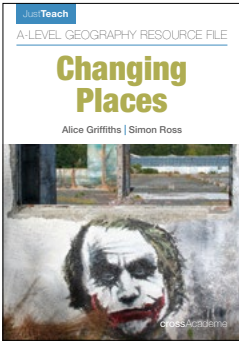


# Changing Places

Alice Griffiths | Simon Ross





Series Editor: Simon Ross

# Changing Places

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## Lesson ideas for teachers

### ‘Place’ in the English language

‘Place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world.’

(Tim Cresswell, 2004)

‘Place’ is an everyday word in the English language (Resource 1). It is also a key geographical concept that has, over time, been defined and redefined by different thinkers and theorists within the field of geography (Resource 2). Different waves of geographers have taken different approaches to this term – some use it to define a thing, an object; others have redefined *place* as an idea or a kind of lens, a construct of our imagination, which we can use to make sense of the world (see also Resource 8).

#### Student activity

- Using Resource 1, students can be tasked with adding other uses of the term ‘place’ in common parlance. They could make a list of the different meanings or usages that this single word has in the English language.

Resource 2 provides an outline of how geographers have approached (and understood) *place*, and therefore how the meaning of this term has changed over time. Students need to read through Resource 2 to help them address the subsequent questions.

### Regional geography versus spatial science

In the early part of the twentieth century (and earlier), places were described by geographers who were generalists; they were interested in local geology as well as history and architectural styles, local traditions, farming practices and industry. Since this ‘regional geography’ was all encompassing, it was necessarily a descriptive art (Resource 3) – more about ‘what’ and ‘where’, and less about ‘why’.

Spatial scientists in the second half of the twentieth century sought to take a more systematic and ‘rigorous’ scientific approach to understanding human activity and the spatial patterns created by human activity. They designed theories (and formulae) that explained these patterns, deducing common rules that enabled them to make predictions that could be tested. Examples of human geographers whose work falls under the umbrella of spatial science include von Thunen, Weber and Christaller.

Walter Christaller sought to understand, describe and predict the number, size and location of settlements within a wider regional system with his *Central Place Theory* (Resource 4), which still forms the basis of ideas about settlement hierarchy today.

However, in this redirection of the subject, quite apart from its assumptions about isotropic planes and therefore active ignorance about the influence of physical geography (not to mention history), other geographers mourned the loss of humanity. They disliked the way that this quantitative discipline held fast to the idea of ‘economic man’ – the idea that every person acts rationally in their self-interest (basically assuming everyone is a ‘consumer zombie’!). They berated the way that spatial scientists reduced settlements (and the people who live in them) to mere dots on a map.

## Lesson ideas for teachers (continued)

### Student activities

- 2 Students could be asked to consider what spatial science's 'economic man' (or 'consumer zombie') would make of the description of Cornwall in Resource 3. Can they model or predict how this hypothetical person would holiday in this county?
- 3 Using a map of Cornwall available online, students could consider to what extent Christaller's Central Place Theory (Resource 4) is helpful in developing an understanding of the settlement pattern in Cornwall.

### Humanistic geography

The work of Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph may be seen in part as a reaction to spatial science, reasserting the 'human' in human geography. Their research focused on the experiences of individuals or small groups of people in small-scale places or localities and led them to a new understanding or approach to *place* that closely tied personal experience to psychological attachment (value or meaning of a place for a person); for them, the depth of experience influenced the depth of attachment and the value placed on a location by an individual. These so-called humanistic geographers argued not only that our experience and understanding of places deepens as we make our way through childhood, adolescence and adulthood but also that our experience and attachment to places (for example, one's home) actually shapes our identity (Resource 5).

Humanistic geography reminds us of the specific and unique nature of places, and dismisses spatial scientists' ideas that formulae can accurately predict or describe the detail and differences between places in which fallible humans live and love.

### Student activity

- 4 Students could use Resource 5 to analyse the blog post about Fistral Beach (Resource 6).

### The social constructionists

In the final decades of the twentieth century, geographers inspired by ideas like Marxism and feminism reacted to what they saw as the worthy but small-scale approach of these humanistic geographers. They believed that the humanistic approach lacked ambition to do more than simply 'understand' the world; these critical, radical geographers sought to 'change the world' through their work.

These academic geographers wanted to address problems like famine, inequality and environmental damage. And just as they wanted to turn away from the 'trivial' approach of humanists, so they saw spatial science as failing because of the way it implicitly justified the status quo. As a direct result of their left-wing politics, these geographers sought to reveal how unequal power-based relationships between different classes, genders, the rich North and poor South, etc. were, every day, made and remade by social processes, including capitalism, benefiting some while impoverishing others. They saw

## Lesson ideas for teachers (continued)

places as being fundamentally *dynamic*, being the products of flows of money, people and information around the world in an age of globalisation. One influential voice was the social constructionist David Harvey (Resource 7) and another that of Doreen Massey. (We will return to Massey's *progressive concept of place* in Topic 3.)

### Student activity

- 5 Using Resource 7, students can be asked to consider why this aerial photograph of the Eden Project has been used to illustrate these quotes about a social constructionist approach to place.

### Different ways of understanding the world

John Agnew (1987) simplified the meaning of the concept of place, for geographers, into three organising aspects or approaches:

- **location** – a specific point on the earth's surface, which may be described using latitude and longitude;
- **sense of place** – the subjective and emotional attachment that people have to a place – its place meaning;
- **locale** – the material setting and scale of people's everyday lives and interactions, e.g. buildings, roads, public spaces.

### Student activities

- 6 Using Resource 8, students could employ each of Agnew's aspects of place to write a tweet-length (140 characters) statement about their local place. (The term 'locale' may require some exemplification.)
- 7 Students could consider to what extent Agnew's aspects (or approaches) to the concept of place can be seen as complementary rather than incompatible?

### Resources

- 1 'Place' in the English language
- 2 A history of place in geography
- 3 Describing the counties of Britain
- 4 Christaller's spatial science
- 5 A humanistic approach to place
- 6 Fistril Beach, Newquay
- 7 A social constructionist approach to a place
- 8 Place as a geographical concept

## Lesson ideas for teachers (continued)

### Glossary of key terms

**Place** A geographical concept that can mean a location on a map, a space given meaning by people, or the setting and scale of people's everyday interactions.

**Sense of place** The subjective (personal) and emotional attachment that people have to a place – its place meaning.

### Online materials

- ArcGIS: [www.arcgis.com](http://www.arcgis.com)
- Google Maps: [www.google.co.uk/maps](http://www.google.co.uk/maps)
- Eden Project: <http://www.edenproject.com/>
- Visit Cornwall: <https://www.visitcornwall.com/>

### Further reading

Agnew, J. (1987) *Place and Politics*, Allen and Unwin.

Castree, N. (2003) 'Place: connections and boundaries in an Interdependent world', in *Key Concepts in Geography*, edited by Holloway, Rice and Valentine (2003), Sage Publications.

Cresswell, T. (2008) 'Place: encountering geography as philosophy', in *Geography*, Vol. 93, Part 3.

Cresswell, T. (2014) *Place – An Introduction*, Second Edition, John Wiley.

Massey, D. (1994) 'A global sense of place', *Space, Place and Gender*, University of Minnesota Press.

Tuan, Y.-F. (1977) *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, University of Minnesota Press.

## 'Place' in the English language

### Key definitions

**Place** A geographical concept that can mean a location on a map, a space given meaning by people, or the setting and scale of people's everyday interactions.

**Sense of place** The subjective (personal) and emotional attachment that people have to a place – its place meaning.

### Examples of usage



'Online was the first place I experienced racism.'

'I'm sorry, I can't be in two places at once.'

'We put him in his place.'

# A history of place in geography

‘Place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world.’

(Tim Cresswell, 2004)

*Place* is an everyday word in the English language. It is also a key geographical concept that has, over time, been defined and redefined by different thinkers and theorists within the field of geography. Different waves of geographers have taken different approaches to this term – some using it to define a thing, an object; others have redefined *place* as an idea or a kind of lens, a construct of our imagination, which we can use to make sense of the world.

## Regional geography and description

In the early part of the twentieth century (and earlier), places were described by geographers who were generalists; they were interested in local geology as well as history and architectural styles, local traditions, farming practices and industry. Since this ‘regional geography’ was all encompassing, it was necessarily a descriptive art – more about ‘what’ and ‘where’, and less about ‘why’.

## Spatial science

Spatial scientists in the second half of the twentieth century sought to take a more systematic and ‘rigorous’ scientific approach to understanding human activity and the spatial patterns created by human activity. They designed theories (and formulae) that explained these patterns, deducing common rules that enabled them to make predictions that could be tested. Examples of human geographers whose work falls under the umbrella of spatial science include von Thunen, Weber and Christaller.

Walter Christaller sought to understand, describe and predict the number, size and location of settlements within a wider regional system with his *Central Place Theory*, which still forms the basis of ideas about settlement hierarchy today.

However, in this redirection of the subject, quite apart from its assumptions about isotropic planes and therefore active ignorance about the influence of physical geography (not to mention history), other geographers mourned the loss of humanity. They disliked the way that this quantitative discipline held fast to the idea of ‘economic man’ – the idea that every person acts rationally in their self-interest (basically assuming everyone is a ‘consumer zombie’!). They berated the way that spatial scientists reduced settlements (and the people who live in them) to mere dots on a map.

## Humanistic geography

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## A history of place in geography

and led them to a new understanding or approach to *place* that closely tied personal experience to psychological attachment (value or meaning of a place for a person); for them, the depth of experience influenced the depth of attachment and the value placed on a location by an individual. These so-called humanistic geographers argued not only that our experience and understanding of places deepens as we make our way through childhood, adolescence and adulthood but also that our experience and attachment to places (for example, one's home) actually shapes our identity.

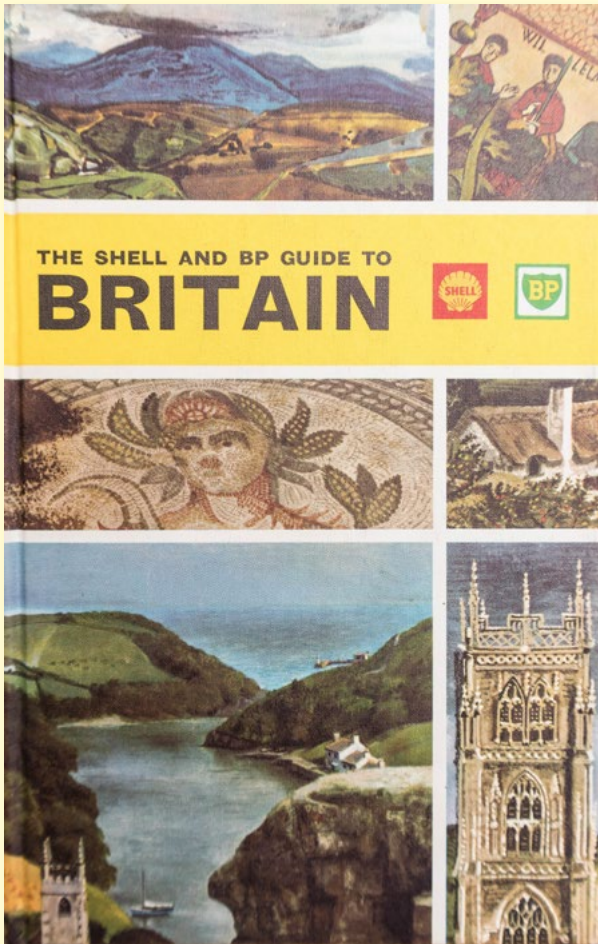
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### The social constructionists

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These academic geographers wanted to address problems like famine, inequality and environmental damage. And just as they wanted to turn away from the 'trivial' approach of humanists, so they saw spatial science as failing because of the way it implicitly justified the status quo. As a direct result of their left-wing politics, these geographers sought to reveal how unequal power-based relationships between different classes, genders, the rich North and poor South, etc. were, every day, made and remade by social processes, including capitalism, benefiting some while impoverishing others. They saw places as being fundamentally *dynamic*, being the products of flows of money, people and information around the world in an age of globalisation. One influential voice was the social constructionist David Harvey and another that of Doreen Massey.

## Describing the counties of Britain



‘Cornwall is astonishingly full of entertaining and rewarding things to see, and for the holiday-maker this favourite of all the holiday counties of England divides into four: Cornwall of the seaside, Cornwall of the granite moors, the ferny luxuriant Cornwall tucked out of the wind along tidal creeks and wooded combs, and the Cornwall of small villages and small fields and deep lanes and isolated lichen-rough churches, which often seem to grow out of hill flanks in the most intimate and natural way.’

*(The Shell and BP Guide to Britain, 1964)*

## Christaller's spatial science

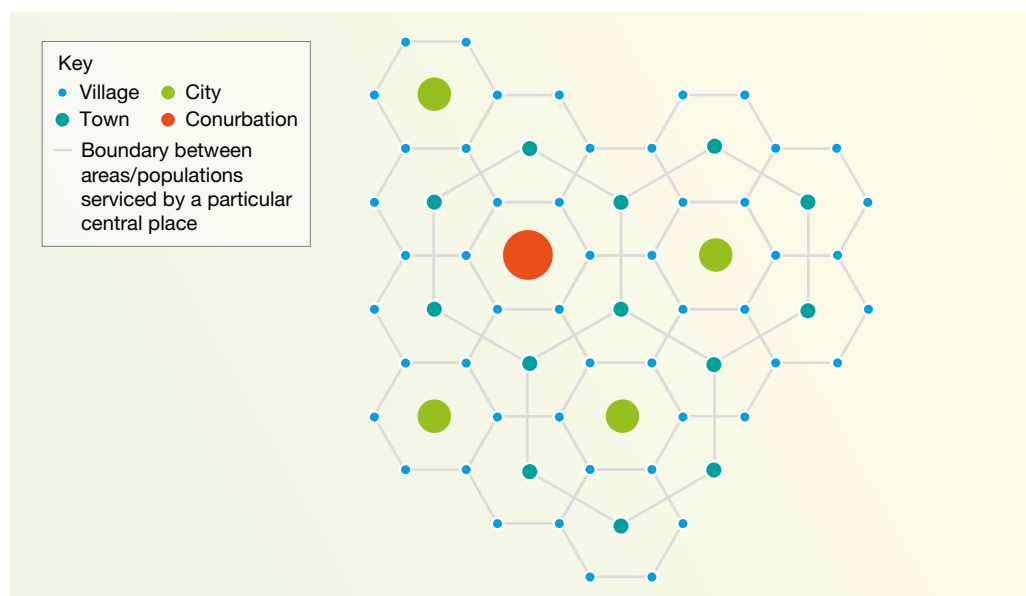
*Central Place Theory* makes the following *assumptions* about an area/population studied:

- It is an unbounded isotropic plane across which resources and population are evenly distributed.
- Perfect competition exists, and all sellers act to maximise profits.
- All consumers have similar demands for goods and services, and similar purchasing power.
- All consumers act to minimise the cost of travel, visiting the nearest central place in which the good or service they need is provided.
- Transport cost is proportional to distance travelled, and does not vary depending on the direction of travel.
- Therefore, the higher the order of goods (the more durable, variable or valuable), the further people will travel.
- There is a maximum distance over which people are prepared to travel for a particular good or service (known as the *range*), as at some point cost or inconvenience outweighs an individual's need for the good/service.

According to the theory, under these conditions an efficient system or hierarchy of central places of different sizes will emerge over time, based on a lattice-style spatial arrangement (see illustration), in which:

- the larger the type of settlement, the fewer in number there are within the area of study;
- the larger the type of settlement, the greater the distance between them;
- with an increase in size, the range and number of functions of a central place increases.

*The spatial pattern of settlements of different sizes, according to Central Place Theory*



## A humanistic approach to place

Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) outlined...

- the difference between place and space (two terms used interchangeably in general parlance) for the human geographer:  
'What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value... From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom and threat of space, and vice versa.'
- the way in which a child changes as it grows and how it develops an understanding of place in parallel:  
'If we define place broadly as a focus of value, of nurture and support, then the mother is the child's primary place... As the child grows, he becomes attached to objects other than significant persons and, eventually, to localities.'
- the link between attachment to home and identity:  
'Human groups nearly everywhere tend to regard their own homeland as the centre of the world...'  
'A profound attachment to the homeland appears to be a worldwide phenomenon... The city or land is viewed as mother, and it nourishes; place is an archive of fond memories and splendid achievements that inspire the present, place is permanent and hence reassuring to man, who sees frailty in himself and chance and flux everywhere.'

## Fistral Beach, Newquay

'My special place is Fistral Beach in Newquay. I've been there about six times because I go and stay with my cousins every year. Even though it's six hours from my house, I still really love it. The weather is normally very sunny, which is good for climbing all the rocks! When I go there I love surfing and bodyboarding. The waves are great! It also has an excellent restaurant which does THE BEST ice cream.'

(Millie, age 10)



## A social constructionist approach to place

‘Place in whatever guise is, like space and time, a social construct... The only interesting question that can be asked is: by what social process(es) is place constructed?’

(Harvey, 1996)

‘If places can be conceptualised in terms of social interactions which they tie together, then it is also the case that these interactions themselves are not motionless things, frozen in time... places are processes too.’

(Massey, 1991)



*The Eden Project, Cornwall*

TOPIC

1

## Place as a geographical concept

John Agnew (1987) simplified the meaning of the concept of place into three organising aspects or approaches:

- **location** – a specific point on the earth’s surface, which may be described using latitude and longitude;
- **sense of place** – the subjective and emotional attachment that people have to a place – its place meaning;
- **locale** – the material setting and scale of people’s everyday lives and interactions, e.g. an office, the high street or local park.

## Student questions

### 'Place' in the English language

- 1 Read Resource 1. Make a list of the different meanings or usages of the word 'place' in the English language.

Now read Resource 2, which provides an outline of the ways in which different geographers have approached (and understood) 'place' and therefore how the term's meaning has changed over time. Use this and the other resources to answer Questions 2–8.

### Regional geography versus spatial science

- 2 What would spatial science's 'economic man' make of the description of Cornwall in Resource 3? Is it possible to predict how this hypothetical person would holiday in this county?
- 3 Find an online map of Cornwall showing this county's settlements.
  - a How useful is Christaller's Central Place Theory (Resource 4) in developing our understanding of the settlement pattern in Cornwall?
  - b Can you think of any criticisms of Christaller's model when applied to Cornwall?

### Humanistic geography

- 4 Use Resource 5 to analyse the blog post about Fistral Beach (Resource 6).

### The social constructionists

- 5 Study Resource 7. Explain why this aerial photograph of the Eden Project has been used to illustrate these quotes about a social constructionist approach to place?

### Different ways of understanding the world

- 6 Study Resource 8. Can you use each of Agnew's aspects of place to write a tweet-length (140 characters) statement about your local place?
- 7 To what extent can Agnew's aspects (or approaches) to the concept of place be seen as complementary rather than incompatible?