

Abstract

Due to increasing urbanisation occasioned by population explosion and the attendant waste management challenges in most developing country-cities, scholars have theorised that residents who exhibit strong place attachment (PA) are likely to embark on pro-environmental behaviour (PEB). This school of thought maintain that their immediate environment is regularly maintained to retain and increase its aesthetic appeal. However, the environmental behavioural patterns of Urora residents – a settlement located on the outskirts of Benin City, Nigeria – contradict this theory. While Urora residents demonstrate strong PA with regular socio-cultural meaning making interactions between them and their habitat, indiscriminate disposal of solid waste both at household and community levels is the normal rather than the exception. In this light, the study applied a combination of direct ethnographic observation methods guided by the principles from (neuro)phenomenology, with focus group discussions among purposefully selected participants to explore the underlying drivers of the apparent co-existence of strong PA with weak PEB. The data were analysed using content analysis/thick description, and phenomenological analysis of the lived-experiences in relation to the indiscriminate solid waste disposal practices. The study finds that residents exhibit strong PA as mediated through rituals such as worship, marriage, burial and community forums, which address issues such as quarrels between neighbours, levies to offset burial expenses, and degraded surroundings. However, these practices do not translate into PEB. Instead, the study finds that, in the absence of municipal waste services such as communal waste collection bins, residents engaged in anti-environmental practices such as open-air burning, *ad hoc* landfills, and indiscriminate waste disposals in open fields, street corners, and secluded nooks and crannies. The study also finds that rituals could be used to bridge the disconnect between PA and PEB. This is because both religious and traditional worship leaders, as key stakeholders, have the unique leverage needed to drive the agenda of ensuring effective solid waste management in Urora. This assertion is premised on the fact that despite having a population of less than 50 000 residents, Urora is host to 36 public worship centres, apart from private and individual altars.

Keywords: Place-attachment, pro-environmental behaviour, solid waste and (neuro)phenomenology