

Such inherent identity is inseparable from identity with other things; Erik Erikson (1959, p.102), in a discussion of ego identity, writes: “The term identity ... connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself ... and a persistent sharing of some kind of characteristic with others.” Thus identity is founded both in the individual person or object and in the culture to which they belong. It is not static and unchangeable, but varies as circumstances and attitudes change; and it is not uniform and undifferentiated, but has several components and forms.

Kevin Lynch (1960, p.6) defines the identity of a place simply as that which provides its individuality or distinction from other places and serves as the basis for its recognition as a separable entity. This tells us only that each place has a unique address, that it is identifiable. Ian Nairn (1965, p.78) offers some expansion of this: he recognises that “there are as many identities of place as there are people”, for identity is in the experience, eye, mind, and intention of the beholder as much as in the physical appearance of the city or landscape. But while every individual may assign selfconsciously or unselfconsciously an identity to particular places, these identities are nevertheless combined intersubjectively to form a common identity. Perhaps this occurs because we experience more or less the same objects and activities and because we have been taught to look for certain qualities of place emphasised by our cultural groups. Certainly it is the manner in which these qualities and objects are manifest in our experience of places that governs our impressions of the uniqueness, strength, and genuineness of the identity of those places.

It is clear that rather than being a simple address in a gazetteer or a point on a map, identity is a basic feature of our experience of places which both influences and is influenced by those experiences. What is involved is not merely the recognition of differences and of samenesses between places—but also the much more fundamental act of identifying sameness in difference. And it is not just the identity of a place that is important, but also the identity that a person or group has *with* that place, in particular whether they are experiencing it as an insider or as an outsider.

In the following discussion identity is considered in terms of, first the constituent components of the identity of places; second, the links between individual, group, and mass images of places and the identities of those places; and finally, the ways in which identities develop, are maintained, and change.

The components of the identity of places

If we consider places only in terms of their specific content, they present a remarkable diversity—one in which common elements are not readily apparent. Furthermore, our experiences of places are direct, complete, and often unselfconscious; if there are component parts, they are experienced in the fullness of their combinations. However, from a rather less immediate perspective one can distinguish elements, bound together but identifiable nevertheless, that form the basic material out of which the identity of places is fashioned and in terms of which our experiences of places are structured. These are like the fundamental components of a painting—the canvas, the paint, the symbols, each irreducible to the other but inseparable. Albert Camus’ essays on North Africa are used here to demonstrate the components of the identity of place, but almost any description or direct observation of a particular place would serve just as well.

In his essays on the life and landscape of Algeria Albert Camus (1955, 1959) uses a clearly structured approach in his accounts of places. Both when he is describing his own experiences and when he is describing as an observer he reveals not only what appear to be the basic components of the identity of all places, but also the interweaving of these. Consider for example his account of Oran (1955, pp.130–131):

“Oran has its deserts of sand: its beaches. Those encountered near the gates are deserted only in winter and spring. Then they are plateaus covered with asphodels, peopled with bare little cottages among the flowers Each year on these shores there is a new harvest of girls in flower. Apparently they have but one season At eleven a.m., coming down from the plateau, all that young flesh, lightly clothed in motley materials, breaks on the sand like a multi-coloured wave These are lands of innocence. But innocence needs sand and stones. And man has forgotten how to live among them. At least it seems so, for he has taken refuge in this extraordinary city where boredom sleeps. Nevertheless, that very confrontation constitutes the value of Oran. The capital of boredom besieged by innocence and beauty”

Here Camus makes quite clear the major features of the landscape around Oran. First there is the bountiful physical setting of sand, sea, and climate and