CHAPTER 2

Matters of Place: The Making of Place and Identity

Jen Daniels, Godfrey Baldacchino, and Kelly Vodden

INTRODUCTION

> *. . . if there is anything to the notion of attachment to place, if cherishing a neighbourhood in which one has spent a significant part of one's life is a meaningful concept, if sense of place and identity are at issue, then the demolition of places large and small inevitably represents an immense cost in human terms.*
>
> Friedmann (2010: 156)

Place is a key factor influencing individual and social behaviour, modes of living, and well-being (Halseth et al., 2010). Place-based development frameworks address this empirical imperative by their sensitivity to the existing assets and challenges experienced in a place. Some scholars and development practitioners recognize that "competitive advantage" comes from assets and resources nested in place. Others are drawn to place and place-making in response to fears of homogenization under such forces as globalization, urbanization, commodification, and the general "horrors of placelessness" (Friedmann, 2010: 150).

And yet, how are notions of place operationalized in place-based development and what are the social and political ramifications of how place is defined and used? How might various conceptions of place inform

understandings and practices of place-based development? Even more critically, what are the ramifications, both intellectual and material, of ignoring, or at best, not fully exploring, the role of a more expanded and nuanced notion of place? This chapter first explores these concerns through an investigation of various notions of place; it particularly examines how identity is involved in place-making and creating individual and collective sense(s) of place, and likewise, how place is involved in identity-making. It then considers the significance of these place- and identity-making processes for development policy and practice.

CONCEPTIONS OF PLACE

Coe et al. (2007: 16) suggest that place refers to "somewhere in particular," a location or space that has history and holds meaning. While place often is conceived of simply as a country, a region, a municipality, a neighbourhood, or some other spatially determined entity, several authors caution against simply collapsing place into space (e.g., Casey, 2001; Entrikin, 2001); understanding place requires understanding deeply embedded processes. Defining place and understanding connections between place and individual and collective identities is far from simple. In terms of empirically assessing place meanings and the emotional attachments to place, there are various approaches across disciplines. Friedmann (2010) describes a growing literature on place by diverse authors: from geographers to anthropologists, from psychologists and sociologists to landscape architects, planners, and philosophers (e.g., Bachelard, 1964; Chandler et al., 2003; Salamon, 2003; Davenport and Anderson, 2005; Escobar, 2008; Easthope, 2009).

Distinguishing between space and place, space is conceived of within geography as a highly abstract entity most commonly understood and applied in the form of cartographic representations and co-ordinate points, while place is a much richer concept, redolent with meaning and affect. Halseth et al. (2010) argue that "championing" place over space is by no means a recent concept in geography; nor is it new within research on place-based development. Understanding the policy implications of such a difference, however, remains largely unexplored. Accordingly, "space-based

analyses tend to be transformed from their descriptive roots to proscriptive objectives, and in the process they come to represent these trends and relationships as inexorable . . . driving us to futures we all must share and over which we have limited influence" (Halseth et al., 2010: 3). Opening up place meanings, then, is an important first step in exploring the potential policy implications of analyses that are based on agency-in-place (rather than space), thus also helping to avoid the observed deterministic pitfalls of the latter (e.g., Baldacchino et al., 2009).

The construction of place is substantiated through multiple, concurrent processes, including economic, social hierarchical relations (e.g., gender, class, race), and biophysical factors (e.g., Massey, 1994; Harvey, 1996; Escobar, 2008). Harvey (1996) argues that there is an inherent tension in place construction through political-economic frameworks that conceptualize place as commodity. A place's assets, often argued as one component of what makes a place unique, may be promoted by entrepreneurs and local economic development actors in an attempt to ensure a continuation of place with minimal personal, affective, or similar valorization (Harvey, 1996). Increasing mobility of capital in recent decades has intensified efforts to *sell* a place. Not only can this pit one place against another, in altogether unsustainable modes of competition; such a strategy of trying to "differentiate [places] as marketable entities ends up creating a kind of serial replication of homogeneity" (Harvey, 1996: 298). It is therefore fruitful to critique attempts to (re)invent place with questions about the motivations to do so and with an eye on the implications of any resulting changes.

Massey (1994) and Cresswell (2002) emphasize the importance of mobility in the perception and performance of place, particularly in the context of a globalized world. Mobility, Massey (1994) asserts, is fundamentally influenced by the movement of capital — money, as the idiom suggests, makes the world go around — which determines who and what moves and does not, influencing our individual and collective sense of place. But capital alone is insufficient; it cannot adequately describe the differences, for example, between women's and men's experiences of place, or those between people of different race, culture, and sexual orientation. Cresswell (2002) demonstrates that recent conceptualizations of place have gained increasing

traction in contemporary cultural theory through shifting focus from "rooted" and otherwise essentialist place identities towards those that are more fluid, boundless, and indeed performative in nature. "Mobilities" scholarship in the last decade insists that identities are situated through networks of people, things, and ideas in flux, and that analysis should not start "from a point of view that takes certain kinds of fixity and boundedness for granted [but rather] start with the fact of mobility" (Cresswell, 2011: 551).

In terms of the biophysical element of places, Escobar (2008) posits that landscapes have agency, and maintains that the place assemblage is not simply a social construction. He argues that landscapes are not passive to the kinds of lives people and other beings make in them. Conversely, the external world is highly relevant in the "kind of distinctions humans make . . . [and] different places have different things to offer humans to work with and live in and this has everything to do with how humans construct places" (Escobar, 2008: 42). Landscapes, and the biological and physiological entities contained therein, are key components of territory, which in turn, as Escobar (2008) argues, is the embodiment of people's uses, practices, and work in the world — and, ultimately, is the embodiment of their relationship with/in it. Places, then, are co-productions between people and environments. An important feature of place, as conceived by human geographers and post-colonial authors, is that place cannot be limited to geographic locality. It stands that the increasing interconnection and interdependence between places marks not "the end but [rather] the beginning of geography" (Paasi, 2004: 536). Thus, in human geography, place must be positioned in a context where "there is no pure 'local' just as there is no pure 'universal' as all things are interconnected and diffuse in meaning, intention and power" (Bowers, 2010: 204). Places are assemblages of relations. Ultimately, people (and other living things) are connected in ways that extend beyond a spatial location. At the same time, the global does not exist without the local, as every global phenomenon that exists is in some way rooted in a locality, with local origins and/or "touching down" points (Massey, 2004; Sassen, 2007). Thus, the relational and territorial are interconnected and do not present an irreconcilable dichotomy, as they are too often portrayed (e.g., Escobar, 2008).

One approach to understanding sense of place is through analysis of human–environment interactions. In their study of governance of the Niohrara River in Nebraska, for example, Davenport and Anderson (2005) demonstrate that examining residents and other river users' diverse perceptions of sense of place provided a framework for informing decisions. They identify four central tenets related to human–environmental relationships in the literature: (1) place manifests physical characteristics as well as social processes; (2) people assign meanings to and derive meaning from place; (3) some place meanings evoke strong emotional bonds, which influence attitudes and behaviours within the context of those places, and; (4) place meanings are maintained, challenged, and negotiated in the context of natural resource management and planning (Davenport and Anderson, 2005).

If places have multiple meanings that transcend the physical and the locational, then investigating these multiple meanings of place is critical to developing a more nuanced and better-grounded understanding of place politics (e.g., Cheng et al., 2003; Yung et al., 2003; Davenport and Anderson, 2005). In political ecology, the role of place is also increasingly seen as fundamental in tackling the complexity of socio-environmental problems. One of the central arguments here is the *environmental identity and social movement thesis*, which argues that "changes in environmental management regimes and[/or] environmental conditions have created opportunities or imperatives for local groups to secure and represent themselves politically" (Robbins, 2004: 15). Thus, understanding the conceptualizations of place, and the identities lurking within, is pivotal to these movements, providing an additional lens to investigate place in place-based development (e.g., Escobar, 2008; Howitt, 2001; Neumann, 2010). Howitt (2001) asserts that perceiving places as complex sites, produced by multiple scales of interactions between human and non-human agents, helps to unsettle and reframe resource development. Such a turn "for place" is subversive: it guides the examination of those power relations and assumptions that surround such loaded terms as "progress," "planning," "management," "capacity-building," and even "periphery," all in the name of that equally loaded term, "development."

PLACE AND IDENTITY

In their analysis of individual and social identity and of place meanings, Cheung et al. (2003) discuss the well-documented evidence of personal and collective identity construction through places. Individuals' deep-seated emotional and impassioned responses to particular resource and development policies, as well as the social and cultural meanings that may be shared by a group towards a particular place, are important markers of identity. They conclude that "natural resource politics is as much a contest over place meanings as it is a competition among interest groups over scarce resources" (Cheung et al., 2003: 87). Although place is also created through processes of day-to-day life and practice, this opens the discussion of place-making as deeply political work. Given the political stakes involved, these authors stress that negotiations around meanings of place must include a wide set of people, especially those who would normally not be included in management and development decisions.

Markey (2010) states that Canadian development policy and practice often adopt a neo-liberal perspective, such that individuals are deemed to be relatively autonomous and capable of acting independently from those people and places around them in their own rational best interest. Such policies completely disregard the role of identity and place on a person's or a group's decisions and well-being. In Aboriginal constructions of identity, for example, the "place of place [has a] vital link in the chain of meaning" (Bowers, 2010: 217), affecting people's decisions on how to conduct themselves and their ability to heal and learn, and to experience culture and fulfillment (e.g., Kelly and Yeoman, 2011). The research by Chandler et al. (2003) on suicide rates in Aboriginal communities demonstrates that identity construction plays a central role in personal persistence and cultural continuity, which can contribute to lower overall rates of youth suicide these communities.

Many studies of identity point to similar challenges and draw parallel conclusions as they relate to the multiplicity of identities. Bowers (2010) offers a conceptualization of identity as expressed in the Mi'kmaq saying *Msit Nogma*, that is, *All My Relations*. He states "this way of knowing deeply connects the local, familial, tribal, regional, global, and cosmic ecologies

into a wholistic/ecology of identity" (Bowers, 2010: 206). Here, identity is grounded in the day-to-day — the places where we eat, sleep, relax, and perform ceremony (Bowers, 2010). Place identity, in this way, also can be viewed from the lens of individual/landscape co-production, and as an interconnected, intermeshed knot, where individual components cannot (or perhaps, should not) be treated in isolation. Bowers (2010) asserts, along with other authors (e.g., Howitt, 2001; Rose, 2004), the urgency of articulating this "deep ecology" of identity by reflecting on the practices within communities and grappling with the complexities and interconnectivity of, in this case, Indigenous ontologies. These complex performances or ontologies of place and identity are not exclusive to Aboriginal communities. Woods (2010), for example, describes an emerging literature on the practice and performance of rural identities.

One common theoretical approach to understanding human–environmental relations and the creation (or co-production) of places and place identities is through phenomenology: this proffers an investigation into how abstract spaces become places through people's interactions and experiences in the world (Buttimer, 1976; Harvey, 1996; Davenport and Anderson, 2005). A person's relationship with a space, particularly the relationship between one's body and the world, involves a baseness and a tactility that require phenomenologists to "reveal an attachment that is native in some way to the primary function of inhabiting" (Bachelard, 1964: 4). Here, Bachelard speaks to the experience of dwelling, using the house as an analogy. Through the act of inhabiting, we create a home, or a sense of belonging in the universe, and by rooting in the home we have access to the cosmos, or consciousness, of the world. Drawing from Relph (1976), Harvey emphasizes that this connection between humans and the earth — the intimate relationship to place(s) — is not simply a sentimental value or "extra" to be indulged after material problems are resolved. It is, indeed, "part of being in the world and prior to technical matters" (Harvey, 1996: 301). We couldn't agree more.

In elaborating on the concept of inhabiting, Buttimer argues that to dwell "implies more than to inhabit, to cultivate, or to organize space. It means to live in a manner which is attuned to the rhythms of nature, to see

one's life as anchored in human history and directed toward a future, to build a home which is the everyday symbol of a dialogue with one's ecological and social milieu" (Buttimer, 1976: 272). The concept of *genre de vie*, or lifeway, closely follows a phenomenological approach in describing the connection between people's livelihood and culture and their biophysical setting (Buttimer, 2001). The relationship between self and place is not simply one of reciprocal influence; rather, it is one of "constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other. That is, there is no place without self, and no self without place" (Casey, 2001: 684).

A considerable literature, both scholarly and populist, gloats over the victimization of local places, and every other thing local, by rampant globalization. But if the latter has its origin in local places, then some of these entities (that is, particular places) are producing globalization and cannot be considered merely victims or consumers. And is this not "an imaginative failure; [one which] closes down the possibility of inventing an alternative local politics, an alternative local economic strategy, in relation to neoliberal globalization" (Massey, 2004: 100)? Throughout history, people have demonstrated a capacity to defend their "local" places while simultaneously reinventing them. As Harvey (1996) suggests, attempts to find, or promote the search for, the "authentic community" — interpreted as one that is grounded in a particular locality and its millenary traditions and that has completely and/or successfully resisted and defied global influences — is probably leading us down the proverbial blind alley. A greater understanding may be gained through an exploration of the hybridization and multi-scalar processes occurring in places, which have provoked in people a "capacity to insert and reinsert themselves into changing space relations" (Harvey, 1996: 318). Invention and reinvention are the stuff of human resilience; the specifics of place are both a cause and an effect of these dynamics.

PLACING PERIPHERIES

This argument is relevant to a more critical understanding of the place of the periphery in a world driven by agglomerations, networks, clusters, and scale economics. Here, we navigate between and among two popular conceptualizations of a globalized world. First is that vision celebrated by

communication and information technology (IT) revolution, which has triumphantly declared the death of distance and the irrelevance of geography. We are now all connected, and all barriers have broken down in what has really become a global knowledge economy of "prosperous city regions" (Ohmae, 2001: 33). The second vision is that driven by hard-nosed economics, where major investments, capital flows, and IT-specializing universities still chase each other, with job seekers likely to follow. Large urban centres, equipped with institutional "thickness" (Amin and Thrift, 1994: 14–15) are the main beneficiaries of these trends, while rural and remote communities lose populations and political and economic power. Localities around the world — irrespective of size, resources, and endowments — need to learn how to navigate being both local and global players. Their task is to nurture livability in all its meanings. Failure to encourage place-based development could easily threaten the very sustainability of their communities, and would be evident in depopulation. People vote with their feet (Baldacchino, 2006a).

The task is not an impossible one. The sheer onslaught of globalization may have nurtured an anodyne reductionism to sameness, triggered by global cultural norms in some instances; but this is only part of the story. The same juggernaut has also provided an added incentive to difference. Cultures celebrate specific identities and rediscover (or invent) specific histories; moribund local languages receive a new lease of life; and all of these, somewhat perversely, are fuelled and supported by global tourism industries. The global reach of the World Wide Web has cut down the costs of marketing local products, leading to a renaissance of branded, "authentic" goods from specific places. Diasporas, widely dispersed and swayed by nostalgia, become important customers and cultural agents. Urban refugees, no longer willing to forgo quality-of-life issues in competitive urban labour markets, choose to move to places that are small, charming, and relatively safe.

Islands share many of the features attributed to remote rural regions: their aquatic delineation and often smaller populations and resource bases give the notion of periphery a stark geographical character (Baldacchino et al., 2009). And yet, just like remote rural regions, they are exploiting the

"structural holes" that pervade the overarching global network (Burt, 1992; Sennett, 1998: 84). If theirs are also places whose future is "in play," they have done well by presenting themselves as places "to play," platforms of amusement, excitement, and relaxation in a hedonistic age (Sheller and Urry, 2003). But not only so: coupled with the resourcefulness of jurisdictional powers — many islands are self-contained administrative units — they have deployed the tools of governance to practise "agency in place," carefully identifying or crafting niches in ever turbulent markets. Their repertoire includes tourism — whether of the "sun, sea, and sand" variety in warm-water locations (e.g., Conlin and Baum, 1995), or the "ice, isolation, and indigenous culture" type of their cold-water cousins (e.g., Baldacchino, 2006b). Beyond that industry, islands also sport military, satellite, and communications installations; nature reserves; offshore banking industries; niche crafts and manufactures; and vibrant arts scenes. All celebrate location, though for altogether different reasons.

Clearly, being an island has its advantages. This is not just a function of the place-specific and revenue-generating repertoire of activities referred to above, but also of those elusive but determining quality-of-life factors (e.g., Dahlström et al., 2006). House prices on islands are usually lower than in metropolitan areas (though with some notable exceptions); cultural and historical heritage is important, as is the value of one's roots in the community. Indeed, islands typically contain tight and robust communities, which are warm, supportive, and welcoming when one belongs; but hard to penetrate if one does not (e.g., Cohen, 1987; Marshall, 2008).

And so, while regional and national development plans generated from metropolitan and administrative cores and rural scholars continue, top-down, to objectify and essentialize peripheries as "have-not" regions that need to be the targets of economic largesse to survive, some of these communities are reacting to this deficit syndrome, refusing to accept its assumptions or consequences. In other cases, communities and regions have adopted and perpetuated this narrative of deficit, whether it has been internalized or is used to further their own interests. While connectivities remain important and vital for survival, what may appear to be remote and marginal to some is very much the view from the centre for others. We all

stand at the centre of our own worlds: valuing place is a significant conceptual turn towards asserting and fulfilling our right to belong.

DEVELOPMENT CAN ONLY BE (MORE OR LESS) PLACE-BASED

Place-based development, in many ways, is a reaction to more conventional forms of development, which have been pronounced in an almost universal application of those policies, programs, and practices deemed most appropriate by Western science and political-economic agendas. In this "rational" Western view, planning is controlled by planning experts, development institutions, and nation-states that govern largely from the top down (Coe et al., 2007; Escobar, 1995), often focusing on single-sector, and frequently large-scale, industrial projects (Markey et al., 2008). Meanwhile, local contexts, their subsequent historical contingencies, and the gamut of socio-cultural, political, and environmental specificities and relationships are temporarily suspended or even completely disregarded (Escobar, 1995, 2008).

In sharp and welcome contrast, place-based development is "a holistic and targeted intervention that seeks to reveal, utilize and enhance the unique natural, physical, and/or human capacity endowments present within a particular location for the development of the *in situ* community and/or its biophysical environment" (Markey, 2010: 1). Place-based strategies adopt a territorial approach to planning and development that encourages the integration of contextual endowments and potentials, such as the environmental, economic, social, and cultural characteristics of a locality (Amdam, 2002; Markey et al., 2008). Such a style of doing development differently is commonly associated with "bottom-up" or grassroots modes of governance, promoting the leadership, participation, and agency of local actors within development (Greenwood, 2009; Halseth et al., 2010; Markey et al., 2008; OECD, 2010; Reimer and Markey, 2008).

It can be argued that place-based development follows on the multiple traditions of community development practice and theory dating back at least to the 1950s (Chekki, 1989) and of area-based initiatives from the 1960s and 1970s (Matthews, 2012). Recent attention to place-based approaches can be largely attributed to the drastic restructuring of the economic, political, and social fabric of rural communities. But there have also

been concurrent shifts in scholarly communities, with the more integrative and relational turn in economic geography, the rise of interest in "sustainable livelihoods," and the generally critical reviews of past approaches to development policy and theory (e.g., Barnes et al., 2000; Hettne, 1995; Markey et al., 2008; Markey, 2010; Sachs, 2003). Surely, place-based development offers a better alternative.

Four critical reasons why place needs to be taken into account in development policy and practice, certainly in a rural context, have been simply yet aptly proposed. First, place is where assets such as resources are located; second, services of all kinds — health, education, sanitation, justice, housing, welfare, recreation — are delivered in places; third, governance and decision-making around planning and development occur in places; and, finally, identities of who we are, individually and collectively, are formed and reinforced in places (Reimer and Markey, 2008). These are important arguments regarding why place matters in development, particularly in the face of standard and context-blind policies that have been indiscriminately applied, top-down, cookie-cutter fashion, to many rural areas (Markey et al., 2008). Is this one reason why rural depopulation has been so extensive worldwide in recent decades?

Yet, what place is, and by what it is constituted, is not immediately apparent within the place-based development literature. The characteristics of place-based approaches, including related local and community economic development literatures, are widely discussed (e.g., Haughton, 2002; Markey et al., 2005; Markey et al., 2008), indicating an obvious interest, in both academia and in practice, in the role of place in development; and yet, there is a lack of an explicit or consistent definition of "place" in this body of work. Such definitional obscurity is just one of the central reasons why place-based policies are often treated with suspicion or indifference (Reimer and Markey, 2008). Other key criticisms include: a danger of elitism and parochialism; an inability to engage or enforce a broader community and/or regional interests; an unreflexive promotion of local control as ideal, including the privileging of local governance mechanisms at the cost of broader (e.g., national and multinational) institutional and political relations; and a disregard for inter-community co-operation, as is especially

required where regional identity does not align neatly with that of a community (e.g., Markey et al., 2009; Reimer and Markey, 2008).

What these criticisms may implicitly suggest is that a geographic locality, understood as a bounded, spatially or politically predetermined entity — such as a municipality — is synonymous with the "place" in place-based development. Place-based resource management, however, is not about removing mechanisms of non-local control over resource decisions. There is a felt need to collaborate across jurisdictional scales, and both knowledge-sharing mechanisms and collaborative relationships warrant greater academic attention, as suggested by collaborative and multi-level governance literatures (Emerson et al., 2011; Vodden, 2009; Hooghe and Marks, 2003). Thus, places and their particularities warrant being explored in their own right and in the context of their wider context and relationships (Cheung et al., 2003; Robbins, 2004; Sivaramakrishnan, 1998).

PLACE MATTERS

Clearly, place-based identities are highly contested, and so are contemporary views on the roles of place and identity, including the explanatory value of place in social theory (Entrikin, 2001). Place can be conceived as both a materially identifiable territory and a set of relations that extend in and beyond "local" actors, to imbricate decisions and relationships that reach far beyond the immediate geographical boundaries. Place meanings are maintained, challenged, and negotiated in the context of management, planning, and development; it follows that there is a dire need for research to explore how such development challenges, reinforces, and dismisses certain understandings of place, sense of place, and identity in place. An important reminder here is that place is in play: it is contestable, up for grabs, embroiled in all sorts of other (mainly incidental) conversations about resources, about local government, about social provision. Place can get lost in the shuffle: it can be implicitly or explicitly redefined; it can be colonized; it can be subsumed; it can be revalorized; it can be renamed; or it can slip off the agenda, unnoticed and unwept. Further exploration of these notions of place would surely help to open place-based development scholarship to alternative notions of place identities — notions that better

capture the contextual richness of these places.

Deeper understandings of place are called upon to support and inform a more equitable and responsible development policy and practice. This requires of us "an act of geographic imagination . . . an ability to read landscapes — not simply as texts, but as complex records of interactions, interrelationships and change over time and space" (Howitt, 2011: 165). As development practitioners, policy-makers, and scholars, but also as affected community members, we all do well to recognize the settings of our work as places, in all their plurality, complexity, and diversity. This recognition needs to be squarely on the agenda in pursuing place-based development. Place matters, and in many more ways than we may realize.

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