Introduction – part 1: What is living geography?

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In this introductory chapter we are going to set the scene. The theme that runs through this book is ‘living geography’. The chapter headings try to evoke this. Living geography captures ways in which geography in the secondary school curriculum presents young people with a basis to understand living in the world.

This chapter pieces together a vision for renewing school geography and the 2008 Programme of Study provides the conceptual framework in which to make this happen. So what do we mean by ‘living geography’?

The book as a whole tries to capture and illustrate notions of ‘living geography’. We want to explore its significance. Take thinking skills, for example: we like thinking skills but want to emphasise the particular kinds of thinking, and approaches to enquiry, that geographical perspectives encourage and, crucially, the deeper knowledge and understandings that result.

Place, space and scale: geography’s fundamentals

Geography is a subject that above all helps us ‘make sense of the world’. You could say that all subjects contribute to this – history, science, art… they all contribute to making sense of the world in some way. However, geo-graphy (literally, writing the world) has a particular take on this. As Ron Johnston wrote some time ago, geography studies ‘the earth as the home of mankind’. Or as Peter Taylor says, geography is the ‘world subject’. You cannot take the ‘geo’ out of geography – the physical shape and the form the earth takes (as a whole, or in your back garden!) – and Rachel Atherton’s focus on the physical world (in chapter 6) is important for the balance of this book. Neither can you take out the people who occupy the earth’s space, and who help to shape it. In doing so, they make particular places through their economic, social and cultural activity.

Thus, geography takes a particular interest in the twin ideas of place and space.

The idea of ‘place’

Every place has a particular location and a unique set of physical and human characteristics. Furthermore, the same place can be represented differently. Places are dynamic and subject to constant change. What we think about places is both shaped by, and shapes, our ‘geographical imagination’.

- Unique – real places, with all their similarities and differences, are unique. No two places are exactly the same. This does not mean that geographers study places one after the other as singular entities. There are universal needs and global processes that impact everywhere – but they play out differently from place to place in the detail.

- Represented – many places can simultaneously be represented differently. For example, a city can be described as an industrial heartland, a shopping heaven or tourist resort. Places can be represented in certain ways for specific purposes. Sometimes there are unintended consequences of representing places in certain ways: for example, what do we mean to convey by the term ‘inner city’? (Dan Raven-Ellison (chapter 9) explores these ideas of representing places to young people.)
• **Dynamic** - places change; they have not always been like this. Geography has a role to play in teaching students to understand this, the potential of places to be different in the future

• **Geographical imaginations** – the ways individuals think about places depend to a large extent on the knowledge and understanding they have at their disposal – but also what they make of the images they see and what they associate with the new or the strange. We all carry a great deal of ‘geography’ in our head.

It (almost) goes without saying that the best way to study place is to do so directly – by getting ‘out there’ to experience and sense the world, and to try our best to interpret what we observe. (Andrew Turney (in chapter 7) focuses on young people’s engagement with fieldwork as do others in parts of the chapters which follow.) The main purpose of doing this is to understand a place, or process, or feature, sometimes with a view to imagining, or envisioning, alternatives. What is this place like? What do I feel about this place? How could it change? It is this kind of thinking that David Hicks had in mind when he wrote that geography is the ‘first curriculum subject to take (alternative) futures seriously’. It is also thinking which Denise Freeman and Alun Morgan explore in chapter 3 of this book.

**The idea of ‘space’**

Most phenomena (eg physical features, people, services, goods) are located and are distributed in space. They therefore have relative locations to each other and often interact with each other across space. Any flows or movements between these phenomena create patterns and networks. Spatial patterns, distributions and networks can be described and analysed, and often explained by reference to social, economic, environmental and political processes.

• **Location** – the Ordnance Survey has estimated that 80 per cent of information can be located – that is, it can be mapped. In some ways this ‘fact’ alone expresses the importance of ‘spatial literacy’ as a part of geography – for if we can locate phenomena using coordinates, we can also study their relative locations too.

• **Interact** – this we do by studying layers of different information and seeking relationships – interactions – between the layers. Ultimately this may lead to undertaking spatial analysis using geographic information systems (GIS). The ability to recognise, interpret and understand spatial patterns, distributions and relationships is an aspect of spatial awareness, and is nurtured through geographical enquiry.

• **Flows** – the movement of phenomena through space, eg migration. Flows are often expressive of links that exist between locations and contribute to the pattern of networks that bind social and economic systems, eg trade links.

• **Patterns and networks** – these are often describable and often display predictable characteristics, eg as shown by gravity models, giving concrete expression to ideas such as the ‘friction of distance’. Distribution patterns are often uneven, eg the distribution of wealth at a global or national scale, or within the confines of a single city. It is possible to seek explanations for the patterns described by reference to the social, economic or environmental processes at work.

Part of the power of geography is realising the limits (as well as the usefulness) of the ‘spatial science’ perspective – or at least its dangers. Many geographers have expressed concern over ‘spatial fetishism’ which may result if we think that space itself has properties (beyond the fairly obvious, like distance) leading us to imagine ‘spatial processes’ at work. This is a dubious idea. There certainly are economic, social, cultural and environmental processes that operate, often with spatially differentiated outcomes. But space can be used too. It can be manipulated, for example, by capitalists seeking the lowest labour costs.
in order to maximise returns. There is no doubt that space is, in Thrift’s words ‘(t)he fundamental stuff of human geography’ and needs thinking carefully about: ‘As with terms like “society” and “nature”, space is not (just) a commonsense external background to human and social action.’ (Thrift, 2003) Concepts of space, and the role of GIS in learning with them, are discussed further, by David Mitchell, in chapter 8.

There is a third big idea that provides geography with its fundamental architecture, influencing profoundly what we ‘see’ when studying place and space, and this is scale.

The idea of ‘scale’

Scale influences the way we represent what we see or experience. We can construct different resolutions of scale from the personal, local and regional to the global. In between, we have the national and international scales. These are very important politically and, like the others, exert great influence on the identity of individuals and groups. Choice of scale is therefore important in geographical enquiry, as is the realisation that scale resolutions are interconnected, as if by a single zoom lens.

- **Personal** – the personal scale refers to personal space – the ‘bubble’ in which people are sometimes said to live – the world they inhabit in their person, and how they perceive the world.

- **Local** – this is sometimes expressed as the scale of experience, and in school geography has given rise to ‘locality studies’ in which the focus of study is the daily lives of people – where they live, the work they do, where they shop and play.

- **Regional** – this is a wider frame of reference, often resting on administrative concerns (such as the planning regions of England), but sometimes strongly associated with identity and linked to landscape or heritage (including, for example, former economic activity such a heavy engineering or mining). Many geographers would argue that regions provide a fundamental unit of study for geography, enabling us to classify and organise the world for descriptive and analytical purposes.

- **National** – this has been expressed as the scale of ideology, in the sense that this is the political context in which people live as citizens in a relationship with a state or government. The borders of nations change, frequently as a result of violent conflict. Territories are often disputed, not least when valuable resources are at stake, such as oil or water. Even the idea can be debated in geography, for idea of ‘nation’ is not straightforward – and does not always coincide with ‘state’. Thus, most children in English schools today express multiple identities. Although ‘British’ may be on their passports, they may think of themselves, for example, as Bangladeshi, English, Irish, Jamaican, Pakistani, Scottish or Welsh – or European, Asian, Islamic... or more likely a combination of these categories (and many more besides).

- **Global** – the global scale has become ever more present in people’s minds since the Apollo photographs of 1969 – and now with Google Earth. The global scale has been dubbed the scale of reality in the sense that economic, environmental, political and social processes operate on a global scale. We cannot fully understand High Street shopping in our locality, or industrial change in a region or country, without comprehending the global context in which decisions are made.

- **Interconnectedness** – virtually any topic, when studied geographically, benefits from a ‘scaled’ approach. In essence this implies study at a range of scales so that ideas of global interconnectedness can be developed.

Several chapters discuss the importance of ideas of scale and interconnectedness for young people’s learning, but none more so than chapter 4 in which Doug Bourn and Alison Leonard look at the global dimension for young people.
Place, space and scale are arguably the three really big ideas that underpin school geography. Opening up these ideas a little, as in the above, quickly shows their scope and potential. We can see the relevance of being able to ‘think geographically’ to anyone living in the world and wanting to understand and respond to the challenges facing them during the 21st century.

Over the years there have been many authoritative appeals for the spirit and purpose of geography. Often these are made slightly defensively: it is so obvious what the power of geography is, so why doesn’t everyone see it! One reason for this is the confused identity geography has, particularly between the academic discipline (in all its diversity and seemingly anarchic specialisms), school geography (with its clear imperative to serve educational aims and purposes) and the subject that resides in the popular imagination (emphasising factual knowledge and sustained through quiz shows and such like).

The purpose of this book is not to add to the pile of books justifying geography. It focuses fairly and squarely on school geography and the need to bring geography alive for young people – to induct them into ‘thinking geographically’. We step forward and seek to demonstrate through a number of exemplars the role of geography in schools. We are taking the cue from the Geographical Association in naming this approach ‘living geography’. It is different from academic geography and from geography in the popular imagination, but is connected to both.

Teachers of geography are concerned mainly with school geography, but need to be engaged in some way with the other two.

Geography as a school subject

Before coming to a definition of what we mean by ‘living geography’, we need to dwell a little more on the nature of geography as a school subject. Time was when geography in school was nothing more, or less, than a reduced form of the subject at large. Geography was considered to be mainly a matter of exploration, resulting in the accumulation and assemblage of knowledge about the world. It was a matter of filling in the map (much of which was coloured red) with useful information. It was self-evidently important to teach a selection of this on the school curriculum – and the university discipline was born partly to ensure a supply of educated teachers.

In the first half of the 20th century several influential school textbooks were written by leading academics. Examinations were still strongly influenced by academics until later that century. Neither is true today. There is now a disconnection between school and university geography which has become more pronounced since, roughly, the Education Reform Act of 1988, which led to the bureaucratising of the school curriculum and examinations. Since that time we have also seen a rapid growth in ‘genericism’ in schools, where subjects seem less important and generic skills become all-important. Influential voices, for example, the sociologist Michael Young (2008), are beginning to analyse the serious dangers inherent in school curricula (and teachers) that fail to think carefully about what is to be taught, the subject matter. It is the difference between ‘learning to learn’ and learning something that is worthwhile, relevant and useful.

Living geography is concerned with learning about the world through a geographical lens. The precise content selection (what is worthwhile, relevant and useful to teach) is best left to teachers locally, but ‘content’ decisions cannot be divorced entirely from ‘process’
decisions. Margaret Roberts (2003) brings this argument together brilliantly and with many practical illustrations and examples. How the teaching is arranged is crucial, and not, definitely not, to be done in a way that mimics the ‘assemblage of information’ approach of the past. As mentioned above, school geography needs to be seen in the particular context of addressing educational aims. This means we can certainly take account of advances made in geography, but also the advances in our thinking about how children learn, their interests and motivations and developments in pedagogy. These perspectives tend to emphasise enquiry learning and pedagogies that are essentially dialogic. This would include strategies that provide opportunities for students to talk to each other, such as in decision-making activities, for example, but also strategies that provide teachers with opportunities to learn what students have made of their learning encounters and experiences.

We can take on these educational matters while staying true to geographical traditions. Take, for example, ‘exploration’ and the ‘assemblage of knowledge’, terminology describing geography (and school geography) in the 19th and much of the 20th centuries. In the modern idiom these are translatable to ‘enquiry’ and ‘knowledge creation’. Extending the point, the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) recently argued strongly that:

‘(S)ubjects constitute the available ways we have of exploring and interpreting the world of subjective experience, of analysing the social environment and of making sense of the natural world. It is through subject study that learners acquire historical, scientific, mathematical and other forms of understanding; and it is through subject study that learners develop the capacity to engage in the distinctive modes of investigation and analysis through which human experience is differentiated and extensions of human understanding are achieved.’

Thus, school geography – living geography – is not concerned with delivering slabs of content as an end in itself (a caricature of school subjects that remains remarkably persistent), but with inducting young people into geographical enquiry and how to ‘think geographically’.

Geography is therefore a vital school subject. It is about the real world, studied directly though virtual and real images, using primary and secondary data of all kinds. It is guided by the overall goal of deepening and broadening young people’s understandings of the world in which they live and which they will inherit. Geographical enquiry often culminates in forms of decision-making activity which requires of students the capacity to analyse, evaluate and synthesise. Enquiries are communicated using a wide range of graphical techniques, including maps, diagrams and various forms of the written word. It is little wonder that students with good geography qualifications are sought after by a bewildering range of employers, because studying geography denotes applicable knowledge and useful intellectual and practical skills.

**School geography – living geography**

We are now, almost, in a position to specify living geography. To start with, let us return to a statement from the eminent academic Ron Johnston, trying to lay down his take on geography in education near the end of the 20th century. We can read this critically.

‘Geography’s origins lie in the need to present material about the world to its citizens – in a packaged format acceptable to the powerful vested interests in society. Initially, this involved emphasising the differences between places and the singularity of regions. More recently, the positivist orientation within geography has stressed commonalities among places, whatever their creations, environments, histories and cultures. Geographers have disengaged themselves from studying and promoting the uniqueness of place, and consequentially have contributed to a general ignorance of the world as a complex mosaic. This disengagement must be corrected... and geographers must once again take the lead in portraying the complex variability of peoples and environments, avoiding
both the generalization trap of treating the empirical outcomes (as against the real mechanisms) as the consequences of general laws of behaviour and the singularity trap of considering each place as a separate entity. Such a task, of description-in-context, is necessary to human survival."

This is an interesting passage that in its opening sentence seems to negate the point emphasised in the previous section. It appears to suggest that in education the role of the geography teacher is to deliver a selection of the discipline’s products ‘in a packaged format’. We disagree profoundly. The role of the geography teacher may include this, but it is also to introduce young people into ways of seeing – what we have called thinking geographically. That is, we stress the need to induct students into enquiry processes as well as show them a selection of the products of geographical investigations. A number of emphases have been added to the quotation for dramatic effect. After its shaky beginnings the passage has much to commend it, and a careful reading of it will reveal much of significance in relation to how we have been setting up a case for living geography. It is a challenging statement, referring to a ‘general ignorance of the world’ which school geography does not appear to address, and later to the need for a stronger focus on ‘real mechanisms’ rather than supposed ‘laws of human behaviour’). In some ways this paragraph says it all and provides a robust theoretical position for school geography.

Well, not quite all. For one thing, as with the official geography ‘importance statement’, there is much that requires interpretation.

The study of geography stimulates an interest in and a sense of wonder about places. It helps young people make sense of a complex and dynamically changing world. It explains where places are, how places and landscapes are formed, how people and their environment interact, and how a diverse range of economies, societies and environments are interconnected. It builds on pupils’ own experiences to investigate places at all scales, from the personal to the global.

Geographical enquiry encourages questioning, investigation and critical thinking about issues affecting the world and people’s lives, now and in the future. Fieldwork is an essential element of this. Pupils learn to think spatially and use maps, visual images and new technologies, including geographical information systems (GIS), to obtain, present and analyse information. Geography inspires pupils to become global citizens by exploring their own place in the world, their values and their responsibilities to other people, to the environment and to the sustainability of the planet.

(QCA: http://tinyurl.com/QCAgeographyKS3-4)

How we interpret such statements may well depend not only on how we perceive the subject but also on young people’s values and understandings. In other words, teachers and educationists are not concerned solely with ‘subject delivery’. Take, for example, this interesting set of questions taken from a discussion by Howard Gardner on how the disciplines may respond to children’s fundamental curiosity:

- **Identity**: Who am I? Where do I come from? Who is my family? What is my ‘story’? Who are the people around me? Where do they come from? What is their ‘story’?
- **Place in the world**: Where do I live? How does it look? How do I feel about it? How is it changing? How do I want it to change?
- **The Physical world**: What is the world (and this place) made of? Why do things move? What becomes of things?
- **The Human world**: Who decides on who gets what, where and why? What is fair? How do we handle differences of opinion?
School subjects are the resources that teachers can draw from in order to help young people address such questions. It perhaps requires no further argument here to show what the significance of geography might be.

Living geography is created when teachers use the subject discipline (see Johnston) and their knowledge of children and young people (see Gardner) to make sense of the world. Living geography:

- embraces ‘young people’s geographies’ – that is young people’s experiences and encounters with the world – and takes seriously what they make of these things
- certainly recognises the past, including the deep past (how else would we understand mountains, for example), but is also current and futures oriented, encouraging young people to envision and project into the future
- is often ‘local’ but always set in wider (global) contexts, requiring practice and steadily deepening awareness of interlocking scales
- investigates processes that bring change to environments – these can be grouped as environmental (or ‘physical’), social, economic and political
- encourages a critical, conceptual understanding of a range of key ideas such as ‘sustainable development’. This foregrounds the nature of geography as a synthesis across the physical and human worlds.

We can readily see that living geography consists of a mix of skills, knowledge and understanding. It is impossible to imagine living geography without a prominent values component.
Introduction – part 2: Why living geography now?

John Morgan

The second part of this introduction will explore the ways in which geographical education has increasingly come to focus on the concepts of ‘living’ and ‘everyday life’. It will locate these developments in two domains; first, the movement within geography over the past three decades towards an understanding of ‘personal’ geographies; second, the arguments in curriculum studies about the role of children’s ‘experience’. The coming together of these strands in current developments in geography education represents a genuine opportunity to develop a meaningful and relevant approach to teaching geography. However, there are significant challenges if this is to be realised.

Last Wednesday was a very ordinary day. I caught the bus from my home in the suburbs to work in the city. After pouring myself a coffee, I spent some time reading and responding to my emails before attending a planning meeting. At lunchtime I walked across the city centre and queued for a freshly made sandwich. Back home, I went for a half hour run, nearly catching a cold through complaining with the neighbour about the trouble with the rubbish collection. I went for a quick drink in the local pub, before coming home and preparing some food.

This decidedly uninteresting set of events is what I understand as a ‘living geography’. I didn’t have to think too hard about it, but it involved me in a whole series of movements and connected me with a lot of people, both near and far. On the assumption that the sheer ordinariness of my Wednesday hasn’t put you off reading the rest of this chapter, in what follows I hope to convince you that taking seriously these ‘living’ or ‘everyday’ geographies is important, and provides you with a set of ideas about how to approach living geographies in teaching situations.

Why do living geographies matter?

Within geography there is a good deal of talk about increased travel and communications, about changing patterns of employment and leisure, and the development of a globalised culture. However, as the geographer Doreen Massey once said:

‘Much of life for many people, even in the heart of the first world... still consists of waiting in a bus shelter with your shopping for a bus that never comes.’

This echoes the advice of Raymond Williams (writer on politics and culture) that ‘culture is ordinary’ and suggests that if we want to gain an understanding of how human geography is lived, we ought to focus attention on more mundane and unremarkable places and spaces.

An example of this type of approach is the work of the cultural historian Joe Moran who has written about topics as quotidian as ‘Queuing up in post-war Britain’ and ‘Crossing the road in England 1939–1976’. Moran says he’s sometimes embarrassed about studying the ‘bleedin’ obvious’, but in fact has developed a theoretical rationale for ‘reading the everyday’. He argues that ‘the study of mundane life demands a necessary concreteness and specificity alongside an awareness of the increasing globalisation of everyday practices’. He is strongly influenced by the work of French writer Henri Lefebvre who was particularly concerned with how the spaces of everyday life or what he called ‘lived space’ was being colonised by the abstract spaces of global forces. Similarly, Moran seeks to show that ‘quotidian spaces – offices, call centres, subway systems, traffic jams,
new towns, suburbs, motorways and housing estates – are caught up in global processes while remaining tied to resilient local conditions and histories’. As can be seen from this list, the spaces he studies are mundane and everyday. Moran’s argument is that changes in the way we live often appear to us as unimportant and inevitable (indeed we may not even notice them) but are in fact linked to wider economic and political forces. The irony is that these changes appear to be beyond politics, and therefore apparently incapable of being changed.

In Reading the Everyday Moran organises his studies around a series of spaces – work spaces, urban spaces, non-places and living spaces. He shows the complex ways in which these spaces have changed in recent decades and how these changes have been represented to us. At the end of the book, Moran returns to Lefebvre. Lefebvre was concerned that Marxist theories tended to downplay the importance of lived experience in favour of discussion of high-level political ideas about capitalism, and sought to show that it was in the realm of the everyday that the alienating effects of capitalism could be observed. He criticised the ‘great modern myth of the Revolution as a total act, radical break, absolute renewal’, emphasising that real change had to occur through a more far-reaching transformation of the spaces and practices of daily life. As Moran concludes:

‘Real social change, this critique of everyday life suggests, comes about in how we catch buses and trains, spend time at our work desks, drive along motorways, get stuck in traffic jams, park our cars and live in our houses.’

Interestingly, Moran’s next sentence states that ‘the cultural materials that have been representing our everyday lives over the past few decades have often served to deny or obscure this potential for change’. This is interesting because it points to the importance of the need for a form of critical or political literacy in order for people to be able to think about their everyday lives. Indeed, Moran’s own more popular writings in Queuing for Beginners (2007) and in various newspapers and magazines may be seen as a form of public pedagogy that seeks to puncture the surface of everyday life (see figure 1.2).

Pedestrian crossings were introduced in Britain in 1934 in response to concerns about the number of deaths caused by traffic. Zebra crossings were introduced in 1949 with the launch of ‘Pedestrian Crossing Week’. The Highway Code in 1954 advised pedestrians that they had precedence at zebra crossings but should be sensible about waiting for a gap in the traffic. By the 1960s it was clear that the zebra crossing could not cope with the increased volumes of traffic which had resulted from the post-war office boom in city and town centres. More and more people were driving to work, often in company cars.

After a number of experiments, a new system of pedestrian crossings was developed, which allows cars to have right of way until pedestrians press a button to activate the ‘green man’. But crossing the road remains a controversial and sometimes highly charged issue, since it involves the question of who has priority in the use of urban space – people or cars (and increasingly cyclists). The 1963 government report Traffic in Towns saw the challenge as one of limiting the numbers of cars in towns, but this has not really caught on as an idea, mainly because it is seen as politically unacceptable. The dominant approach is to try to separate people and traffic. In the City of London there were elaborate plans for elevated walkways that would allow people to walk to work and from shop to shop above the streets. These didn’t materialise, and instead there was a trend towards building systems of subways and underpasses that are found in many city centres. Built in the 1960s and early 1970s they are now often regarded as symbols of the failure of urban planning, with reputations as urine-stained, graffiti-tagged environments for crime, especially mugging.

Since the 1980s, there have been moves to make cities more ‘walkable’, and some cities have developed ‘walking strategies’ to ease apparent congestion (in London’s Oxford Street there were plans to tackle ‘pedlock’ by introducing a fast lane in which pedestrians had to maintain a minimum speed of 3 mph). The trend towards partial pedestrianisation in many towns and cities is part of the drive to give pedestrians more freedom of movement.
Recent years have seen a spate of publications that are concerned with the ‘geographies of everyday life’. These include:


Why living geography now?

These geographies of everyday life are part of a broader interest in the ‘ordinary’ within the social sciences and cultural history. This is reflected in books with titles such as Globalisation and Everyday Life (Ray, 2006), Understanding Everyday Life (Bennett and Watson, 2005), Reading the Everyday (Moran, 2005), and Ordinary Lifestyles (Bell and Hollows, 2005).

Bennett and Watson argue that there are three reasons for the increased sociological (and, as we suggest below, geographical) interest in everyday life. These are:

- changing meanings of the ‘public’. This means that what is counted as worthy of interest or study has changed over time, and things that were previously considered private (such as people’s romantic lives or their material poverty) are now seen as suitable subjects for the Sunday supplements or photo-journalism
- growth of a disciplinary society that takes more interest in individuals’ behaviour
- growth of new social movements such as feminism that have shifted focus onto how life is experienced by particular groups.

The thing that each of these reasons has in common is change, and this is highlighted by the editors of The New Sociology when they argue that:

‘Globalization, new information technologies, the techno-industrialization of warfare and terrorism, the privatization of public resources, the dominance of consumerist values: these developments involve major change to the ways people live their personal and social lives today.’

(Elliott, 2006)

Given that since the late 1960s human geography has aligned itself closely with the social sciences, it is unsurprising that geographers have also come to take an interest in everyday life. The new geography of the 1960s with its focus on spatial models and rational economic man provoked a backlash which sought to develop a more fully human geography that focused on the behaviour and meanings individuals attached to places and environments. This was enhanced by the growth of social geography in the 1980s which sought to explore the ways in which economic changes were impacting on different groups of people. The rise of feminist geography was important here because it focused attention on some spaces that were previously ignored by geographers such as the home and everyday routines of women such as journeys to and from schools, shops and work. The changing nature of leisure and work gave rise to new types of spaces, many of which were inhabited by young people, and cultural geographers became interested in how these spaces were produced and reproduced.
An example of living geography

To conclude this chapter, we want to offer an example of a ‘living geography’ and suggest some of the ways in which teachers might productively develop geographical learning. The example we use is that of housing. As Moran states:

“As a densely populated country with some of the oldest and most dilapidated homes in Europe and a largely unrestrained housing market, Britain is a good place to begin thinking about a universal site of daily life: the house.’

It is also a good example of how the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ are inextricably linked. We all live somewhere, but may have different degrees of choice about where to live, and that choice is shaped by economic and political forces. A simple place to start is to consider the different housing types that make up the school’s catchment area. These housing types have a history and correspond to particular periods. Though housing types are in part linked to technological development, more important in the British context are issues of political ideology, with large-scale public provision in the period after the Second World War (‘council housing’) as well as private development and the outward growth of suburbs. Any discussion of this sort will quickly raise questions of private ownership (with a dramatic shift in owner-occupation from 29 per cent in 1951 to 71 per cent in 2003), as well as discussions of taste (why are some houses deemed more desirable than others?).

The challenge in teaching the type of living geography discussed in this chapter is how to engage students in a ‘critique of everyday life’. Ira Shor, a leading exponent of critical pedagogy, describes this as helping students to ‘extraordinarily re-experience the ordinary’, so that an apparently ordinary thing such as a house can never be seen again in the same light. One possible way to structure this is to explore the issue of housing through a variety of scales. There is an obvious link, here, to Angus Willson’s approach to ‘unsettling’ traditional approaches to settlement in the geography classroom (chapter 10). The following suggests possible themes, though the challenge is for teachers to connect with the experiences of the students they teach and make links between scales:

The body – there are distinct ways in which people behave in houses and these are linked to the use of space. For example, homes are places where ideas about gender are reproduced. In western cultures the home has traditionally been considered the realm of the female and men and women play distinct roles. Students could consider the way in which domestic space is represented in television programmes and/or newspapers and magazines (advertisements and television programmes are a good source for this). An important question is whether and how this ‘domestic ideology’ is changing. There is plenty of scope for learning about the ways in which particular ideas about space develop historically. For example, many students will assume that children have the right to their own space (e.g. bedrooms, play areas) within houses, but when did this idea develop?

Community – houses do not often stand alone, but are part of a community or neighbourhood. This offers the opportunity to explore notions of belonging and processes of inclusion and exclusion. It is often argued that western societies are becoming increasingly privatised as people spend more time in their own homes and gardens and partake in private leisure activities. An important theme identified by humanistic geographers is a ‘sense of place’, and this could be the basis for work on what it means to live in a particular place.

The city – cities are characterised by dense and varied housing types. This is the source of the models of urban structure associated with Ernest Burgess and the Chicago school of sociology. Within cities there are distinctive zones of housing types (e.g. inner city, suburbs) and these are worth exploring. The challenge for a living geography is to link these ‘zones’ on models and maps to living processes of change. For example, how do these distinctive areas develop and how do they change over time? Who moves into and out of different parts of cities? What is the balance of personal choice and economic constraint? How are these linked to particular social geographies connected to income, ethnicity
and class? Again, it is important to recognise that our geographical imaginations are often constructed through media culture, and television shows such as *Location, Location, Location* and *Property Ladder* can be the basis for analysis and discussion, offering insights into ‘up and coming’ or gentrified parts of cities.

**The region** – it is at the level of the region that patterns of housing supply are shaped, through development plans and policies. This determines where new houses are to be built and where the existing housing stock is to be redeveloped. New town policies and plans for sustainable communities, though mediated through the national scale, are played out at the level of the region.

**The nation** – as noted previously, different housing types relate to distinctive periods of national housing policy. In the British case, the shift from relatively high levels of state-funded house building to market provision reflected a decisive shift in political ideology about the role of the state in welfare provision. Comparative examples are useful here, especially in other countries in Europe where private ownership is less advanced. The economic geography of the housing market can be considered at this scale, though the challenge is to make links between other scales. For example, national policies to increase labour supply through encouraging more mothers to return to work clearly have implications at community and personal scales, and, as the economic crash in 2008 demonstrated, shifts in the national housing market are linked to wider global forces.

**The global scale** – finally, there are opportunities to explore the way in which something as personal as housing is inextricably linked to global forces. There is scope for understanding homelessness as a global phenomenon and exploring how people in different places devise answers to the problem of where and how to live. In doing so, the aim should not be to invoke some universal humanity (people are basically the same, wherever they live), but to understand something of the distinctive processes that shape people’s lives.