

Book Review: A Place to Belong; Community Order and Everyday Space in Calvert, Newfoundland

Gerald L. Pocius. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1991. ISBN 0-7735-0805-8

Wael W Al-Azhari

Department of Architecture, the University of Jordan, Amman 11942, Jordan

w.alazhari@ju.edu.jo

Abstract: The idea of belonging is important in order to understand how spaces are reformed through people's activities. For people, belonging tied to a series of spaces that make up the place, spaces that extend both throughout the community and back in time. Gerald L. Pocius, in his book, *A Place to Belong* tries to study the landscape and the community, and how human beings socially construct the spaces in which they live. He thus took a particular community in Newfoundland called Calvert.

[Al-Azhari, W. *A Place to Belong: Community Order and Everyday Space in Calvert, Newfoundland*. *J Am Sci* 2013;9(8):60-63]. (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.jofamericanscience.org>. 9

Keywords: Belonging; vernacular landscape; community; a place

1. Introduction

Pocius's book is, as much, a critique of life in what is often considered by the modern world to how a traditional culture, not a culture under threat, but one in a creative interrelationship between past and present.

The author suggests in his study an analytical approach to investigate the vernacular landscape of a small community, called Calvert (Figure 1), in which he is primarily interested. So, he looks at a number of various spatial levels in the community, drawing links between spaces and material culture at each level.



Figure 1. The Southern Shore

2. Material and Methods

Pocius divides his study in three sections. First, he examines the social activities that contribute to how space in the communities has actually produced, with specific units involving particular kinds of knowledge and work. Second, he discusses consuming spaces, those filled with mass-produced objects, but still governed by the social relations considered appropriate (Day and Parnell, 2003). The final section deals with the old and new in Calvert, and how the total socially constructed landscape reflects attitudes relatively recent or long standing. At the same time, this addresses the more basic issue of tradition within the modern world.

In his analysis, the author relies primarily on a number of standard studies of the historical artifact to interpret how similar objects were being used. Pocius problematic was clear. He conducted ethnography of cultural space by combining the methods of both fieldwork and object-centered research in order to provide an alternative approach to current material culture work, cautioning scholars who research historical objects yet rarely study living cultures.

The main source of the author's literature was himself, because he was familiar with Calvert's community and he made several visits to the people there since 1974. As he mentioned in his book: "*I thus often had to rely on my own formulations about everyday life, testing in daily contexts the assumptions I had about ordinary objects and spaces*" p. xiv.

So, his main resources were primary ones, depending on participant observation. Taped interviews provided contemporary ethnographic detail, and family photography albums, census and court records, land grants, and travelers' accounts added historical background material. These raw data were emphasized the author's ideas, so he put it as

illustrations and it was related with the sequence of his ideas. From these illustrations, the reader can get a general idea about the book.

3. Results

Pocius divided his book into eight chapters according to the three categories already mentioned.

In the first chapter "*Places to Belong*", the author explains the analytical methodology which he depend on. Also he put the main purpose for his study which relates to the terms: key words he used in the main title for his book. Belonging to a place, means maintaining a series of spaces that are created again and again in certain ways, and are filled with the appropriate objects for specific kinds of behaviors (Gieryn, 2000). Community existence is not just residing in a place; it is belonging- with attendant benefits and obligations (Sherwin, 2008). Again with the commonality resource sharing and the subsequent leveling of the artifact world, this belonging occurs not in terms of material goods but in common spaces (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Looking across the bay at the north side of Calvert from the High Road

In the second chapter, "*Places in History*", the author tries to understand the spaces through the time. He centers on three main concerns: time, motivation, and space. Talking about the past involves characters and events that fit into particular chronologies and time periods. Actions from the past are usually a scribed to a reason: people were motivated to act the way they did. And, most importantly, the discussion for the people deal with a community space, a specific landscape feature, a particular space (Figure 3).

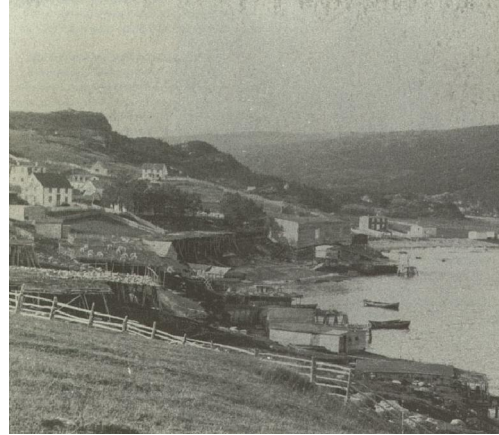


Figure 3. A view of the point at the head of the bay

In chapter three, "*Landscapes and Gender*", the author wants to emphasize that the gender differences will affect the space's identity, also these spaces are systematically structured so that it can work together and create the community (Gieryn, 2000). Therefore, every community is made up of individuals with specific social roles, each role part of the identity of that person, and these roles, in turn, determine which areas are used by each resident (Talen, 2008). Space is therefore linked directly to role and identity, and these identities are governed largely by shared ideologies that ensure that certain social roles have appropriate social space (Figure 4).

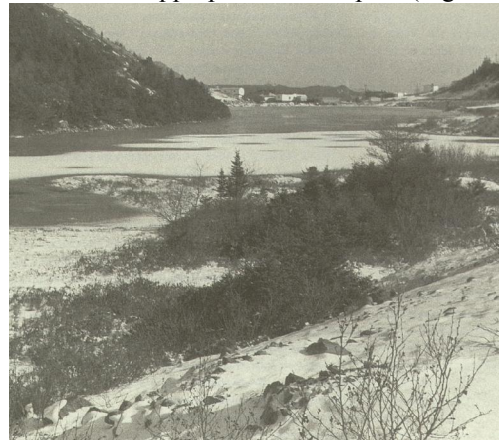


Figure 4. Old Women Pond, with Gorman's Hill to the left

In chapter four "*Property and Work*", the author suggests that the land is there to be used, and resources are to be shared by all. Work, then, is a public performance that is constantly on view to other audience members of the community. Also, he relates the idea of sharing with Calvert's residents that their utilization of land and water space must be primarily attentive to community good, the same concerns that

govern social relationships. So it is with the location of the community's buildings (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Tom Clancy's slide loaded with logs

In chapter five, "*Settlement Clusters to Visit*", the author's idea was the social connections between the members of the same family and also with other families shaped the community's landscape, and it must be examined in order to fully understand building location (Talen, 2008). Thus, the spaces of exchange have pushed the buildings close to one another; facing daily community activities and encouraging frequent visits as well as exchanges of verbal and material gifts (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Celebrating Father's Day in Tom Sullivan's front room

In chapter six, "*Houses*", the author expresses concern that Calvert's houses was functional issue rather than historical one, because the basic spatial configuration of all houses in a community forms a series of relationships at any point in time—regardless of the actual data that any individual building was erected. That is to say, houses have always been consumer items brought in from the outside (Gallagher, 2006), but indigenous spaces have ensured adaptations of these forms (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Mary Boland's house

In chapter seven, "*Interiors and Exteriors*", the author emphasizes the importance of studying indoor and outdoor spaces of individual house in order to understand the community organization patterns. The house provides both physical comfort and a degree of privacy. Beyond these fundamental needs, we compartmentalize our dwellings, carving out spaces that promote the social relationships that have been important in our culture. According to this, the hierarchy of spaces is important (Day and Parnell, 2003). One domain cannot be understood without the others, front room and kitchen seem to keep social categories very separate; the yard, however, dissolves much of this boundary. Without considering all three spaces, we would not realize, finally, how arbitrary our division of the world into artifacts and space may be (Figure 8).

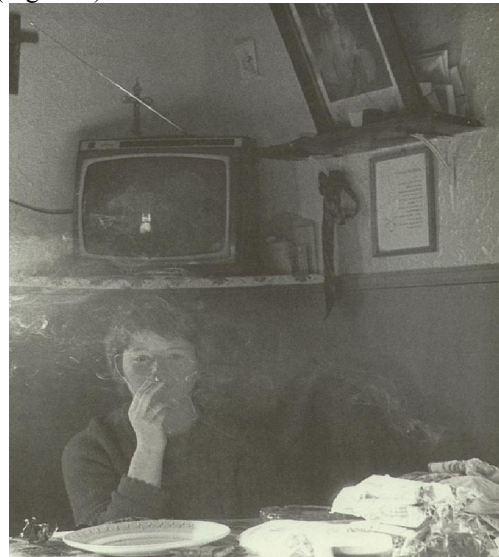


Figure 8. Doris Sullivan and the Sacred Heart corner in her home

In the conclusion, "*The Spaces between Tradition and Modernity*", the author tries to draw conclusions from his study, so he speaks about the problem of the past against future, the tension between continuity and change, between what are often labeled tradition and modernization (Gehl, 2006). The Calvert landscape has been socially constructed- both now and in the past- to stress certain spatial relationships, whereas the actual vehicles used to communicate and maintain these relationships- artifacts- frequently change (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Doris Sullivan turning butter

Therefore, in his conclusion, Pocius wants to emphasize that culture does not have to choose between leaving the past behind or rejecting the new. Instead, both are possible, eliminating any cognitive necessity for creating categories like traditional and modern. So, the interaction between old and new, as found in Calvert, as the author said: "*People in Calvert can live in both worlds. Because for them, it is simply one world*" p. 294.

4. Discussions

At the end of this chapter the author tries to relate his assessments to the opening ideas that he discusses. He underlines that life is the sharing of space (Gehl, 2006). Not just families sharing the space in their house, or relatives the space of their neighborhood, but an entire community sharing the resources that surround it, the resources of land and

water, all shared through systems that ensure knowledge of place and equity of product. So, it is the space rather than the things that are more meaningfully shared. In brief, "*Each person in Calvert knows that in this sharing rests the essence of everyday life, the sharing that orders this place where they belong*" p.299.

A Place to Belong, is one of the primary books that deal with the phenomena of belonging. This is considered a very important issue in studying vernacular landscape for a community (Nett and Hayden, 2007). The author suggests a systematic and clear approach to analyze the spaces in the community, in which he has experience. This book could be a reference guide for any researcher who is interested on this topic because belonging is an international idea and it does not relate with ever one region or one community.

Acknowledgements:

The author is grateful to the Department of Architecture at the University of Jordan for academic support to carry out this work.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Wael W Al-Azhari
Department of Architecture, The University of Jordan
Amman 11942, Jordan
E-mail: w.alazhari@ju.edu.jo

References

1. Day C, Parnell R. Consensus Design: Socially Inclusive Process. Oxford; Boston: Architectural Press, 2003.
2. Gallagher W. House Thinking: A Room-by-Room Look at how we Live. New York: Harper Collins, 2006.
3. Gehl J. New City Life. Copenhagen: Danish Architectural Press, 2006.
4. Gieryn T. A Space for Place in Sociology. Annual Review of Sociology 2000; 26(1): 463-496.
5. Nett J, Hayden M. Globally Mobile Children: The Sense of Belonging. Educational Studies 2007; 33(4): 435-444.
6. Sherwin J. Acceptance and Belonging: the Usefulness of Being in Valued Roles. Families for Change 2008; 3(7): 2-3.
7. Talen E. Design for Diversity: Exploring Socially Mixed Neighborhoods. Amsterdam; Boston; London: Architectural Press, 2008.