

Topic: Changing Places

3.2.2.4 Place studies: continuity and change in the nature of places

What you need to know
How people's lives are affected by continuity and change in the nature of places
People's lived experience of a place local to them in the past and at present
The developing character of a contrasting and distant place
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing demographic and cultural characteristics of both places OR• Economic change and social inequalities in both places
How qualitative and quantitative sources represent places

Studies in this unit must be grounded in the investigation of two contrasting places, one to be local. Case studies of your local place and a contrasting and distant place should be developed. The 'local place' is likely to be the place within which the students live and study. It may comprise a locality, neighbourhood or small community – either urban or rural. The 'contrasting' and 'distant' place may be in the UK or elsewhere, as long as at least one of the places in the contrasted pair is located in the UK. 'Distant' is not specified in terms of how far away, but the contrasted location should be a discrete entity, clearly distinguishable from the local place and with distinct contrasts. A place an hour away by bus may well fit the description and would permit access for primary data collection, although this data source is not a requirement. The most important quality is in the contrasting nature of the two places selected. (If in doubt, consult your exam board subject advisor).

Students should use both primary and secondary data – probably more of the latter is readily available - and include a range of both qualitative and quantitative sources which should be given equal weight. A place's character and people's lived experiences of it are shaped by both **endogenous** factors (such as physical geography, built environment, infrastructure, demographic and economic characteristics) and **exogenous** factors (such as its relationship with other places as represented by shifting flows of people, goods, resources, capital and ideas). The **agents of change** (external forces) such as government, the local council, businesses and communities must also be considered as they have a central role in the shaping of place identity and representation.

People's lived experience of the place in the past and at present

Both studies must focus on people's perceptions of the place in the past and at present and how that lived experience influences people's relationship to it. This is more likely to involve primary data collection of attitudinal surveys and identifying how mental perceptions affect behaviour and habits (such as shopping location choices, use of local facilities – maybe including school choice, intentions towards moving or staying in the future and optimism/pessimism about the future prospects of the location). Collecting information from different demographic sub-sets (age groups), and from an older sub-set and enquiring how the place has changed in their lifetime will help identify change in perceptions over time.

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Relationships, connections and agents of change giving a place its character

Demographic, cultural, economic and socio-political characteristics of the place

Researching the historical background of a place is a straightforward way to draw contrasts between the past and the present and to enable students to assess the degree of change, the rate of change and the key geographical agents of change and compare these between the two places:

- Changing demographic and cultural characteristics of both place
- OR**
- Economic change and social inequalities in both places

For qualitative data, start with a search on Vision of Britain and the British Film Institute's (BFI) archives of historical maps, photographs, travel writings, newspaper entries, census returns and films. These will give an engaging introduction to past connections. The findings can be contrasted to contemporary representations of the place on television, film, literature, social media, art and music. Social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, are a rich source of people's lived experiences of a place local to them and primary research can be conducted using these platforms. In-depth interviews with residents and visitors can provide useful information.

Contemporary quantitative data on demographic and socio-economic characteristics can be collected from Neighbourhood Statistics and local council websites (where they are often termed 'snapshot' statistics). Other sources of data include the Index of Multiple Deprivation, NHS health profiles, crime mappers by the Police and several geospatial data websites such as Check my File. There are lots of interactive websites which use GIS to geo-locate census data. The most easily manipulated are Datashine, Illustreets and CDRC (Consumer Data Research Centre) maps, although ArcGIS packages will also have useful and relevant data. Questionnaire surveys of residents and visitors may also provide quantitative data.

Students must be confident at interpreting and manipulating the data – presented in both numerical and graphical form and be conscious of appropriate data-collection techniques, showing respect for reliability, accuracy and risk-awareness.

Past and present forces at a range of scales (local, regional, national, international, and global) shape a place's identity

Every place studied is likely to have unique past and present connections and these will, in turn, shape both changing demographic and cultural characteristics and economic change and social inequalities.

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As a guide, the following themes could be researched:

- Migration flows and communities in the local area – historical or contemporary, including commuting patterns
- Infrastructure – roads, railways, canals, proximity to airports
- Business and commerce – industrial/business parks, multinational companies located there, local businesses
- Leisure, tourism, retail – ‘clone town’ or unique place
- Arts, heritage, festivals, events, music, culture – are these only promoted locally or externally?
- Conservation – protected green spaces, Green Belt areas, listed buildings
- Town twinning and other international connections
- Promotion and representation in various media. Direct and in-direct marketing of the place and the images and messages being conveyed (and omitted).
- Education – universities, research parks, further education colleges, specialist training facilities – sources of funding and staff/students

It is important to analyse how each (or all) of these themes has shaped the location under investigation and consider the combination of local forces (and links between communities) with external forces in the extent to which they make the place unique.

Sources of primary and secondary data

Qualitative	Quantitative
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interviews with local people (use connections with your school or college)• Photographs – historical and contemporary (use tourist leaflets and ‘official’ websites and contrast with social media)• Maps (historical and contemporary)• Film, television, websites, social media• Text from various media• Art• Poetry, literature, journalism, blogs• Oral recordings• Music and song	<p>Statistical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Census data – Neighbourhood Statistics• Index of Multiple Deprivation• NHS Health profiles• Council ‘snapshot’ data <p>Graphical (and GIS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Datashine, Illustreets, CDRC maps• ArcGIS packages• Crime mappers from the Police

Of course, a rich source of data is primary collection in the field. This could take the form of ‘psychogeography’ (the effect of the physical landscape on the emotions, perceptions and behaviour of individuals) or of more traditional methods such as place check forms, clone town surveys (the land users common to many high streets that lead to a similar offering of retail and services) and pedestrian flows. Some suggestions for psychogeographical fieldwork:

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- Dérive maps (untargeted wandering according to attraction/repulsion of certain city areas and mapping the resultant route)
- Soundscapes
- Photographing different people's experiences of place
- Participant observation – who is using the place and how?
- Place profiling using an analytical narrative
- Imageability survey – what makes a place unique?
- Map of meaning – annotating a base map with feelings and emotions
- 'Invisible' places survey – map and photograph the places you're not meant to see (CCTV, public toilets, alleyways, graffiti)