**GEG7120: Place, Space and Scale – the core concepts**

There are different ways of thinking about each of these key concepts.

Place

Place – a dot on a map

Place as making a difference – a space in which things happen - uneven development, sedimented traditions and social practice/culture

Place as in relationship to other places – spreading culture, moving people/ideas

Place as a product of things happening in other places – relational space (eg. spatial divisions of labour (Massey), global supply chains, global cities, social movements, political jurisdictions)

Space

Places are thus connected to one another across space, by virtue of variously scaled ‘spatial relatons’ (you begin to see why we need all 3 concepts working together). Space is in many ways for geographers as class is for Marxian political economy. It is less a thing and more a ‘process’ – something that is constantly being produced through social relationships. Think of the way that capital for example moves across space but is embedded in particular places (financial centres) for a while, before moving on again. Think of how the physical landscape of the city then develops over time in response to this.

**A *relational* understanding of place and space**A global sense of place/the politics of place-beyond-place/power-geometries (**Doreen Massey**) So, ‘geography matters’ –but how exactly?

John Agnew (1987) argues that place has a three-fold salience. First, as the space in which people live, shaping the microsociology of everyday life. Second, and relatedly, as the arena in which local people generate a sense of shared identity connected to place, which he calls a ‘sense of place.’ And third, as a geographic location in the macro-order of things, being about relationships to other locations.

**A triad – location, locale, sense of place.**

But is this about particularity OR having a place in a network and relationships to other places – is this a matter of emphasis or more?

In his philosophical topography, Jeff Malpas (1999) draws on Heidegger’s notion of *dasein* to highlight the necessary relationship between place and ‘being-in-the-world’ – being with others. As he explains: ‘Heidegger’s fundamental conception of human existence as ‘being in the world’ implies the impossibility of properly understanding human being in a way that would treat it as only contingently related to its surrounding and to the concrete structures of activity in which it is engaged’ (Malpas, 1999, 8).

For Malpas (1999, 32): ‘place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience’ and it is fundamental to understanding the world.

Malpas (1999, 198): ‘[T]he complex structure of place, its resistance to any simple categorisation or characterisation, its encompassing of both subjective and objective elements, its necessary inter- connection with agency, all suggest that the idea of place does not so much bring a certain politics with it, as define the very frame within which the political itself must be located.’

Scale

The *gemeinschaft* of the small scale rural community in which face to face relationships were established over time contrasted with the *gesellschaft* of the urban society in which people lived anonymous lives spread across space (Tonnies, 1887).

The automatic solidarity of the former was argued to be replaced by anonymised processes associated with industrialisation and urbanisation in ever-more-complex divisions of labour (Durkheim, [1893] 1933). The old ‘Great Communities’ in which local publics could form and determine their mind were replaced by the ‘Great Society’ in which mediated publics operated across a much larger scale in a largely disorganised way (Dewey, 1954 [1927]).

What does this mean for community/place/space today? It ultimately comes down to the **rescaling of certain forms of social life as much as** their replacement. This is where geographers may begin to depart in their analysis from historians, for example.

John Tomaney (2013) has recently mounted **a defence of parochialism** arguing that local places remain critical to everyday life by shaping experience, identity and behaviour, and providing a set of perspectives on the rest of the world. For him: ‘A parochial outlook values the local, its culture and solidarities, as a moral starting point and locus of ecological concern and a site for the development of virtues including commitment, fidelity, civility and nurture’ (Tomaney, 2013, 659). While Tomaney develops this position in relation to the creation of art, a similar position can be developed in relation to civic organisation and politics.

But whether the focus is on the local or the global, these lived frames of reference and experience only make sense in relation to the social life that exists at other scales as well. In short, scale as something that is socially constructed (recall the Sallie Marston article) is inherent to the (social) reproduction of human life.

You could write many different accounts of place, space and scale – and the readings you have to just that. But I wanted you just to see how they interlink with one another in this way, as I think that can be helpful in getting one’s head around them as specific concepts within a wider social science tradition.

SRH Nov 02.