

Experienced places and media places

An **experienced place** is one in which a person has actually spent time within. This could even be for a short period, but the person has the experience of being there. The longer we spend in places, the stronger our sense of place.

Media places are different, these are places that a person has only read about or seen within various forms of media such as on film, in print, on social media or on the Internet. Such is our exposure to social media today, that people can generate an experience of media places without having ever physically been there. The use of Google maps, Street View and Earth is one way we can “visit” a place in a virtual sense. We are however, robbed of certain senses “visiting” media places in this way – there are no sounds and smells for example, it will also feel a lot safer to see these places from our own homes.

In this sense media places are lacking **Genius Loci**²- the prevailing character or atmosphere of a place, literally means “*the presiding god or spirit of a place*”.

The media portray places in particular ways. In travel brochures and websites, we are sold an “idealised idea” of a place. The reality of the place when we arrive there on holiday may or may not live up to that image we have been sold. There is even a syndrome associated with this. **Paris Syndrome**³ is a temporary mental disorder exhibited by some individuals when visiting or going on vacation to Paris, as a result of extreme shock derived from their discovery that Paris is not what they had expected it to be as represented by media. These tourists can be let down by Paris, billed as the city of love.

This is because the media push stereotypes - a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing, such as Paris is perfect and the city of love! Other stereotypes might be all urban areas are centres of crime and violence and all rural areas are peaceful and idyllic.

We need to be careful when dealing with media portrayal of place – publicity media is trying to paint a picture and sell a product, from tourist brochures to estate agent listings to film trailers. These are Qualitative sources of evidence.

Similarly, social media offers more individual portrayal of places, so although sometimes more honest portrayals we can get a warped sense of place from someone else or they are trying to make themselves look good!

In addition, we now have lots of digital technology that locate us whilst visiting places. The use of GPS software on mobile phones allows us to connect experiences like restraint dining or going to concerts to a specific place.