

Topic: Changing Places

3.2.2.1 The nature and importance of places

What you need to know
The concept of place and how humans create a sense of place
How 'insiders' and 'outsiders' have different perspectives on a place
Different categories of place: near and far places; places people experience and places experienced through the media
Endogenous factors contributing to the character of places
Exogenous factors contributing to the character of places

The concept of place

- Place is defined as **location plus meaning**. Location simply describes where a place is on a map whereas meaning is more complex. Each place has a different meaning to different people and is therefore highly personal, experiential and subjective. A particular market square, building or café is likely to mean different things to different people depending on what has happened to them (or others) there. A **sense of place** then, refers to those meanings which are associated with a place.
- Place can be **applied to any scale**: from a particular room in a building to a country or region which rouses shared feelings in people. This is particularly noticeable in times of rapid political change (such as the concept of a 'United Kingdom') or public events (like the Olympics) where people experience shared feelings of belonging and attachment in response to an external stimulus.
- Place does **not necessarily have to be a fixed location** spatially or temporally. A camper van or cruise ship which a group of people have shared for a period of time may invoke a sense of belonging in those people, as may a camp site or other temporary structure. Similarly, every place is a product of its history – formal and personal – and is therefore likely to engender feelings of attachment based on individual life events or distant historical events which are represented in architecture and iconography. People may feel a sense of belonging to a particular house where they grew up or a playground they went to as a child or similarly, may feel attachment to a part of the country where their ancestors came from.
- Places are **dynamic and subject to constant change** in their material structure and meaning. Places are not isolated or cut off from outside influences and so as people, ideas and objects pass in and out of a place in space and time they change it. They are therefore changing places.

Insiders and outsiders have different perspectives on a place

- Place is a social construct, not a physical location, and this can invoke feelings of being 'in place' or 'out of place'. These feelings may stem from demographic factors such as place of birth, residence or age – or they may come from socio-psychological factors such as gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity or role in society.

Topic: Changing Places

3.2.2.1 The nature and importance of places

- Dominant political and economic groups tend to project their power onto a place through its architecture and functions which have the effect of excluding some groups of people: they feel 'out of place' in that location. London Docklands is a clear example of this with its wholesale change of economic function from docks to financial centre during the 1980s with a parallel change in social characteristics. Affluent business people feel 'comfortable' there when some other groups do not.
- Even within one location, there may be places where some groups of people feel more welcome than others. Immigrant populations often form spatially close-knit communities in response to feelings of exclusion from often nearby neighbourhoods. They may experience a place very differently to non-immigrant groups. The same is true of gay communities. Both groups of people will perceive a place in a different way to the dominant socio-economic group.
- A place may also be experienced differently within a day. An area of a town where there are lots of office blocks and apartments is likely to be perceived very differently by employees during the day and by residents at night. The same is true of a busy shopping area of a town which has restaurants and bars interspersed. The same group of people is likely to feel both an 'insider' and an 'outsider' in that place at different times of day.

Near and far places

- National identity is, in some senses, a fiction since any one country is the product of a multitude of different groups of people, ideas and experiences. Most societies, however, are characterised by feelings of 'us' and 'them' based on shared experiences and values. These feelings are sometimes carefully cultivated for political or commercial purposes and can be both positive and negative.
- The stirring of national pride to support the Welsh football team during the Euro 2016 football tournament (where the team reached the semi-finals for the first time in 53 years) was a positive response to feelings of 'us' and 'them'. The feelings were amplified by the media and had the effect of reviving and reinforcing a sense of national identity. This national pride emerged out of a sense of belonging (to the successful group) and was formed in response to favourable comparisons to the 'other'.
- Sometimes, however, responses to the 'other' do not result in positive feelings. Xenophobia and racism are extreme reactions to 'other places' and peoples and go some way to explain football hooliganism, racially motivated hate crimes and terrorist acts. Of course, less harmful behaviour is known to emerge out of feelings of 'us' and 'them' and one explanation for the outcome of the EU referendum in 2016 is that Britain saw Europe as 'the other' – i.e. external and contrary to the sense of British identity.

Topic: Changing Places

3.2.2.1 The nature and importance of places

Experienced places and media places

- Victorian explorers such as David Livingstone (searching for the source of the Nile in 1866) travelled to far locations in order to experience and know a place. Modern day explorers and travellers do the same. It is interesting to explore the idea, however, that you have to physically go to a place to experience an emotional attachment to it. Direct experience of a place can certainly create a sense of belonging, however transitory in nature. People who have travelled to a place are often able to describe the sounds, images and feelings they experienced there many years later. They have developed a 'sense of place' about the location.
- The media often represents a place in a way which contrasts with our lived experiences of it. Publicity for tourism, feature films and estate agent fliers all have different functions and appeal to different groups of people. They have a particular purpose in their portrayal of a place and can differ quite markedly from statistical and other types of qualitative data. Social media often gives a more realistic portrayal of a place, although these experiences are very individual and do not necessarily represent others' sense of place.
- Digital technology is further changing the way that people experience place. Locative media available on mobile phones uses GPS software to bring place-specific content and experiences to people. Whether the technology is used for geo-caching or as a dating app, the line between experienced place and virtual place is blurred.

Endogenous factors contributing to the character of places

Endogenous factors are the local, internal characteristics which create a place's identity.

Characteristic	Description
<i>Location</i>	Site or situation
<i>Topography</i>	Height of the land, relief (hills, mountains)
<i>Physical geography</i>	Drainage, floodplain, soil type, valley
<i>Land use</i>	Settlement, industrial, commercial, agricultural
<i>Built environment</i>	Age of buildings, type of buildings
<i>Infrastructure</i>	Road and rail networks, waterways, airports
<i>Demographic</i>	Age structure, ethnicity
<i>Economic</i>	Sector (primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary)

Topic: Changing Places

3.2.2.1 *The nature and importance of places*

Exogenous factors contributing to the character of places

Exogenous factors are external influences on a place's identity. They are caused by a place's relationship with other places.

Characteristic	Description
<i>People</i>	Migrants or workers come from outside a place to live or work
<i>Capital</i>	Investment from a business based outside the area
<i>Resources</i>	Raw materials, transport infrastructure
<i>Ideas</i>	Urban planners, architects, businesses and artists may bring ideas to shape and change a place