



Royal Holloway Geography for Schools Lecture Series

Changing Places

Lecture summary

Place is one of the most important terms in Human Geography, but it's also one that's hard to define (which is often the case when words used in everyday language come to be the subject of academic analysis.)

We can contrast place with another term – location. Location refers to objective position in **space** – perhaps as measured using latitude and longitude, or as indicated on a GPS. We can say exactly what location we are in, but it's more complex and challenging to ask what place we are in. Geographers have developed a range of ways of making sense of place – and this talk works through each of these:

1. Place as **experienced** through senses, emotions, or memories.

We have a very direct and very human **experience** of place. One of the ways that it is different from location is that we each give meaning to particular places we know directly that can be very powerful.

2. Places as **representations**.

We don't just rely on our own experiences to understand places – they are often experienced through the interpretations of others. Cultural geographers study the ways that places are **represented**, for example in novels, films, TV series, websites, or social media.

3. Places as strongly associated with **belonging** and **rootedness**

Our strong connections with place are often associated with a sense that we belong to a place and that the place belongs to us. We can often talk of where we feel at home, or where we come from. Social and political geographers are interested in these kinds of claim and their consequences – to say that a place **belongs** to a particular group of people often suggests that there are other people who are 'out-of-place' and don't belong there.

4. Places as **contested** and **exclusionary**

Different people and particularly different social groups may have different ideas about the nature of a place and who it belongs to. Places are often contested, and may lead to different forms of conflict around who belongs in a place, and who is excluded.

5. Places as being made through **connections** and **flows** that link them with other places

Many of the ways that we think about places put real or imaginary boundaries around them. Many geographers, following the ideas of Doreen Massey, think of places in alternative way, as being where different kinds of connections and flows come together. In this view, no place is completely bounded, and its distinctive characteristics come about because of its position in past and present movements of people, money, goods, cultures and technologies. Massey called this an 'outside-in' idea of place, and is sometimes called a **relational** approach to places.

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