense of place as 'interaction with other humans'. This included the friendliness displayed by inhabitants in the area, the close-knit community and the relationship between fellow-inhabitants in the area. The participants referred to sense of place as "being in an area with the family" and "society and the relationship with the people in my area". "Sense of place is very important and has many components; it's not only about the natural appearance of a place, but also about who you meet here" (Participant VIR8, 2012). The participants experienced a sense of place "whether you see a tractor on the road, or you see donkeys next to the fence...you know it is part of you". The local residents with a sense of place recommend attractions and facilities to visiting tourists and/or friends and relatives, because of their familiarity and solace with the destination (Shani & Uriely, 2012). Furthermore, the residents also act as salespersons who share stories or narratives of their hometown's attractions with other people (Stylidis, Sit & Biran, 2014). This cordiality among the residents, tourists and inhabitants towards each other contributed greatly to their sense of place for this study.

#### **4.1.3 Physical environment**

The physical environment refers to natural features and references made towards the environment. Sense of place is generally based on symbolic meanings attributed towards the setting (Williams & Stewart, 1998). However, Stedman (2003), suggested that the physical

environment itself contributes to sense of place through specifiable mechanisms. The theme and physical environment forms part of the cognitive or objective dimension and consists of the following categories:

#### Care for environment

Care for the environment reveals that one has a strong sense of place or place attachment and this may develop over a period of time (Carr, 2002). Understanding sense of place in this regard was expressed as: “the respect you show towards the area you live in and appreciate its natural beauty” (Participant VQT39, 2012; Participant PQR102, 2013). The participants often referred to specific natural features and the importance of taking care of them. For example, a participant explained the view of the Vaal River and adjacent plains and farms from the top of a mountain in the VDWHS as follows:

*It is of great significance that the Vaal River passes through the Vredefort Dome. It's amazing how nature is interlinked; therefore, I somehow wish that other people could just respect what nature gives to them because when people perish, nature will still remain long after. I experience a lot of positive emotions about this view, just seeing how beautiful it is and how it can change a person's perspective and life by just looking at it. Nature is precious and we must take care of it (Participant P11, 2013).*

Natural features link closely with caring for the environment and for the purpose of this paper is placed in a distinct category.

#### Natural features

The participants portrayed sense of place as the rich biodiversity of species and landscapes in the area. Some authors implied a direct relationship between landscape features and sense of place and that one is attached to places because of outstanding physical features (Stedman, 2003). Statements from the participants confirmed Stedman's findings. Sense of place has been explained as “the unity of people within a natural environment” (Participant PQR50, 2012). This statement suggests that people perceive themselves as united with the area and its natural features. Other participants referred to the beauty of the environment as “clean air and beautiful place”, the “mountains” and the “unique character of an area that consists of its plants, geology, topography, and unusual and new plant and animal species” (Participant VIR3, 2011). Another participant stated that “it is peaceful; one doesn't hear people or cars – its magic! You can see the stars” (Participant VIR6, 2012). It can be inferred that natural features formed an important part of the sense of place for the participants in this study and should be taken into consideration when development is intended. Natural features are experienced and appreciated by means of one's senses. ‘Use of senses’ is, therefore, considered as a distinct category under the physical environment theme.

#### Use of senses

The individual participants become aware of their surroundings when they spent time in the area. Experiences of nature are multi-sensory. In other words, they stimulate and involve all the senses. As people participate in activities in nature such as game drives, hiking and bird watching, their experiences are shaped by the information that they receive through their senses. For example, Gramman (1999) and Mace, Bell and Loomis (2004) examined the impact of noise and sounds on national park visitors and found that the restorative properties of nature, experienced through the senses, were significant. Although the multi-sensory nature of experiences in a specific area may possibly be somewhat intuitive, this characteristic should not be overlooked. One's senses are often under-utilised, which can prevent people

from fully appreciating their surroundings and from connecting to their natural abilities as humans (Mace, Bell & Loomis, 2004).

The opportunity to use one's senses was cited by a number of participants to describe their understanding of sense of place. A participant referred to "being in touch with nature and feeling the breeze wherever you are" (Participant PQR171, 2013). Others associated the use of senses as "there is a harmony between what is 'inside' me and what I see around with my eyes and hear with my ears" (Participant VIR11, 2012) and "being able to use all my senses in this specific environment" (Participant VQT35, 2012). A participant expressed the feeling of excitement when standing next to the Vaal River for the first time, remembering the experience because of his sensory awareness at that moment:

*The most interesting thing for me was that the river was flowing and making a loud sound through the bridge. There were a lot of birds ... a spoonbill, herons and egrets. One could feel the fresh air and relax listening to the sound of flowing water and different bird calls. You could feel that you are in true nature (Participant P20, 2013).*

This quote is confirmed by Ryden (1993:38) who emphasises the physical nature of place as "grounded in those aspects of the environment which we appreciate through the senses and through movement: colour, texture, slope, quality of light, the feel of wind, the sounds and scents carried by that wind".

From the abovementioned description of themes and categories, the complexity of the concept 'sense of place' becomes apparent. Individuals expressed diverse meanings and opinions about the different places and features from their narratives. The participants expressed themselves affectively (subjectively) or objectively, while certain participants merged the features in their depictions.

## **5. Conclusion**

Sense of place is a complex phenomenon and has various dimensions. The meaning that the respective participants attached to sense of place was divided into three main themes, namely: affective, anthropogenic and the physical environment. It can be concluded that all the participants ascribed an affective meaning to sense of place and made reference to spiritual, attachment, belonging and psychological aspects. This dimension is found and addressed to a certain extent in the National Heritage Act of South Africa. Emotional attachments to a place represent a unique sense of place involving unusually strong sentiments about places and increasing concerns about their management. The connectivity between people and places is often described as powerful emotional sentiments that influence how people perceive, experience and value the environment. In addition to the physical setting of places, it includes human activities, social and psychological processes, meanings, and values. Therefore, the participants also understood sense of place as the physical environment and the anthropogenic aspects of nature.

It is clear that the current character and 'spirit' of the place are important to both the tourists and the residents. There are subtle differences in the meanings that the respective participants attached to sense of place. The residents of the VDWHS in particular saw both the anthropogenic and natural features as an extremely important part of their sense of place. This group is, therefore, the most vulnerable when future development is considered. The residents in the area were in general open to tourism and a great shift towards tourism establishments, activities and wildlife areas have been noticed in the last decade. However, this should not lead to uncontrolled development, globalisation or impact negatively on the

*Td*, 10(3), December 2015, pp. 208-224.

‘small town’ or ‘country’ atmosphere of the area. Development should not jeopardise the sense of place and should adhere to strict regulations. As a tourist attraction, it is recommended that the inhabitants be educated, various zones of engagement be identified, the number of visitors and entry into the area be regulated and the type of recreational activities be monitored.

Enhanced cooperation and involvement are needed from the government, the municipality and the landowners to ensure that the future of the area is secured and approved by everyone. Sense of place is rarely considered when development is contemplated in an area which should be part of every heritage report regarding future development. There are many enquiries and heated discussions that currently prevail among planners, developers, authorities and other role players about development opportunities in the area. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the guidelines which must be followed that will suit all the role-players involved. It is recommended that the findings of this research be used as a basic guideline for developers in the area. A better understanding of the relationship of place and the attributes individuals assign to Parys and the VDWHS may help managers and practitioners find worthier ways to address, identify and engage residents in conservation and in future planning processes. The sense of place and the place images that both the tourists and residents attached to Parys and the VDWHS is essential for future marketing of the area. The participants value the simplistic country atmosphere of the area. Subsequently, all planned development and marketing should be integrated with the area.

## **6. Acknowledgments**

The authors would like to thank the Tshwane University of Technology and the Faculty of Science (TUT) for the scholarship to undertake this study.

## **7. References**

### **Oral interviews (Notes in possession of the author)**

- PARTICIPANT P2. 2013. Photograph. VDWHS.
- PARTICIPANT P11. 2013. Photograph. VDWHS.
- PARTICIPANT P20. 2013. Photograph. VDWHS.
- PARTICIPANT P22. 2013. Photograph. VDWHS.
- PARTICIPANT P25. 2013. Photograph. VDWHS.
- PARTICIPANT P27. 2013. Photograph. VDWHS.
- PARTICIPANT P42. 2013. Photograph. VDWHS.
- PARTICIPANT PIR1. 2011. Interview. Parys.
- PARTICIPANT PIR6. 2012. Interview. Parys.
- PARTICIPANT PIR7. 2012. Interview. Parys.
- PARTICIPANT PQR33. 2012. Interview. Parys.
- PARTICIPANT PQR34. 2012. Interview. Parys.
- PARTICIPANT PQR37. 2012. Interview. Parys.

PARTICIPANT PQR39. 2012. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR40. 2012. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR50. 2012. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR52. 2012. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR54. 2012. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR58. 2012. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR69. 2012. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR70. 2012. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR102. 2013. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR116. 2013. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR118. 2013. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR128. 2013. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR133. 2013. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR134. 2013. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR171. 2013. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT PQR175. 2013. Interview. Parys.  
PARTICIPANT VIR3. 2011. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VIR4. 2011. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VIR6. 2012. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VIR7. 2012. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VIR8. 2012. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VIR9. 2012. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VIR11. 2012. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VQR7. 2012. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VQR27. 2013. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VQT35. 2012. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VQT39. 2012. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VQT43. 2012. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VQT64. 2013. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VQT76. 2013. Interview. VDWHS.  
PARTICIPANT VQT84. 2013. Interview. VDWHS.

### **Secondary sources**

BELL, P.A., GREENE, T.C., FISHER, J.D. & BAUM, A. 1996. Environmental psychology. 4th ed. USA: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

*Td*, 10(3), December 2015, pp. 208-224.

- BUDRUK, M., WHITE, D.D., WODRICH, J.A. & VAN RIPER, C.J. 2008. Connecting visitors to people and place: visitor's perceptions of authenticity at Canyon de Chelly National Monument, Arizona. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 3(3):185-202.
- CARR, A. 2002. *Grass roots and green tape: principles and practices of environmental stewardship*. Sydney: The Federation Press.
- CRESWELL, J. 2009. *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage.
- DAY, C. 1999. *Places of the soul: architecture and environmental design as a healing art*. London: Thorsons.
- DE CROM, E.P. 2005. *A narrative interpretation of contemporary nature experiences in southern African environments*. PhD, Vanderbijlpark, North West University.
- EWERT, A. & STEWART, B. 2004. Philosophical perspectives on natural resources. Examining the past to understand the future. In: MANFREDO, M., VASKE, J., BRUYERE, B., FIELD, D. & BROWN, P. (Eds.). *Society and natural resources: a summary of knowledge*. Prepared for the 10th International Symposium on Society and Resource Management. Jefferson, MO: Modern Litho :9-20.
- FREDRICKSON, L.M. & ANDERSON, D.H. 1999. A qualitative exploration of the wilderness experience as a source of spiritual inspiration. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 19:21-39.
- GARST, B.A. 2005. *An exploration of developed forest camping experiences and meanings in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area*. PhD, Blacksburg, Virginia., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- GOUWS, C. 2013. *Vestiging langs die Vaalrivier in die omgewing van die Vredefortkoepel, 1840 - 2012*. PhD, Vaaldriehoek, Noordwes-Universiteit.
- GRAMMAN, J.H. 1999. The effect of mechanical noise and natural sound on visitor experiences in units of the national park system. *Social Science Research Review*, 1(1):1-16.
- HAGUE, C. & JENKINS, P. 2005. *Place identity, participation and planning*. Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- HALL, C.M. 2008. *Tourism planning: policies, processes and relationships*. 2nd ed. Essex: Pearson.
- HOLMES, G.E., PATTERSON, J.R. & STALLING, J.E. 2003. Sense of place: issues in counseling and development. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 42(2):238-251.
- JENNINGS, G. 2001. *Tourism research*. Australia: John Wiley & Sons.
- KALTENBORN, B.P. 1998. Effects of sense of place on responses to environmental impacts. A study among residents in Svalbard in the Norwegian high arctic. *Applied Geography*, 18(2):169-189.
- KAPLAN, R. 1992. The psychological benefits of nearby nature. In: RELF, D. (Ed.). *Role of horticulture in human well-being and social development: a national symposium*. Arlington, Virginia: Timber:125-133.

- KORPELA, K.M., HARTIG, T., KAISER, F.G. & FUHRER, U. 2001. Restorative experience and self-regulation in favorite places. *Environment and Behavior*, 33:572-589.
- KOTLER, P., HAIDER, D.H. & REIN, I. 1993. *Marketing places: attracting investment, industry, and tourism to cities, states, and nations*. New York: Free Press.
- LEGAULT, M.K. 2013. *Lived experiences of the trails: perspectives from three southwestern Ontario trail organisations*. Masters of Environmental Studies, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, University of Waterloo.
- LERM, R. 2014. *Maps of Parys and the VDWHS*. (s.l.): (s.n.).
- LEWIS, C.A. 1996. *Green nature/human nature: the meaning of plants in our lives*. Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois.
- MAAS, J., VERHEIJ, R.A., GROENEWEGEN, P.P., DE VRIES, S. & SPREEUWENBERG, P. 2006. Green space, urbanity, and health: how strong is the relation? *Journal of epidemiology and community health*, 60(7):587-592.
- MACE, B.L., BELL, P.A. & LOOMIS, R.J. 2004. Visibility and natural quiet in national parks and wilderness areas psychological considerations. *Environment and Behavior*, 36(1):5-31.
- MAREE, K. (Ed.). 2012. *First steps in research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- MAZUMDAR, S. & MAZUMDAR, S. 2004. Religion and place attachment: a study of sacred places. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 24(2004):385-397.
- NANZER, B. 2004. Measuring sense of place: a scale for Michigan. *Administrative Theory and Praxis*, 26(3):362-382.
- PROSHANSKY, H.M. 1978. The city and self-identity. *Environment and Behavior*, 10:147-169.
- PUREN, K. 2010. Sense of place. What does it mean for the Dome? *Impact*, 15-16.
- PUREN, K., DREWES, E. & ROOS, V. 2006. An exploration of sense of place as informative for spatial planning guidelines: a case study of the Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site, South Africa. *International Journal of Human and Social Sciences*, 1(3):190-197.
- REIMOLD, W.U. & CONEY, L. 2001. *The Vredefort Dome impact structure and directly related subjects: an updated biography*. Johannesburg: Economic Geology Research Institute, University of the Witwatersrand.
- RELPH, E. 1979. *Place and placelessness*. London: Pion.
- ROOS, V., COETZEE, H. & PUREN, K. 2011. Mense se ervarings in 'n natuurlike omgewing in die Vredefortkoepel, Suid-Afrika: implikasies vir ruimtelike ontwikkeling. *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, 51:68-85.
- RYDEN, K.C. 1993. *Mapping the invisible landscape: folklore, writing, and the sense of place*. United States, Ames: University of Iowa Press.
- SANEWS. 2012. Government and Vredefort Dome landowners reach an agreement [Online]. Available from: <http://www.buanews.gov.za/rss/12/12052713151005>. [Accessed: 05/06/2012].



- SCHOEMAN, G.P. & VAN DEN BERG, J. 2010. A word from the impact team. *Impact*, 4:3.
- SHANI, A. & URIELY, N. 2012. VFR Tourism: the host experience. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39(1):421-440.
- SHARPLEY, R. & JEPSON, D. 2011. Rural tourism: a spiritual experience? *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(1):52-71.
- SHAW, S. 2003. Connecting to nature's spirit. *Gatherings*. 8, Aug.
- SPENCER, C. 2005. Place attachment, place identity and the development of the child's self-identity: searching the literature to develop a hypothesis. *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, 14(4):305-309.
- STAKE, R.E. 2000. Case studies. In: DENZIN, N.K. & LINCOLN, Y.S. (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research*. 2nd ed. California: Sage.
- STEDMAN, R. 2003. Is it really just a social construction? The contribution of the physical environment to sense of place. *Society and Natural Resources*, 16:671-685.
- STYLIDIS, D., SIT, J. & BIRAN, A. 2014. An exploratory study of residents' perception of place image: a case of Kavala. *Journal of Travel Research* :1-16.
- TEMPELHOFF, E. 2008 Vredefortkoepel dalk nie meer wêrelderfenis. *Beeld*, March 6: 10.
- ULRICH, R.S., SIMONS, R.F., LOSITO, B.D., FIORITO, E., MILES, M.A. & ZELSON, M. 1991. Stress recovery during exposure to natural and urban environments. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 11(3):201-230.
- UNEP. 2006. Vredefort Dome – South Africa [Online]. Available from: <http://www.unep-wcmc.org/sites/wh/pdf/Vredefort%20dome.pdf> [Accessed: 17/03/2011].
- VAN RIET, G. & TEMPELHOFF, J.W.N. 2009. Slow-onset disaster and sustainable livelihoods: the Vaal River in the vicinity of Parys. *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 5(1):29-49.
- VAN VOLLENHOVEN, A.C. 2003. Die wet op nasionale erfenishulpbronne. *SA Tydskrif vir Kultuurgeskiedenis*, 17(2):23-45.
- VAN VOLLENHOVEN, A.C. 2015. Dealing with statues, monuments and memorials in South Africa - a heritage based response to current controversies. *SA Journal of Cultural History*, 29(1):7-21.
- WILLIAMS, D.R. & STEWART, S.I. 1998. Sense of place: an elusive concept that is finding a home in ecosystem management. *Forest Science*, 95(5):18-23.
- WILLIAMS, D.R. & VASKE, J. 2003. The measurement of place attachment: validity and generalizability of a psychometric approach. *Forest Science*, 49(6):830-840.