

Relationship with the place of living and the development of aggressive behavior

F. Vlastou¹ & F. Pahlavan¹

¹ *Laboratoire de Menaces Sociales et Environnementales, EA 244, Paris Descartes University (Paris V), Institute of Psychology, Paris, France*

Introduction

In many cities of the world, increasing number of conflicts between police and residents of certain neighborhoods is quite remarkable. Individual or collective aggressions expressed in neighborhood contexts are against physical (e.g. cars damaged or burned) as well as social environment, including the police. Exarchia district, located in the centre of Athens, is a known example. This is an area frequented mostly by young people, whose violent encounters with the police have been the subject of debates in the media, considered as a kind of ghetto in the city. The present study suggests that the local residents (Authority Granted) show aggressive behavior in order to defend their neighborhoods against the presence of police (Authority Imposed), perceived as a social threat. Therefore, the objective is to verify existence of this relationship and to examine how this relationship is likely to generate defensive aggression in the neighborhood contexts.

Method

Obviously, city's neighborhoods are not identical comporting physical, social and historical differences. Given their diversity, we propose to distinguish them into "symbolic neighborhoods" and "non-symbolic neighborhoods", based on their historical differences, with the first one defined as neighborhoods perceived as representative of a social group (Appleyard, 1974). We chose three different neighborhoods in Athens because of their common characteristics (centrality, inhabitant's socio - economical status etc.), with Exarchia considered as a "symbolic neighborhood". The central hypothesis was that living in a symbolic neighborhood influences the bond that a resident develop

for his neighborhood. In order to identify the characteristics of this bond, we examined the following concepts: (a) place attachment, (b) sense of territoriality, (c) space identification and (d) aggressiveness, in residents of Exarchia (n = 29) compared with the inhabitants of two other districts of Athens (Pangrati: n = 22; Ghyzi : n = 20). To measure the first three variables, we developed our own questionnaires, while for the fourth, we used the "TAG" a Greek standardized questionnaire (the Test of Aggression; Stalikas & Galanakis, 2005). After validation (external and internal) of our questionnaires through a test / retest procedure, the material was administrated via e-mail with respect to the ethical principle.

Results

The results showed that compared to the residents of the other neighborhoods, the inhabitants of Exarchia were more attached to their neighborhood, identified more with it and less to their city, and perceived it most as their territory. We also found a positive correlation between place attachment and sense of territoriality. Finally, the scores on the dimension Defense of the sense of territoriality were higher in male than female residents of symbolic neighborhood, with revers tendencies for residents of other neighborhoods (higher scores for female).

However, we didn't find any differences in scores of aggressiveness. The lack of differences in aggressiveness is interpreted in an interactive perspective so that aggression is viewed as an instrumental behavior, motivated by situational factors which aim to maintain and defend residents' social identity.

References

Appleyard, D. (1979). The environment as a social symbol: Within a theory of environmental action

and perception. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 45(2), 143-153.

Galanakis, M., & Stalikas, A. (in press). Evaluation of a prototype test of aggressiveness in a greek sample.