



HUNGARIAN UNIVERSITY OF  
AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES

PLACE IDENTITY AND PLACE  
ATTACHMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION  
STUDENTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON  
SETTLEMENT MARKETING

DOCTORAL (PhD) DISSERTATION THESIS

**Urbánné Treutz Ágnes**  
Gödöllő  
2026

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# 1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE WORK

My commitment to the topic of place marketing emerged during my university studies and has accompanied me throughout my academic journey.

Today, an increasing number of settlements—particularly smaller ones—struggle to retain their population and to attract new residents. Settlements with ageing populations strive to keep their young people local, which becomes a major challenge when young individuals leave for higher education in a larger city. Considerable effort is required to lure them back and encourage them to settle, as fewer opportunities are not necessarily appealing for everyone—especially when we consider that the current generation of higher education students has different lifestyles and needs.

Despite this, in certain cases it is still possible for settlements to win these young people back, provided they are committed to their place of origin, can identify with it, and feel attached to it.

The aim of this dissertation is to examine place identity and place attachment within the framework of place marketing, with a specific focus on understanding the place identity and attachment of higher education students. Place identity and place attachment are becoming increasingly important today, as globalisation, mobility, large-scale migration trends, and the postmodern society all contribute to the changes occurring both within society and within consumption patterns (GUSTAFSON, 2014; HAMIDI et al., 2025; PENG et al., 2020). Related to this is the increasingly discussed issue of alienation (“rootlessness”), when individuals do not feel attached to or identify with their place of residence, and remain indifferent toward local people and local issues.

This also raises the possibility that during their studies, students may develop a form of attachment or identification with their university town which, after graduation, encourages them to remain there. For a settlement to increase or maintain its population, it is essential to understand which factors make residents place-loyal, which aspects they can identify with, and what makes them satisfied “consumers” of the settlement.

My research examines a specific group—students—who are potential future residents standing at the threshold of establishing households and starting families. I explore the factors that play a role in the development of their place identity. Moreover, I analyse students’ dual place identity in relation to the two most significant settlements present in their lives. This represents the novelty of the dissertation.

It is also essential to examine the topic of consumer satisfaction, since an individual will only commit to and settle in a settlement if they are satisfied with it.

The dissertation approaches the topic primarily from the perspectives of place marketing and consumer behaviour. The research problem stems from the fact that existing studies do not synthesise the factors influencing place identity, nor do they examine students' dual place identity from a settlement-based perspective. Investigating dual or multiple place identity is particularly compelling, as several places may be simultaneously present and influential in students' lives, shaping their identification with place.

In my view, it is crucial for a settlement to understand whether there is a younger generation who will eventually replace its current population, as this substantially influences strategic planning. Forward-looking planning must take into account not only the potential target group but also the set of influencing factors that shape their final decisions, as well as their satisfaction. This dissertation approaches the task of retaining or attracting young people through the lens of place identity. My primary goal is to highlight the significant role of place identity in encouraging individuals to remain in a settlement.

In the course of my research, I formulated the following objectives:

C1: To map and present the significance of place identity and place attachment in place marketing, along with relevant theoretical models and influencing factors.

C2: To explore dual and multiple identities—already present in sociological research—and examine how these can be applied in place marketing and place identity research.

C3: Based on the secondary literature, to develop a conceptual model that provides a foundation for conducting the primary research.

C4: To examine higher education students—particularly those living in a different settlement from where they study—in terms of their place identity related to both their hometown and their university town, investigating their dual or multiple place identities.

In my research, I first collect the literature related to the target group, identity, place attachment, and consumer satisfaction. This is followed by the construction of a theoretical model. After conducting student interviews, the model is refined. The next phase consists of a questionnaire-based student survey. Finally, the dissertation concludes by identifying my new and novel scientific results.

The actuality of the subject can be approached from two interrelated perspectives. On the one hand, conscious settlement development and marketing activities are playing an increasingly significant role today. The role and value of settlements—of place—have become more prominent than ever. Current trends show that globalisation leads to standardised products and services, reducing the differences that once stemmed from differentiation. As a result, settlements increasingly strive to emphasise their strengths and unique characteristics in their marketing activities. Identity planning, which builds on the unique values of the settlement, is essential for effective settlement development (KAVARATZIS, 2004). Several authors (TÖRŐCSIK, 1995; PISKÓTI, 2012; TÓZSA, 2014) approach the topic of identity through the lens of Corporate Identity (the visual and conceptual image of the settlement), which encompasses those factors required for a settlement to become “marketable,” that is, capable of attracting individuals’ attention. Moreover, it assists local leaders in recognising the strengths and focal points necessary for creating a well-designed settlement strategy. Identity development—which is strongly connected to image and reputation—can contribute to a more profound understanding of the target audience, as well as to the creation of a positive settlement image.

The second perspective of the topic’s relevance arises from the intensifying migration triggered by globalisation (including permanent or temporary emigration and immigration). Globalisation is spatially uneven, resulting in increasing competition for financial resources and people among city-regions worldwide. Cities concentrate economic and political power, and have traditionally been centres of economic development, decision-making and cultural innovation (MUSTERD – KOVÁCS, 2013). In Hungary, not only these global processes but also domestic factors have deepened the divide between rural areas and cities. Following the political transition, rural areas developed a diminished economic capacity, making it difficult for local residents to find employment; many were forced to commute between their workplace and their home (in villages, the commuting rate was 61% in 2011, and 67% in small villages). This further widened the rural-urban divide, as not only the cost of commuting but the commuting distance also increased (GERSE – SZILÁGYI, 2015; KOVÁCS, 2008). Several studies point to the problem of depopulating villages (BAJMÓCY – MAKRA, 2015; IGNITS – KAPITÁNY, 2007; SZÉKELY, 2006), as well as the growing tendency of people moving to larger cities or their agglomerations (e.g. Budapest, Debrecen, Győr, Pécs) (KSH, 2014a; KSH, 2014b; forbes.hu). As a consequence, the population of large cities and their agglomerations has significantly changed and reorganised in recent years. The emerging processes of suburbanisation affect both large and smaller cities alike (KSH, 2024). The role of rural areas is also important here, as there is fierce competition in the

labour market for retaining the workforce. It is difficult to compete with the wages and job opportunities available in larger cities. Educated young people seeking challenges and opportunities to utilise their knowledge often leave their home villages and relocate to cities—or to their vicinity—in search of more inspiring employment prospects. Demographic data from recent years reinforce this, indicating that domestic migration balances were positive in the capital, and in intermediate and lower-level centres (GERSE – SZILÁGYI, 2015; KSH, 2022). Although in recent years many villages have recorded positive migration balances, it must be taken into account that these gains primarily concern settlements in Pest County and Western Transdanubia. In contrast, the southern and eastern regions of the country continue to be characterised by outmigration (KOÓS, 2025).

The survey conducted by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (KSH) categorised Hungarian settlements into settlement hierarchy levels on the basis of their central functions. Since different academic sources classify settlements according to varying population sizes, in the present case a functional approach is used instead of population size. Based on this: 8 higher-level centres (Győr, Székesfehérvár, Pécs, Kecskemét, Szeged, Miskolc, Nyíregyháza, Debrecen), 29 intermediate-level centres (Mosonmagyaróvár, Sopron, Szombathely, Pápa, Veszprém, Siófok, Zalaegerszeg, Nagykanizsa, Kaposvár, Szekszárd, Baja, Hódmezővásárhely, Békéscsaba, Gyula, Jászberény, Szolnok, Cegléd, Érd, Budaörs, Gödöllő, Vác, Esztergom, Tatabánya, Salgótarján, Gyöngyös, Eger, Ózd, Kazincbarcika), 308 lower-level centres, 1684 villages, and 1124 small villages were identified. The positive migration balance of the intermediate centres may be explained by the fact that these settlements are not yet large cities, yet remain significant in terms of education, industry, and public administration. The positive values shown by the lower-level centres may indicate that people from small villages tend to commute primarily to lower- and intermediate-level centres; thus, these smaller urban settlements function as “escape opportunities” for those wishing to move out of very small villages (GERSE – SZILÁGYI, 2015).

## 2 MATERIAL AND METHOD

In my dissertation, I conducted both secondary and primary research. Through secondary research, I mapped the body of literature related to place identity — including the concept of multiple place identity — as well as place attachment and consumer satisfaction, examined from the perspective of place marketing. I presented the target group of the study and its characteristics. I systematised the collected models related to place identity and consumer satisfaction and organised them into tables.

## 2.1 Qualitative research

In my primary research, I applied both qualitative and quantitative methods. As part of the qualitative phase, I conducted individual in-depth interviews with members of Generation Z who are pursuing their studies in bachelor's or undivided degree programmes at Hungarian universities. The individual in-depth interview is an exploratory, small-sample, non-representative research method in which the conversation is conducted with a single participant. Its purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of the individual's attitudes, views, feelings, and motivations (MALHOTRA, 2009). A total of 20 participants were interviewed, preceded by three pilot interviews. The data collection period lasted from 31 October 2022 to 27 February 2023.

## 2.2 Quantitative research

In my quantitative research, I conducted an electronic survey using a standardised questionnaire. A pilot test was carried out between 31 December 2024 and 19 March 2025, during which 20 individuals were surveyed. The data collection took place online between 5 May 2025 and 30 September 2025, yielding a total of 675 responses, from which—after data cleaning—a final sample of 477 cases was included in the analysis. The sampling method applied was convenience sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique (MALHOTRA, 2009).

The following hypotheses were formulated, linked to research objective C4:

H1: Students are less satisfied on average with their place of residence than with the university town where they study.

H2: There is a relationship between being native to their place of residence and students' identification with that place.

H3: First-year students have a stronger place identity related to their hometown than second- or third-year students.

H4: Second- and third-year students have a stronger place identity towards the university town than first-year students.

H5: Students who study and live in different town have a dual place identity linked to their place of residence and the university town.

H6: Among the groups formed based on dual place identity, there is a segment for whom social cohesion and community have significant importance.

## 3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Results from Secondary Research: A Combined Model for Examining Place Identity, Including the Study of Dual Identity

After structuring the elements of place identity models, a combined theoretical model for examining place identity can be outlined, in which the factors presented in the literature review are arranged within a systems-oriented framework. The basis of the model is the process through which place identity is formed, into which the emergence of multiple identities is also embedded. The model was prompted by the examination of factors appearing in various earlier place identity and consumer satisfaction models, as well as by the shortcomings of those models. Place identity models naturally include the factors influencing place identity, while consumer satisfaction models used in place marketing also contain elements that may influence the process of identification and the outcomes that, as a result of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, may trigger action on the part of the individual. During my secondary research, I confirmed that consumer satisfaction is indispensable in the process of place identity formation.

The model I outline is a combined model, as it represents and supplements numerous factors that appeared in earlier models. The starting point of the combined model is that there are external and internal influencing factors (individual and settlement-related identity elements) that create and shape the identity components through which the individual can identify with a given place. These identity elements may develop in relation to multiple settlements. Since the present research also examines dual place identity, the model displays identity elements related to one place and to the other. In the process through which these identity elements develop for either place, two possibilities arise. One possibility is that the identity elements are lost entirely or partially merge. This is the process of assimilation, which has already been discussed by TAJFEL (1981) and TÓTH (2004). The other possibility is that the identity elements remain intact, which may lead to identification. If the individual identifies with only one of the places, exclusive identification occurs. If the individual identifies with both places, dual place identity emerges.

At this stage, the typology of settlement perceptions that I have outlined can be examined in the context of dual place identity. This may also help assess whether the identity in question is balanced or conflictual. Following this, the issue of satisfaction appears in the process—namely, whether the individual is

satisfied or dissatisfied with the given places, and what actions this results in. Satisfaction may lead to staying in or moving to the settlement, while dissatisfaction may result in leaving it. As a consequence of satisfaction, attachment to the settlement also emerges, which may lead to becoming a local patriot. Although some literature presents place attachment as a consequence of satisfaction (INSCH – FLOREK, 2008), other sources argue that satisfaction develops as a consequence of attachment (SPEARE, 1974). In the present study, I regard satisfaction as the result of place attachment. Since the literature is not unified regarding whether place identity leads to place attachment or vice versa, in this model the final decision is that the two factors jointly and simultaneously produce consumer satisfaction, while continuously influencing one another. (Figure 1)

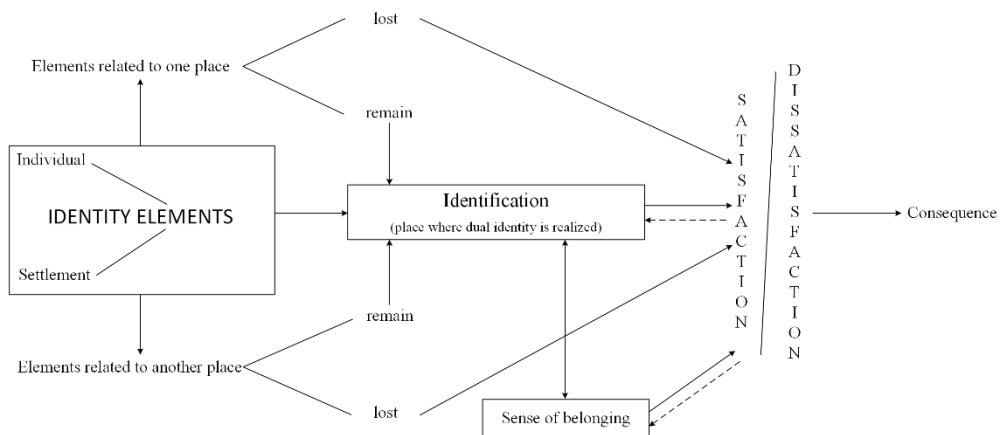


Figure 1: The Combined Model for Examining Place Identity, Including the Study of Dual Place Identity  
Source: Own figure, 2025

It is important to elaborate on the individual elements of the influencing factors included in the model. Using the classification principle presented in the section “Structuring the Elements of the Main Models Related to Place Identity” of the literature review, I expand the categorisation of individual and settlement-related identity elements. While the earlier section examined only place identity models, in the present case I also take into account the elements of consumer satisfaction models used in place marketing.

The external influencing factors (settlement-related identity elements), which originate outside the individual, can in this case be associated with a given settlement. Applying the grouping structure presented in Section 2.6.1., the settlement identity–influencing factors can be summarised and categorised as follows:

- social and cultural environmental factors — people (local residents), history, cultural opportunities, traditions, arts, plots, symbols, values, fashion, image, general atmosphere, different cultures, the settlement's openness, the settlement's tolerance
- technological environmental factors — technological background required for the built environment, infocommunication, technological infrastructure, equipment related to the city
- physical environmental factors — natural environment, built environment
- economic environmental factors — job opportunities, financial resources and burdens, infrastructure, quality of life, economic image, competing settlements, costs, shopping opportunities, provided services, marketing
- political environmental factors — financial resources and burdens, the city's external appearance, architecture, crime

All of the listed factors were addressed in the reviewed literature and the examined models.

It is important to address certain factors that may require further explanation or whose significance should be emphasised. The memories mentioned within the social and cultural environment (TAYLOR, 2008; GOUSSOUS – AL-HAMMADI, 2018) and the customs (MARZANO, 2015) refer to the recollections and practices of residents who live or once lived in the settlement—memories and habits that have not been forgotten, have remained present, continue to exert influence today, and may even be actively maintained within the community. I consider it essential to highlight the factor of cohesion (UZZELL et al., 2002; YANG et al., 2013; QIAN – ZHU, 2014), as it has rarely been examined in depth, yet the literature review has shown that its influence on place identity is indispensable. Cohesion is a driving force of social functioning; when it operates effectively, it can support the development and strengthening of commitment to a place.

The psychological factors (CSEPELI, 1992; WEDER, 1998; PISKÓTI, 2012; KERMANI et al., 2016; MARIEN, 2016) refer, from a settlement perspective, to the residents of the settlement rather than to a specific individual—that is, how individuals perceive, for example, a municipal decision, how they feel about it, and how they respond to it. Alienation (YANG et al., 2013) may be a crucial issue in the examination of place identity. Its relevance is increasing in a world where young people are leaving their hometowns in growing numbers, moving to other settlements in search of a better life or livelihood. It may be connected to place attachment, as the presence of alienation can initiate a process of emotional distancing from the settlement and the weakening of ties associated with it.

Fashion (PATAKI, 1986) can also be linked here as a factor. Its mention is noteworthy, as it has received relatively little emphasis in previous analyses. Nevertheless, a current fashion trend may shape young people's behaviour, needs, attitudes toward a given settlement, and even their future decisions about relocation.

Furthermore, I emphasise that settlement communication (RELPH, 1979; TAYLOR, 2008; ZENKER – PETERSEN, 2010; PISKÓTI, 2012) includes both internal communication directed at residents and external communication aimed at various outside target groups. I found it important to highlight internal PR, as it reflects the identity awareness of locals and the ways in which they identify with their settlement (URBÁNNÉ TREUTZ, 2018c).

Regarding the technological environment, technological infrastructure is becoming increasingly important, as many settlements strive to implement “smart” solutions in practice, for which the provision of an adequate technological background is indispensable.

Examining the physical environment raises the question of the importance of green areas (DEMIR, 2016) in the process of identifying with a place. The current trend of large numbers of people moving from big cities to suburban settlements (novekedes.hu) prompts the question of how significant a role green space and the natural environment play in this process. Sustainability (UZZELL et al., 2002; KROGER, 2016) may be a defining factor in the life of a 21st-century settlement that aims to remain viable in the long term and retain the younger generation locally. Sustainability encompasses both environmental and social processes. These two cannot be examined separately from the perspective of sustainability, since, as previously noted, the environment is an essential part of social processes.

As numerous scholarly sources demonstrate, built elements and the external appearance of the settlement (EBERLE GRAMBERG – GRAMBERG, 2004; KAVARATZIS, 2004; ZENKER – PETERSEN, 2010; MARZANO, 2015; KERR – OLIVER, 2015; DEMIR, 2016; KERMANI et al., 2016) can exert a significant impact on the individual. Even when viewed through the eyes of a tourist, it is the prominent buildings and public spaces that are most readily associated with a settlement. Their orderliness and cleanliness create the first impression, which can strongly influence the overall perception of the place. For locals, these buildings and spaces are part of everyday life and may be linked to more meaningful personal experiences. In this otherwise intangible topic of place identity, they may appear as tangible elements.

It is also important to mention safety (UZZELL et al., 2002; DEMIR, 2016), which is gaining increasing significance today. An individual cannot identify with a place they do not perceive as safe and will seek to leave it as soon as possible.

Within the economic environment, I highlight the factor of quality of life (EBERLE GRAMBERG – GRAMBERG, 2004), which essentially reflects the presence and level of economic factors such as earning opportunities, financial resources, infrastructure, shopping possibilities, provided services, and costs. Within the political environment, the factor of financial resources and burdens (EBERLE GRAMBERG – GRAMBERG, 2004) refers to municipal subsidies and local taxes. The external appearance of the city and its architecture (EBERLE GRAMBERG – GRAMBERG, 2004; KAVARATZIS, 2004; ZENKER – PETERSEN, 2010; MARZANO, 2015; KERR – OLIVER, 2015; DEMIR, 2016; KERMANI et al., 2016) can also be highlighted in this group, as various regulations and legal provisions (Act LXXIV of 2016) (NET.JOGTAR.HU) ensure the protection of the settlement image and prescribe its appropriate development.

The internal (individual identity element) influencing factors originate from the individual. The list of factors included in the model follows the categorisation of VÁGÁSI (2007), which briefly contains the following:

- personal socio-cultural characteristics — values, memories, household characteristics, characteristics of the dwelling unit, services available within the dwelling unit, relationship with neighbours, social characteristics of the neighbourhood, community networks in the environment, university-related background, city-related offers
- personal socio-psychological characteristics — opinions of parents, friends, opinion leaders
- personal characteristics — demographic characteristics, geographic characteristics
- psychological characteristics — attitude towards settlements, attachment to family, attachment to friends, individual interests, experiences, activity related to the place, individual happiness, individual comfort, attractive lifestyle, sense of community, commitment, quality of life, loyalty to the university town

I consider it essential to highlight the role of values (EBERLE GRAMBERG – GRAMBERG, 2004; MARIEN, 2016; GOUSSOUS – AL-HAMMADI, 2018) within personal socio-cultural characteristics, as values mean different things to different individuals. Several scholarly sources emphasise the importance of values, which may be both intangible (GOUSSOUS – AL-HAMMADI, 2018) and physical. Intangible values may include cultural and subcultural elements present in the settlement, traditions, and historically significant factors that carry meaning for the individual, as well as a special bond formed toward something or someone. Physical values represent

materialised forms, which for the individual may include a building, a public space, a statue, or any object associated with the settlement.

The university-related background (HELGESEN et al., 2013) expresses the individual's satisfaction with social activities at the university. City-related offers (HELGESEN et al., 2013) reflect the individual's satisfaction with the services available in the university town. It is worth noting that, alongside subjective factors, objective factors also appear within the group of personal socio-cultural characteristics, such as the characteristics of the dwelling unit and the services available within it (ADEWALE et al., 2018).

Within the group of personal socio-psychological characteristics, the role of opinion leaders appears based on VÁGÁSI (2007). They may have a significant influence on how local residents relate to their settlement, to the people living there, and to the processes taking place locally. Based on my exploratory research conducted in the United States (URBÁNNÉ TREUTZ, 2019d), and in line with the previously mentioned gap identified in VÁGÁSI's (2007) categorisation, I consider it necessary to emphasise the opinions of parents and friends. As members of the individual's immediate environment, they can continuously shape their attachment to the place and their identification with it.

Within personal characteristics, the group of geographical characteristics includes the factor of the "best" place (GOUSSOUS, 2018), referring to whether the individual has a most preferred location within the settlement. Preference indicates whether the examined person likes another place more than their own settlement. Length of residence (ADEWALE et al., 2018) expresses how long the individual has lived in the given settlement. University-related background (HELGESEN et al., 2013) refers to consumer satisfaction with the location of the university.

Within the group of psychological characteristics, the factor of special bonds (GOUSSOUS, 2018) refers to whether the individual has a personal, unique attachment to the settlement or to something/someone within it. In the case of attachment, cognitive, affective, and conative components may be examined, appearing both in relation to family and friends. The factor of attractive lifestyle (CUBA – HUMMON, 1993) also appears among psychological characteristics. Whether a rural lifestyle or a bustling urban environment is attractive depends on the individual's disposition and psychological processes. It is essential to highlight the factor of quality of life (EBERLE GRAMBERG – GRAMBERG, 2004; INSCH – FLOREK, 2008), as the extent to which the perceived and expected quality of life differ for the examined individual (INSCH – FLOREK, 2008) influences numerous factors and ultimately affects whether they remain in the settlement or leave it.

Overall, the developed model is illustrated in Figure 2, with boxes representing the incorporated individual and settlement identity-influencing factors.

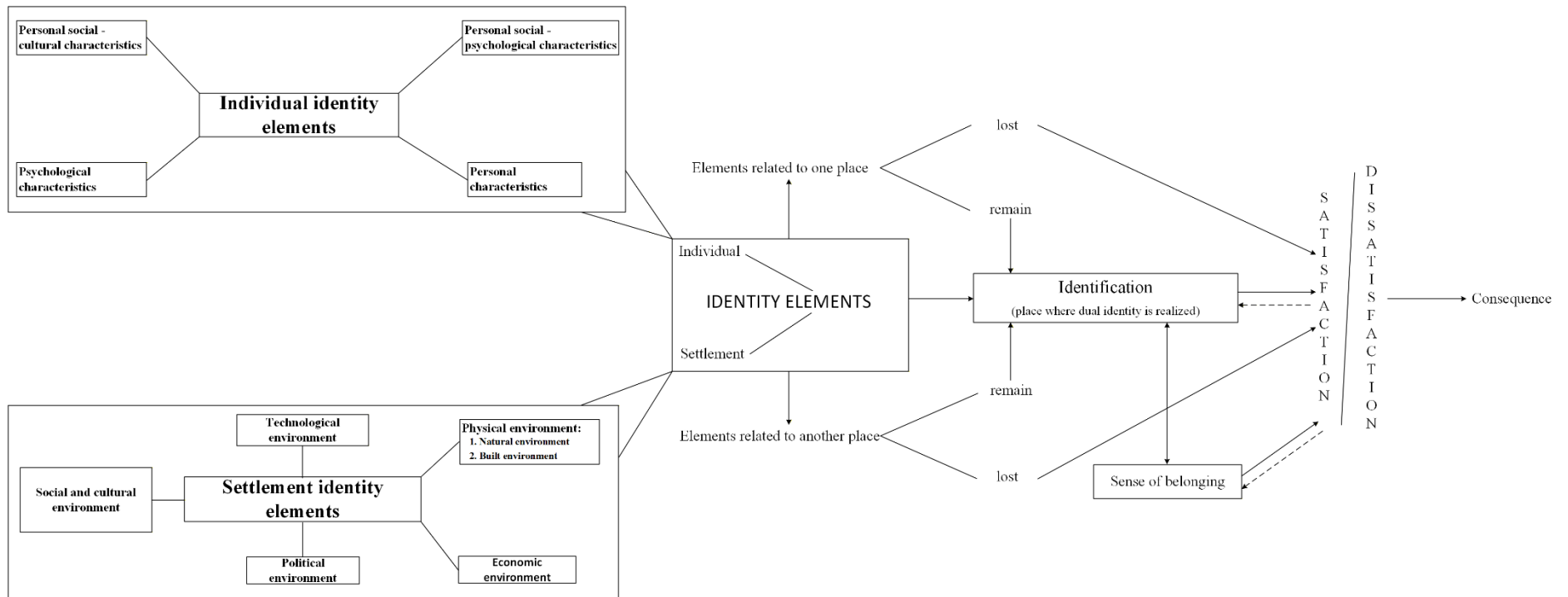


Figure 2: The Combined Model for the Examination of Place Identity, including Dual Place Identity  
Source: Own figure, 2025

### 3.2 Results of the Qualitative Research

Overall, the most important factors in place attachment are the bonds with family and friends, alongside the influential role of local residents and their communities. Memories associated with the settlement, physical elements (house, streets), and natural environmental features also appear frequently. When compared with the factors influencing place identity, several overlaps can be identified. Based on this, home, family, social cohesion, the physical environment, and the natural environment emerged as shared influencing factors, reinforcing the elements outlined in the model.

In some cases, the interviews contradicted the findings of YANG et al. (2013), who argued that first-year students identify more strongly and feel more attached to their hometown than to their university town. Furthermore, even in higher years, some students still show strong attachment to their hometown. At the same time, a counterexample also appeared: a student who, compared to earlier university years, felt more attached to the university town in later years. Based on these findings, no clear relationship can be established between place of residence and place attachment or place identity, making it worthwhile to examine this further using quantitative research methods to determine whether a measurable connection exists.

The present qualitative research suggests that two types of first-year students can be distinguished: those who cling to their hometown, which continues to provide them with a sense of security; and those who seek to escape from their current place of residence to a settlement that offers a more appealing or higher standard of living. According to the interviews, students in agricultural programmes tend to seek closeness to nature and prefer the presence of natural elements even within the built environment.

Two factors emerged from the interviews that may expand the developed model: the sense of home and the proximity of family. The latter may also imply the proximity of friends. These two factors belong to the group of individual identity elements, specifically personal socio-psychological characteristics, while the sense of home fits into the group of psychological characteristics. It is important to distinguish the sense of home from the concept of home itself: while home is a permanent place for the individual, the sense of home may develop toward several places even without a long-term relationship. This distinction allows the final model to be refined.

The factor of settlement knowledge did not appear in any model; however, questions related to the settlement's history may cover this area, so it does not need to be emphasised separately.

### 3.3 Results of the Quantitative Research

#### 3.3.1 Examination of Place of Residence

Students generally like living in their place of residence (mean = 4.56; relative standard deviation = 28.09%). Supporting this, and indicating an even stronger level of commitment to the settlement, respondents reported being on average proud of their settlement (mean = 4.8; relative standard deviation = 38.68%). Based on these results, a relationship can be assumed between liking one's place of residence and feeling pride in the settlement. This was confirmed through cross-tabulation analysis, which showed a relationship between the two factors ( $p < 0.001$ ), with a moderately strong intensity (Phi, Cramer's  $V = 0.481$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.433). Both identity elements were highlighted by BUGOVICS (2004a), although the relationship between them was not emphasised. Several sources (BUGOVICS, 2004a; GRAJCZJÁR, 2013; WEDER, 1998) also identify pride as an important element of place identity.

The fact that students like living in their place of residence does not mean that they would not move away. A total of 69.4% of respondents would move away from their current place of residence. This is not surprising given how mobile the examined generation is and how easily they adapt to change. It is worth examining the timeframe in which those who like living in their settlement but would still move away plan to do so, as they represent the group that can still be persuaded to stay. Those who do not like their settlement are unlikely to be convinced to settle there long-term. Of the total sample, 79.87% like living in their place of residence, and 63.25% of them would move away for some period of time.

Most respondents would move away for a few years (44.40%), which may be explained by the fact that 80% of these respondents would still live in their current place of residence. This can be a positive message for settlement leaders, as it indicates a certain willingness to commit to the settlement. Regarding the distance of relocation, 41% of respondents would move within a 90 km radius, while another 41% would move more than 200 km away. This is likely due to young people's desire to gain experience elsewhere, even abroad.

A moderately strong relationship can be identified between liking one's place of residence and willingness to move away ( $p < 0.001$ ; Phi, Cramer's  $V = 0.363$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.341). This suggests that if a settlement can make itself likeable, the likelihood of individuals staying may increase. Even among those who like living in their settlement but would still move away, 42% would do so within the country, 41% within the region, and none of the respondents would move abroad.

### 3.3.2 Examination of University Towns

To characterise the university towns, I applied an image profile analysis, including only those cities from which the proportion of respondents reached at least 5% of the sample size. Based on this criterion, six cities were included in the analysis: Budapest (43.3%), Debrecen (5%), Gödöllő (22.9%), Pécs (5.2%), Sopron (6.7%), and Szeged (5%). It can be stated that there are no extreme values, and the evaluations of the cities largely move together, with mean values ranging between 3.5 and 5.3 on a 1–6 scale. This indicates that students generally hold a relatively positive opinion of the city in which their university is located.

Overall, based on student opinions, Sopron, Gödöllő, and Pécs can be classified as calmer, quieter university towns, while the larger cities—Budapest, Debrecen, and Szeged—belong to the more vibrant, bustling, lively, and noisy university towns. All cities are considered beautiful, liveable, and developing by the students (Figure 3).

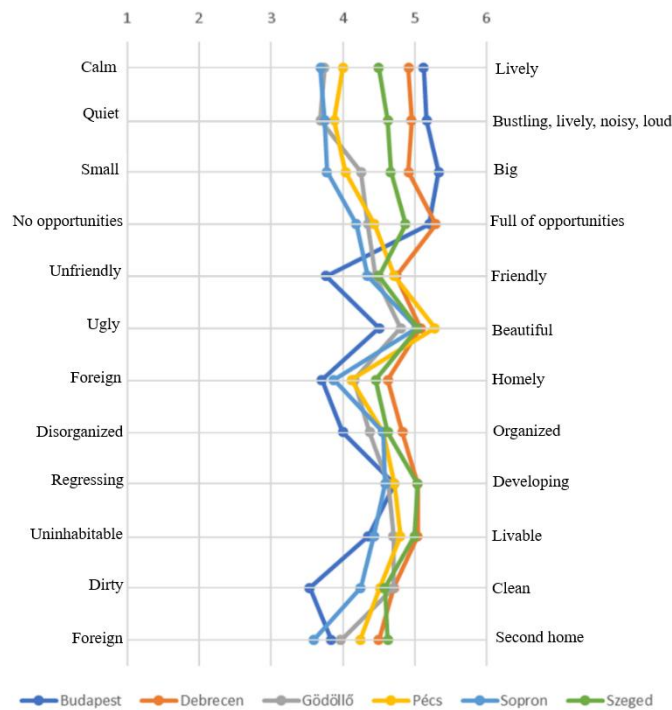


Figure 3: Image Profile Analysis of University Towns  
Source: Own figure, 2025

The positive results regarding the cities align with the fact that, overall, 61% of respondents would be happy to settle in the town where their higher

education institution is located. Examining this in more detail shows that the strongest willingness to settle appears in the case of Debrecen (91.7%), followed by Szeged (78.3%). Budapest (61.2%) ranks lower, presumably due to its perceived unfriendly, impersonal, and dirty characteristics, and the likelihood of settling there is only 30.6%. In Sopron (59.4%) and Gödöllő (52.3%), slightly more than half of the students would move there in the future, while interestingly, Pécs is the only city where the majority of students would not settle (52%).

Overall, for each city, most respondents see less than a 50% chance of settling there in the future. At the same time, it is noteworthy that, with the exception of Sopron (21.9%) and Szeged (21.7%), the proportion of complete rejection does not exceed 15%.

When examining students' satisfaction with their university town, it can be stated that they are on average rather satisfied (mean = 4.32) with the location of their studies, calculated as the average of all evaluated aspects. Comparing this with the overall average for their place of residence (mean = 4.09), it is evident that the latter is rated slightly lower, although the difference is not large in either the mean or the relative standard deviation (place of residence: 34.42% – university town: 31.69%). The lower overall average for the place of residence is a less reliable value than the overall average for the university town. The more positive evaluation of the university town may be due to the greater number of opportunities and more accessible services available there. Based on these results, I accept **H1: Students are less satisfied on average with their place of residence than with the university town where they study**. This may also be explained by the fact that students perceive fewer opportunities in their place of residence (possibly due to lower activity levels in quieter settlements), even though such opportunities may exist but are not consciously recognised.

### 3.3.3 Place Identity

#### 3.3.3.1 Place Identity Related to the Place of Residence

Students on average tend to identify with their place of residence (mean = 4.04; SD = 1.32). Examining the distribution in more detail, respondents mostly tend to identify (29.6%) or do identify (24.5%) with their settlement. On average, respondents agree that they feel like residents of the settlement they come from (mean = 4.43; SD = 1.35). This reflects the concept of natural identity defined by CSEPELI (1992). From the perspective of place identity, the question arises as to how individuals distinguish themselves from people originating from other settlements or regions. Most respondents differentiate themselves based on mindset and way of thinking (53.25%), while a considerable proportion also distinguishes themselves based on traditions (31.87%).

A moderately strong relationship can be identified between students' satisfaction with their current place of residence and the degree to which they identify with it ( $p < 0.001$ ; Phi, Cramer's  $V = 0.547$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.480). This supports the findings of the literature, which emphasise the importance and influence of satisfaction on place identity (KROGER, 2016; LEE et al., 2012; MARIEN, 2016; UZZELL et al., 2002; ZENKER – PETERSEN, 2010). Those who are satisfied with their place of residence are more likely to identify with it. The examination related to place of origin is less subjective. It can be stated that originating from the same region shows only a weak relationship with identification with the place of residence ( $p = 0.039$ ; Phi, Cramer's  $V = 0.176$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.173). Geographical location can influence many aspects of a settlement's life. Objective factors (e.g., infrastructure, built environment) have a significant impact on subjective factors (e.g., satisfaction, place identity). As with the settlement's legal status, the development level of the region and its distance from economic centres also play a major role.

In examining place of origin, the question arises whether the respondent has lived in the region since birth, how long they have lived there, and how much experience they have with the place. This leads to the question of whether there is a relationship between the degree of identification with the place of residence and whether someone has lived in the area since birth (i.e., being a long-term native). The issue of long-term nativeness was examined using two questions: "How many years have you lived at your current place of residence?" (Q13) and "What is your age?" (Q53). If the respondent's age equals the number of years they have lived at their residence, they are considered native. Accordingly, 216 respondents in the sample are natives. Cross-tabulation analysis shows no relationship ( $p = 0.941$ ) between nativeness and the degree of identification with the place. Therefore, **H2: There is a relationship between being native to their place of residence and students' identification with that place** is rejected. This may be due to the fact that satisfaction with a place—and thus identification with it—can develop both in those who have lived there for many years and in those who have recently moved there. Being native does not necessarily imply commitment to the settlement or agreement with local processes.

Based on YANG et al. (2013), the question arose whether first-year students identify more strongly with their place of residence than students in higher years. First, I examined which year group shows the highest average level of identification with their place of residence. Students in years above the fifth (fifth, sixth, and higher) were merged into one group. The highest averages

were found among second- and third-year students, while the lowest averages appeared among students in years above the fifth (Table 1).

Table 1: Average Degree of Identification with Place of Residence by Year of Study

	Identification with place of residence (average)	Identification with place of residence (standard deviation)	Identification with place of residence (relative standard deviation)
First grade (n=75)	4,01	1,52	37,88
Second grade (n=199)	4,06	1,32	32,43
Third grade (n=133)	4,06	1,31	32,34
Fourth grade (n=39)	4,05	1,10	27,13
Fifth/sixth/ above sixth grade (n=31)	3,87	1,20	31,10

Source: Own research, 2025

Examining whether there is a relationship between first-year students and students in higher years regarding identification with their place of residence, the Mann–Whitney U test did not show a significant difference in any comparison. Although the literature suggests that first-year students tend to have a stronger place identity related to their place of residence than second- or third-year students, the present study found no significant difference between first- and second-year students ( $U = 7413$ ;  $p = 0.931$ ), nor between first- and third-year students ( $U = 4949.5$ ;  $p = 0.926$ ). While the mean rank of second-year students (Mean Rank = 137.75) was slightly higher than that of first-year students (Mean Rank = 136.84), and the mean rank of third-year students (Mean Rank = 104.79) was slightly higher than that of first-year students (Mean Rank = 103.99), these differences were not statistically significant. Even when calculating exact p-values for smaller groups, no meaningful differences emerged. (M4.64.)

Based on these analyses, it can be stated that students in higher years do not have a stronger place identity related to their place of residence than first-year students. This may indicate that university studies do not influence identification with one’s place of residence, and that the degree of identification remains relatively stable throughout the study period. This stability may be explained by the fact that place attachment remains present to a similar extent throughout the students’ university years.

Since no relationship could be demonstrated, **H3: First-year students have a stronger place identity related to their hometown than second- or third-year students** is rejected.

Place attachment may help explain these findings, as a moderately strong relationship can be identified between identification with the place of residence and the degree of attachment to it. This holds both for nominal variables using

the Chi-square test ( $p < 0.001$ ; Phi, Cramer's  $V = 0.601$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.515) and for interval-scale variables using Spearman's rank correlation, which also shows a moderately strong relationship ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $r_s = 0.660$ ). This is an important result, as it supports the presence of place attachment in the model and its connection to the process of place identification.

As seen earlier, satisfaction with the place of residence also showed a moderately strong relationship with place identity. Therefore, the three main themes examined in this study—place identity, place attachment, and satisfaction with the place—are interconnected.

### 3.3.3.2 Place Identity Related to the University Town

Students on average tend to identify with their university town (mean = 4.15; SD = 1.30). This value is higher than the degree of identification with their place of residence (mean = 4.04). A total of 27.8% do not identify, while 72.2% do identify with the settlement where they study. Respondents on average do not feel like residents of the town where their university is located (mean = 3.58; SD = 1.49). This lower average compared to their place of residence (mean = 4.43) is understandable, as students do not live in their university town as permanent residents. A deeper and more permanent connection with the settlement and its inhabitants would be required for someone to describe themselves as “being from” that town.

The distinction between the two questions is evident: calling oneself a resident of a town represents a higher level of attachment than simply identifying with it. The data support this, as more students can identify with their university town (72.12%) than those who consider themselves residents of it (54.93%). Looking more closely, a slightly higher proportion feel like residents of their university town (54.93%) than those who do not (45.07%), yet this still represents only half of the total sample.

A more detailed examination shows that the largest number of respondents identify with Budapest (140 students; 29.35%), which is unsurprising given the high proportion of students studying in the capital. Of these 140 students, 116 (83%) consider themselves “Budapest residents,” which is a notably high value. Among the cities with larger sample sizes, Debrecen, Szeged, and Pécs stand out even more strongly. In Debrecen, 92% of respondents identify with the city and 71% consider themselves “from Debrecen.” In Szeged, 91% identify with the town and 65% consider themselves “Szeged residents.” In Pécs, 80% identify with the county seat and 72% consider themselves “from Pécs.”

These findings align with the results of the image profile analysis, which showed that students are satisfied with many characteristics of these cities.

This satisfaction may contribute to their sense of well-being and increasingly shape their sense of belonging.

Gödöllő és Sopron esete különösen érdekes. In Gödöllő, while 72% of students identify with the place, only about half 53% consider themselves residents of the town, while 46.8% do not. In Sopron, the contrast is even more striking: although 66% identify with the city, 71.9% do not consider themselves “from Sopron.” This likely reflects the earlier point that calling oneself a resident of a settlement requires a deeper and more permanent connection with the town and its community, which students typically do not develop during their studies.

Examining the results by year of study shows that first-, second-, and third-year students on average tend to identify with their university town, whereas students in higher years do not. Overall, the average values for identification with the place show similar patterns across both types of settlements. (Table 2)

Table 2: Average Degree of Identification with the University Town

	Identification with university town (average)	Identification with university town (standard deviation)	Identification with university town (relative standard deviation)
First grade (n=75)	4,13	1,30	31,40
Second grade (n=199)	4,15	1,31	31,55
Third grade (n=133)	4,32	1,21	28,00
Fourth grade (n=39)	3,97	1,29	32,39
Fifth/sixth/ above sixth grade (n=31)	3,74	1,59	42,52

Source: Own research, 2025

The differences between the averages were so small that I examined whether there is a relationship between first-year students and students in higher years regarding identification with their university town. A Mann–Whitney U test was applied, which did not show a significant difference in any comparison (first- and second-year students:  $U = 7359.5$ ;  $p = 0.857$ ; first- and third-year students:  $U = 4571.5$ ;  $p = 0.304$ ). Based on these analyses, it can be stated that students in higher years do not have a stronger place identity related to their university town than first-year students, which does not support the findings from the interviews. This may indicate that the amount of time a student has spent in the university town, or how well they know it, does not necessarily influence their identification with it.

Therefore, **H4: Second- and third-year students have a stronger place identity towards the university town than first-year students** is rejected.

### 3.3.4 Multiple Place Identity

#### 3.3.4.1 Examination of Dual Place Identity

The students in the sample can be classified into identity categories for two settlements based on MARKS (1999), following the approach used in the interview analysis. In this case, 241 students fall into the category of dual place identity (in Marks's terminology: multiple identity), meaning they identify with both their place of residence and their university town (I/I). A total of 188 students have exclusive place identity (I/N or N/I), meaning they identify either only with their place of residence or only with their university town. Forty-eight students fall into the non-attachment category (N/N), meaning they do not identify with either settlement. (Table 3)

In the interview phase, the category "partially identify" appeared as an optional response, but this does not arise in the quantitative research, as respondents were required to give a definitive answer on a paired interval scale.

Table 3: Classification of Students into Identity Categories for Two Settlements According to MARKS's (1999) Territorial Identity Types (I = yes, identifies; N = does not identify)

Place Identity Types According to Marks (1999)	Person	Responses
multiple place identity	241	I/I
exclusive place identity	188	I/N; N/I
non-attachment	48	N/N

Source: Own research, 2025 (n = 477)

Based on the classification of BINDORFFER (2001), 241 students have a balanced place identity, meaning that their residential identity and their university-town identity coexist without conflict, and they are able to identify with both places. A total of 188 students have a conflictual place identity, where the elements of identity contradict one another, and the respondent identifies either with their place of residence or with the university town, but not with both. Of these 188 students, 85 identify with their place of residence but not with the university town, meaning that the majority of those with a conflictual identity tend to identify more strongly with the university town than with their place of residence.

Lost place identity applies to 103 students, who do not identify with their place of residence but do identify with the university town. According to BINDORFFER (2001), this may be explained by factors such as lack of job opportunities (as an element of economic survival), the pressure to start a

family (as a driver of mobility), the pursuit of higher income (as a form of status change), or the desire to move away and seek more opportunities (e.g., institutional infrastructure), which provide easier access to resources. (Table 4)

Table 4: Classification of Students into Identity Categories for Two Settlements Based on BINDORFFER’s (2001) Identity Types (I = yes, identifies; N = does not identify)

Place Identity Types According to Bindorffer (2001)	Person	Explanation (residential identity / university-town identity)
balanced place identity	241	I/I
conflictual place identity	188	I/N; N/I
lost place identity	103	N/I
rediscovered place identity	0	
regained place identity	0	

Source: Own research, 2025 (n = 477)

As the results show, half of the surveyed students (50.5%) have a balanced place identity with regard to both their place of residence and their university town, meaning they are able to identify with both settlements. Based on these findings, **H5: Students who study and live in different town have a dual place identity linked to their place of residence and the university town is accepted.**

I examine which individual and settlement-level identity elements influencing place identity are the dominant factors in the case of dual place identity. In this analysis, only students with dual place identity are included (n = 241). To do so, I apply principal component analysis, through which groups are formed by reducing the number of variables derived from the influencing identity elements, and the component with the greater weight determines group dominance (SAJTOS – MITEV, 2007).

When examining the principal components of the place of residence and the university town, it becomes apparent that the settlement-level identity elements often cluster into similar groups, although subtle differences can still be observed (Figure 45). The analysis shows that services/infrastructure, the environment, community, safety, income/cost of living, and activity are consistently present and play a role in defining the groups. When looking at the individual identity elements, both settlements display principal components with identical labels, indicating that the same factors were grouped together in both cases: influence of the immediate environment, heritage and built environment, settlement intentions, attachments, activity,

and religion. These factors support and complement the key determinants of place identity and place attachment identified in the interviews.

Following this, I conduct a cluster analysis using the principal components previously developed, with the primary aim of creating homogeneous groups that can characterize the students with respect to dual place identity. In this analysis, the 32 principal components generated earlier are included: 16 principal components related to the place of residence and 16 related to the university town. As a result of the cluster analysis, the following five clusters can be identified, each describing different patterns of dual place identity among the students:

### **1. Passives**

They have lived in the settlement for a long time and would not move away even for a higher income. A total of 90.2% are satisfied with their place of residence. The majority are religious (54.9%), and local tensions are present in their settlement. At the same time, they do not value the characteristics or environment of their place of residence, nor the infrastructure or community life of the university town. They are not particularly motivated regarding local development or community activity. Most of them are not native locals (58.8%).

This cluster consists of 51 students, 64.7% of whom are male. 25.5% are 23 years old. Nearly half (49%) live in a town smaller than a county-ranked city, while 21.6% live in the capital, and the majority (51%) live with their parents. The largest proportion in this cluster do not work alongside their studies (49%). Almost half (45.1%) study in Budapest at various universities, mostly in the field of economics (49%). This cluster also contains the highest proportion of students belonging to a different nationality (25.5%).

A large majority are satisfied with their place of residence (90.2%) and feel attached to it (87.2%). Their attachment to the university town is somewhat lower (70.6%).

### **2. Local patriots**

The settlement has become part of their identity, and they possess a strong place identity toward their place of residence. They evaluate their settlement positively (clean, developing, welcoming), where community cohesion is strong and local tensions are absent. A significant proportion are native locals (57.4%). Social relationships are highly valued in the university town as well.

This cluster consists of 47 students, 68.1% of whom are female. 29.8% are 20 years old. A total of 74.5% live with their parents, yet this cluster has the highest proportion of married or cohabiting students (21.3%), even though none of them are older than 24. A total of 97.9% do not belong to another

nationality, and 51.1% are religious. They mainly study in Budapest (44.7%), predominantly in the field of economics (72.3%).

A significant majority are satisfied with their place of residence (95.7%), feel attached to it (87.2%), and also feel attached to their university town (74.5%).

### **3. Urbanites**

They evaluate the university town positively due to the services and opportunities it offers (range of programs, attractions, job opportunities). Members of this cluster do not commute; they live in the university town. They feel attached both to the town (80.4%) and to university life, and they actively participate in the life of the city.

The cluster consists of 56 students, 64.3% of whom are female, and 69.7% are 20–21 years old. This cluster contains the highest proportion of students originating from villages (30.4%). A total of 62.5% are not native locals. Most live with their parents (83.9%), yet 57.2% work alongside their studies. They perform intellectual and physical work in similar proportions (28.6%–28.6%). The vast majority do not identify with any nationality other than Hungarian (96.4%). Most are non-religious (75%).

They typically study at the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (32.1%), the University of Sopron (16.1%), and the Budapest Business University (10.7%), mainly in economics (46.4%), medical and health sciences (12.5%), agricultural sciences (8.9%), and engineering (8.9%). They predominantly attend university in Budapest (32.1%), Gödöllő (15%), and Sopron (16.1%), with smaller proportions studying in Debrecen, Pécs, and Szeged.

Most are satisfied with their current place of residence (89.3%) and feel attached to it (85.7%). Their attachment to the place of study is also strong (80.4%).

### **4. Actives**

These students possess a strong dual identity: they are happy in their place of residence, can identify with it, and consider both the settlement and its community important—so much so that they are willing to contribute actively to local life. At the same time, they are attached to the memories, experiences, atmosphere, friends, and local communities of the university town, and they also participate actively in its community life.

The cluster consists of 75 students, 65.3% of whom are female. A total of 62.7% live in a town with a status lower than a county-ranked city, and 56% have not lived there since birth. More than half (54.7%) live with their parents. This group has the highest proportion of students who already hold a bachelor's degree (18.7%).

Half of the students study in Budapest (50.7%), with smaller proportions in Gödöllő (17.3%) and Debrecen (10.7%). A significant share study in economics (62.7%), followed by medical and health sciences (12.5%). Most do not identify with any nationality other than Hungarian (82.7%), yet religiosity is characteristic of the group (65.3%).

A total of 97.3% are satisfied with their place of residence, and 96% feel attached to it. The same proportion (96%) feel attached to their university town as well.

##### 5. **Comfort-seekers**

They consider the price level of services and the level of safety in the university town to be adequate, and they also evaluate their place of residence as a developing settlement. For them, the ideal place to live is a city, and they also like their university town, to which they are additionally connected through previous tourist experiences.

This cluster consists of 11 students. The majority are female (63.6%) and religious (65.3%). Most live alone (90.9%), all of them in Budapest, which is not the first place of residence for any of them. Their low income suggests that they are not yet fully financially independent from their parents. Most completed grammar school (90.9%) and work part-time (81.8%). None of them have children.

Most students in this cluster study in Gödöllő (54.5%) and Pécs (27.3%), primarily in economics (72.7%) and law (27.3%). A total of 91.9% are second- or third-year students. They are fully satisfied with their current place of residence, to which the majority (90.9%) feel attached, and they show the same level of attachment (90.9%) to their university town as well.

The analysis supports what has been described in the literature (EDULINE, 2025; VASKOVICS, 2000), namely that a significant proportion of students work alongside their studies and still live with their parents. It also highlights that most students have already moved at least once in their lives and are largely not native locals. The presence of both passive and active student types also became evident, indicating that there is potential for municipalities to engage young people more effectively.

Based on the findings, **H6: Among the groups formed based on dual place identity, there is a segment for whom social cohesion and community have significant importance.** is accepted.

#### 3.3.4.2 Examination of Multiple Place Identity

The analysis revealed that the largest number and proportion of students belong to the group with multiple place identities, most of whom identify with their first place of residence (130 students). This is followed by those who identify

with their second (96 students) and third (47 students) place of residence, in addition to their current place of residence and the university town. A relatively large category is formed by students with dual place identity. Within this group, the highest values were found in relation to identification with the first place of residence (V2 = 39 students; V3 = 36 students; V4 = 33 students). After this, however, the largest proportion consists of those who do not feel attached—typically in all four residence-based identity groups: first (31 students), second (31 students), third (36 students), and fourth (38 students). These findings indicate, on the one hand, that multiple place identity is indeed present in the lives of students. The present research was able to assess identification with previous places of residence, but it would be an interesting future question to examine other settlements where individuals spent shorter or longer periods of time. Although the proportion of students with multiple identities is smaller relative to the full sample, it is still evident that respondents—despite their young age—are capable of feeling attached to several settlements simultaneously. As the analysis also shows, and as previously noted, more than half of the surveyed students (53.8%) have moved at least once in their lives, meaning they have already had to adapt to new life situations multiple times. As highlighted in the literature (KÖMÜVES et al., 2023), Generation Z adapts easily, which may facilitate their ability to identify with multiple places at the same time.

On the other hand, the data also show that students generally either identify with two or more settlements simultaneously, or do not identify with any. This may be linked to characteristics often associated with Generation Z, such as emotional instability and identity exploration. They may seek to compensate for what they cannot find in one settlement by turning to another, enabling them to feel connected to several places. Conversely, the lack of identification with any settlement may reflect that young people are still searching for their path and identity, and in some cases may feel dissatisfied due to the generation's high expectations.

Overall, it can be concluded that exclusive place identity—identification with only one settlement—is the least common among students. This raises the question of whether those who identify with only one place do so because they find it difficult to develop attachment to any settlement. The present study does not provide an answer to this question, but it offers a promising direction for future research.

### 3.3.5 Place Attachment

The comparison of attachment factors related to the place of residence and the university town was conducted using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, as the non-normal distribution of the sample had been previously confirmed. For

three pairs of factors, no significant difference was found between the two variables regarding attachment to the place of residence and the university town: attachment to streets ( $p = 0.420$ ), attachment to local communities/organizations ( $p = 0.090$ ), and attachment to hobbies ( $p = 0.217$ ). This can be explained by the fact that respondents generally had weak connections to organizations in either settlement, and hobbies are presumably not place-dependent, as they can be pursued anywhere.

For all other factors, since  $p < 0.05$ , significant differences were identified. The results are logical: attachment to local people, past memories, experiences, events, natural environment, green areas, buildings, attractions, atmosphere, lifestyle, work, entertainment venues, services, and the dwelling itself (house/apartment/dormitory/rented flat) differs substantially between the place of residence and the university town, as different settlements provide different living conditions.

Students are more strongly attached to family and relatives at their place of residence than in the university town (365 positive vs. 26 negative differences). This factor also shows the lowest number of ties ( $N = 86$ ), meaning 86 identical values were recorded for the two variables. Respondents are also more attached to friends at their place of residence (233 positive vs. 117 negative differences). Consequently, they also feel more attached to local people (200 positive vs. 134 negative differences) and past memories (230 positive vs. 116 negative differences) in their place of residence. The number of ties—identical values—was highest for attachment to local people ( $N = 143$ ).

While attachment to the natural environment is stronger at the place of residence (199 positive vs. 154 negative differences), attachment to the built environment—specifically buildings (150 positive vs. 189 negative differences) and attractions (134 positive vs. 226 negative differences)—is stronger in the university town. Respondents also feel more attached to the atmosphere (171 positive vs. 187 negative differences), work (154 positive vs. 220 negative differences), entertainment venues (123 positive vs. 226 negative differences), and services (141 positive vs. 234 negative differences) in the university town than in their place of residence (M4.127 and M4.128).

These results suggest that students tend to use services and engage in work activities primarily in the university town, where elements of the built environment evoke stronger attachment than in their place of residence. In contrast, attachment to the place of residence is rooted mainly in social relationships.

The more connections an individual has to a settlement, the stronger their attachment and the greater the likelihood of identifying with that place (the relationship between these two concepts has already been demonstrated earlier). This is supported by the finding that there is a weak but detectable

relationship between membership in a local organization/group and attachment to the settlement ( $p = 0.013$ ; Phi, Cramer's  $V = 0.114$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.113). Despite this, respondents generally do not consider it important for place identification whether an individual is a member of a local organization/association/club/group (mean = 2.87; SD = 1.49). Yet such memberships can create points of connection not only to the organization's activities but also to local people, which may strengthen the sense of identification with the settlement. This is further supported by the weak relationship found between organizational membership and place identification ( $p = 0.008$ ; Phi, Cramer's  $V = 0.121$ ; contingency coefficient = 0.120).

In contrast, no relationship could be detected between local activity and place attachment, due to low cell counts ( $<5$ ). A possible underlying reason is that the sample size is small, and respondents' strongest attachments are primarily to family and friends, which may override the influence of local activities. Emotional ties may therefore outweigh the role of participation in settlement-level activities.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of testing the hypotheses formulated in my research are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Results of the Hypothesis Tests

Objective	Topic	Hypothesis	Basis of hypothesis	Measurement level	Method of analysis	Result	Result of hypothesis
C4	Characteristics of place of residence and university town	H1: Students are less satisfied on average with their place of residence than with the university town where they study.	Castle – Grant (2023): individual in-depth interviews (students who have left their place of residence see the advantages of the university town)	interval	mean, standard deviation, relative standard deviation, total mean	Students are less satisfied with their place of residence than with their university town.	Accepted
C4	Place identity related to place of residence	H2: There is a relationship between being native to their place of residence and students' identification with that place.	Cuba – Hummon (1993): Long-time residents have a stronger sense of place identity on average than those who have moved later to the community.	nominal	Chi2 test	There is no correlation between students who are deeply rooted in their hometown and their identification with their place of residence.	Rejected
C4	Place identity related to place of residence	H3: First-year students have a stronger place identity related to their hometown than second- or third-year students.	First-year students have a significantly higher place identity in relation to their home life than second- or third-year students (Yang et al., 2013, p. 97; Cicognani et al., 2011)	interval, nominal	Mann–Whitney U test	First-year students do not have a stronger place identity than second- and third-year students; it is almost identical.	Rejected
C4	Place identity related to university town	H4: Second- and third-year students have a stronger place identity towards the university town than first-year students.	Yang et al., 2013, p. 97, Qingjiu – Maliki (2013)	interval, nominal	Mann–Whitney U test	No correlation can be found between the academic years and the students' sense of place identity in relation to the university town.	Rejected
C4	Dual place identity	H5: Students who study and live in different town have a dual place identity linked to their place of residence and the university town.	Based on Váriné Szilágyi, 1989, p. 116: "These triggering effects can also break old bonds, provide new perspectives on old values, and initiate new identification processes."	nominal	statistics, relative frequency	Half of the students (50.5%) have a balanced place identity between their place of residence and the university town.	Accepted
C4	Dual place identity	H6: Among the groups formed based on dual place identity, there is a segment for whom social cohesion and community have significant importance.	Social cohesion plays a decisive role in place identity (Rivlin, 1982; Maricchiolo et al., 2021; Erfani, 2022; Hamidi et al., 2024).	interval, dichotomous	factor analysis, cluster analysis	Those in the Local Patriots segment are happy to do things for their place of residence; it is important to them where they come from and how strong the community spirit is in their town.	Accepted

Source: Own research, 2025

Students' generally less favorable evaluation of their place of residence can be attributed to the broader range of opportunities available in the university town. From the perspective of municipal leadership, this presents two possible pathways. The first concerns the university town: the fact that more than half

of the students—although not regularly—attend city events creates an opportunity for city leaders to establish connections with students, address them directly, and involve them in local life (e.g., organizing events such as sports programmes for those interested in sports, involving culturally oriented students in museum or city cultural programmes, or offering volunteer opportunities such as assisting in retirement homes). Another possibility is to reach students through their communities. As the literature has pointed out, local communities have a significant influence on the development of place identity, and therefore local organizations that would welcome the involvement of young people could present themselves at university or dormitory events to draw attention to their activities. If these initiatives can be realized, they may shape the differing place identities of second- and third-year students toward their university town in a different direction than indicated by the results of the fourth hypothesis, meaning that their identification could be further strengthened. As seen in the image profile analysis, all examined cities were perceived as beautiful, developing, and livable, which means that students hold positive views of them and generally consider them suitable for settling down (despite the relatively low actual likelihood of doing so). It is therefore the responsibility of city leadership to make their city even more attractive to students.

The second pathway concerns the students' home settlements. In this case, municipal leaders should draw young people's attention to the programmes and opportunities offered by local organizations. The research revealed several instances in which young people were unaware of the opportunities available in their place of residence or of the groups and organizations they could join. To address this, municipalities could provide information through appropriate communication channels—primarily online—targeted specifically at young people (even tailoring opportunities by age group).

It is thought-provoking that, according to the results of the second hypothesis, there is no relationship between students who are native residents of their place of residence and their identification with that place. This can be traced back to several factors, both at the municipal and family level. My recommendation approaches the strengthening of the relationship between these two factors from the perspective of local patriotism. From the municipality's side, it is important to emphasize that the development of local patriotism among residents must begin at an early age (kindergarten, primary school). This can be supported through participation in local programmes, visits to local landmarks, and the organization of local history competitions and quizzes. For success, not only municipal leaders but also local institutions and organizations must take part in this process (including not only educational and cultural institutions but also local civil organizations such as sports clubs or dance

groups). From both educational institutions and local leadership, local history education would be essential for young people so that they can learn about their “roots,” potentially involving elderly residents who can revive traditions and pass on their knowledge to younger generations, contributing to the preservation of local values.

Another important factor is that, if possible, young children should attend local institutions rather than being taken to schools in other settlements, as being present in the local community lays the foundation for later social relationships. Those who do not develop friendships or attachments locally are more likely to leave their place of residence later in life. At the family level, setting an example through active participation in the life of the settlement is essential so that young people will follow this pattern and later be able to “put down roots” in their place of residence.

Considering the rejection of the hypothesis and the absence of a relationship, as well as the increasing number of non-native residents, municipalities must also reflect on how they can strengthen the identification of non-native locals with the settlement. In line with current trends, the target group is no longer limited to those who find employment locally or in the immediate vicinity (micro-region), but also includes those applying for jobs that allow remote work (home office), meaning they do not necessarily need to live in the same settlement as their workplace. From the municipality’s perspective, this is advantageous, as it expands the pool of potential local residents beyond those living in or near the settlement. For these individuals, the role of community cohesion becomes particularly important, as it can foster a sense of commitment to the settlement. This is especially relevant for potential residents who are not yet familiar with the local environment.

When attracting new residents, two recommendations emerge for municipalities: first, facilitating opportunities for new locals to meet and collaborate with existing residents; second, introducing newcomers to local traditions. As new residents, it is essential that they can connect with locals and have opportunities to meet in organized settings (e.g., discussion evenings), which can help avoid the types of conflicts described by CSIZMADY and CSURGÓ (2012), where newcomers perceive the countryside merely as a suburban extension. The second recommendation concerns familiarizing newcomers with local traditions. Its importance lies in minimizing the process of retraditionalization and ensuring that the settlement can preserve its socio-cultural characteristics.

It can be stated that half of the students possess a dual place identity. In this case, both municipalities—the place of residence and the university town—need to focus on strengthening young people’s identification with their settlement, since in such situations positive factors are present for both places,

which can increase the likelihood of long-term settlement. From the perspective of the students' home settlements, local leaders need to pay closer attention to the young people living in the community. It may be important for them to consider the following tasks: mapping the young people currently living in the settlement and segmenting them—those who study locally, those who study elsewhere but commute home daily, and those who study elsewhere and return home only occasionally. Each group requires different methods of engagement.

Students who attend university and return home only on weekends are more difficult to involve, yet it would still be worthwhile to organize occasional, even thematic workshops where leaders can sit down with them, listen to their opinions and suggestions regarding a more livable settlement (what they consider important in a town, how they perceive their own), and explore their interests (which may help create local leisure opportunities). It is essential for the municipality to facilitate the grouping of young people with similar interests and ages, and to create joint programmes and activities for them. This can help balance their place identity from the perspective of their home settlement and strengthen their attachment, thereby enhancing local patriotism. From the perspective of the university town, the recommendations align with those proposed for the first hypothesis.

The examination of the sixth hypothesis resulted in the formation of five clusters (Passive, Local Patriots, Urban, Active, Comfortable), each described by their main characteristics. This can be seen as a continuation of the segmentation approach previously outlined for municipal leaders. I believe that this method of group formation can provide guidance for municipalities on how to segment the young people living in their settlement, understand their characteristics, and find ways to address them effectively.

Individuals in the Local Patriots segment are willing to contribute to their place of residence; it is important to them where they come from and how strong the community cohesion of the settlement is. They are satisfied with their social relationships both in their place of residence and in the university town. It is therefore essential to identify who belongs to this group, as they may serve as key pillars of community building, identity strengthening, and enhancing attachment to the settlement among the younger generation.

The topic of place identity and place attachment contains numerous untapped research opportunities. The following directions can be formulated for future research:

- examining the model on a representative sample,
- deepening the analysis of dual/multiple place identity by incorporating additional analytical methods,

- narrowing the focus of the analysis—and the weighting of factors in the model—by considering consumer priorities,
- exploring values: identifying what constitutes value for the consumer and how strongly these values influence their decisions,
- examining Csepeli’s typology of settlement perceptions in relation to dual place identity,
- further investigating the differences between rural and urban residents.

## 5 NEW SCIENTIFIC RESULTS

During my doctoral research, the following new and novel scientific results were formulated:

- 1. The factors influencing place identity were identified and systematized, and a combined model for examining place identity was developed, incorporating the analysis of dual place identity.**

I mapped the place-identity-related models that include elements potentially influencing the process of identification with a place. Based on this, I constructed a combined model of place identity that starts from the influence of individual identity elements and settlement-level identity elements, and also incorporates the presence of dual place identity within the identification process.

- 2. It was demonstrated that a moderately strong positive relationship exists between students’ place identity, place attachment, and satisfaction with their place of residence.**

In my quantitative research, a moderately strong relationship was found among the examined students between identification with their place of residence and place attachment ( $p < 0.000$ ;  $C = 0.601$ ), between place attachment and satisfaction ( $p < 0.000$ ;  $C = 0.563$ ), and between identification with the place of residence and satisfaction ( $p < 0.000$ ;  $C = 0.547$ ).

- 3. It was proven that students possess a dual place identity: toward both their place of residence and their university town.**

In the quantitative phase, I measured the extent to which students identify with both their place of residence and their university town. Students who identified with both were classified as having dual place identity. According to MARKS (1999), these individuals can be described as having multiple identities, while BINDORFFER (2001)

refers to them as having balanced identities. The results show that half of the respondents (50.5%) identify with both examined settlements, confirming the presence of dual place identity in students' lives.

**4. The research demonstrated that the identity categories of MARKS (1999) and BINDORFFER (2001), originally used in sociology for examining dual identity, can be adapted to settlements as well.**

Since the place-marketing literature does not include methods for measuring dual place identity, I drew on sociological theories. I adapted MARKS' (1999) territorial identity framework and BINDORFFER's (2001) dual identity types. Based on these, students were classified into identity categories according to whether they identified with both places, only one, or neither.

**5. It was demonstrated that among the groups formed based on dual place identity, there is a segment for whom social cohesion and community play a particularly significant role.**

By reducing the elements of the model developed for examining dual place identity, I created groups (principal components) based on individual and settlement-level identity elements related to the place of residence and the university town. These were used to form clusters: Passive, Local Patriots, Urban, Active, and Comfortable. Members of the Local Patriots segment are willing to contribute to their place of residence, value their origins, and consider community cohesion important. They are predominantly native residents. They are satisfied with their social relationships both in their place of residence and in the university town.

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