

# Identity

## Definition

- Identity is defined as “the fact of being who or what a person or thing is.” (Oxford Dictionary)
- Or more simply stated, identity is “who I am and how I differ from other people”.

## What is identity?

Whilst historically, identity may have simply be formed by your family and friends. Increasingly, identity is individualised, shaped by factors such as technology, clothing, even social media.

These influences change over time and it is important to note that identity is a fluid concept.

## Is identity more complex than ever before?



Social and cultural geographers suggest that personal identity is far more complex than conventional definitions suggest.

Conventional approaches to identity incorporate your background and biological make-up, such as gender, ethnicity or religion. However, identity can also be expressed through various material things and our intangible social relationships.

These social aspects that form our identity can be understood as ‘cultural capital’.

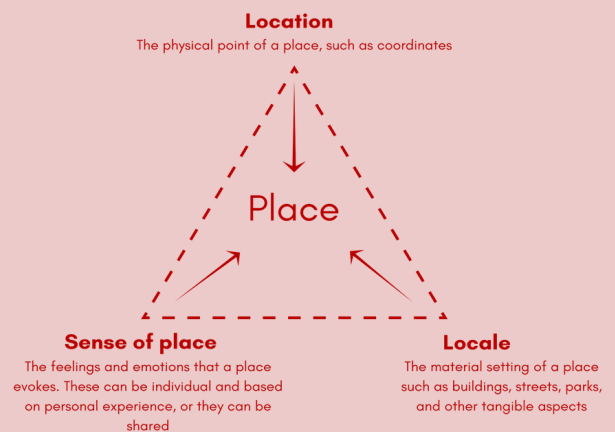
## What is place identity?

Geographers understand place and identity as inextricably linked. Each concept informs the other.

For example, heritage closely connects places and landscapes with personal and collective memories

Representations of place are presented through the media, literature, art and other outlets, so often, we can have an idea of a place even without visiting it ourselves.

**‘Place’ is made up of three factors:**



Pier head © Beverly Goodwin, Flickr

## How do place-makers shape identity?

Example: Liverpool: European Capital of Culture 2008

- The European Capital of Culture award is given to a different city each year to help create a greater sense of place identity.
- During the year, multiple cultural events and festivals are held there and it generates many social and economic benefits
- In 2008, Liverpool was granted the title which massively increased tourist visits and instigated a multimillion-pound boost to its economy (The Guardian, 2010)
- That year, there was a **34%** increase in visitor numbers and **85%** of Liverpool residents agreed that it was a better place to live than before (The Guardian, 2010)

## How does identity shape our experience of place?

- Differences in gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, body shape, and appearance shape our social identities.
- Sometimes, these identities can make a person subject to oppression and exclusion in various places and spaces.

### Dis/abilities

'Physical disability' includes those with mobility-related disabilities but also people with sensory impairments, for example blindness or deafness

- Geographers have argued that whilst we may have physical differences, it is *the organisation of society* that restricts a person with an impairment from mainstream social activities, not their physical impairment

#### Example:

- Step-free access is only available in a **1/4** of London tube stations which limits wheelchair users compared to those who can use steps

### Age

- Certain age groups are more welcome in particular places than others
- With an ageing population in many countries across the globe, age-friendly urban design is important to make cities more accessible for elderly people
- Elderly people require different housing, transport and social needs from younger people

#### Example:

- In **2016**, the UK announced it is building **10** new towns designed to address ageing and health issues
- reducing the distance between transport stops, shops, and benches, may make public places more accessible for an ageing population (The Guardian, 2016)

### Gender

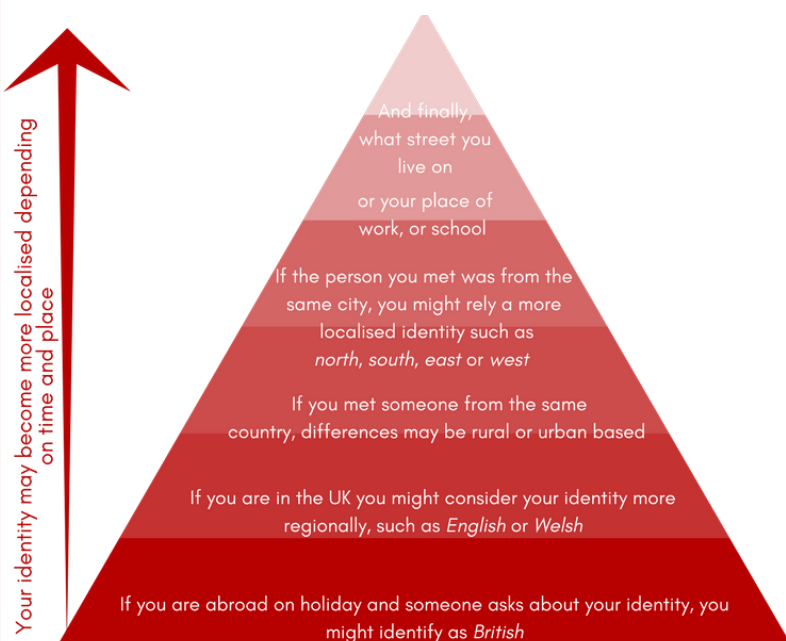
- A person's gender can completely alter how they experience a certain place
- For years geographers have noted how women have frequently viewed public spaces as dangerous and unwelcoming, and often women are fearful of being alone in public spaces for their safety

#### Example:

- In India, **79%** of women have been subjected to harassment or violence in public places
- This harassment stops women entering public spaces and getting jobs because they have to commute
- This has led to the creation of "Ladies Specials" female-only commuter trains in four Indian cities: New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Calcutta (World Bank, 2009)

## Identity and differences

Identity can vary depending on time, place and scale. Therefore, your sense of identity can also vary depending on who is asking, for example:



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