



A-LEVEL GEOGRAPHY TOPIC MASTER



CHANGING PLACES

Simon Oakes

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Place characteristics, dynamics and connections

The dynamic relationship between people, economies and the physical environment helps create multi-layered places. Different places develop distinctive identities over time. Using a range of ideas, concepts and supporting data, this chapter:

- analyses the different human and physical elements which interconnect to give a place character
- investigates how places change over time on account of dynamic internal and external processes
- explores ways in which places and communities are shaped by past and present network connections and relationships with other places at regional, national and global scales
- evaluates the extent to which places can ever be preserved and protected from agents of change such as globalisation.

KEY CONCEPTS

Place identity The physical and human elements that help to make a place distinctive from other places. This chapter examines the quantifiable physical, economic and demographic characteristics of places (whereas Chapter 2 explores more subjective interpretations of place identity).

Interdependence The relations of mutual dependence that develop between different places over time. Also, the influence that the society, economy and landscape of a place exert over one another.

Globalisation The intensification of connections between different places on a global scale. Accelerating flows of capital, commodities, people and information are the result of a 'shrinking world' shaped by markets, technology and political changes. Some people and societies embrace globalisation; others try to reject it.



KEY TERMS

Space The basic organising concept of the geographer – geographical studies historically aimed to establish the locations of people and phenomena on the Earth's surface and represent this knowledge to others using maps. In contemporary studies of places, space can be understood as the distance which separates places. Two important points arise. First, the space which separates two places is never empty or devoid of features and meaning. For example, migrants will sometimes pass through a place they did not know about previously while moving from their home place towards an intended destination. They may decide to settle at this 'intervening opportunity' instead of completing their journey. Second, the space (or distance) between places is both real and perceived: the sense of distance between places lessens wherever fast transport and communications are available.

1 Place characteristics

- What are the main elements which make up a place, and how do they combine to create a distinctive identity?

Discovering places

A place is a portion of geographic **space** the identity of which is viewed as being distinctive in some way. Particular places have unique landscapes deriving from the underlying physical geography as well as the way different societies have shaped their surface appearance over time. 'Layered history' is an important aspect of a place's character. This term describes the



▲ **Figure 1.1** Clerkenwell in London: this central area of the city is characterised by an urban mosaic of contrasting buildings and land uses from different historical eras

KEY TERMS

Near places In real terms, these are places located in adjacent settlements and the wider surrounding region. In the UK, historical rural–urban migration flows took place between cities and their surrounding countryside. The term can also be used to describe places that *feel* close-at-hand thanks to technology and transport – even though the real-world distance is great.

Far places Distant places within a country, or places in other countries often at a considerable distance away. Also, isolated places that feel distant because they take a long time to reach (even though the real-world distance may be small).

Region A broad area, such as the Midlands or Lake District, within which places share certain physical and cultural characteristics.

accumulated landscape imprint of physical and human processes operating in the past and present. Some of the UK's oldest cities, such as Chester, London, Bristol and York, are built on a floodplain or coastline. In each case, evidence of past flooding or erosion is demonstrated by the defences that have become an important part of their modern place identity. Older places found within these cities, such as London's Clerkenwell district, are characterised by an 'urban mosaic' of contrasting buildings and land uses (see Figure 1.1). These include Victorian and contemporary housing, Norman churches, medieval synagogues, postwar mosques and repurposed factories now functioning as offices, nightclubs or restaurants. This montage of ancient and modern land uses is the outcome of a long, multi-layered history of economic change and challenge, population growth and migration.

The present-day landscape of Clerkenwell offers many clues about how this place's identity – or 'personality' – has been reshaped repeatedly by its changing relationships with other places and societies at a range of geographic scales. All places are dynamic and 'relational' to some extent. This is because the society and economy which have made them, and upon which they depend, are themselves in a constant state of flux. In part, this dynamism is a result of changing connections with other **near places** (at the local and national scale) and **far places** (at the international and global scale). In recent decades, globalisation has accelerated the rate of change experienced by many places, including Clerkenwell, where an increasing number of properties, businesses and shops are now foreign-owned. Political forces are another highly significant influence on the extent to which places change (or do not) over time (see pages 32–35).

Place and scale

Villages, small towns and city neighbourhoods are all local places. Each, in turn, is embedded in a larger-scale geographical context, such as a **region** or city. The inner-city district of Bootle and the fringe village of Formby both belong to the city of Liverpool in the northwest of England, for instance. All these entities – Bootle, Formby, Liverpool and the northwest – can be understood as places, insofar as each possesses a set of physical and human features that provide an identity and distinguish them from other places at the same scale.

The idea of large-scale 'regional identity' was of central importance for early twentieth-century geographical thought. Writing in the early 1900s, Paul Vidal de la Blache introduced the concept of homogeneous regions – that is, broad areas within which a particular 'bond' had developed between the natural landscape and the societies living there. Vidal's ideas survive in the way we view the different regions or countries as possessing a combination of distinctive physical and cultural characteristics. The characteristic mills, factory chimneys and farm walls of the Yorkshire region were built with local Pennine gritstone, for instance (see Figure 1.2). They give Yorkshire a sense of uniformity, along with its regional dialect. Yet each village or urban neighbourhood within Yorkshire is also a distinctive place in its own right at the local scale.



Two important principles follow from this. First, part of a particular place's identity may be shared by the wider region or city to which that place belongs. Second, the economic decline of particular places is often part of a much bigger picture of sectoral and regional decline (see Chapters 3 and 4).

At the very largest geographic scale of global systems or world development studies, the word 'place' is used sometimes as a synonym for 'country' by non-geographers and geographers alike. For instance, an exam question might ask a student to discuss why levels of economic development vary 'from place to place' across the world. In this context it is reasonable to give credit to the student who uses two countries at different stages of development as examples of 'place'. A good answer may do this before 'drilling down' to a far more local level and comparing the economic development of two neighbouring villages within a region.

To conclude, the word 'place' can be used legitimately in several different ways, according to the geographic scale of enquiry that is being undertaken. But for practical (fieldwork) reasons, a place is best understood in A-level Geography as being *a distinctive locality at a geographical scale somewhere between a street and a city or region*. Accordingly, the word 'place' is used primarily in that sense in this book. The places written about here are mostly villages, small towns and local city neighbourhoods. Although Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the redevelopment of cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and London, the focus is invariably *city centre* redevelopment. These city centres can themselves be viewed as local places embedded within much larger-scale settlements.

Urban and rural places

This book is concerned equally with the study of **urban** and **rural** places, and the changes and challenges they experience. Both urban and rural studies are significant sub-disciplines within Geography. Each has its own highly specialised vocabulary. Some of this terminology needs clarifying, including the terms 'rural' and 'urban' themselves, both of which can be defined in varying ways. The rural-urban distinction may, for instance, be based primarily on 'form', that is, what an area looks like in terms of its landscape features and housing density. Alternatively, a classification can be made based on the economic **function** of the land, namely the services and employment found there. Function-based definitions have changed over time, however, because it no longer makes sense to define a rural area as being one where agricultural employment dominates. Although this may once have been the case, today very few rural people depend on farming to make a living. Rural functions have diversified in recent



▲ **Figure 1.2** Hebden Bridge has its own distinctive identity while sharing certain landscape characteristics with much of Yorkshire as a whole



KEY TERMS

Urban In its most general sense, this word relates to towns, cities and the life that is lived there. In some countries and contexts, it may have a more specific meaning (usually in relation to land use or population).

Rural In its most general sense, this word relates to the countryside and the life that is lived there. In some countries and contexts it may have a more specific meaning (usually in relation to land-use or population).

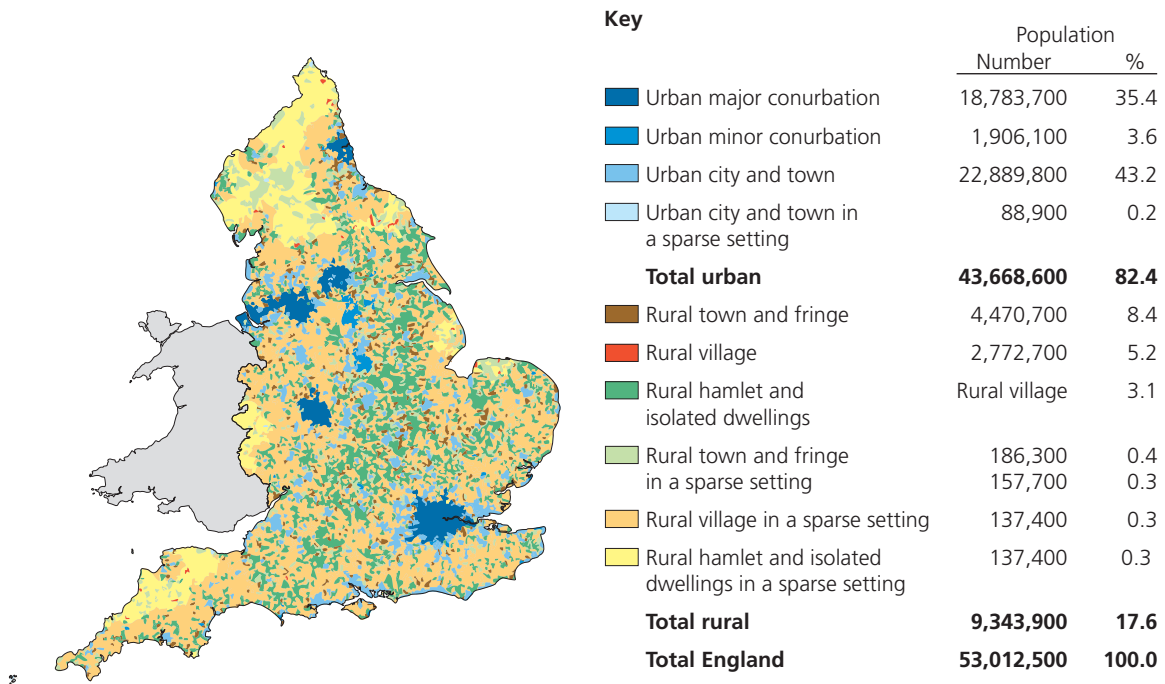
Function The role(s) a place or settlement plays in its local community as well as the wider world. The main function of a small town may be to provide supermarket services, for instance. Large cities that are home to universities and the headquarters of large companies may offer national or even global functions.

years to embrace tourism, technology and leisure services (see pages 139 and 195–199).

In the UK today, it is settlement population size – rather than either form or function – which policymakers use as the main marker of difference between rural and urban areas. In total, six rural and four urban ‘types’ are identified by the UK Government (see Figure 1.3). The most important guidelines underpinning this classification are that:

- ‘urban’ refers to an individual settlement of more than 10,000 people
- ‘rural’ refers to open countryside or areas where people live in smaller settlements of fewer than 10,000 people (small market towns, villages and hamlets).

In practice, using these terms is not always straightforward in the study of Geography. First, people living in small towns are sometimes defined as a rural population, which may seem counterintuitive. Second, some British



▲ **Figure 1.3** Rural and urban areas of England according to the official ten-category classification system.
Source: 2011 UK Census



KEY TERMS

Green belt A land use designation which forms an important part of planning law. The green belt is a 'girdle' of undeveloped land which encircles towns and cities in the UK (although it contains some villages and other developments built prior to the introduction of the green belt).

Urban sprawl The outward expansion of a settlement, as people and economic activities relocate near its edges.

Rural–urban fringe A zone of change between the continuously built-up suburbs and the surrounding countryside.

Rural–urban continuum

The unbroken transition from sparsely populated or unpopulated rural places to densely populated and intensively used urban places.

Edgelands Transitional areas of land found where countryside borders the town or city. Lacking either a truly rural or urban character, these are hybrid (or 'liminal') places possessing their own unique identity.

Home place Your home neighbourhood or the place where you study.

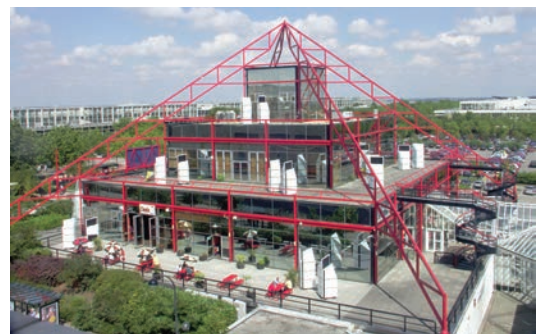
counties and regions are characterised as 'rural regions' within a national context. Examples include Cornwall or the Scottish Highlands. Yet these rural regions include large urban settlements of more than 10,000 people, such as St Ives (Cornwall) and Inverness (the Highlands). Similarly, urban regions such as Merseyside and Greater Manchester include small rural settlements located in the **green belt** surrounding their major cities.

Finally, it would be wrong to infer from Figure 1.3 that rural and urban places always have boundaries that can be clearly identified using field evidence. In fact, visible landscape characteristics may not necessarily correlate at all well with the 'official' picture provided by administrative boundary maps. Urban areas rarely terminate neatly at a city wall beyond which green fields stretch to the horizon. Instead, there is often a gradual change in housing density due to **urban sprawl** at the **rural–urban fringe**. Housing slowly thins out as gardens get bigger; residential estates start to become interspersed with golf courses, reservoirs, landfill sites or small areas of woodland. Ribbon development along transport arteries results in areas which are predominantly countryside yet have veins of housing or industry running through them.

In fringe areas, urban and rural forms and functions become fused together. These are hybrid places where farm workers and city commuters are sometimes neighbours. A range of specialist vocabulary exists for these 'liminal' areas which lack a clearly urban or rural character. Words and phrases like 'rurban' places, the **rural–urban continuum** and **edgelands** are all used in the study of overlapping rural and urban populations and land uses at the edges of major settlements (see Chapter 6).

Home places

This chapter explores the characteristics, dynamics and connections of the places which geographers can discover, map and analyse. One way to begin is through the study of your home neighbourhood or where you study. This is your **home place**. Think about how the place where you live has changed during your own lifetime or that of older residents who you know, including family members. Even recently-built housing estates may have changed in significant ways during their relatively short lives due to migration and economic restructuring. UK new towns dating from the 1950s and 1960s – including Milton Keynes (see Figure 1.4) and Stevenage – also contain traces of much earlier settlement if you look carefully.



▲ **Figure 1.4** Milton Keynes is a purpose-built settlement dating from the 1960s which has nonetheless experienced major changes in its short lifetime



KEY TERM

Cultural landscape The distinctive character of a geographical place or region which has been shaped over time by a combination of physical and human processes. In Geography, the concept is associated strongly with the work of Carl Sauer.

What's in a place?

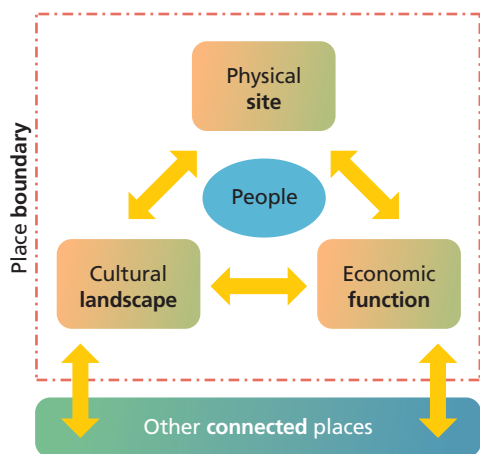
Figure 1.5 provides one possible framework for the study of place characteristics. This approach draws on several well-established geographical concepts: (i) physical site factors, (ii) economic functions and (iii) the **cultural landscape** (which includes a place's population characteristics). Figure 1.5 also emphasises how part of a place's identity is gained from the connections and relations it has with other places.

The site of a place

The site of a place is the actual land it is built on. Settlements have historically taken root wherever geographical site factors favour economic activities that cannot be carried out as profitably in other locations.

Expressed simply, local resources such as coal or water explain why some places are where they are. Physical geography helps to shape the characteristics of entire cities and regions. For example, in Sheffield and the surrounding region of Hallamshire, the iron and steel industries traditionally created a strong sense of place, whereas coal moulded the identity of settlements in South Wales.

Particular places and neighbourhoods within large cities have their own advantageous site factors and topography. The high elevation of London's Hampstead and Highgate neighbourhoods provided wealthy Victorians with clean air and safe water. They remain affluent places today (see page 18).



▲ **Figure 1.5** The main elements of place

In addition to the site itself, climate is another important physical influence on regions and places. It determines what plants and crops can grow. France's Champagne region enjoys warm, dry summers. Grapes used for viticulture (wine-making) thrive in the flinty, chalk soils found there. The world-famous flavour of its wines is said to reflect these geographic characters of Champagne's climate and geology in equal measure. Physical geography provides essential elements of place identity for villages in the Champagne region, such as Chouilly and Cramant.

However, it is important to not overstate the extent to which physical geography decides the ways in which a place (and society) can or cannot develop over time. The prevailing view within human geography is that human ingenuity, technology and political forces usually have the final say about what happens in any one place. Environmental 'obstacles' (such as lack of water) can often be overcome if people have the will (and money) to make it happen.

The economic functions of places

The economic function of a place is what it does in terms of providing services and work for people. Originally, this was often linked closely with site factors. Table 1.1 shows the traditional economy of three large UK cities.



City	Traditional economy (1700–1950)	Urban cultural landscape features
London	London is seven times larger (in population size) than any other UK city and has an accordingly diverse economy. Traditionally, docks, textile and furniture making, food and drink processing, munitions and engineering were important employers.	A wide range of local cultures, from the Cockney East End to Chelsea and Bloomsbury.
Birmingham	In the twentieth century, Birmingham became a hub for the British car industry (important employers included Austin and Dunlop). Earlier success came from jewellery, guns and food processing (Cadbury's is a Birmingham brand).	A rich music heritage, ranging from the work of Elgar to the city's 'heavy metal' scene.
Glasgow	In riverside places such as Dumbarton, Clydebank and Govan Graving Docks, shipbuilding was a major source of wealth for Glasgow. So too were fishing, textiles and manufacturing, sugar and tobacco processing and engineering.	The Glaswegian dialect; traditional religious rivalry between Celtic and Rangers football clubs.

▲ **Table 1.1** The traditional economy of UK cities and the linked culture of urban places

As we have already seen, most cities, towns and villages are located where they are for economic reasons. The comparative advantages enjoyed by different settlements can be linked to site factors such as soils, water supply or proximity to raw materials. Many settlements have, however, changed their function over time. Liverpool and Manchester are now **post-industrial** cities where consumer services have replaced manufacturing industries. As a result, many places within these cities have changed beyond all recognition in recent decades (see Chapter 4). In some **post-productive** rural places, agriculture has given way to tourism.

The cultural landscape of urban places

The cultural landscape is everything we experience in a place. It is the totality of the changes which people have brought to the natural landscape, including the architecture, infrastructure and demography of a place. It also includes the art, music (part of a place's **soundscape**) and sporting life of somewhere. Alongside their traditional industries, Table 1.1 also shows selected cultural landscape traits which have developed in those cities. Before car ownership and mass public transport, many urban workers lived their lives in close-knit local neighbourhoods and knew of little beyond this. Low pay, long working weeks and short holidays meant few people travelled to other places. Leisure time was in limited supply and involved pursuing activities near the workplace. As a result, urban cultural landscapes developed which strongly reflected each settlement's economic functions. City football teams originally drew their amateur players from



KEY TERMS

Post-industrial An economy or society where traditional manufacturing or mining employment has been replaced by an employment structure focused on services and technology. A post-industrial city is a settlement where most jobs are in the tertiary and quaternary sectors.

Post-productive A rural place or economy where agriculture is no longer a major employer (although large areas of land may still be used for mechanised agriculture).

Soundscape The natural and human-made sounds that are generated by a particular environment and help shape people's experience of a place.



▲ **Figure 1.6** Football club badges continue to show links with the past economies of places. Can you deduce what the traditional economic functions were for each of these cities or regions?

local factories. For instance, the cannon on Arsenal's badge reflects the club's birth in the 1880s among the munitions factories of Woolwich, sited by the River Thames. By 1900, London supported over 100 local football teams, each one rooted in a different factory neighbourhood (see Figure 1.6). In contrast, Welsh coal and slate mining communities often became renowned for their male voice choirs.

North American cities also have rich cultural histories linked to their economic traditions. For example, in the 1950s, Detroit was a national hub for car making where major transnational corporations (TNCs), including Ford, were based. After the successes of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, large numbers of African-Americans had migrated there from southern states in search of manufacturing work. Detroit subsequently became the home of Tamla Motown, the record label that launched Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder and many more black music acts in the 1960s and 1970s. Motown is an abbreviation of 'Motor Town', a clear illustration of how the economy of Detroit shaped its cultural landscape, particularly places like the Grand Boulevard district where Motown was first headquartered. Equally important was the role played by Detroit's demography and in-migration from other places: Motown artists drew on black musical traditions from the southern states, including the Blues, a musical form whose roots span the Atlantic to West Africa.

Not all people view the cultural landscape of the urban place where they live positively, however. Between 2003 and 2013, a series of best-selling humorous books titled *Crap Towns* documented 'the worst places to live in the UK' as voted for by members of the public visiting *The Idler* website. Popular as Christmas stocking fillers, these volumes were controversial because of their perceived harmful effects on real patterns of investment in the places they mocked. Table 1.2 shows the top ten rankings from the very first *Crap Towns* volume in 2003. Local newspapers and politicians were quick to defend these locations; later in this book, you will encounter regeneration and redevelopment work carried out subsequently in Hull, Liverpool and Hackney.

Rank	Location
1	Hull
2	Cumbernauld
3	Morecambe
4	Hythe
5	Winchester
6	Liverpool
7	St Andrews
8	Bexhill-on-Sea
9	Basingstoke
10	Hackney, London

▲ **Table 1.2** The 2003 top ten *Crap Towns* rankings



The cultural landscape of rural places

Many rural places have distinctive characteristics which derived originally from each local community's agricultural practices or from artisan and craft traditions which had often developed alongside farming. Making cheese or knitting woollen garments was a good way for agricultural communities to add value to their produce, for instance. In other places, local ores were used for metalworking by blacksmiths. Prior to large-scale manufacturing in the 1700s, rural crafts were vital to the UK's economy during the 'proto-industrial' development phase of the 1600s. Because many villages were relatively isolated prior to modern transport, unique craft-making and cultural traditions sometimes developed in such places. These ways of life did not always survive the Industrial Revolution, however. Out-migration meant traditions were no longer handed down from generation to generation.

Where they have survived, rural traditions sometimes include unique words and language. The geographer Robert Macfarlane (2015) has uncovered hundreds of different local dialect words for 'rain' or 'water' while carrying out his extensive studies of language in rural places that used to be isolated. Local communities often had unique music too, which researchers have worked hard to preserve.

- In the 1800s, songs written by people in isolated communities were often passed from generation to generation *in situ* but remained unknown to people living outside of these places. The melody for 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' belongs to the Surrey village of Forest Green, for instance. It survives only because of research carried out in the early 1900s.
- The composers Ralph Vaughan Williams and George Butterworth visited isolated villages and wrote down the words and melodies they heard. Ethnographer Cecil Sharp used a wax cylinder, an early sound-recording device. He recorded songs that belonged to particular places and were on the verge of vanishing.
- Some music from these places was later adapted by Vaughan Williams and performed in cities worldwide by orchestras: a splendid example of one place's culture connecting with others globally.

Unique festivals and rituals have been preserved in some rural places in the UK and other European countries (see Chapter 5). Costumed processions, symbolic dramatisations and traditional maypole dances mark the changing seasons. In some places surviving celebrations of the yearly cycle of sowing and harvesting crops have been passed down between generations for centuries or possibly millennia. These local rituals often blend elements of Christian ritual (the harvest festival) with older pagan beliefs (celebrating the cycle of seasons).



▲ **Figure 1.7** The Abbots Bromley Horn Dance and Brockworth's annual cheese-rolling race are both unique rural place-based traditions

- Since 1226, a ceremony called the Horn Dance has taken place in the Staffordshire village of Abbots Bromley. Costumed musicians, including a Hobby Horse and Fool, carry reindeer antlers from the church through the village (see Figure 1.7).
- In the northwest of England, the 'Pace-egging' ritual of begging for eggs is still staged at Eastertime in Heptonstall in the Calder Valley.
- Since the mid-1800s, people from Brockworth, Gloucestershire, have gathered each May to chase a round, locally-made cheese down a hill (see Figure 1.7). Word has spread worldwide through YouTube and the ritual now attracts new contestants from surprising places. A visitor from Japan won the race in 2013; this demonstrates how flows of information and people now connect Brockworth with far more distant other places than in the past.

Place demographics

People are, of course, an important part of the cultural landscape of any place. Over time, different places sometimes develop distinctive demographic characteristics as a result of their local economic functions and site characteristics.

Economic opportunities may attract internal (national) and international migrants. Both migration flows can have a major effect on the age structure, fertility rate and socioeconomic character of a neighbourhood. International migrants additionally bring cultural diversity to a place. In contrast, some places in the UK attract retirees who are far less concerned with the economic opportunities on offer. Instead, these non-economic migrants are more interested in the quality of life gained living in a place with spectacular views or good restaurants and theatres. Table 1.3 explains further reasons why demographic characteristics vary from place to place.



Demographic characteristics	Explanation	Examples
Age profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population structure may vary from place to place as a result of age-selective migration movements. 'Mover' groups include students, young professionals, couples with young children and retirees. Life expectancy varies markedly between neighbourhoods, according to wealth and poverty levels. As a result, the age-gender structure of places can differ significantly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some neighbourhoods in Leeds have very high numbers of students as part of a process called 'studentification'. London's Balham neighbourhood is known locally as 'nappy valley', reflecting a high fertility rate due to its popularity with young professional London commuters who are of child-bearing age. Life expectancy for men in affluent Kensington, London, is 84, whereas in Calton, Glasgow, it is just 54 (2016 data).
Socioeconomic profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-migration of professionals has transformed the population profile of some neighbourhoods. This process is called gentrification and it affects both urban and rural areas. It brings rising property prices and changes to the character of local shops and services. In some cities, particularly in the USA, professionals and families have abandoned some inner-city places altogether due to high crime rates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Liverpool's inner-city Bootle district (Linacre ward), more than 50 per cent of people face significant economic challenges according to local government data. In contrast, in the fringe village of Formby, just 10 km north, less than 10 per cent of people belong to this group while up to 70 per cent are working or retired professionals, including teachers, doctors, secretaries and solicitors. Many have migrated to Formby from other parts of the region.
Cultural (ethnic and/or religious) diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ethnic composition of a country, city or local place can change rapidly as a result of the arrival of international migrants and also high fertility among young migrant populations. Cultural diversity can be measured in varying ways, including diversity of nationality, language, religion or race. Migrants may differ from established residents in all or just one of these ways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over time, some places in London have developed a strong association with Jewish, Muslim or Sikh communities. Sometimes, places of worship or specialist food shops help to 'anchor' some diaspora groups to particular places. As a result, some ethnic minority populations in the UK show a high level of segregation in statistical data (see Figure 1.8). Accordingly, some urban neighbourhoods have a distinctive ethnic character.

▲ **Table 1.3** How places may vary according to demographic characteristics and processes



KEY TERMS

Gentrification The movement of middle-income and high-income groups into places that were previously working-class urban or rural neighbourhoods

Diaspora People with the same ethnic or national roots who live in a range of different countries, such as global citizens of Irish or Indian descent.

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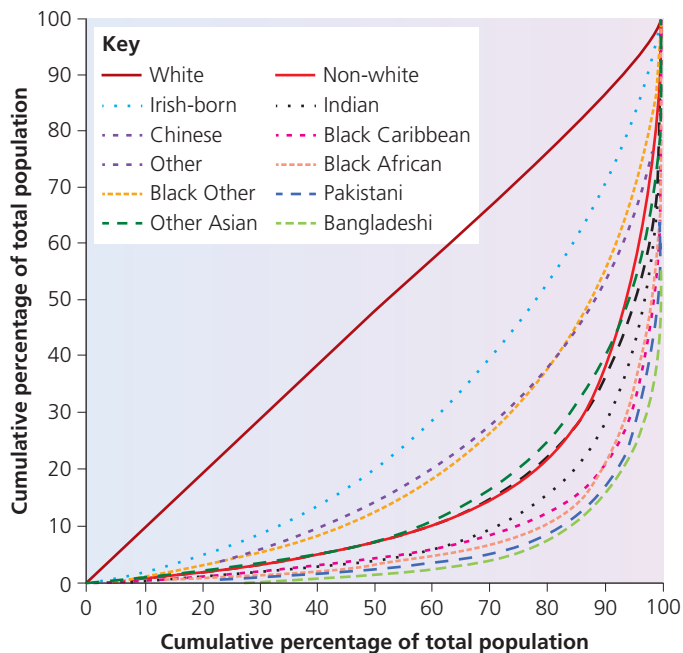


Figure 1.8 Lorenz curves showing the historic level of segregation for different ethnic communities in the UK in the 1991 Census. Source: Ceri Peach, published in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 21(1) p220 (c) RGS-IBG. How might these patterns have changed since, and why?

Places and their boundaries

Finally, one important point to note in this introduction to the study of places is that they may lack clearly identifiable boundaries. In some places, rivers and coastlines provide at least one well-defined settlement margin, whereas local boroughs, wards and electoral constituencies are clearly demarcated on administrative maps. Other places are far less clearly bounded, however. Some urban neighbourhoods do not actually correspond with 'official' administrative areas. In London, it is not clear where Clapham or Chelsea actually begin and end, for instance. In rural regions, topography and vegetation can help create a sense of place, but it is often difficult to establish practically where one upland environment ends and a lowland area begins (see also pages 202–203).

The geographical challenge of boundary-making is indicated by the use of a dashed line in Figure 1.5.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Figure 1.9 shows actual and projected population changes by age group in different UK cities for the period 1993–2020.

- For the period 2013–20, identify one demographic characteristic shared by all the cities shown.
- For the period 1993–2013, describe how changes in the 25–29 group vary from city to city.
- Suggest reasons for the varied changes you have described.

GUIDANCE

Some cities show an increase in the size of the 25–29 group while others show a decrease. Question (c) is best answered by outlining the uneven economic prosperity of different cities during the 1990s following widespread decline in traditional industries in the 1970s and 1980s. London developed a more diverse post-industrial economy more rapidly than many northern cities, in part due to its global influence. London's economic pull factors attracted non-skilled and skilled migrants alike from other parts of the UK. A key element of this 'north–south divide' is the way that demographic changes in different cities are interconnected through migration.

- (d) Explain why the changes shown will not occur in every place within each city.

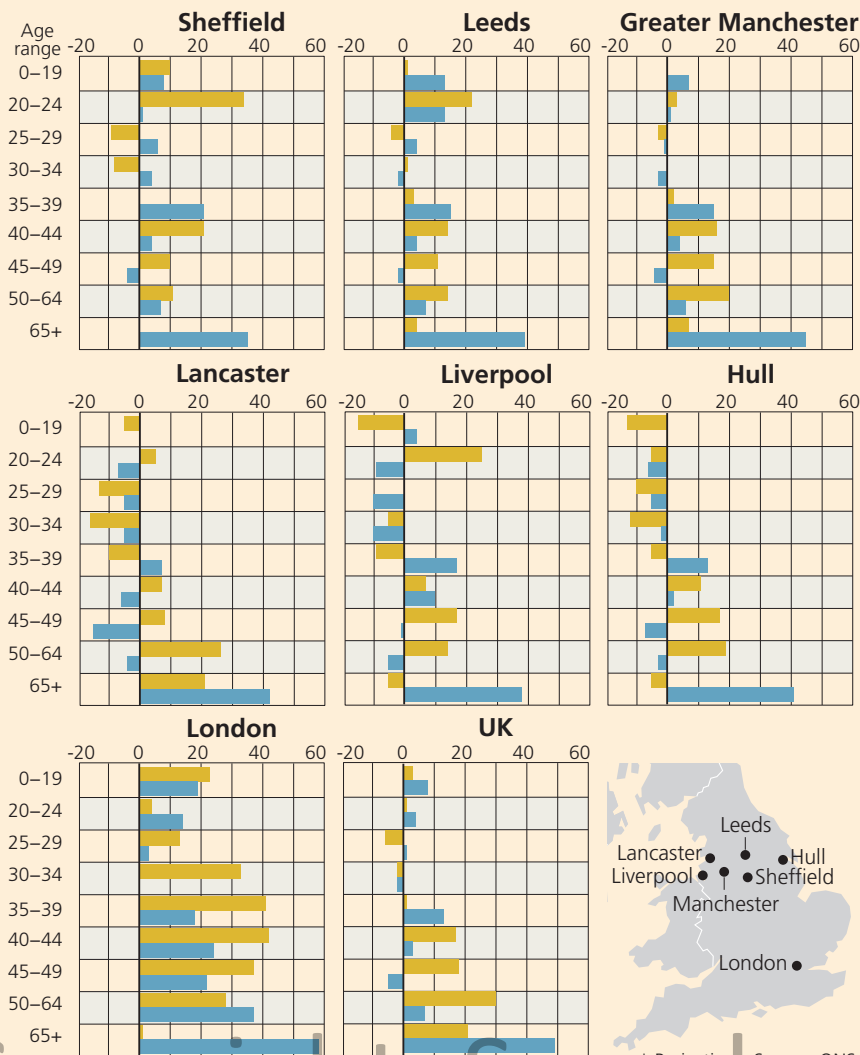
GUIDANCE

Local places within cities do not necessarily experience the exact changes shown at the larger city scale. Inner-city areas that suffered the greatest losses in traditional employment may have experienced even greater out-migration than the whole-city data show. Some affluent neighbourhoods at the rural-urban fringe or in gentrified central areas of northern cities will have gained 25–29-year-olds, particularly towards the end of this time period. Equally, trends may have been uneven within London (some inner-urban areas were still experiencing decline in the 1990s). A well-supported explanation ought to provide named examples of actual places within some of the cities shown.

Population change by age group and region

Per cent change

■ 1993–2013 ■ 2013–20*



◀ **Figure 1.9** Actual and projected population changes for major UK cities, 1993–2020

CONTEMPORARY CASE STUDY: HAMPSTEAD HEATH

London's famous Hampstead Heath has a naturally advantageous physical site and is circled by high-class neighbourhoods (see Figure 1.10). Originally several kilometres distant from the edge of the medieval city, Hampstead Heath is around 100 m higher than the city of London. This raised elevation is a result of ancient sea-level changes. The River Thames has eroded downwards into its original floodplain, leaving relict river terraces to the north and south of London. These strips of high ground are identified easily on Ordnance Survey maps.

The prestigious 'village' neighbourhoods of Hampstead and Highgate are sited adjacent to the heath's common lands. These places have housed affluent Londoners ever since they were absorbed by London's urban sprawl in the nineteenth century. During the Industrial Revolution, they enjoyed two important advantages. First, the smog which choked central London rarely bothered the residents of high-altitude Hampstead or Highgate. Second, these places had their own supply of spring water and so escaped the water-borne cholera epidemics of the 1800s.

With spectacular views over London, it is easy to see why these neighbourhoods were originally favoured by the aristocracy and the upper classes. Today, house prices near Hampstead Heath remain well beyond the reach of ordinary people. A five-bedroom house with a view of the heath cost up to £20 million in 2017. This has impacted on social and cultural characteristics and diversity.

The population profile is relatively elderly: life expectancy is 84 compared with the national average of 78 (a reflection, perhaps, of the elite status of many residents and their access to excellent private healthcare).

In the 2011 Census, 84 per cent of Highgate's population was white, compared with 76 per cent for London as a whole.

High levels of education and political influence among Hampstead residents may help explain the area's reputation as a stronghold of **NIMBYism**. The Highgate Society is a pressure group which tries to protect local place character by minimising evidence of globalisation. Legal action by local residents prevented McDonald's from moving into Hampstead High Street for many years. Permission was finally granted in 1992 following years of dispute and only after McDonald's agreed to adopt a very plain shop front.

However, more global high-street brands have begun to arrive in recent years. The local population is changing too as a result of global connections. Overseas property buyers have flocked to London since the 1990s: Russian, Chinese, French and Middle Eastern money has poured into the Hampstead and Highgate property market. The 2011 Census showed a marked rise in foreign nationals living there.



▲ **Figure 1.10** The view from Parliament Hill on Hampstead Heath



KEY TERMS

NIMBYism The occurrence of 'not in my back yard' attitudes. Local people may, in theory, support a new development such as wind turbines, but they want them built in a place other than their own.

4

Evaluating the issue

► To what extent can places be completely protected from change?

Possible contexts for protection and change

Early-industrialising countries like the UK, France and the USA have experienced centuries of economic growth and rural–urban migration. During this time, settlements have been affected by important functional and landscape changes as their economies have matured. Additionally, some landscapes contain archaeological evidence of more ancient settlement and civilisation pre-dating the Industrial Revolution.

- Older places are often characterised by a ‘palimpsest’ landscape. This means it contains traces of both recent and far older societies, activities and cultures. In successive historical periods, new layers of development were laid down like a blanket (Figure 1.20). But these blankets contained holes and did not cover *everything* that had come before. Roman, Norman and medieval churches and houses can be seen in many older British towns and cities,

despite being surrounded by more recent housing and offices.

- The oldest surviving structures are generally those with special uses and meanings attached to them, such as cathedrals, museums and town halls. In recent decades, however, a wider range of building types has been valued and protected, including **brutalist** tower blocks and other forms of modern architecture.

For comparative purposes, it is worth considering the extent to which these patterns and trends are also true for cities in developing countries and **emerging economies**.

- Many cities in Asia, Africa and Latin America have ancient histories. Since 1945, many important surviving buildings and places have been awarded World Heritage Site (WHS) status by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), whose aim is the ‘preservation and promotion of the common heritage of humanity’. Cairo’s Old Town, where



▲ **Figure 1.20** Canals and warehouses from the early 1800s still show through the gaps in layers of more recent urban development at Victoria Quays in Sheffield; Park Hill (page 25) is visible on the horizon

Sultan Hassan Mosque is situated, has WHS status.

- However, population pressure on Cairo and other developing world cities is even greater than that experienced by Europe in the past. Some megacities like São Paulo and Lagos now receive half a million new arrivals annually. Shenzhen in China has grown from a small market and fishing town of fewer than 300,000 people to a sprawling metropolis of 20 million people in just 35 years. Growth is so rapid that protection of older districts becomes a challenge.

In contrast to cities, rural areas are sometimes relatively easy to insulate from change. In Europe, the countryside is often highly protected, especially in places where ancient monuments and architecture are found. Legal restrictions limit new development on UK **greenfield sites**. There is less demographic and commercial pressure to develop isolated rural places in any case.

- Rural land ownership plays an important role: Scotland's Isle of Jura has been preserved and protected by its owners. It functions as a hunting estate where land use changes have been kept to a minimum.
- However, unpreventable changes to the physical environment, such as those associated with climate change, may be far more clearly visible in a rural rather than an urban context.

Evaluating the view that places can be protected

There are many examples of protected places. Ultimately, most land markets are highly regulated. Planning laws and rules control the changes that may occur legally. In UK towns, any proposed land-use alteration (from residential to commercial use, or vice versa, for instance) is considered carefully by the local authority. Many applications are rejected. Also, over 400,000 buildings in the UK now have Grade I, II* or II listed status, which gives them a high level of protection. Since 1983, the government-funded agency English Heritage (now known as Historic England) has overseen this process. All buildings

built before 1700 which survive in anything like their original condition are listed, as are most of those built between 1700 and 1840.


The valuing of landscapes and places can become a controversial and contested process, however. Not everyone will agree on what should be protected and what should not. Inevitably, subjectivity, individual perspectives and bias affect decision making. Tension can result if some people find special meaning in a place while others do not (see Section 1.2).

- The 'top-down' decision by a government or UNESCO to preserve a place may meet with 'bottom-up' resistance from local people who would prefer to see fresh commercial development and new employment opportunities.
- Historic England has added modern buildings to its protected list, including the brutalist Park Hill estate in Sheffield (see page 25), which has architectural merit according to experts. This view is not shared by many people.

Sometimes, it makes commercial sense to protect places rather than develop them, of course. Heritage tourism can be rewarding: the historic Belgian city of Bruges (Figure 1.21) has seen very



▲ **Figure 1.21** Bruges is a globally-connected city on account of its picturesque and protected 'fairy tale' skyline



little modern development and its picturesque skyline draws millions of visitors annually. New developments in Oxford and Bath are closely monitored in case they detract from the historic landscape visitors expect to see. City planners in London have allowed a mixed modern and historic landscape to develop but no large new construction is approved if it blocks the protected view of St Paul's Cathedral from various prominent locations around the city.

- Green belts remain in place around the UK's major cities, despite rising demand for new **affordable housing**.
- Some places within UK towns and cities have been designated as conservation areas where trees are protected and cannot be cut down without special permission from the local planning authority.

Evaluating the view that places *cannot* be protected

Many counter-arguments can also be made, showing that place protection can, in reality, be hard to achieve. The sky-high value of the land in world cities like New York and London means that large commercial developments can yield enormous profit. The stakes are so high that developers are often prepared to fight long and expensive legal battles to gain planning permission.

Population pressure cannot be ignored either. Migrants are drawn disproportionately to high-performing cities like London and Cardiff. City planners have no control over immigration into the UK. Instead, they must attempt to accommodate population growth as best they can. What options are there other than to grant permission for the construction of more housing, primary schools and supermarkets? External pressures mean that proposals for new developments and housing extensions are more likely to be accepted; 'you

can't stop change' becomes the pragmatic and prevailing response.

Additionally, laws and principles of protection will always be breached in exceptional circumstances:

- Little can be done to protect places from harm in times of war. Liverpool and London were damaged greatly by Second World War bombing, while Coventry lost its cathedral during the conflict. More recently, the Roman temple at Palmyra, in Syria, was destroyed by Daesh (or so-called ISIS) forces. They did not care that UNESCO had awarded it WHS status.
- Extreme weather events transform places through the havoc they wreak. In 1976, southern England experienced an eighteen-month drought that killed many trees. A further 15 million English trees were felled by a great storm in 1987. Hurricane Katrina obliterated entire urban neighbourhoods of New Orleans in 2005.

Increasingly, many places are affected by uncontrollable longer-term climate change. Rising sea levels mean that many coastal areas must either be abandoned or acquire new defences. Either way, place change is inevitable. Landscape characteristics of rural areas will gradually be modified as rainfall and temperature patterns change. In southern England, ecosystems like Epping Forest may not survive in their current form if climate change projections are correct.

Arriving at an evidenced conclusion

To what extent can places be completely protected from change? Realistically, total protection – in the long-term – is impossible. Around the world, different places are threatened by unpreventable earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, coastline retreat and climate change. Adaptation through engineering or out-migration may be the only response: inevitably, affected places are changed.



Hard to avoid too are globalisation and global developmental processes, including changing fertility and mortality rates, and the growth of social media. Few places are truly switched-off from these trends. Even relatively isolated places and populations change in line with global development over time.

However, place change can potentially be minimised in the short term by effective **governance**.

Enforceable local planning controls and laws are required for NIMBY ('not in my back yard') and 'preservationist' attitudes to prevail. Place changes may also be minimised by political decisions taken at the national level limiting global interactions, such as the introduction of stricter migration controls or higher import tariffs on foreign-made goods.

Finally, places can sometimes be restored to their

previous state after an unwelcome and unpreventable change has occurred. The ability of some societies and places to manage this outcome is called **resilience**. The reconstruction of historic buildings and monuments after a fire is one example of this.

Ultimately, though, all societies and environments change over longer timescales. Accordingly, so too do places, given that their identity is shaped by the interplay of dynamic social and environmental forces. In the long term, place changes can be slowed down by protective measures but never prevented entirely. In the short term, the degree of protection which is possible depends on (i) the scale and pace of the force of change, (ii) the political will to resist it and (iii) the cost of doing so.



KEY TERMS

Brutalism A mid-twentieth-century architectural style typically characterised by massive, plain and unadorned concrete blocks and towers. Brutalist designs are now viewed widely as fierce and aggressive rather than inspiring. The term was originally coined in Sweden in 1950 to describe boring brick building designs.

Emerging economies Countries that have begun to experience higher rates of economic growth, often due to rapid factory expansion and industrialisation. Emerging economies correspond broadly with the World Bank's 'middle-income' group of countries and include China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria and South Africa.

Greenfield site A place which has remained free of housing, industry or urban development (although it may have been used for farming) and which remains 'natural' in appearance.

Affordable housing New homes which are sold at below-market prices to first-time buyers. Local councils can require new housing developments to include some affordable housing.

Governance The term suggests broader notions of steering or piloting rather than the direct forms of control associated with 'government'.

Resilience This describes the capacity of a place (or society or economy) to return to its previous state, or establish a new growth path, following some major disruption, shock or disaster.

Chapter summary

- ✓ Places can be understood as small-scale settlements, neighbourhoods or areas whose physical and human characteristics collectively create a distinctive identity. Site factors, economic functions and the cultural landscape of a place are three interconnected elements which provide a place with its 'personality'.
- ✓ The elements of a place are dynamic: internally-driven (endogenous) changes may result from the operation of physical processes or the management decisions of the people living there.
- ✓ External (exogenous) connections with other places and people bring frequent changes to places. Migration is an important driver of cultural landscape change on account of how it affects population structure and ethnic diversity. Globalisation is another key influence: the global shift of manufacturing industries had knock-on effects for local economies and societies throughout the UK.
- ✓ Rural areas have been changed by links with other places, especially neighbouring urban areas. The migration of city workers into adjacent countryside blurs the distinction between rural and urban places by creating 'rurban' fringe areas or edgelands.
- ✓ Geographic connections and network flows change in successive historical eras. Older settlements therefore gain a multi-layered identity which reflects both past and present flows of people, money, resources and ideas.
- ✓ No place can be completely protected from change due to the complexity of the many geographic processes and connections which shape the surrounding world. Contingent political and natural events, including wars, extreme weather and climate change, bring destructive and creative effects that cannot always be mitigated against.

Refresher questions

- 1 What is meant by the following geographical terms? Settlement site; settlement function; cultural landscape.
- 2 Using examples, outline the interrelationships that exist between the economic function and cultural landscape of different places.
- 3 Using examples, explain the difference between a rural place and a rural region.
- 4 Outline different ways of distinguishing between rural places and urban places.
- 5 Explain the demographic and economic changes which cities in the UK have experienced on account of in-migration from (i) near places and (ii) far places.
- 6 Using examples, explain two ways in which new technology has brought change to rural places.
- 7 Outline how different flows of people, resources and ideas create networks of connected places.
- 8 Using examples, explain what is meant by 'a shrinking world'.
- 9 Using examples, explain how players at varying geographic scales have attempted to protect different places from change.

Discussion activities

- 1 In pairs, discuss the characteristics of (a) the place or neighbourhood where you live and (b) the city or region it belongs to. What characteristics does your home place share with the wider city or region? What makes your place unique and distinct from the rest of the city or region?
- 2 Use Figure 1.5 and Figure 1.18 to help you describe the 'place story' of your home neighbourhood or settlement.
- 3 Draw a timeline from 1945 up to around the time you were born for (a) the UK as a whole and (b) the place where you live. Add annotations to show any major economic and social changes that you have learned were taking place during each decade of your timeline.
- 4 In pairs, make a list of as many of the UK's largest towns and cities as you can. Use the names of football teams or the location of television shows you have seen to help you create your list. Now try to identify a traditional industry that each settlement was originally associated with.
- 5 Draw a diagram to show the movements of people that were taking place in the UK during the 1970s and 1980s. Your diagram could include the inner areas and suburbs of cities, rural land in the commuter belt and remote rural regions further away. Who was moving in and out of all these different places? Where were they going? What changes did their movement bring?

FIELDWORK FOCUS

The topic of place characteristics, dynamics and connections can be used to frame any number of interesting and potentially unique A-level independent investigations. There is plenty of scope to collect both qualitative and quantitative primary data. A wide variety of resources can be drawn on as forms of secondary data, including literature, music and art. Some possible suggestions are as follows.

- A *Profiling different neighbourhoods in order to investigate how and why the demographic characteristics of places vary.* Governments collect a range of data about places that are available in numerical form and can be subjected to statistical tests. These data could be used to compare levels of ethnic diversity in different neighbourhoods, for instance. The secondary data could be complemented with primary interview data: a questionnaire might focus on the reasons why certain social groups prefer to live in some neighbourhoods but not others.
- B *Interviewing multi-generational families in order to investigate place connections.* A series of interviews can be arranged with the children, parents and grandparents within several family groups belonging to a diaspora population (see page 15) population, such as British citizens of Indian descent. Data can be collected by asking individuals a range of questions, including how often they have visited India and how often they correspond with family members there using social or traditional media. With more recently established diaspora populations, such as Polish citizens living in the UK, place connectivity could be investigated by asking people about the importance and role of remittances within their family networks.



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