This paper examines the relationship between place and identity. The context is provided by the enforced relocation to a nearby site of Arkwright Town, a one hundred year old North East Derbyshire mining village. The study on which this paper is based was longitudinal in design and monitored the relocation process during the period 1992-1998. The data used for this study was obtained from 22 participants at 5 time points over the 6 years. This paper focuses on how participants made sense of changes in their spatial environment and how these meanings affected their self-perceptions and self-evaluations as well as being implicated in changes within their community which occurred during and after the relocation. Breakwell’s (1986) Identity Process Theory was used to examine the degree to which the participants’ identity processes were affected by the changes in the spatial environment. This included an examination of the ways in which the spatial change threatened or enhanced distinctiveness and continuity, two of the principles of identity described in Breakwell’s theory. Evidence was found for the important role of place in maintaining and enhancing the principles of identity.

The role of place in the construction of self and identity has been studied extensively by environmental psychologists (e.g. Proshansky, 1978; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981; Korpela, 1989; Lee, 1990; Giuliani, 1991; Altman & Low, 1992; Brown & Perkins,
However, social psychologists have often conceptualised place as a social category (e.g. Graumann, 1983; Bonaiuto, Breakwell & Cano, 1996) or as a symbol of an ideology or social group (e.g. Devine-Wright & Lyons, 1997; Wallwork & Dixon, in press). The research on which this paper is based attempts to integrate these two conceptualisations by focusing on the relationship between spatial change and identity processes in the context of the relocation of a traditional English coal mining community. The study explored the meaning over time which the adjustments to the villagers’ new environment held for them and aimed to discover how these meanings influenced identity. Specifically it sought to establish empirically whether the principles of identity become differentially salient over time and to assess whether the relocation involved any changes to identity content and/or evaluations. It should be noted that this research adopted a constructivist position in that it viewed the ‘reality’ experienced by the participants as being shaped by the meanings they attributed to their social, physical and cultural environment.

This research adds to the body of work tracing how the concept of place identity has developed within Environmental Psychology and how the dynamic relationship between identity and place has been investigated. It also draws attention to the sometimes confused use of the terms identity and identification and the difficulties of unravelling this complex tangle of ideas and definitions.

The term place identity has received increasing attention in the psychological, sociological and anthropological literature on place. It was coined by Proshansky in 1978 when he considered the nature of self identity in the city (urban identity). He describes place identity as

“those dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and
unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral
tendencies and skills relevant to this environment” (1978, p. 155).

He goes on to state,

“If, as already suggested, both physical settings and people change, then it is clear
that the place identity of the individual is a changing as well as enduring structure,
which is also true of course of the person’s self-identity” (p. 159).

Place identity is more explicitly addressed by Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff
(1983) when they express the need to view person-place relationships as a dynamic
process in a changing social and physical environment. In a further paper, Proshansky
and Fabian (1987) recommend that psychology should consider the role of social and
physical settings in child development processes. Although this suggests that a child’s
place identity develops through experiences of home, neighbourhood and school, there is
no indication of which ‘qualities’, or specific features of settings or the social and
cognitive processes, might contribute to somewhere becoming or being a ‘place’ for
someone. Proshansky and colleagues do not provide any empirical data to verify their
place-identity theory and, whilst it is acknowledged (Krupat, 1983) that these papers have
advanced thinking on the generic and specific contexts in which identity is formed to
date, it has proved difficult to translate their arguments into a clear research agenda.

Another expression used in the research literature on place identity is place
identification. The expressions place identity and place identification are often used
interchangeably without the meaning of or the distinction between the two expressions
being defined or articulated (e.g. see Cuba & Hummond, 1993) yet these terms need to be
carefully defined and distinguished from each other to be of use when trying to
understand their relationship with place.
Graumann (1983) addresses this by describing three processes or modes of identification which lead to the person’s identity: ‘identifying the environment’; ‘being identified’; and ‘identifying with one’s environment’. It is the last of these which is of interest here. For Graumann ‘identifying with’ means modelling oneself on someone else. He states that this model does not need to be real but that it symbolises what the person is trying to achieve. It is this symbolic function which is important because it also allows places and ‘things’ to become objects of identification. Graumann explains how even minor everyday objects (including shabby toys or threadbare sweaters) may symbolise persons and that it is through this symbolic function that we identify with these objects. This identification with the object results in the objects being cared for and guarded against damage or loss. Graumann (1983, p. 314) concludes that

“ultimately, there is no social identity which is not also place-related (Proshansky, 1978) and thing-related (Graumann, 1974)”.

Turning to the concept of identity, Graumann (1983) proposes that

“The unity of a person is not a natural given, but has to be attained psychologically (by identification) and maintained (as identity) in a continuous and often conflictive process of socialization” (p. 315).

This indicates that ‘identification’ refers primarily to acquisition (“the process is one of concept and object appropriation” (Graumann, 1983, p. 314)), whereas the term ‘identity’ (as in ‘urban identity’ or ‘urban related identity’) characterises a condition (Lalli, 1992), or rather its maintenance. Identity in this view is not seen as static but as a product.

Since 1989 researchers have attempted to integrate the concept of place into an identity model (e.g. Korpela, 1989; 1992; Giuliani, 1991; Twigger, 1992; 1994; Twigger & Breakwell, 1994; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996; Skantze, 1997; and
Devine-Wright & Lyons, 1997). This research recognises that place is more than context, it is an integral part of the identity process. This is encouraging in that the dynamics of the actual process of place identification have been explored by asking ‘why’ and ‘how’ rather than simply measuring the outcome.

By contrast, social psychology theorists have tended to focus on the relationship between individuals and their social world and have developed a number of social and socio-cognitive theories of self and identity to capture this relationship (e.g. Symbolic Interactionism (Mead, 1934), Social Identity Theory, (Tajfel, 1978; 1981); Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner, et al, 1987), Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 1986; 1992)). Nevertheless, these theories and the research they generate have neglected the emotional aspects of identity and the environment is largely viewed as a background to social differentiation processes (after Lalli, 1992). This paper, however, suggests that place is an integral part of the identity process, where places can be nurturing (safety, attachment, belonging) and challenging (skill development, expanding physical and psychological limits). Identification with place occurs through functioning within it, shaping understanding of the place and person and this understanding enables one to modify place and/or perception of place and self, giving meaning to both. Twigger-Ross & Uzzell (1996) argue that places are important sources of identity elements since places embody social symbols and are invested with social meanings and importance. Breakwell (1996) states that places “become elements of identity, subject to the pressure to maintain self esteem, self efficacy, continuity and distinctiveness” (p. 9).

In order to capture the dynamic nature of the relationship between place and identity in the context of relocation, this paper has drawn on Identity Process Theory (IPT) (Breakwell, 1986) which acknowledges the role of the social world (including socially constructed objects such as place) and which specifically addresses the effect on
identity of changing external circumstances. The authors are not arguing that IPT in itself is inadequate since it takes into account the socially constructed position on phenomena such as place but rather that research using IPT usually fails to acknowledge the role of place as part of the participants’ social world. It is this omission which is addressed in this study. IPT was developed to explain what happens when external changes threaten an individual’s identity and as such it provides an appropriate theoretical framework within which to examine any possible threats that the relocation of Arkwright might pose to the residents’ identities.

IPT describes how an individual’s identity is composed of two distinct but related planes or sets of dimensions, the content dimension and the evaluative dimension (Breakwell 1986; 1988; 1992). The content dimension contains information about the individual, including behavioural, physical, psychological and life-historical aspects as well as group membership and category identifications. The value plane of the identity structure contains the current evaluation of each of the content dimensions or items.

In this structure of identity, the content and value planes are ‘filled’ by two processes which Breakwell claims are universal (i.e. not culturally dependent): assimilation-accommodation (a ‘two-pronged process’) and evaluation. Assimilation is the absorption of new information into the pre-existing identity structure; accommodation is adjustment of the identity structure to include the new information. This is not a mechanical addition of facts but active, motivated processes operating in tandem in terms of the development of identity (Breakwell, 1988). Similarly, the continuous process of evaluation of the identity elements (the content plane) is purposive and motivated in order to achieve a positive outcome for the self. Four basic principles guide the assimilation-accommodation and evaluation processes in order to achieve the desirable outcomes.
These four motivational principles are: distinctiveness, self-esteem, self-efficacy and continuity. If a threat to identity occurs, behaviour or cognitive processes are adjusted in order to maintain or increase the individual’s sense of distinctiveness, self-esteem, self-efficacy or continuity, as a means of dealing with the threat\(^1\). This list of identity principles is presumed to be neither exhaustive nor universally (cross-culturally) applicable (in contrast to the identity processes of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation). The principles, for which there is considerable evidence within our culture, are rather “reifications of what society regards as acceptable endstates for identity” (Breakwell, 1987, p. 107).

Breakwell (1986) raises the question of the relative salience of the four principles in controlling identity processes, suggesting that “in all probability the salience-hierarchy will be situation-specific and temporally relative” (1988, p. 195). This paper explores the question of the relative salience of two of the identity principles (distinctiveness and continuity) over time during a situation of major change for the individual. Before exploring these more fully, the principles of self esteem and self efficacy will be briefly outlined. Space constraints preclude full consideration of all four principles at this time.

**Self-esteem** has been recognised as a key psychological principle since the early days of psychology. William McDougall, in his 1923 “Outline of Psychology”, referred to the importance of the “self-regarding sentiment” (quoted in Thouless, 1967, p. 305). A wide range of empirical studies supports the central role of self-esteem in identity. A number of studies have found that coping reactions along the lines suggested by IPT are elicited when self-esteem is threatened (e.g. Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985; Steele, 1988).

\(^1\) Breakwell’s earlier descriptions of the theory (1986) included only three principles, with self-efficacy being added in the 1992 paper.
The principle of **self-efficacy**, “the wish to feel competent and in control of one’s life”, is closely related to self-esteem (Breakwell, 1988, p. 194). Feelings of self-efficacy are related to a sense of well-being (Bandura, 1982) in contrast to the deleterious effect on self of the loss of self-efficacy, including severe depression (Seligman, 1975).

Evidence for the principle of **distinctiveness** derives in part from the way in which intergroup comparisons often involve emphasising the distinctions between one’s own group and those of other people. Breakwell (1988) cites work by Snyder & Fromkin (1980) and Maslach (1984) which suggests that interpersonal comparisons are also used to establish personal distinctiveness. Other evidence for distinctiveness is outside the context of groups. For example, the positive evaluation of scarce experiences (Fromkin, 1970), the increased recollection of information distinguishing an individual from others (Leyens, Yzerbyt & Rogier, 1997) and the negative effect on mood of the belief that one is very similar to other people (Fromkin, 1972). An individual’s identity may include, as valued aspects of self, both group distinctiveness and individual distinctiveness (Breakwell, 1988). Breakwell (1987; 1993) has pointed out that there appears to be a tendency to attempt to achieve moderate rather than extreme levels of distinctiveness (e.g. Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). It may be that the optimal level of distinctiveness represents a balance between individual and collective distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991). Codol (1984) suggests that distinctiveness must be socially recognised in order to be relevant to identity. Individuals must project a sense of distinctiveness to others, rather than simply develop and value it within themselves (Vignoles, Chryssochou & Breakwell, 2000).

The analysis of the relocation of Arkwright reported in this paper will contribute to the ongoing discussion about the exact nature and generality of the distinctiveness principle.

**Continuity** within IPT refers to subjective, self-perceived continuity “across time and situation” (Breakwell, 1986, p. 24). This is distinguished from consistency as “there
can be continuity in inconsistency” (Breakwell, 1988, p. 194). Continuity involves not the complete absence of change but some connection between the past, the present and the future within identity. Absence of continuity is usually experienced negatively (Rosenberg, 1986) and Breakwell (1986) reports on people’s efforts to maintain feelings of continuity in the face of serious life events which disrupt continuity, such as unemployment or bereavement.

Discussing the probable historical specificity of the identity principles Breakwell (1988) states that

“the principles guiding the operation of these (identity) processes must be acknowledged to be both culturally and temporally specific. They are, after all, reifications of what society regards as acceptable endstates for identity; when society changes, they will change” (p. 196).

Changes in the operation of the identity principles will be explored in relation to the societal change experienced by Arkwright villagers as a result of the relocation (villagers described the change as moving from a working class to a middle class environment). Evidence for such a change within the Arkwright community will be discussed in the context of a move from a collective level to an individual level of functioning within the new environment.

The impacts on identity of being in a new place have been discussed by Breakwell (1996; cited by Twigger-Ross, Bonaiuto & Breakwell, 2001). She considers that a change of place may alter the relative importance to the individual of various aspects of their identity, particularly those aspects which were supported by the previous location. This may result in the previous location becoming either more important (if the person values the aspects of identity which the location supported) or, when the related aspects
of identity are no longer salient, the location becomes irrelevant (Breakwell terms this ‘dislocation’). In addition, the new place may itself act as a threat to identity, if it presents new content or causes a change in the evaluations composing the previous identity. In support of these ideas, Timotijevic (2000) reports Thoits’ (1991) claim that reactions to threats from the environment cannot be understood without taking into account how self-identity will make particular aspects of the environment differentially salient.

A number of studies have used IPT in a place-related context. Twigger (1994) and Twigger-Ross & Uzzell (1996) provide a review of this literature. Korpela (1989) found that adolescents used place to maintain a positive sense of identity by means of the self-esteem principle. Twigger-Ross & Uzzell (1996) conclude that attachment to a local area was used by people to help maintain their identity, with differences between people in their degree of attachment corresponding to differences in their references to distinctiveness, continuity, efficacy and self-esteem. Thus, both these studies point to the role of place in forming and supporting identity. This is supported by the work of Macdonald (1997) who, whilst not working strictly within an IPT framework, found that ‘localness’ related both to distinctiveness and to ‘belonging’, in terms of distinguishing those who are part of the place from those who do not belong.

Devine-Wright & Lyons (1997) looked at the way in which places can act to support collective (in this case, national) identity through acting as a source of social meanings and memories. This notion of place as a locus of memories and meaning which is important to identity will also be explored in the Arkwright context. Place as the bearer of cues for continuity has been discussed by others, such as Korpela (1989, p. 251), who stated that
“the continuity of self-experience is also maintained by fixing aids for memory in the environment. The place itself or the objects in the place can remind one of one’s past and offers a concrete background against which one is able to compare oneself at different times. This creates coherence and continuity in one’s self-conceptions.”

This paper focuses on the changing meanings which the villagers of Arkwright attached to their old and new environments in relation to the way they constructed themselves, in particular

• the degree to which participants’ accounts of themselves and their relationships with their changing physical and social environment related to changes in two of the identity principles - distinctiveness and continuity - at different stages of the relocation process; and

• the extent to which changes in participants’ evaluation of particular elements of their identity structure seemed to be associated with spatial change.

Quotations from interviews with the participants, which are presented in this paper, are a subsection of the full data set which was used in the analysis of the thesis. They have been selected to provide most succinctly both evidence of reduced or accentuated salience over time of the two principles of identity, as well as changes to the participants’ previous identity structure in terms of the content and value dimensions.

Research context

In November 1988 a major explosion was narrowly avoided when it was found that methane gas was seeping from a disused coal mine into houses of Arkwright Town, a 100 year old mining village in north-east Derbyshire. In October 1990, British Coal Opencast put forward a plan to opencast mine in the area of Arkwright Town. Together with the
local council, a plan was agreed to provide the community of 177 households with a new village nearby, in exchange for planning permission to opencast the area, thereby also providing a solution to the ongoing methane problem.

The old village consisted of 5 straight rows of terraced houses without front gardens and mostly with very small or no back gardens, a primary school, a public house, a miners’ welfare club, a sub-post office/shop and a small grocer’s shop. The replacement offer was for semi-detached houses or bungalows with both front and back gardens, existing facilities replaced and increased leisure facilities. A show of hands at the end of the meeting confirmed “absolutely overwhelming” support for the village relocation. The first residents moved into the new village in 1995.

Method

This paper uses data obtained from in-depth interviews with 22 residents of Arkwright at five times over the 6 year period of the relocation process.

Interview time table

The relocation scheme was announced and accepted in October 1990. Figure 1 provides details of the interview timings.

Figure 1 about here

The sample

Participants were recruited through door to door canvassing. For the study only interviews of participants who had taken part in at least four interviews were used, resulting in 22 participants and 104 in-depth interviews. It should be noted that this study covered the entire (willing and able) population of Arkwright and hence there was little control over the spread of demographic variables. The quotations in this paper are from
participants ranging in age from 25 to 74 at Time 5. Table 1 shows a profile of other demographic variables that were considered important for the analysis. There was little variation in social class as the majority of residents had worked in the coal mining industry and many had been made redundant either when the Arkwright Pit was closed in 1988 or when the other neighbouring pits were closed in 1992/3.

Table 1 about here

**Interview schedules**

The interviews ranged from being barely structured in the first and second time phases to being semi-structured during the later interviews. The Time 1 schedule explored the existing level of community spirit, place attachment and relocation issues. At Time 2 adjustments were made to expand on issues which were salient during Time 1. In addition a section on public participation and health effects was added. The Time 3 schedule particularly focused on individuals’ feelings about the relocation. The Time 4 and 5 schedules specifically explored identity and place concepts.

**Analytical procedure**

To begin with, Grounded Theory (GT) was used to identify values, meanings and constructs regarding participants’ experiences and to inform the next stage of data collection. However, GT alone was not felt to be sufficient as the underlying methodology for this research. The difficulties were twofold. First, the philosophical position of GT, in terms of its assumption that there is a theory hidden within the data waiting to be uncovered is, as Stanley & Wise (1983) have discussed, fundamentally positivist rather than adopting the constructivist philosophy espoused by the authors. In addition, there were practical difficulties with the method in the context of longitudinal interviews of the number and scale undertaken in this study. Due to the overlapping time
phases, it was not possible to follow one of the basic tenets of GT, which is that data collection and analysis should proceed simultaneously. In addition, it became apparent that a methodology was needed which acknowledged the duality of the perspectives involved: the phenomenological worlds of the participants and the conceptual framework of the researcher which would facilitate the process of interpretation. This two phased approach was found in the ‘Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis’ (Smith, 1991) and was used after the initial time phases.

The focus of the analysis was on the range of reported experiences and on comments which indicated a change in behaviour patterns or participants’ conceptualisation, interpretation and evaluation of situations rather than a numerical account of the data. The emerging themes were coded, starting with one interview and comparing additional interviews to try to understand in what way these may differ or fit the previous themes or codes. It is not claimed here that a quotation in itself is evidence for an emerging theory but that by drawing together a number of quotations into themes, a theoretical argument can be supported.

At the same time memos were written which captured links with established theories or indicated the beginning of a cluster of meanings which may represent a new insight. This process of constantly comparing, analysing and memo-writing clarified the data and highlighted areas which needed further exploration and which were therefore included in the subsequent interview schedule in order to learn as much as possible about the participants’ values, cognitions and emotions and to access meanings inherent in participants’ accounts.

Findings and discussion of the principles of identity
Participants’ responses were followed over time to discover the degree to which the two identity principles of distinctiveness and continuity became salient/not salient. Only trends which applied to more than one participant are included.

**The principle of distinctiveness**

During the interviews prior to the relocation, comments displaying distinctiveness focused almost exclusively on the collective uniqueness of the old mining community, rather than, as IPT theory predicts, individual distinctiveness.

Sadie, at T1, emphasised the lack of overt individual distinctiveness. She had only recently moved into old Arkwright and appreciated that “everybody is the same, it doesn’t matter what you’ve got, they don’t want to know. It’s lovely.” At T5 she commented on the change from collective to individual distinctiveness: “In the old village, nobody seemed to feel the need to make the outside different from other houses but now everybody wants to outdo their neighbours!”

Phillip’s comment about the outside of houses at T1 supports Sadie’s perception. Phillip, when asked whether the way the outside of his house and garden looked was important to him, replied: “I don’t think many people bother about the outside. I don’t bother about what the outside looks like. If the grass gets too long I get it cut, I keep it tidy and that.” Phillip spoke for the majority of residents. There was little indication of distinctiveness on exteriors of houses in old Arkwright. Hormuth (1990) suggests that “when a person is new in an environment, socially provided and shared meanings of the environment are accepted and made use of in self-presentation” (p. 198).

It was mostly at T3, four weeks before the move, that participants began to verbalise a desire for future *individual* distinctiveness, when thinking about their new homes. Les, for instance, began to talk about personal distinctiveness: “you will be able
to do enough that if you do want [your house] to look better than anybody else’s within a few years, ... yeah, believe it or not, I am actually looking forward to that bit of it.”

At T4 Les made a stronger statement: “we are trying to enhance [our house and garden] and I think that is part of our job, to individualise it, if you like. ... people will have done different things. Houses that at the moment look all the same will eventually look all different. It’s nice when you can individualise it.” Les’s identity structure now accommodated this new component when he said: ‘I think that is part of our job’ and he gave this a positive evaluation ‘it’s nice when you can individualise it’.

Bill, too, responded to the opportunity to display individuality, explaining at T3, how easy it would be for people to locate him in the new village: “… It’s the only house in the village with a purple door, just with a number 1 on it.” Bill had not painted his door purple in old Arkwright. Like Les, he was delighted and comfortable with expressing his uniqueness in New Arkwright.

The absence of any mention of individual distinctiveness at T1 could be explained within Breakwell’s theory as being either due to the absence of any threat to identity, hence the distinctiveness principle was not salient, or due to the existence of cultural values within the community which deemed individual distinctiveness inappropriate or simply not relevant. Nevertheless, the data at T1 suggest that the principle was operating in terms of collective rather than individual distinctiveness. When Phillip was asked at T4 whether he had personalised his new home he replied: “I’ve not really personalised it. I won’t stick out, I won’t be thinking I’m better than anybody else like some of them.” He clearly disapproved of other people’s efforts towards self distinctiveness and resented the outward change in the village. Phillip evaluated the change negatively, retaining his previous identity content.
In summary, before the relocation, the pressure on residents to ‘be the same’ was part of the cultural/behavioural patterns which had developed within the coal mining community. Breakwell states that

“distinctiveness can only be achieved by being willing to reject standard expectations and orthodoxies in the interests of creativity and uniqueness” (1986, p. 113)

and suggests that “principles will achieve priority according to the social context” (1986, p. 25). Distinctiveness of the self had little priority in the old village as far as overt distinctiveness is concerned. Yuki & Brewer (1999) distinguish between two different types of group representations, i.e. as an undifferentiated collective, where group loyalty is derived from perceived similarity, or as a network of interacting individuals, where group loyalty is derived from attachment/connectedness to other group members. Both types of group representations were evident in old Arkwright but it was the former which resulted in an unwritten law that cohesive group similarity should also be expressed externally. This changed, however, over the course of the relocation so that, ultimately, individual distinctiveness was clearly evident and positively valued by most, although not all, residents.

**The principle of continuity**

For a number of participants, their need for continuity with the previous lifestyle was not salient until after the relocation. It was only then that people became aware of the effects of a different lifestyle and began to miss the past. Milligan (1998) suggests that such nostalgia is a device often used to create continuity and that the
“crucial common denominator in this link is, frequently, a specific physical site ... Thus [it] serves as an organizer for the past through categorizing the site-specific memories as continuous” (p.11).

Old Arkwright, until its demolition, remained as an anchor for place-dependent memories, providing a place referent continuity (Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). Its physical structure had embodied many symbols which were invested with social meanings and importance. The loss of these represented a discontinuity for the residents; the loss of tangible connections to their identity.

Milligan (1998) proposes that in the same way that humans can serve as “mnemonic others” to help us remember experiences of the past, so can “places act as mnemonic devices by verifying that certain experiences did occur” (p. 12).

The demolition of old Arkwright removed all place-dependent mnemonic devices of people’s personal and collective past. The monument to old Arkwright, a clumsy brick pillar, erected about 3 years after the demolition, was seen by many participants as a poor tribute to Arkwright’s past.

Participants’ responses embraced three types of continuity, i.e. collective/social, spatial and continuity retained through possessions, examples of which are given below.

**Collective continuity**

Ben described the discontinuity of the social behaviour of old Arkwright at T5: “... you know, if you hadn’t seen [people], you’d go and see if there was something up and of course, if one of them was ill, then you’d go and ask, you’d say, ‘How is your wife getting on?’ or your husband or your daughter. ... Now they don’t. No. It seems like everybody’s in their own little nest and they don’t want to come out or to invite people into it.”
The compactness of old Arkwright ensured frequent interactions with people. At T4 and T5 there were many comments about the lack of interaction with others, simply not seeing people any more, hence it represented a discontinuity of the previous way of life. Charles commented on New Arkwright at T5: “... there don’t seem to be people milling around the village like you used to see in the old village. I mean, quite a few times I walk down to the post box and I’ve not met anyone. It’s like a ghost town! It’s very odd.”

Norma echoed the same feeling at T4, “you look out of this window and ... you don’t see what you want to see ... you were so used to looking out of the window over there and seeing people that you know ... and it’s so changed now.” Milligan (1998, p. 9) explains that when spatial continuity is disrupted, “it acts to close a category of past experiences. ... the closing of a door on a particular interactional past”. Norma’s powerful comment, ‘you don’t see what you want to see’ reflects the knowledge of the closed door, a door which Norma would have preferred to keep open. A person’s identity is, in part, confirmed by others and for this reason the perceived emptiness of the new village was disturbing for some of the residents.

Participants also reported collective discontinuity. Tom at T5 talked about the loss of the sense of community: “... it’s not the community that is was, ... not as we used to know it. It’s like a, well, really modern village, if anything. ... Like this Christmas, it just wasn’t, it didn’t seem the same, it definitely wasn’t the same.” Alice also recognised the changes in the sense of community. At T5, to the question, ‘Do you feel part of the village community now?’ she replied: “well, only as a resident. We don’t go to any functions or anything like that because for a start there aren’t any and we can’t go to this [community lounge]. No, I don’t think we do feel part of the community.”
At T5, in answer to the question, ‘What is the least satisfactory aspect of New Arkwright?’ Enid replied “hmmm, there is no community now” … No. No, there isn’t, because you don’t see anybody.” A little later Enid stated that she would prefer to be still living in old Arkwright: “I would, if I could pick up this bungalow, if I could pick it up and take it [to old Arkwright], I would.” When asked, ‘why?’ Enid replied: “Well, I think it is because it was so different, you saw people all the time.” She returned to the same subject later: “I hardly see Mandy or Christine now, you just gradually, you just lose contact.” When Enid was asked whether her relationship with her close friends had changed in any way, she replied: “Not really, you chat when you see them but you ….. you don’t know what’s happening in their lives, day to day.” Enid stated that she did not feel as content as in old Arkwright: “probably we lived there too long, I don’t know. You classed it as home for all these years, didn’t you and then it’s gone, ……….. it’s gone.” Enid was steeped in the culture of old Arkwright and perceived the changes as disruptive to her social network. Social support was an integral part of everyday life within the old community. Within the old Arkwright setting the interconnectedness of people and the links between kinship groups provided not only a sense of belonging, but more importantly, immediate access to information, guidance on how to assess a particular situation, unsolicited offers of help with cumbersome tasks. These qualities were much less obvious in New Arkwright.

Bill explained how in old Arkwright, front doors were opposite front doors and back doors were opposite back doors, easy to achieve with straight rows of terraced buildings: “It’s less (sense of community) … because you’d only got to walk through the old village and somebody would speak to you but hardly anybody speaks now, they are hardly ever out now. I don’t know why. In the old village, people used to sit outside. … There were still people on their gardens and they’d talk like that but it’s not … it’s very
Bill continued: “it’s the loss of contact, everybody is spread out all over. That’s it. You can’t get to see everybody, people don’t come out anymore.”

On the subject of Norma’s choices for their chalet bungalow she commented: “yes, I’m actually very pleased with all the choices [we made], I can’t fault any of it.” She continued: “I like this house. It’s just, it’s just … well, you’re living in a certain style of life and then all of a sudden it’s changed and it takes some adjusting. … That’s the only thing, you know. I’m quite content to be in [the house] all the time, not go out. That’s how it’s got me.” As she continued to explore her feelings she said, “Even when I handed the keys in I went back to [the old] house and had a look at it.” After a long pause Norma added: “I’d go back tomorrow, you know, how can you [feel like this] when you’ve got a nice house and everything? … It’s the way of life that I want back, you know, when everybody is friendly and they’ll do anything for you and, you know, that’s what I miss, that way of life.”

Other examples expressed the previous sharing of property, such as the joy over presents and communal use of back gardens. The community had been Norma’s extended family and she felt bereft. The community had been the source of her identity, a source no longer available, neither through social interactions nor spatial mnemonics. She had not, as yet, assimilated/accommodated a more individualistic life style.

The discontinuity with old Arkwright did not represent a loss of meaningful experiences for all participants. Barbara explained at T2 that she would be happy to move: “I don’t mind what happens because I wasn’t born here, I haven’t lived here for donkeys’ years. I admit it was going to be last stop before heaven sort of thing but I’m not unhappy to leave it.” Barbara’s house had been close to the Pub and the Miners’ Welfare Club and they were often disturbed by noisy revellers. “I shall be pleased to
leave that ... and we've had a lot of trouble with children. ... breaking fences down and jumping over, trampling the plants to death and that sort of thing ...” Thus Barbara’s values had been incongruent with old Arkwright and such a state of dissatisfaction was found by Hormuth (1990, p. 199) “to imply a readiness for change and openness to new experiences.”

**Spatial continuity**

Sadie was aware of the need to retain some physical connections. When asked how she thought she would feel about the old village being demolished, she replied: “I don’t think all of it should be demolished. I think part of it should be kept like a heritage, to show what it was actually like. It should not be demolished and be gone, there has to be something to remind people. I think to just knock it down would be wrong.” Sadie continued this theme later: “I think the school would be ideal, it’s a place many people went to. I think it would be a shame if there was nothing left whatsoever, without any memory left of any of it.”

When Enid was asked at T1 which thoughts occurred to her most often when considering the move, she replied: “I can’t envisage them knocking all this down, it all going, I can’t imagine that and I can’t imagine what it will look like at the moment. I’ve no vision at all of what it’s going to look like. You can’t picture it.”

At T5 Alice talked about the symbolic continuity of old Arkwright. “They did ask us what we wanted to have done with the site of old Arkwright and I suggested a plaque, you know, a walking area and a plaque to say that this was old Arkwright. They seemed to like that idea but nothing has been said since. I really think there ought to be something to remind us of old Arkwright, well, for the younger generation coming up. It’s history, isn’t it.” (A memorial was erected 18 months later).
Places which do not physically change also offer the opportunity for people to revisit or relive their past (even if reconstructed through the eyes of an autobiographic present). When Jackie was asked at T1 how she felt about her house being demolished, she replied: “I feel sad about that really because it is the only house I ever had apart from living with my parents. ... it’s the only little piece of England that was ever mine ... most of the alterations are our own work and to see all that flattened by bulldozers will be sad. ... When you sell a house and move on, that house is still there, you can always drive past it. In this situation it is going to be completely erased.” Jackie much regretted the threatened discontinuity with her past life.

**Continuity through possessions**

Some participants did not consider that their identity was at all related to the continuity of their possessions. When talking about the belongings which she might take with her and which would provide a sense of continuity, Enid stated: “Nothing from this room is going with us, I’ll have to have a giant car boot sale.”

Norma explained that it had been easy for her to dispose of her old possessions:

“... it just didn’t fit in with the new house, you see. I wanted all nice things around me. When I say ‘nice things’ I mean in keeping with the new house. Everything wanted renewing, it were old, weren’t it, our furniture. I like change, if it’s the right kind of change.”

Others, whilst still wanting new possessions for the new house, expressed some feelings of attachment to their possessions. At T2, Alice explained that they were buying all new furniture and that her old furniture was being given to her granddaughter, who had just become engaged: “... my granddaughter is having my suite, that unit there, that cabinet there. ... She is having my fridge freezer, oh yeah, and my cooker. ... She has
always liked my suite and I said to her your granddad said you can have that suite and she said ‘oh can I Grandma’ and I said ‘yeah, if you want it’, so she is looking forward to it.” Later, at T4, she was asked whether she was now missing any of those items. Alice replied: “None of them because they are still in family, yeah. Those that have got any value are still in family.” This had both eased the disposal of their old belongings and provided Alice with a sense of personal continuity reflected in possessions.

Breakwell (1988) emphasises that it is ‘subjective or perceived continuity’, not ‘objective continuity’, which is sought to maintain identity. Alice provided another example of subjective continuity. At T4, during a period of obvious change, she focused on continuity of herself and place referent continuity: “my photographs. I mean I wouldn’t get rid of my photographs”. Referring to a specific photograph she says: “I was only five when it was taken with my mum and my dad and I’ve still got it hung in the spare bedroom. It was in the spare bedroom, which was my mum’s room at home (in old Arkwright) and yeah, it’s still there now” (in the new spare bedroom). Note that Alice said “it’s still there now”, clearly seeing continuity between the spare bedroom which was her mother’s room in the old house and the spare bedroom in the new house, even though her mother had never lived in the new house. Alice thus successfully created a subjective continuity.

In summary, the principle of continuity is evident throughout all 5 time phases. It is suggested that it is possible to differentiate between participants who perceived themselves as ‘static’ selves and located in a past time frame, and others who perceived themselves as ‘developing’ selves, hence located in a future time frame. In addition, old Arkwright was the setting for past experiences but viewed by participants in two ways. For some, experiences were perceived as important personal and collective milestones tied to the old setting and people felt bereft of these experiences without the setting. For
others, experiences were perceived as unwanted ‘ baggage’ which could not be discarded whilst remaining in the old setting. For them, the enforced relocation represented a new beginning in their lives. Principles were made differentially salient over time and the new content evaluated either positively or negatively, thus impacting on participants’ identity processes.

Concluding remarks

The Arkwright relocation context provided an abrupt and clear incident of socio-spatial change on an individual and collective level. Some participants had not adapted well to this change by the time of the last data phase (2 years post relocation). In IPT terms they had not assimilated and accommodated changes to their identity structure. This is particularly the case for people whose identity was based on their being members of the old mining community, where the emphasis was on ‘being the same’ and this sameness represented a sense of belonging. Although the solidarity of the old Arkwright community had lessened after the miners’ strike in 1985, the community remained in the same place and the same unwritten rules were largely adhered to. It is suggested that the relocation to a spatially different environment released the individuals from their previous commitment to the community and increased the salience and positive evaluation of individual distinctiveness, i.e. collective distinctiveness was replaced by individual distinctiveness. Furthermore, New Arkwright did not provide a place-congruent or place-referent continuity and, faced with the loss of collective continuity embodied in old Arkwright, participants evaluated the new situation and the threat to their identity in different ways. For some, the increasing salience of individual distinctiveness more than compensated for this loss whilst for others the issue of discontinuity became highly salient.
The evidence presented here suggests that place is an integral part of identity and plays an important role in maintaining and/or enhancing the principles of distinctiveness and continuity. Place is also an important link to identity as it organises past experiences of individuals over time and their subjective interpretations. Vignoles (2000) argues that “identities are embedded within wider systems of meaning, which are constructed through processes of perception, cognition and social interaction” (p. 381). In the Arkwright context, there is another important addition, i.e. perceptions, cognitions and social interactions were embedded in the physical place and, for those participants whose identity was reflected in the mining group and the old village, without it much of the meaning of identity was lost.

In Vignoles, et al.’s (2000) terms, people who were distinctive by virtue of their relationships to each other (‘I am the person who looks after Nora’, or ‘I am the person who lives next to Mary and Ben’) lost these relationships in the new spatial environment and this could be seen as a type of deindividuation since everyone became anonymous in their new home. Vignoles, et al. (2000) suggest that IPT would then predict that people would seek alternative dimensions of individual distinctiveness, such as an emphasis on making individual homes overtly distinct. The same can also be said for continuity.

Identity is understood to contain both personal and social elements (after Deaux, 1992). For participants for whom the social element was salient, the loss of this source of identity was deeply felt. For some it meant a developing emphasis on the personal element of their identity, for others, a shift in the salience of principles.

The data supports Breakwell’s suggestion that identity principles are culturally dependent, so that as the cultural values change, the salience of the principles changes. In the data presented here the relevant principles were collective distinctiveness and collective continuity. After the relocation the personal element attained prominence, i.e.
individual distinctiveness and individual continuity became salient. It is suggested here that a further factor of identity must be taken into account when applying Identity Process Theory, namely the operation of the identity principles which include both personal and social elements of identity. This new factor clearly emerged as important from the Arkwright data. Not only do principles achieve priority according to the social context but also depending on whether the emphasis is on the personal or the social elements of identity. This research provides clear evidence of a culturally determined negative evaluation of overt individual distinctiveness and collective continuity and provides an account of how this negative evaluation changed when the socio-spatial environment changed.

The theoretical papers by Proshansky on place identity (1978), Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff (1983) and Proshansky & Fabian (1987) were an important milestone in that they initiated the inclusion of the spatial environment in the identity construct. These authors conceptualised ‘place identity’ “as a substructure of the person’s self-identity” (Proshansky & Fabian, 1987, p. 22). The Arkwright study, however, suggests that identity is not a distinct entity which can be separated into substructures but that identity is shaped through dynamic complex interaction with the social and spatial environment. It also demonstrates that the concept of ‘place identity’ as a substructure of identity does not reflect the full impact which place has on the whole of a person’s identity. It is this more comprehensive perspective which needs to be developed.

We used the Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 1986; 1992) as a framework in order to clarify the relationship between identity and place. Breakwell sees the identity structure as resulting from a dynamic process between intra-psychic and social influences within a developmental and temporal framework. This research, however, demonstrates that a spatial framework is of equal importance in that it helps maintain and/or enhance
the four principles of identity. Additionally it has been demonstrated that place organises past experiences over time and their subjective interpretations, and hence plays an important role in forming and supporting a person’s identity.

This paper provides a detailed and eventful picture of the Arkwright relocation process in terms of place and identity. The emphasis was on understanding participants’ perspectives and defining phenomena in terms of experienced meanings. The sameness, the undifferentiated group salience had already diminished in part when the mining industry collapsed. The relocation and the demolition of old Arkwright further increased this decline. This changing environmental and social context facilitated priority to the individual distinctiveness motivation for participants. In terms of the principle of continuity, the data differentiated between participants who perceived themselves as located in a past time frame and others who saw themselves located in a future time frame. This difference in response illustrates the dynamic nature of the relationship between place and identity, with place embodying social symbols and being invested with social meanings and importance.

References


Fig. 1: Time phases

The Relocation of Arkwright
In-depth interviews with participants at 5 intervals

Time phases

Time 1 (T1)
1992
15 months after relocation announcement

Time 2 (T2)
1994
12-18 months prior to relocation

Time 3 (T3)
1995 / 96
approx. 4 wks before relocation (over 10 months)

Time 4 (T4)
1995 / 96
6 months post-relocation

Time 5 (T5)
1997 / 98
2 years post-relocation
Table 1: Demographic variables at Time 1 of the 22 participants used in the analysis

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