

Stacey Smith

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space and place

How is the concept of a space and place in contemporary society framed by a progressive move towards sustainability and sustainable development?

- **What impact does this have on the perceptions of future generations and their mental health and wellbeing?**

Introduction

This paper will use the theory of space and place to contextualise the argument that a holistic shift towards sustainability and sustainable development is needed in contemporary society. The mainstream education system arguably needs to do more to balance economic, social, and environmental concerns ensure a sustainable future for both current and future generations, and their perception of sustainable living practices to lower their environmental impact. The focus of this topic is the overconsumption of humanity and implications this is having on the environment. This paper will emphasise the importance of reconnecting and co-existing with

nature from a permaculture and horticulture perspective to bring significant improvements to our immediate environments and physical and mental well-being. I will be examining and using the core texts by Paul Clarke, Fay Blair, Bob Evans, John Dryzek, E Nisbet, F Wilson, M Mabhala, A Massey, P Dauvergne, Derek Jarman and Yi Fu Tuan to support this question.

Chapter one

Space and place are both abstract concepts open to multiple interpretations and understanding. Space is literally defined as “an empty area that is available to be used” (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2023) whereas place is “an area, town, building; a home” (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2023) When both concepts are linked together however their meanings become intertwined. As the world becomes more interconnected and globalized, traditional understandings of space and place are being challenged. In the past, space and place were often seen as fixed and unchanging, with specific physical boundaries and social structures that defined them. “Objects and places are centres of value. They attract or repel in finely shaded degrees. To attend to them even momentarily is to acknowledge their reality and value” (Tuan, 1977). The value a person attributes to a space is arguably what makes it a place however this is subjective and open to interpretation.

In contemporary society the meaning of space and place can be understood differently by each person and can be defined accordingly. Whilst “Space and place together define the nature of geography” (Tuan, 1977), space is abstract and open to perception whilst place “incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people” (Tuan, 1977). A space is an openness of a location or area, a feeling is what gives a space an identity, how the atmosphere of an environment makes a person feel; how to make use of a space for it to become a place. A person’s experience of space can be significantly influenced by their beliefs and cultural background. For some, space may be seen as natural, while for others, it may be associated with man-made structures or accessories. “An object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind” (Tuan, 1977) Similarly,

different societies can place levels of importance on access to open spaces; while space may be a tangible and measurable entity, our perception of it is far from objective. Spatial awareness is infused with a collection of beliefs and values. For instance, a home is a physical space, a domestic space, somewhere where we spend most of our lives within, a place to relax, unwind and feel safe. The surroundings, and atmosphere within the environment provide a homely vibe. This feeling, a person's emotional connection, is what changes a space to make it become a place, a home. "Feelings and ideas concerning space and place are extremely complex in the adult human being. They grow out of life's unique and shared experiences" (Tuan, 1977). Each individual's understanding of space and place is born from their own set of experiences so arguably cannot be quantified or compared.

This could be compared to the space within us, the internal space, our consciousness, personality and the vibes we give off which become our identity. In many ways, our internal space and consciousness can be compared to an external garden. Firstly, both require regular maintenance and attention. Just as a garden needs watering, pruning, and weeding to thrive, our internal space and consciousness also requires regular upkeep. This can take many forms, such as getting enough sleep, exercise, and proper nutrition, or engaging in activities that promote inner peace and mindfulness like meditation, deep breathing or connecting with nature. "Human beings not only discern geometric patterns in nature and create abstract spaces in the mind, they also try to embody their feelings, images, and thoughts in tangible material" (Tuan, 1977, p.17). A person's feelings and emotions can transform their space to a place.

In modern society, the concept of space and place has undergone numerous changes due to the issues of sustainability and sustainable development. As people become more aware of the impact that human activities have on the environment, our understanding of space and place is shifting towards a more dynamic and interconnected view. With the growing concern for sustainability, it is essential people start to think differently about the utilisation of space and place. "There is a general lack of understanding as to what sustainable development means.

While there is a set of government- affirmed principles and approaches to sustainable development, awareness and ownership of them across departments, agencies and beyond are low” (Blair & Evans, 2004, p.14). The idea is to create a sense of place that provides affordable and accessible amenities, whilst minimising the carbon footprint associated with transportation.

Another example would be the current consumer culture we live in, where the forestry commission carelessly cut down trees frequently to make space for new housing developments. This is because our current understanding is that forests are not places but spaces to be reclaimed and used for building houses which are considered places. But the trees inhabited these forests beforehand, and they created a ‘place’ for the wildlife and other living things to live and survive. To create a ‘new’ place we are destroying another.

From cities to homes to nature, space and place can be experienced in a variety of ways and differ greatly depending on personal beliefs and experiences. It is necessary therefore to consider whether space and place are merely feelings or if they represent broader belief systems. Place, involves the attachment and meaning that human beings associate with geographic locations. For instance, a birthplace or a spiritual site may hold personal significance to an individual. It is also worth noting that different narratives and traditions can shape communal attachments to places, such as monuments or cultural landmarks. The concept of place appears to be less objective than that of space, and more closely linked with personal feelings and beliefs. While space and place may have physical manifestations and correlations, the way humans perceive and understand them is heavily impacted by a mix of cultural beliefs and subjective experiences. When considering how we understand the meaning of and the differences of space and place it arguably is important to be mindful and think of it in terms of literal wild, open space and when this was first defined; when were the boundaries established. Nomads and Native Americans were arguably some of the first people to put boundaries of land in place and in turn create places. The Native Americans divided land into two types of territory ‘Estate’ and ‘Range’ which can be used as a close representation of this. “Estate is the

traditionally recognised home or dreaming place of a patrilineal decent group and its adherents. Range is the tract or orbit over which the group ordinarily hunts or forages" (Tuan, 1977, p.157). Native Americans defined their concept of space and place in terms of estate and range as this was their lived experience and important to their way of life.

The American Indian tribes were primarily nomadic hunter-gatherers who depended heavily on the land and its resources for their survival. Therefore, their understanding of the concepts of estate and range were deeply rooted in their way of life and their relationship with the environment. In terms of estate, the American Indians believed that the land belonged to everyone, and no individual or group could claim it as their own. The land was considered sacred, and it held a spiritual and cultural significance for them. They believed that the great spirit had provided them with the land, and it was their responsibility to take care of it and so, they utilised sustainable land use practices. "Spaces are marked off and defended against intruders. Places are centres of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied" (Tuan, 1977, p.4). For American Indians spaces were transformed into places according to the needs of the community and what best served their needs. "Our fathers taught us to love our own country" (Tuan, 1977, p.157).

These methods helped to ensure that the land remained healthy and productive for generations to come, and the natural balance was maintained. Their concept of range was closely related to their understanding of estate and played a vital role in their way of life. They recognised that animals were food, clothing, tools, and spiritual symbols, and so they had to be respected and treated with care as they played a vital role in their way of life (Tuan, 1977, p.156). The plains tribes, for example, relied heavily on buffalo, and they created a complex and holistic approach to land management. They took into consideration the land's entire ecosystem, developing hunting rituals and techniques to ensure that they did not overhunt and deplete their resources.

“Place is a pause in movement. Animals, including human beings, pause at a locality because it satisfies certain biological needs. The pause makes it possible for a locality to become a centre of felt value” (Tuan, 1977, p.138). American Indians recognized the buffalo's importance to the ecosystem and understood how it contributed to the grasslands' health. Understanding of estate and range reflected their deep connection to the land and their commitment to its sustainable use. Their approach to land management was based on respect, reciprocity, and responsibility, and it provided a blueprint for modern conservation. “The idea is to cultivate a deep consciousness and awareness of organic unity, of the holistic nature of the ecological webs in which every individual is enmeshed. ‘Transpersonal ecology,’ a psychological condition of identification and care for other beings, ecosystems and nature in its entirety” (Dryzek, 1997, p.184).

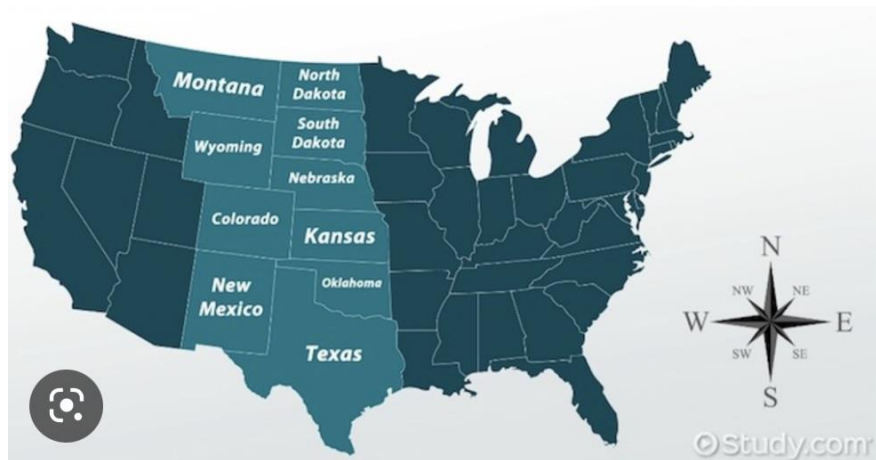


Fig.1: Space-Map/Land (Estate)

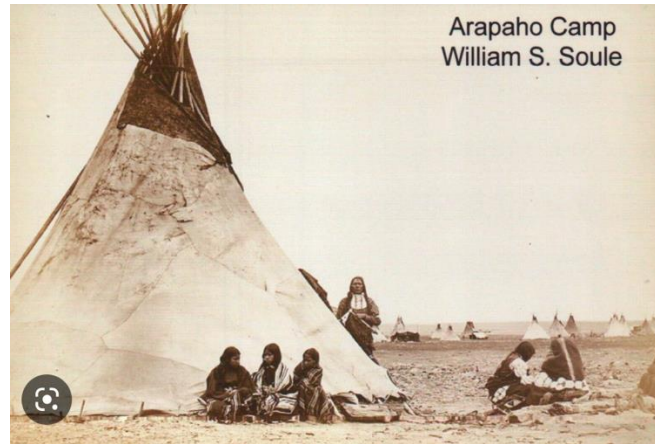


Fig 2: *Place (Arapaho nomad camp)(Range)*

In modern society exportation of goods such as food and medicine and overseas production has had a negative impact on the current global situation; transportation of food goods is required to keep up with the demands of an over consuming throw away culture. “Western society which through its demands and its inventions is the principal cause of the attack on nature” (Nisbet, 1991, p.301). This is having a devastating effect on our environment and eco systems. The implications of these transportation methods are the formation of carbon emissions being released, directly impacting the physical environment which in turn is increasing the negative effects on the world globally and causing climate change. The accumulation of human activity over the past 200 or so years has begun to mount up in an unsustainable manor and we are starting to realise that we need to do something about it. our collective ways of living are starting to cause us real problems (Clarke, 2012, p.14). Sustainable gardens are a way of tackling environmental concerns being caused by overconsumption and production globally.

Chapter 2

Horticulture is a unique medium that can transform the ordinary into the extraordinary. There are many artists who are known for using horticulture to transform spaces in this way. In this essay, some of these artists and their works will be examined and discussed.

The first artist is Rebecca Louise Law, a British artist who is known for creating site-specific installations that incorporate living materials, into her work. Her art transforms spaces by bringing in the natural world and creating an immersive experience that connects the observer to the environment. In one of her most well-known installations, *The Flower Garden Display's*, Law suspended over 4,000 flowers from the ceiling of an old London market building. The result was a stunning display of colour and beauty that transformed a space into a place of wonder, combining the urban environment with the natural world.



Fig 3: *The Flower Garden*.

Patrick Blanc is a French botanist and artist who is known for creating living walls, or vertical gardens, in urban spaces. His work brings greenery to areas that are usually devoid of nature, transforming them into places of tranquillity and beauty. His largest installation, the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, is an arresting example of how horticulture can be used to transform a space into a work of art.



Fig. 4: *Musée du Quai, Paris.*

Derek Jarman's world famous garden (see figure 5) allowed him to symbolically and aesthetically address the political issues with which he had always passionately concerned himself: environmental degradation, nuclear expansion, homophobia, consumer culture and aids.



Fig. 5: *Derek Jarman's Garden, Kent.*

Horticulture is an art form that is gaining popularity among artists who want to transform spaces into places of beauty and tranquillity. Rebecca Louise Law, Patrick Blanc, and Derek Jarman are just three examples of artists who are using horticulture to create immersive installations that connect the observer to the environment. Their work is a testament to the power of nature and its ability to transform our world. Whether it is, a living wall, a suspended floral display, or a public garden. In today's world, the concept of sustainability and self-sufficiency has become more important than ever before. As a result, educating future generations on the need for sustainability and self-sufficiency is essential to help them become responsible and conscious individuals. Future generations should be educated on sustainability and self-sufficiency as a matter of urgency. The accumulation of human activity over the past 200 or so years has begun to mount up in an unsustainable manor and we are starting to realise that we need to do something about it. our collective ways of living are starting to cause us real problems (Clarke, 2012, p.14). These works show that that the natural world can be used to express a calmness in urban environments and influence the observer to connect with nature...

ideas of tackling environmental concerns. The next section looks further into the steps we can take to achieve this.

Chapter 3

A sustainable living culture could be created through taking a step backwards and adopting a more holistic approach to local farming, using permaculture methods to inspire this. “One route to changing the world is through the way people think. In an environmental context, this change would involve the way people experience the world, and the inculcation of new kinds of ecological sensibility. The precise content of this sensibility is contested. In some cases, it is radically new, looking to innovative notions of ecological citizenship, in other cases it is radically old, looking back to primal human society before the rise of agriculture. One earth first! Slogan declares ‘back to the Pleistocene!’ Sometimes, the radically new and radically old are combined in creative fashion” (Dryzek, 1997, p.183).

One of the primary health benefits of permaculture is that it encourages the consumption of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables. Since permaculture relies on the cultivation of a diverse range of crops, it offers a vast array of fresh produce for individuals to choose from. These nutrient-dense crops are not only healthier for consumers but also better for the environment, as they require fewer fertilizers and pesticides. In addition, fresh fruits and vegetables are an essential part of a healthy diet, providing essential vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients necessary for maintaining optimal health. “We begin to re-connect with our own relationship with nature, through food, and with others through the connexion of food that exists in every person, in every place on the planet, but we do so with serious intent” (Clarke, 2012, p.23). Permaculture practices also help to reduce stress levels and improve mental health. Gardening, in general, has been shown to have therapeutic benefits and can help to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. Additionally, permaculture gardening offers the opportunity to connect with nature and engage in physical activity, which can release endorphins and promote well-being. The simple act of being outdoors and working with plants

has been shown to have a calming effect on the mind and body, as well as improve cognitive performance. “It is for this reason that well-being must be considered when exploring the effects of the environment on health” (Wilson, 2015). This progressive move towards sustainability would require a significant change in the way we think about space and place in contemporary society. The traditional approach towards urbanization has been centred around the relentless exploitation of resources, which has led to environmental degradation. “Sustainable society can be built only by ecologically motivated citizens, and not by consumers and producers responding to the carrots and sticks of economic incentives” (Dryzek, 1997, p.189).

Sustainability is the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development, on the other hand, refers to a holistic approach towards development that considers environmental, social, and economic factors. Focusing on sustainability can have a direct impact on the physical environment in which future generations live. “What we do becomes a vital consideration” (Kellstedt *et al* 2008) (Clarke, 2012, p.19). This can include everything from reducing air pollution and improving water quality to promoting sustainable transportation and designing green spaces. In turn, this can have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing, as access to clean and healthy environments has been shown to improve both physical and mental health outcomes. “The balance we achieve in the daily search for resources is set within a context which can erode or nourish us physically and mentally” (Wilson, 2015, p.112).

If the education system integrated more sustainability and self-sufficiency practices into its curriculum by incorporating the use of natural systems such as permaculture and horticulture, preparations for the future would be in place to address environmental issues. “This seemingly translates much further, however, into the day-to-day things people do, which in turn have a bearing on the possibility of new ways of living. mitigation, adaptation, and amelioration are not just the macroeconomic actions of government, they are the practical stuff of our individual

lives, they are our civilisation, our cultures, our habits of mind and deed, and they are embedded in our ways of educating “(Clarke, 2012, p.22).

For instance, schools could partner with local businesses and non-profit organizations to provide students with hands-on experiences that teach them about sustainable practices and self-sufficiency. Students could be taught how to grow their own food in community gardens or sustainable farms at school, sports pitches could be swapped for vegetable gardens which would teach them about the importance of sustainable agriculture. This can be accomplished, through building such partnerships. The education system can ensure that students are being exposed to a wide range of resources, experts, and experiences that will help them develop the knowledge and skills needed for a sustainable future. Through these experiences, students could gain an understanding of the interconnectedness of nature, and the importance of preserving the environment for future generations. “For example, we can take the urban farm concept and locate it into a school environment. we begin to look again at the land space around the buildings, we begin to think about the amount of tarmac, perhaps a grassy field a few bushes. What else can this space become? We can look at the site as a set of experiments for urban growing” (Clarke, 2012, p.95).

By emphasizing the importance of sustainability and the need to protect the planet, a message is being sent to future generations that their wellbeing and quality of life is important. This can have a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing, as it helps to instil a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. “All eco systems not only affect our physical health; they are also important as they structure our experience of daily life and consequently how we feel about ourselves. It is for this reason that well-being must be considered when exploring the effects of the environment on health (Wilson, 2015, p.112). Permaculture practices have a positive impact on local communities, which can lead to social and psychological health benefits. Community engagement in the planning and development process offers the opportunity to create close-knit communities centred around shared values of sustainability, environmental stewardship, and healthy living. The idea is to promote social sustainability by

ensuring that the needs and aspirations of all members of the community are considered. This approach towards community collaboration and sustainable development can foster a sense of belonging and social connectedness, which is essential for overall health and well-being.

“Bioregional consciousness implies a kind of ecological citizenship, in which individuals learn to become respectful citizens of an ecological place, rather than transforming the place to suit themselves. Such citizenship involves awareness of how the ecosystem supports life, and of life’s vulnerabilities. It involves meeting one’s material as well as spiritual needs from the resources available locally” (DryZek, 1997, p.189).



Fig. 6: *Permaculture flower*.

Values surrounding, sustainability, self- sufficiency and the measures to employ these should be implemented to ensure the education system is looking to the future to protect the impact on

the next generations. If these are taught during the early years of education, this fundamental practice could be modelled as a normal way of life in children's daily lives and later years.

"Schools generate habitual activities and rituals, and these are difficult to quit once people get hooked on the idea that they are the only way to behave or to solve existing problems" (Clarke, 2012). "Since one of the first places where the human and natural world intersect is on our plates, in our farms and gardens, and in our minds" (Michael Pollen.com, 2023). How to plant and maintain sustainable, edible gardens would be of huge benefit to the younger generation and quite possibly one of the greatest lessons they could learn. Keeping the food source as local as possible is imperative. This will not only lower food bills, it would also lower carbon emissions as less food would be needed to be transported or imported. "It is not just a matter of doing green things, it is a matter of being green in doing them, of using these actions to cultivate a post-industrial way of experiencing and relating to the world" (Dryzek 1997, p.190).

Conclusion

In conclusion, sustainability must have a profound impact on the way we think about space and place in modern society and the movement towards sustainable development as well as the promotion of green infrastructure. Furthermore, the emphasis on community engagement has highlighted the importance of social sustainability in the planning and development process. This progressive move towards sustainability is critical for the preservation of our planet and the survival of future generations in contemporary society,

The concept of space and place in contemporary society needs a progressive move towards sustainability and sustainable development. This has significant implications for future generations and their mental health and wellbeing, as it emphasizes the importance of protecting the planet and promoting healthy and sustainable environments. Trade-offs between economic growth and environmental protection have been battling against each other since the latter is not of monetary gain to the governance of the world yet it's having a disastrous effect on our natural ecosystems. The concept of space and place has often been seen as a simple

matter of geography and physics, but as we delve deeper into the intricacies of human perception, it becomes clear that these terms are much more complex. Permaculture and horticulture methods offer many significant health benefits. From improving soil quality and promoting nutrient-dense crops to reducing stress levels and fostering community involvement, there are numerous reasons to embrace these practices. To reduce the negative effects on the environment it is crucial that the future urban minds are re-educated for sustainability purposes and this needs to start within the mainstream education system. Now.

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